



INTERVIEW TIPS

Interviewing can be awkward for students and new grads because the conversation is far removed from our daily exchanges. So how can you set yourself apart in an interview? Do your homework, prepare actual stories from your experience and above all, practice!

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Tell me a bit about yourself.

- Briefly describe your experience, skills, accomplishments, goals and personal qualities.
- Talk about your interest in the company and how you plan on making a positive contribution.
- Discuss your educational qualifications; elaborate on the classes you took that are relevant to the position.
- Relate specific experiences and how they have prepared you for this opportunity.

Notes:

What are your strengths?

- Describe 2 or 3 skills that are most related to the job; be specific and provide supporting examples. Describe how your strengths would add value in the position.

Notes:

Someone who doesn't know you well doesn't like you. What are a few adjectives that person would use to describe you?

- Do not offer too many adjectives; describe how you are working to improve the behaviour; be specific.
- Avoid negative language (weakness vs. working to improve).

Notes:

**What do you see yourself doing in 5 years?**

- Be able to articulate a vision for your future.
- May include a career/education path, the environment you anticipate being in, roles you would like to hold and contributions you would like to make.
- Important to include how this opportunity/job fits in with your plan.

Notes:

Other **Commonly Asked Questions** to consider:

- Describe your ideal job.
- Go through your decision making process.
- Why did you choose your major?
- What do you do when you are not working/studying?
- What is your definition of success?
- What can you do for this organization that another potential candidate cannot?
- What criteria are you using to choose companies of interest?

BEHAVIOURAL BASED QUESTIONS

These questions are based on the assumption that your past behaviour is a good predictor of how you will act in the future. Your interviewer will ask questions to determine if you have the skills/traits that are considered vital to the organization's success. Your knowledge of the organization and industry will help you predict what qualities/characteristics are most valuable. Behavioural based questions are likely to begin with "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give an example of ..."

How do you answer a behavioural question?

- Decide ahead of time which experiences you will describe (refer to your research of organization and industry); share your stories within the context of the opportunity.
- Share experiences that involve both positive and negative outcomes; demonstrate lessons learned when sharing negative circumstances.
- Focus on what you did, not what you would do.
- Draw on experiences from school, work, extra-curricular involvement, volunteer, study-abroad, internships and field placements ...



Use the **SAR** formula as a framework for your stories or examples:

S is for 'situation' – introduce the circumstances you are about to describe and outline your responsibilities

A is for 'action' – describe what you did

R is for 'results' – summarize the outcomes or lessons learned

Note: Interviewers may also ask hypothetical questions (“What would you do...”), which you can turn into behavioural questions by providing concrete examples of how you have handled similar situations.

Q. Give me proof of your persuasiveness

***A.** During my summer internship I was assigned the task of conducting a benchmarking study for all of the communication expenditures for a major utility. I had to get the consensus of employees in several different departments. Unfortunately, they were cautious about following the lead of a summer intern (SITUATION). I had to schedule individual meetings with every employer and persuade each one that what I was doing would be ultimately beneficial to his or her department and to the company (ACTION). After a challenging month I finally got everyone’s cooperation, the project went smoothly, and I met a very tight deadline. In addition, I was able to prove my communication skills within a professional environment – very different from a classroom. (RESULT).*

Tell me about a time when you were put in a situation and had to get up to speed quickly.

- Define the situation and illustrate obstacles or challenges that were overcome.
- Demonstrate your perseverance, initiative and measures taken to exceed expectations.

Notes:

Describe a time when you were presented with a challenge and the outcome wasn't what you expected.

- Focus on the process of how you handled the negative (or less than desirable) outcome; how you made the best of the circumstances or resolved the situation.
- Assume responsibility for the situation without making excuses or blaming others.
- Share the lessons learned.

Notes:



Tell me about an experience where you excelled as an individual contributor.

- Discuss the situation and define the scope of the task.
- Highlight the challenges encountered and the results or impact your actions had.

Notes:

Give me an example of a successful project you were a part of.

- Highlight the team's objective and your individual role.
- Demonstrate your initiative; provide evidence of your contributions.

Notes:

Tell me about your least favourite manager or professor?

- Be cautious when answering this question; choose an example that is not too negative.
- Be brief in providing your answer and focus on what you learned.
- Do not talk badly about a former boss or professor; remain tactful and respectful.

Notes:

Other [Behavioural Based Questions](#) to consider:

- Tell me about the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle —maybe an angry or irate customer.
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused?
- Give me an example of something you've done in previous jobs or school that demonstrates your willingness to work hard.
- Tell me about a recent job or campus experience that you would describe as a real learning experience.
- Tell me about a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.



STRESS QUESTIONS

Interviewers commonly pose 'stress' questions to assess how candidates react when put under pressure. More specifically, they allow the interviewer to gain further clarity about how you think and behave when facing uncertainty. Questions you may face:

- If you were a novel, what would the summary on the back of the book say?
- What would be your instant reaction if you realized you had lost something important and could not get it back?
- If you could be any kitchen appliance, what would you be?
- Why is your GPA not higher?
- Why were you not more involved in extra-curricular activities while at university?

To prepare for these 'zingers':

- Be aware that these questions may come your way in the middle of a Q&A interview
- Remain professional, positive and focus on highlighting your skills.
- Do not take the questions personally, make excuses or become defensive – they are asked with a purpose in mind.
- Being humorous is not the answer.
- Often there may not be a correct answer ... therefore, the logic and assumptions you present to support your response are very important.
- "Stress" may come in the form of the interviewer's manner rather than a specific question. If an interviewer comes across as unfriendly, maintain a professional and friendly demeanour yourself.

THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

Employers use telephone interviews as a convenient way to screen and narrow the pool of applicants. Your goal ... to secure a face-to-face interview! Treat the telephone interview with the same importance as a face-to-face meeting and consider the following:

- Have a copy of your resume and key organization/industry facts within reach for easy reference.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking (e.g. recording next steps).
- Turn call waiting off so that you are not interrupted; shut out all background noises (television, pets...)
- Smile when you speak – this will project a positive tone in your voice.
- If concerned about projecting your voice – stand rather than sit throughout the interview.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer and take your time! It is okay to take a moment to collect your thoughts.
- Keep a glass of water handy. Do not smoke, chew gum or eat throughout the interview.

While you are actively job searching ... you must be prepared for the telephone interview! Seek opportunities to practice aloud or record and play back your responses. Remember that employers may be contacting you at home – ensure roommates and/or family members know this and respond appropriately, and that your answering machine has a professional and courteous—rather than funny or overly casual—greeting.



DELIVERY

In an interview, how you deliver your answers is just as important as what you say. Often candidates are amazed at how their message changes when they speak aloud, as opposed to rehearsing in their mind or on paper. Think about someone who has compelling delivery; what attracts you to them as they speak? It may include the following behaviours or traits:

Verbal Factors	Body Language
Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice how you will greet people, express thanks and say good-bye• Pace yourself• Include pitch variations in your answers• Choose words/phrases you are comfortable with• Take a moment to think before you respond• Be enthusiastic	Do: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shake hands using a firm grip• Look your interviewer in the eye• Position your legs close together• Sit up tall and lean slightly forward to show interest• Smile• Dress professionally• Carry your belongings in your left hand so you do not have to shuffle to shake hands• Wait to be seated until directed to do so
Avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of slang• Use of fillers such as 'like', 'you know' and 'umm'• Repetitive words or phrases	Avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hunched posture• Chewing gum• Folding arms• Twiddling with paper/pens

Face to Face – bring a portfolio with:

- Several copies of your resume
- A notepad and pen (ask permission to jot down a few notes while the interviewer provides details of the opportunity; do not write down interview questions)
- A list of professional references

END-OF-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Usually at the end of an interview, you'll be asked if you have any questions. The questions you ask can be as important as the answers you have provided up until this point. If you don't ask something, it can be taken as a sign of lack of interest.

Have a list of prepared questions. If you have done your homework (research of organization and industry), questions will suggest themselves to you!



Do ask:

Job/Organization/Industry Related Questions:

- ✓ Are you clear on the responsibilities of the job? If not, ask for clarification.
- ✓ Do you see where the job fits into the structure of the organization?
- ✓ How will success in the role be measured?
- ✓ How has a current event/market conditions impacted the department/organization?

Process Related Questions:

- ✓ Be sure you know what the next steps are after the interview.
- ✓ Are they going to contact you? Would they prefer you to follow up with them?

Don't ask:

- ✗ About salary or benefits (vacation, holidays, sick days, etc.) in the first interview; wait until an offer is presented.
- ✗ About information you should already have obtained through your research into the job and the organization (e.g. the organization's mission, the basic tasks associated with the job).
- ✗ Personal questions about the interviewer (if you happened to find the interviewer's personal Facebook page, keep this to yourself).
- ✗ Condescending questions (questions that begin with 'why' can be construed as demanding).

The end of the interview is also a good time to emphasize how interested you are in taking the process to the next step and why you think you'd be the perfect candidate for the job. Upon leaving, make sure to shake the person's hand again and make sincere eye contact. And, of course, don't forget to thank him or her.

REMEMBER TO SAY THANK YOU

Today, sending a thank you is part of interview etiquette. Thank you letters should be brief, personalized and sent within 24 hours. In your letter you should:

- Express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview
- Articulate your continued interest and enthusiasm for the position
- Recap your strengths
- Mention something interesting from your meeting (a new product or system you discussed)
- Request to meet again