



Interviewing Guide

If you've made it to the interview phase, it means the employer believes that you meet the minimum skills and qualifications required for the job. Now, your goal is to connect your experience and successes to the position, and to demonstrate that your strengths, qualities, and work style are a fit for the company.

Five Step Interview Prep

1. Research and Investigate

- The organization: its culture, economic conditions, structure, history, and purpose/mission.
- The position: review the requirements and duties, develop 3-5 questions ahead of time and have them written down.
- The industry: be prepared to discuss current issues and trends.

2. Review Your Responses

- Assess yourself. Make a list of strengths, abilities, and experiences that relate to the job.
- Determine major points you want to stress in the interview and decide how you will "sell" yourself.
- Identify three reasons for selecting this job and/or employer.
- List three assets you have which you feel will interest the employer.

3. Study your resume

- Review your resume as it fits the position, anticipating questions or issues that might arise.
- Consider skills and experiences that you want to be sure to highlight in your interview.

4. Practice, Practice, Practice

- Practice responses to potential interview questions. Answers should be a brief, results-oriented view of your experience and skills.
- Watch yourself in front of a mirror.
- Participate in a mock-interview at the Career Development Center.

5. Get Organized

- Solidify travel arrangements for the interview and identify backup options in case of issues.
- Choose your outfit: project a professional image, be comfortable (not casual), dress conservatively.
- Gather appropriate paperwork: resume (bring 2-3 copies – make sure they match the resume you submitted to employer), a completed application (if requested), references (a list of names, addresses, and phone numbers and/or letters of recommendation), and, in some fields, a portfolio (samples of your work).

Interview Types

You may encounter several types of interview, depending on the employer, and your position in the interview process. Following are several basic types of interviews:

Individual/Traditional Interview

- The most familiar interview format is the one-on-one employment interview. The focus of this face-to-face meeting is to determine whether your qualifications meet the employer's needs, and whether you will be a good fit for the company.
- Strategy: Approach the interview as a professional conversation rather than an interrogation, providing thoughtful responses and building rapport.

Phone Interview

- Purpose: Employers use this opportunity to screen the applicant and gather basic information that allows them to decide who to bring for an in-person interview. The interviewer will ask detailed questions about your background, skills, and professional interests which may not be covered in the resume or cover letter. It also gives the employer the chance to inspect your phone etiquette and behavior.
- Strategy: Conduct your interview in a quiet place with good cell service. Have your resume, the job description, and any notes out and accessible (but not too many!). Allow pauses before/after speaking if either party is using speakerphone.

Web (Video Chat or Recorded) Interview

- Purpose: Employers may use this technology in lieu of a phone interview or to interview an applicant out of state. Web interviews can be live, with you and the employer speaking in real time, or it may present questions for you to record your answers on camera.
- Strategy: Both formats require trustworthy technology and internet connection, as well as a professional setting with adequate lighting and audio. Be sure to look at the web-cam directly, rather than the image of the person you are speaking with. Dress professionally from head to toe.

Panel Interview

- In a panel interview, the applicant typically meets with two or more company representatives at the same time.
- Purpose: A panel interview allows you to meet with multiple people at once, which is efficient for the company and helps you understand team dynamics.
- Strategy: Panel interviews can be intimidating. Remember you are not alone; others interviewing for the job must go through this as well. Make eye contact with each interviewer rather than focusing on just one person.

Group Interview

- This allows multiple applicants to meet with one employer. You will either be asked questions as a group or given a specific task to accomplish.
- Purpose: Group interviews allow employers to interview a high volume of candidates at once with the goal of observing how you work within a team.
- Strategy: In this scenario, the applicants are doing the majority, if not all, of the work. Strike a balance between taking the lead and taking direction. Don't allow yourself to fade into the background.

Non-Verbal Communication

What you don't say can be as important as what you do. Following are seven key non-verbal communication skills:

- **Handshake** – Keep your hand straight and firm; not too firm that they wince, but no limp handshakes.
- **Eye Contact** – Maintain eye contact without staring. If you look away while listening, it shows lack of interest and a short attention span. If you fail to maintain eye contact while speaking, at a minimum it shows lack of confidence in what you are saying and at worst may send the subtle message that you are lying. Practice, and ask others to watch you.
- **Facial Expressions** – Don't forget to smile – sounds easy but often when we are nervous or stressed, we don't realize we are not smiling. Practice being aware of the expressions you are making: frowning, raising and lowering of your eyebrows, or turning your nose up. Practice the interview in front of the mirror and watch your facial expressions, or better yet, record yourself.

- **Posture** - Posture signals your confidence and power potential. Stand tall, walk tall, and most of all, sit tall. When standing, stand up straight.
- **Sitting** - Sit at the front edge of the chair, leaning slightly forward. This will speak volumes about your interest and motivation. Don't slouch or sink into the chair. Keep your arms at your side or in your lap.
- **Gestures** - Gestures should be used sparingly during the interview. When you do use gestures, make sure that they are natural and meaningful. Minimize fidgeting with your hands or touching your face/hair.
- **Space** - Recognize the boundaries of your personal space and that of others. Approximately arm's length is typical. Try not to back up or move away from an interviewer who has a personal space that is smaller than your own. Hang in there, take a deep breath, and relax.

What to Wear

Know the field and organization you are interviewing with to assess the appropriate attire. Even if employees dress in business-casual, you want to impress - professional attire is appropriate for the interview. An exception can be made if you know the organization endorses very casual dress – in which case you should wear business-casual.

- Suit: Conservative two-piece business suit (solid black, dark blue or gray is best); suit jacket may be removed if you feel your interviewers are more casually dressed
- Shirt: Dress shirt, long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Shoes: Clean, polished dress shoes, dark to match suit - no colorful shoes or gym shoes
- Coat: Dress coat or trench coat (mid to long length) – avoid leather, no short jackets, ski jackets or athletic wear
- Accessories: subtle color/patterned necktie can be appropriate, minimal jewelry (avoid things that may rattle when gesturing)
- Hair: Well-groomed hairstyle (facial and head)
- Fingernails: Clean and trimmed (neutral color, if any, is best)
- Avoid cologne or perfume – the best scent is no scent at all
- Empty your pockets--no bulges or noisy keys or coins
- Piercings, tattoos, and colorfully dyed hair colors: unless you know the company's dress policy or cultural norms around these trends, it is best to remove or cover piercings and tattoos

Etiquette - Basic Guidelines

- Leave the cell phone at home or turn it off – forget the vibrate setting, it can be heard in a quiet room. Avoid additional electronics with sound – handhelds that beep or ring, watches that beep on the hour, etc.
- No laptops, unless it is necessary for the interview – if you have to carry it, keep it in a briefcase.
- Place all necessary items in a briefcase or purse - choose a dark color such as black, brown or navy. Avoid backpacks and bags with wild colors.
- No gum, candy or cigarettes.
- Be on time (not too early, e.g. more than 15 minutes) – practice your route if the location is new to you
- Bring a pen, paper, and extra resumes; it's worth investing in a professional quality pen and nice leather (leather-like) portfolio folder.
- Don't make excuses or criticize.
- Wait to be seated.
- When asked into the interviewer's office, walk in as if you belong; do not hesitate, peek in, or act sheepishly.
- Be courteous to *everyone* you encounter at the interview site.

Interview Questions

Commonly Asked Interview Questions – Traditional Interview

Practice your responses and prepare answers which offer a brief, results-oriented view of your experience and skills.

- Tell me about yourself. *Focus on your experience and accomplishments as they relate to the position.*
- Why do you want to work for our company? *Use your research about the company/position to reply.*
- What are your strengths/weaknesses? *As they relate to performing the job, focus on accomplishments that highlight strengths and ways you are improving upon your weaknesses.*
- What are your professional/career goals? *Connect this to your personal career/future plans.*
- What did you like best/least about your previous job? *Never offer negative information about a company or supervisor. Your examples should demonstrate/highlight particular values/skills.*
- How would you describe your ideal job? *Connect this to your career objectives and the research you have done about the organization and position. Be genuine.*
- Describe your most significant accomplishment...biggest challenge. *Relate these experiences to attributes you will bring to the position.*
- What motivates you? *As it relates to your career plans.*
- Why should I hire you? *Focus on your accomplishments, experiences, and the abilities you can bring to the position.*
- Do you have any questions? *YES! This is when you can ask from memory or ask for permission to use your "prepared" list of questions. (Make sure questions are neatly typed on professional paper; 3-5 questions)*
- Why did you leave your last job? *Tell the truth positively.*
- What do you see yourself doing five/ten years from now? *Relate one or two of your long-term goals to the position/organization.*
- Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it? *Focus on the process of conflict resolution, not the nature of the conflict itself.*
- Why did you choose to attend Loyola University Chicago? *Focus on the decision-making process or aspects of Loyola's mission which related to your goals.*
- Is your GPA an accurate reflection of your ability? *Focus on your activities, projects, classwork to further represent your capabilities.*
- Why are you interested in our company/the position? *Use your research findings to relate information about the organization to your needs/values.*
- What kind of salary are you looking for? *Research should give you an average range for the industry, position, and location. Additionally, by researching the company, you may be able to determine the organization's salary ranges. Avoid bringing up salary yourself in an interview.*

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral-based Interviewing was developed as an objective measure of a candidate's past performance. By asking about how someone has acted/reacted to a given situation in the past, an interviewer can get a clear picture of how that candidate will likely act in a similar situation in the future. Most companies will ask behavioral questions in addition to the more traditional questions. See STAR method below for formulating responses.

- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something unexpected.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you proceed?
- What has been the most difficult project for you to see through to completion?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer, coworker, or team member.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a situation when you worked with a person who did things differently from you. How did you get the job done?

Providing Great Answers

Use the **STAR** technique to help structure your answers in a clear and professional story format that emphasizes your skills and backs them up with real-life evidence.

- **S**-situation (Briefly lay the stage for your story and provide some context)
- **T**-task (Briefly discuss the problem or task at hand that you had to address)
- **A**-actions (Detail the actions that you took to manage the task—here is where you showcase your understanding of a problem-solving process and where you highlight your strengths and skills—use those actions verbs!)
- **R**-result (What were the positive results you contributed to? Or more importantly, what did you LEARN from this situation that can translate into your new position or role?)

REMEMBER – if asked about a challenge or weakness, the goal of your answer is to demonstrate self-awareness and growth, not to dodge the question!

Suggestions for Questions You Might Ask the Interviewer

- Clarification regarding particular aspects of the position; typical day/week; reporting relationships; learning opportunities; fit into the corporate structure?
- How would you describe the company’s values and management philosophy?
- What are the policies and procedures for evaluation in this position?
- What qualities would it take to be successful in this job? The company?
- Where are you in the search process? What are the next steps?
- Why did the position become available?
- What do you feel are the essential factors for success in this position?
- What problems/challenges do you feel the successful candidate should be able to solve?
- What short-term objectives would you like to see the person in this position achieve?
- Any questions which would be appropriate related to current events/trends/company-related content.

Follow Up

As you wrap up an interview, it is appropriate to ask when you can expect to hear back from them with a decision. Make notes immediately following the interview to track this and other important details of the conversation. This will help aid decision-making if you receive an offer, and it will also make writing thank-you notes easier. Always send a thank-you note to everyone you met within 24-48 hours. You can find a sample in our Career Correspondence guide- a strong thank you shares sincere gratitude and outlines a few details of the position/your candidacy that make you a great fit. This can be emailed or mailed based on the timeline for decision-making.

What to do if You Are Asked an Inappropriate Question

It can be an uncomfortable situation when asked an inappropriate or illegal question pertaining to such topics as race, nationality, religion, age, or marital status, especially if you are interviewing for a position that you really want. It is important to assess what kind of information an employer is seeking in asking these questions. For example, if an employer asks if you are planning on having children, they may be interested in whether you will be able to travel. You can address this issue in an interview without having to answer the question. For instance, a possible reply could be “Well, if you are worried about whether or not I will be available for business trips the answer is yes, I will be able to travel.” This can effectively convey the necessary information that the employer was interested in and direct the line of questioning away from the inappropriate topic.

Career Development Center

LSC: Sullivan Center for Student Services, Suite 255 • 6339 N. Sheridan Rd

WTC: Schreiber Center, Suite 115 • 16 E. Pearson

P • 773.508.7716 • E • careercenter@luc.edu • W • LUC.edu/career



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