



Interviewing 101

Congratulations, you've landed an interview! There are several different types of interviews that you will want to be aware of when going to prepare for a job or internship. While there are some general principles that apply to all, there are also some unique considerations for each one. In order to adequately prepare for your interview, you'll want to understand the differences and what to expect for each.

In-Person Interviews

In-person interviews are by far the most popular method for interviewing a potential candidate. Students may interview either on-campus or on-site with the employer.

On-Campus Interviews

On-campus interviews give you the opportunity to interview with a company on-campus in a reserved conference or classroom. Generally, these interviews coincide with one of our career fairs, but they can also be scheduled at any time throughout the year. Rooms can be reserved by either the employer or the student by contacting the Director of Career Services. Please schedule at least 24 hours in advance to ensure availability.

Employer On-Site Interviews

The on-site interview occurs at the employer's physical location. It is usually the final interview (if there is more than one involved in the hiring process), but it can also be the first or second interview as well. Generally, in this interview you will meet a number of individuals who are likely all to be a part of the hiring process in some way. You may also receive a tour of the facility (especially if it is the location you will be working at).

Be prepared for the format of your interview to vary from organization to organization—some organizations may only interview you for an hour or so, while others may plan to have you on-site all day (and may even feed you a meal!). Similarly, organizations may choose from multiple different formats to interview you, including an individual interview, panel interview with multiple interviewers, and/or group interview that involve several job candidates all applying for the same position you are. Another aspect of the on-site interview that many employers incorporate is a presentation, where they will provide you with a job-specific topic in advance of your interview date and ask you to present on it.

Group Interviews

Group interviews are when an employer interviews a group of candidates at the same time. Typically, this is done to give employers a sense of your leadership style and how you interact with others. The employer will typically present an interview question either to the group as a whole or to someone in the group specifically, with the expectation that you and other group members will respond to that individual's response and with your own response to the question. Usually the interviewer will clarify how they want the group interview to flow, but if they do not, make sure you ask for clarification on how the process will go. Remember to treat others with respect and to offer input without overpowering the conversation and preventing others from responding.

Panel Interviews

A panel is an interview with a single interviewee (i.e. you), but with multiple interviewers. A lot of times, panel interviews are done in addition to a one-on-one interview, where future coworkers or upper administration are given the opportunity to also interview you for company fit. Be sure to greet each interviewer and try to address each one individually at least once during the interview. You want to make sure that each interviewer obtains a good impression of you, so be sure not to make anyone feel ignored.

Before the Interview

There are several things you should do to prepare for your interview, including researching the employer, practicing interviewing, and planning the logistics of the day of (i.e. travel and location info, dress attire, items to bring, etc.).

Research the Employer

- ✓ Too often, one of the biggest mistakes interview candidates make is to not know about the organization they are interviewing with. Research the company's website and speak to professionals that work for or are familiar with the company to figure out its culture, history, mission, structure, philosophy, and potential career paths. You can also view the employer's social media accounts or do a Google search to see what information comes up about the company. The more you know, the more prepared to will be and appear to the employer. Employers want people who want to work for their company and knowing a lot about a company shows that you are invested in working for them.
- ✓ Prepare possible questions to ask the interviewer(s):
 - Don't ask questions that could easily be answered by visiting the employer's website. Instead, create thoughtful questions that dig deeper into the culture of the company and details of the position. If there was any information you were unable to locate about the employer during your research of them, consider these as possible questions to ask in the interview. Some examples include:
 - What is a typical day like for this position?
 - Who is your ideal candidate?
 - What is the supervision structure?
 - What are the next steps in the interview process?
 - What opportunities are there for professional development and career growth?
 - Don't ask about salary or benefits unless and until you have a formal job offer to consider.
- ✓ At times, employers will ask you about your salary requirements before they offer you a job. You should be ready to provide an answer based on the research you've done and your living requirements. If you are unsure how to go about doing this, consider scheduling an appointment with Career Services.

Practice & Prepare for the Interview

- ✓ Identify and articulate how your experiences, strengths and skills, competencies, goals, etc., apply to the position you are interviewing for. You want to make sure you are able to demonstrate to the interviewer why you are a good fit for the position and what you can offer the company. Consider the following:
 - Who are you? What are your interests, passions, values, talents, and skills/competencies? Why would you be a good fit for this position?
 - What is your educational background? What classes, research, certifications, ratings, etc. have you taken or earned that would apply to the position you are interviewing for?
 - What do you know how to do? What experience have you gained through work, internships, volunteer experiences, clubs and organizations, leadership positions, projects, hobbies, etc.?
 - It may be helpful to analyze the job description by going through each line and considering examples for each from your academic, extracurricular activities, or work experience that demonstrates the associated skill/competency or quality the employer is seeking.
 - Be sure that you can speak to your career competencies (critical thinking/problem solving, oral/written communication, teamwork/collaboration, digital technology, leadership, professionalism/work ethic, career management, and global/intercultural fluency), how you have been developing them and can use them in the position you are interviewing for.

- ✓ Prepare to answer interview questions. While you will never be able to completely predict what questions the employer will ask you in an interview, there are some general variations of certain questions that you can anticipate being asked and will want to prepare for—go to the *Mastering the Interview* section for more information on preparing for interview questions.
- ✓ Practice actually interviewing. Ask a friend, faculty/staff, professional colleague, parent—anyone who can provide you with valuable feedback on how you interview. Another convenient method for practicing is to use an online software program (such as [Big Interview](#)) that can provide instant and non-biased feedback on your responses and physical presence. Check the Career Services calendar ([link to Event Calendar](#)) to see when there are mock interviews for you to participate in for practice.

Logistics

- ✓ Know the details of the interview: date, time, length, location, number of interviewers, and who the interviewers are. If the employer doesn't provide you with this information, it's perfectly fine to ask for an agenda.
- ✓ Ask the employer whether you will need to make travel and hotel arrangements, or whether the employer will take care of this.
- ✓ Many employers will reimburse you for travel (lodging, airplane tickets and expenses for travel back and forth from the airport, mileage if you travel by car, and meals) to interview with them. If no mention is made of this, it is okay to ask what their policy is for reimbursement before agreeing to travel for your interview. If they do not cover travel costs and you are unable to afford the trip, you may want to try and request a virtual interview instead.
- ✓ Update your résumé and be sure to bring several copies with you.
- ✓ You may want to bring a notepad, pens, or a portfolio (if you have one). Taking notes is perfectly OK—and expected.
- ✓ Plan a professional outfit. A good rule of thumb is that it is better to be overdressed than underdressed. You may also want to plan to bring an extra back-up outfit and shoes in case a wardrobe malfunction occurs during or on your way to the interview. Some general guidelines are below, however, it is important to remember that what is considered appropriate interview attire may vary between industries. Speak with a professional in your field or schedule an appointment with Career Services to determine the most appropriate attire for your interview.
 - **Suits:** Dark or neutral colored professional suit or skirt suit at least knee high; ark blue, gray, brown, black, or muted pin-stripes are all acceptable. Make sure clothing is not too tight or too loose.
 - **Blouses:** Keep it simple. Avoid flashy colors and styles, low-cut necklines, strapless, halters, sheer, and tank tops
 - **Shirts:** A white or light colored button-down shirt with a collar is appropriate. Be sure it is wrinkle-free and iron if necessary. Wear a plain white t-shirt underneath light colored dress shirts.
 - **Ties:** Ties are a great way to up your professional appearance. Keep it simple, conservative, and complimentary to your suit
 - **Shoes:** Flats or low heels up to 2 inches are appropriate. If you cannot walk normally in them, do not wear them. Avoid bright colors, sparkles, and prints. Pair with plain tights or stockings. Avoid bold patterns and lace. For men, brown or black dress shoes are appropriate—try to match your belt and shoes. Socks should cover your calf and match your suit color; no white athletic socks.
 - Avoid jeans, t-shirts, tank tops or midriff shirts, shorts, short skirts, flip-flops or tennis shoes, and excessive jewelry, make-up, cologne or perfume.
 - Make sure you are clean and well-groomed: shoes are polished, fingernails trimmed, conservative nail polish, clean shaven, hair is styled appropriately

- If you do not have an appropriate interview outfit and cannot afford to purchase something new, contact the Director of Career Services to explore your options for obtaining new clothing.

During the Interview

Your interview starts the moment you arrive on-site, regardless of where or how your interview is taking place. Be enthusiastic, confident, and friendly to *everyone* you meet before, during, and after your interview. You never know who the hiring manager is going to ask for feedback about you, and if you're rude to the front desk receptionist, it is not likely to play in your favor. If you want to be successful in your interview, keep in mind the following tips:

- ✓ Arrive roughly 10 minutes before the start time of your interview. This will give you some buffer zone in case you get lost or stuck in traffic on your way to finding the interview location. It will also give you time to prepare if you get there slightly early.
- ✓ Make a good first impression. Follow the lead of the interviewer—greet them by name. Establish the correct pronunciation of the interviewer's name and use a first name only if invited to do so.
- ✓ Typically in American culture, making eye contact and shaking hands is expected, however, this may not be the case with the person that you are interviewing with or culturally appropriate. Again, follow the lead of the interviewer. If these things are appropriate, they will likely do them first. Try to be flexible. Similarly, if shaking hands and making eye contact aren't culturally appropriate for you to do, you may want to let the interviewer know in advance or plan for how you'll approach this issue at the interview.
- ✓ Be confident, but be yourself. Don't worry about giving the "right" answer to each question, because there often isn't one. The interviewer is not looking for a right answer, but is instead trying to understand who you are and whether you would be a good fit for the position and the organization.
- ✓ If you don't immediately have an answer for a question, take a moment to collect your thoughts. You may also ask the interviewer to give you a moment to do this. Taking a pause and answering thoughtfully is much more effective than providing a quick but poor response.
- ✓ Share your knowledge of the organization and your interest in the position. You want to interview as if this was the only job you were applying for.
- ✓ Be aware of your non-verbal behavior. If you have any nervous habits, try to break them before the interview.
- ✓ Ask the interviewer any questions you have about the position, company, etc. This will show that you've done your research on the company but also help you to figure out if the organization is one you want to work for.
- ✓ Thank the interviewer(s) for his/her/their time. Ask about the hiring timeline and next steps. And if you don't already have contact information for your interviewer(s), ask for his/her/their business card(s) so you can follow up with a thank-you note.

After the Interview

Once you complete your interview, it may be helpful to reflect on how you did and your current level of interest in the position and working for the organization.

- ✓ If you're no longer interested in the job, go ahead and contact the organization as soon as possible to withdraw from the process.
- ✓ Send a thank-you letter (this can be hand-written, typed or sent via email) expressing your appreciation to the hiring manager within 1-2 business days of your interview. Be sure to restate your interest, qualifications, and anything you enjoyed during the interview.
- ✓ If you haven't heard back from the employer within the designated timeframe, it is appropriate to send a follow-up email or call to check on the status of the hiring process and to indicate that you are still interested in the position.

Virtual Interviews

A virtual interview is a type of interview that takes place remotely, sometimes over the phone, but more often using technology like video conferencing (ex. Zoom) and other online communication platforms. Many companies are transitioning to virtual interviews because it is cheaper and allows for wider range of candidates to interview. Similar to in-person interviews, virtual interviews may be one-on-one, in a group or with a panel of interviewers. In much the same way that you would prepare for and perform in an in-person interview, you will also do for a virtual interview. There are, however, some distinct differences that you will want to keep in mind, and some things that you will want to make sure you consider for a virtual interview that you would not have to do for an in-person interview.

Set the Scene

- ✓ *Choose an appropriate location*—choose a quiet location with few disturbances (you don't want anyone walking in on you during your interview). Consider any possible distractions or inappropriate items that might show up behind you on camera. You may want to consider removing anything illegal or especially revealing about your views or identity that could be used against you in a discriminatory manner.
- ✓ *Check your technology*—make sure your technology and internet is working prior to the day of your interview and again about an hour before your interview. You should have a camera and microphone on your device and should make sure you understand how to operate the software or system that the employer is using to interview you (ex. Zoom, Skype, etc.). Many of these programs require that you download them to your computer, so make sure you do this ahead of time.
- ✓ *Check your image and lighting*—ensure that your camera and microphone are functioning properly by recording a video of yourself. This will also help you see how you appear to the interviewer and whether you need to adjust your clothing, lighting, camera settings, etc. For the interview, prepare lighting by using a 2-point lighting system. In this system, there should be two points of light in front of you and to either side. Make sure the lighting in the room shows you clearly and in an attractive manner. You may also sit yourself just slightly off-center on-screen which will allow the light to highlight our appearance best. For the best view vertically, try to position your camera at eye-level. This will also let you more easily look at the camera when you are interviewing—which you should be doing instead of staring at the computer screen when speaking.

Dress Appropriately

- ✓ As with in-person interviews, you will want to dress professionally and appropriate to the position you are interviewing for. However, when interviewing virtually you will want to also consider how your outfit contrasts with your background and lighting of the location you have chosen to interview in. Avoid wearing patterns and the color white, solid colors tend to work best. White areas on a screen are noticed first and patterns tend to be distracting.

Practice and Practice Some More

- ✓ One of the benefits of practicing for a virtual interview is that you don't necessarily need another person to practice for one. You can start by recording yourself answering practice questions and critiquing your own performance. If you want additional feedback, ask a staff member from Career Services or a professional mentor for their critique on your practice interview. There are also several online tools that can offer feedback, including [Big Interview](#) which is free for all K-State students.
- ✓ Check out our Interview Prep ([links to new Interview Prep page](#)) page for more interviewing resources.



Phone Interviews

Phone interviews often take place as an initial screening for employers to determine if they would like to bring you in for an on-site interview and are usually one of your first chances to make a good impression. Prepare for a phone interview much the same way you would prepare for an in-person interview. An advantage to phone interviews is that you can have your resume and any helpful notes or research right in front of you while interviewing. Just make sure you don't depend on these too heavily as the interviewer will likely be able to tell more easily on the phone if you are reading from paper.

Some other tips:

- ✓ Eliminate distractions and background noise when using your phone. Phones can pick up and amplify background music, voices and other noises. Make sure you are in a space where you can maintain privacy.
- ✓ Have a fully charged battery and good service before answering the call.
- ✓ Be calm. Try not to talk fast and make sure you are speaking clearly and directly into the phone. Keep the mouthpiece about one inch from your mouth. Don't have anything in your mouth during the interview.
- ✓ Don't take the interview call while driving or operating any other noisy objects.
- ✓ If you are the one placing the call and have been asked to call at a specific time, call at exactly that time. Calling earlier or later may be interpreted negatively by the employer.
- ✓ Smile when answering questions. Smiling (although the interviewer cannot see you) improves the sound and tone of your voice and helps you project a positive image.
- ✓ Don't become overly familiar with the interviewer.
- ✓ Establish the correct pronunciation of the interviewer's name. Refer to the interviewer as Mr. or Ms. until you are invited to use a first name.
- ✓ Provide comprehensive responses and ample conversation, but don't monopolize the call.
- ✓ Take notes or write down questions during the call, if needed.
- ✓ If the interviewer does not outline the next steps in the process, be sure to ask before ending the call.

Mastering the Interview


To make a good impression in your interview, you will need to prepare and know what to expect going in. Just like studying for an exam, you can lessen some of your anxiety and improve your chances of success through preparation and practice.

What do employers look for when interviewing a candidate?

- ✓ Knowledge of the employer, industry, and position you are applying for.
- ✓ Oral and written communication skills, and the ability to interact well with others.
- ✓ Qualifications for the position.
- ✓ Professional appearance.
- ✓ Mature behavior and judgement.
- ✓ Enthusiasm for the company and position you are interviewing for.
- ✓ Flexible and pleasant demeanor.
- ✓ Leadership potential and ability to work in a team with others.
- ✓ Self-confidence and realistic appraisal of self.
- ✓ Work ethic.
- ✓ Problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- ✓ Motivation and demonstrated patterns of accomplishment.

Interview Questions

Although you will never be able to guess exactly what the employer will ask you in an interview, there are some common questions that most employers generally ask some variation of. These



are good questions to practice answering. You may also use the job description for clues as to what you might be asked about in your interview. For example, if one of the job qualifications for the position is “strong customer service skills,” you will want to make sure you have a response planned describing your customer service skills and how you have demonstrated this in past roles, in case the employer asks you about them.

Common Interview Questions

- ✓ Tell me about yourself.
- ✓ Why do you want to work for our company?
- ✓ Why should we hire you?
- ✓ What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- ✓ Why did you choose this career field?
- ✓ Why do you think you will be successful in this career?
- ✓ How do you spend your free time?
- ✓ What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- ✓ Describe something you have accomplished in your work or personal life.
- ✓ What will you bring to our company?
- ✓ How do you work under pressure?
- ✓ How do you work with a team?
- ✓ What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
- ✓ Describe a challenge you had to overcome and how you did it.

Common Categories of Interview Questions

- ✓ Questions related to the job description. Employers will often ask you to speak on the required skills/attributes listed in the original job description. They will likely want you to share how you have demonstrated these in the past or how you have the potential to perform the task.
- ✓ Questions related to your resume. Employers may ask you about something you have listed on your resume. Know your resume and be prepared to elaborate on anything asked about.
- ✓ Tell me about yourself questions. Probably the most common question in an interview, you will want to focus on sharing parts of yourself that are relevant to the position you are interviewing for. You don't have to explain your entire life history, just the parts that show off your personality and demonstrate how you are a good fit for the position. You may want to share your educational background and the experiences you've had that are relevant, such as internships and student club involvement. Keep your responses concise—a couple minutes is a good timeframe to shoot for.
- ✓ Describe your strengths and weaknesses questions. Again, another very common question. We recommend thinking of three strengths you have that are related to the job you are applying for. Then try to come up with specific examples of when you've used these strengths to accomplish something that matters. The best way to respond when asked about your weaknesses is to share something you are working on improving, such as your proficiency at using social media. Try to pick a skill, rather than a personality trait and make sure you mention what you are doing to improve your weakness. For example, “While I am confident in my professional networking abilities, I am not as familiar with the best practices and processes for posting to social media and networking in an online environment. I am currently taking an online course in social media networking to improve my skills in this area.” Also, it's not usually a good idea to pick a skill to talk about as a weakness that is listed as essential to the position you are applying for.
- ✓ “Why are you interested in our organization?” questions. Another very common question you are likely to be asked. To answer this question effectively, you need to know the organization. Do your research!
- ✓ Behavioral questions. These questions are designed to give the employer a better understanding of how you have handled various situations in the past. Employers like to

ask these questions because they believe it will give them a good understanding of how you will respond to different workplace scenarios in the future.

Behavioral questions ask you to describe a situation and how you responded. Usually starting with, “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of a time when...”

- ...you were faced with a challenge and had to overcome it.
- ...you had to work in a team to meet a tight deadline.
- ...you were in a stressful situation. How did you handle it?
- ...you had to work with someone you didn’t get a long with.
- ...you were successful in reaching your goal.
- ...you accomplished something you were proud of.
- ...you were faced with an ethical dilemma.

Answering Interview Questions

A solid way to respond to interview questions is to use the STAR(L) method:

- ✓ Situation—describe the situation by providing a short description—the who, what, where, when, why and how. Keep it brief!
- ✓ Task—describe the task (or dilemma) you worked on in more detail.
- ✓ Action—explain what you did, your specific role, and the steps you took in the situation.
- ✓ Result—describe what happened as a result of your actions.
- ✓ Learned—describe what you learned from the situation and what you will do again in the future when faced with similar circumstances. If the outcome of the situation was not necessarily positive, you can share what you would do differently next time.

Here’s an example of the STAR(L) method at work:

Question: Describe a time when you were faced with multiple deadlines and how you handled it.

Response:

- ✓ Situation: A couple years ago, I took the initiative to apply for funding to pay to bring in a professional speaker for one of our UAS Club events.
- ✓ Task: I researched different funding options and found several opportunities, however, each had different requirements, but similar deadlines.
- ✓ Action: In order to make the varying deadlines and make sure I fulfilled all the funding application requirements, I created a database to organize their deadlines, purposes, requirements, and other important application information such as how and where to submit it.
- ✓ Result: By breaking down the different funding applications into smaller steps and keeping all the information organized in a database, I was able to submit all of the applications for funding. We received two out of the five applications submitted and ended up with extra money left over even after paying for the speaker to come in.
- ✓ Learned: When juggling multiple deadlines, it is important to stay organized and break down each task into smaller, more manageable ones.

Inappropriate and Illegal Questions

Although these infrequently come up in an interview, the unfortunate reality is that they still may occur. These types of questions are ones that are not relevant to your professional qualifications or that ask you a question in relation to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age or marital status, which is illegal. It is also illegal for an interviewer to ask questions related to your medical history, pregnancy, or plans for children.

If you are asked one of these questions, a good way to respond is by telling them that you are happy to share helpful information about your qualifications for the position in which you are applying, but that you are having trouble understanding how this particular question relates to the job requirements. If they still insist on you answering the question, politely decline. You



want to remain professional, but also protect your rights as a candidate. If you are faced with one of these types of questions in an interview, please notify the Director of Career Services.