INTERVIEWING RESOURCES

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER
Familiarize yourself with the questions most frequently asked by interviewers for business positions, internships, and graduate school admission interviews. It is essential that you ask questions to show your professionalism and enthusiasm for the position and company to which you are applying. Be sure to do some research and take some thoughtful, engaging questions with you to the interview!

ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS
Check out these examples of how to respond to difficult or behavioral based-questions

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS
With increasing competition in the job market, candidates must be prepared to handle a variety of situations with self-confidence. Prepare for phone and virtual interviews, panel and one-on-one interviews and market yourself effectively in any situation

ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
There are some questions that prospective employers should not ask, such as familial status, religion, or nationality. Candidates must be prepared for these and provide a professional response if necessary.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS
Find out more about the field you wish to pursue by meeting with a professional in the industry. Informational interviews provide candidates with much more information than what a company website or job description can.

MOCK INTERVIEWS ON THE BUC CAREER NETWORK
Use this unique online practice software from your own webcam for a view from the other side of the interview table! Review your recording and share it with friends to help sharpen your interview skills. You may practice your interview multiple times to ensure a polished presentation that markets your professionalism, experience, skills, and eagerness to work for the prospective employer!

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Integrating Faith in Learning, Leading and Serving
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COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY INTERVIEWERS

If you are able to answer these types of questions, you will be well-prepared! Consider how you will answer these prior to your interview so you will sound professional and ready for work.

**Personality/Character**
- Tell me about yourself.
- What motivates you to do your best?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your greatest accomplishment?
- What does “service” mean to you?
- What is a weakness or an area you would like to improve in?
- What is your definition of success?
- Are you an individual or a team player?
- What does confidentiality mean to you?
- What is your “personal motto?”
- Where do you see yourself in 3 years? 5 years?
- What is your most important quality that you bring to the table?

**Past Experience**
- Give me an example of how you have demonstrated teamwork in the past.
- Give me an example of how you handled a difficult customer (or boss, or co-worker).
- How do you deal with anger?
- Think of a time when you were working with someone who knew a lot more than you do. How did you close the gap?
- Think about your past work and volunteer experience. Where do you feel you made the greatest contribution? How?
- Tell me about your computer skills.
- What would your former supervisor tell us about your performance? How about your attendance?
- What tends to be stressful for you? How did you handle stress in your last job?
- What goals did you set for yourself in your last position?
- Describe a situation where you made a mistake and how you corrected it.

**College**
- What prompted you to get a degree in ____________?
- I notice you participated in ___________ in college. What did you get from that experience?
- Why did you choose to attend CSU?

**Current Position**
- Why did you apply for this position?
- Tell me what you know about this position.
- Tell me what you know about our company.
- Please describe why you are the best candidate for this position.
- If you joined our company, how do you think you could make a contribution?
- What do you need from an organization to feel motivated?
- What kind of performance feedback do you prefer?
- What do you know about our company
QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

To show that you are informed and interested in the prospective employer, it is very important to ask questions. In addition to helping you appear serious and professional, this will give you valuable information which will help you determine if the job is a good fit for you.

- Would you take a few moments to give me a more comprehensive description of the job requirements?
- What does a typical day in this position look like?
- Tell me about the last person who was in this position.
- What makes your company different from others?
- How does the job for which I’m interviewing fit in with the mission of the company?
- What are the core values of this company?
- From your perspective, what is the greatest challenge this organization faces during the next year?
- What do you see as the areas that most need improvement within the company?
- What is the short-term and long-term strategic direction of the company?
- What do you think are the most important qualities that candidates for this position should have?
- What do you perceive to be the most important qualities for success in this job?
- What can I tell you about my qualifications?
- What opportunities exist in the future for someone who performs successfully in this position?
- Will training be provided? And if so, what type of training?
- Is there anything else I can review during the rest of the hiring process? What is the next step in the selection process?
- Who would be supervising the person who fills this job?
- Is there anyone else involved in the final hiring decision for the position?
- Outside my department, whom else will I work with?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

Helpful Hint:
Make a written note of the answers to the last two questions. Hopefully you will learn the names of more people to whom you can send copies of your follow-up letter.
HELPFUL HINTS FOR ANSWERING TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

An interviewer may say, "Tell me something about yourself."

Make sure you have prepared a response ahead of time. Don’t launch into a twenty minute monologue on your life history from birth to the present; instead, describe a situation in which you displayed your dedication, hard work, or motivation. A potential employer wants to know that you can recognize and briefly communicate your accomplishments.

An interviewer may ask you one of the following questions: "What’s your passion?" "How do you like my tie?" "What’s your favorite book and why?"

The interviewer is most likely interested in discovering your personality and the kinds of things that interest you. He or she is also looking to see how creative you are and how well you can think on your feet. The key to handling such questions is simple: maintain your composure and answer truthfully.

Another typical interview question is: "What are your weaknesses?"

When you encounter this question, make sure that you answer honestly with a short and direct response. Focus on an area that you are planning to improve and try to turn the negative into a positive. For instance, you might say, "I don’t have any corporate experience in this field, but I am very excited about the training that you offer your new employees."

A similar question to the one above is: "Is there anything in your background or work history that would give us reservations about hiring you?"

Recruiters want to know that you can learn from a negative experience. Remember to make sure that everything you say is positive!

It is quite common for an interviewer to ask you "Why do you want to leave your present job?" or "Why did you leave your most recent job?"

Focus on the positive aspects of change. Respond with something similar to: "I’ve learned a great deal in my job, but it’s time to move on to a larger organization where I can use my experience in new and different areas. I’m ready for more responsibility, and this change will be a positive one in my profession." This question also offers the opportunity to tell the interviewer what attracts you to his or her particular company.

When thinking ahead to possible interview questions, use common sense.

What type of position are you applying? What skills were listed in the job description and how do your experiences match those? Pretend that you are an interviewer. Make up questions that you would ask yourself or that you feel are relevant to the job. You may also talk to your family members or friends. Ask them what questions they anticipate that you may be asked.
STAGES OF THE INTERVIEW

Introduction
Where First Impressions Are Made
Objective: Make Good First Impression and Determine Specific Hiring Criteria

Question & Answer
Interviewer trying to find out more about you
Objective: Highlight your strengths and show how you can increase company profits.

Information Gathering
Interviewer provides specific information about position and Company.
Objective: Ask questions that demonstrate your interest and preparation

Conclusion
Discuss the next step in the hiring process
Objective: Attempt to achieve goal of interview (2nd Interview or Hire)

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Become familiar with various types of interviews, as you may encounter interviewers who blend styles to suit the interview objectives and to test for employment readiness.

The Behavioral Interview
In behavioral interviews, candidates are asked to respond to questions that require examples of previous activities undertaken and behaviors performed. To succeed at this type of interview, be prepared to give accounts of how you have dealt with difficulties on the job. The purpose of this type of interview is to predict future performance based on past experiences.

The Directed Interview
The directed or directive interview involves the interviewer using an outline and asking specific questions within a certain time frame. The interviewer works from a checklist and takes notes. This type of interview is impersonal and seeks to reveal facts.

The Undirected Interview
The undirected or non-directive interview is unstructured and allows candidates to discuss their qualifications openly. This interview gives candidates a measure of control over the interview, providing for an opportunity to concentrate on strengths and to show leadership and organizational abilities.
**The Panel Interview**

A panel involves a number of interviewers. The composition of this panel could include:

- The supervisor
- The manager
- A union representative
- A human resources officer
- An employment equity officer
- Employees from the department that is hiring

**The Group Interview**

The group interview is used by some large companies or organizations for graduate intakes when several graduates are interviewed at one time. This interview can last from two hours to a day or longer and usually includes a group problem-solving exercise.

The interviewers may ask questions in an unstructured manner; therefore, the questions and comments may be unrelated to one another. This type of interview is used to:

- Observe how candidates react under pressure
- Evaluate how individuals interact with people with different personalities
- Test for communication skills
- Assess the "fit" with the group

*NOTE: It is wise to seek the advice of someone who has experienced this type of interview before engaging in this process.*

**The Sequential Interview**

Some interviews are sequenced over a longer period, such as a half or full day. These interviews are used as an assessment tool. The first stage may begin with a panel interview, followed by a tour around the company (during which the assessment continues). The interview sequence may then conclude with another interview when you may be asked questions that test your creativity or your "fit" within the organization.

Further, you may be invited to more than one interview; for instance, the first may be an overall screening, followed by some form of assessment, then a post-assessment follow-up.

**The Stress Interview**

The stress interview intentionally creates and promotes discomfort. The interviewer may have an abrupt or brash attitude. Alternately, the interviewer may stare, be silent, and spend time taking notes. The purpose of this type of interview is to test the candidate's ability to be assertive and handle difficult situations.
The Screening Interview

Companies use screening tools to ensure that candidates meet minimum qualification requirements. Computer programs are among the tools used to weed out unqualified candidates. (This is why you need a digital resume that is screening-friendly. See our resume center for help.) Sometimes human professionals are the gatekeepers. Screening interviewers often have honed skills to determine whether there is anything that might disqualify you for the position. Remember—they do not need to know whether you are the best fit for the position, only whether you are not a match. For this reason, screeners tend to dig for dirt. Screeners will hone in on gaps in your employment history or pieces of information that look inconsistent. They also will want to know from the outset whether you will be too expensive for the company.

Some tips for maintaining confidence during screening interviews:

- Highlight your accomplishments and qualifications.
- Get into the straightforward groove. Personality is not as important to the screener as verifying your qualifications. Answer questions directly and succinctly. Save your winning personality for the person making hiring decisions!
- Be tactful about addressing income requirements. Give a range, and try to avoid giving specifics by replying, "I would be willing to consider your best offer."
- If the interview is conducted by phone, it is helpful to have note cards with your vital information sitting next to the phone. That way, whether the interviewer catches you sleeping or vacuuming the floor, you will be able to switch gears quickly.

The Meandering Style

This interview type, usually used by inexperienced interviewers, relies on you to lead the discussion. It might begin with a statement like "tell me about yourself," which you can use to your advantage. The interviewer might ask you another broad, open-ended question before falling into silence. This interview style allows you tactfully to guide the discussion in a way that best serves you.

The following strategies, which are helpful for any interview, are particularly important when interviewers use a non-directive approach:

- Come to the interview prepared with highlights and anecdotes of your skills, qualities and experiences. Do not rely on the interviewer to spark your memory—jot down some notes that you can reference throughout the interview.
- Remain alert to the interviewer. Even if you feel like you can take the driver's seat and go in any direction you wish, remain respectful of the interviewer's role. If he or she becomes more directive during the interview, adjust.
- Ask well-placed questions. Although the open format allows you significantly to shape the interview, running with your own agenda and dominating the conversation means that you run the risk of missing important information about the company and its needs.
The Audition

For some positions, such as computer programmers or trainers, companies want to see you in action before they make their decision. For this reason, they might take you through a simulation or brief exercise in order to evaluate your skills. An audition can be enormously useful to you as well, since it allows you to demonstrate your abilities in interactive ways that are likely familiar to you. The simulations and exercises should also give you a simplified sense of what the job would be like. If you sense that other candidates have an edge on you in terms of experience or other qualifications, requesting an audition can help level the playing field.

To maximize on auditions, remember to:

- Clearly understand the instructions and expectations for the exercise. Communication is half the battle in real life, and you should demonstrate to the prospective employer that you make the effort to do things right the first time by minimizing confusion.
- Treat the situation as if you are a professional with responsibility for the task laid before you. Take ownership of your work.
- Brush up on your skills before an interview if you think they might be tested.

The Tag-Team Interview

Expecting to meet with Ms. Glenn, you might find yourself in a room with four other people: Ms. Glenn, two of her staff, and the Sales Director. Companies often want to gain the insights of various people when interviewing candidates. This method of interviewing is often attractive for companies that rely heavily on team cooperation. Not only does the company want to know whether your skills balance that of the company, but also whether you can get along with the other workers. In some companies, multiple people will interview you simultaneously. In other companies, you will proceed through a series of one-on-one interviews.

Some helpful tips for maximizing on this interview format:

- Treat each person as an important individual. Gain each person's business card at the beginning of the meeting, if possible, and refer to each person by name. If there are several people in the room at once, you might wish to scribble down their names on a sheet of paper according to where each is sitting. Make eye contact with each person and speak directly to the person asking each question.
- Use the opportunity to gain as much information about the company as you can. Just as each interviewer has a different function in the company, they each have a unique perspective. When asking questions, be sensitive not to place anyone in a position that invites him to compromise confidentiality or loyalty.
- Bring at least double the anecdotes and sound-bites to the interview as you would for a one-on-one interview. Be ready to illustrate your main message in a variety of ways to a variety of people.
- Prepare psychologically to expend more energy and be more alert than you would in a one-on-one interview. Stay focused and adjustable.
**The Mealtime Interview**

For many, interviewing over a meal sounds like a professional and digestive catastrophe in the making. If you have difficulty chewing gum while walking, this could be a challenge. With some preparation and psychological readjustment, you can enjoy the process. Meals often have a cementing social effect-breaking bread together tends to facilitate deals, marriages, friendships, and religious communion. Mealtime interviews rely on this logic, and expand upon it.

Particularly when your job requires interpersonal acuity, companies want to know what you are like in a social setting. Are you relaxed and charming or awkward and evasive? Companies want to observe not only how you handle a fork, but also how you treat your host, any other guests, and the serving staff.

**Some basic social tips help ease the complexity of mixing food with business:**

- Take cues from your interviewer, remembering that you are the guest. Do not sit down or begin eating until your host does. Order something less extravagant than your interviewer. If he recommends an appetizer to you, he likely plans to order one. If he orders dessert, do not leave him eating alone.
- If your interviewer wants to talk business, do so. Practice eating and talking simultaneously.
- Try to set aside dietary restrictions and preferences. Remember, the interviewer is your host. It is rude to be finicky unless you absolutely must. If you must, be as tactful as you can.
- Choose manageable food items, if possible. Avoid barbeque ribs and spaghetti.
- Find a discrete way to check your teeth after eating. Excuse yourself from the table for a moment.
- Thank your interviewer for the meal.

**The Follow-up Interview**

Companies bring candidates back for second and sometimes third or fourth interviews for a number of reasons. Sometimes they just want to confirm that you are the amazing worker they first thought you to be. Sometimes they are having difficulty deciding between a short-list of candidates. Other times, the interviewer's supervisor or other decision makers in the company want to gain a sense of you before signing a hiring decision.

The second interview could go in a variety of directions, and you must prepare for each of them. When meeting with the same person again, you do not need to be as assertive in your communication of your skills. You can focus on cementing rapport, understanding where the company is going and how your skills mesh with the company vision and culture. Still, the interviewer should view you as the answer to their needs. You might find yourself negotiating a compensation package. Alternatively, you might find that you are starting from the beginning with a new person.

**Some tips for managing second interviews:**

- **Be confident.** Accentuate what you have to offer and your interest in the position.
- **Probe tactfully to discover more information about the internal company dynamics and culture.**
- **Walk through the front door with a plan for negotiating a salary.**
- **Be prepared for anything: to relax with an employer or to address the company's qualms about you.**
HOW TO ADDRESS ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When prepping yourself for interviews, bear in mind that the employer wants to know if (1) you can do the job; (2) you will do it; and (3) ask questions that are most likely to invade your rights to privacy.

Answering penetrating job interview questions is tough. Handling those that invade your privacy is even tougher. Employers sometimes ask questions that are technically improper. Some of them don’t know any better. Others make unlawful queries to get at a legitimate concern, such as dependability. How do you answer such questions in a way that meets your objective-to turn all employment interviews into job offers?

When you’re asked an improper question, you have three choices:

1. You can refuse to answer, and tell the employer you think the question is improper. You may feel better, but chances are you’ll be back pounding the pavement tomorrow.
2. You can swallow your pride and your privacy and answer the question as it was asked. You may feel worse, but you’ll still be in the running.
3. You can answer the legitimate concern that probably lies behind the wrongful question, and ignore the improper question itself-the best of both worlds.

It’s important that you decide before starting an interview just how sensitive you are about prohibited topics, and how you intend to handle them if they come up. Decide NOW. The interview room isn’t the place to make a quick choice. You’re on strange turf where you may easily overreact. Make a list of sensitive questions that might come your way. Determine in advance which of the previous three options you’ll use when responding. Rehearse different ways of answering so that your reply will come out smoothly and naturally.

Q: Do you plan to have children?
A: I plan to pursue a career whether or not I decide to raise a family.
The interviewer may have a genuine concern about how long that candidate might remain on the job. But the question is improper at best and illegal in many states. The answer ignores the inappropriate question but answers the interviewer’s concern.

Q: Are you aware that we’ve usually hired a more athletic person for this job because the pressure and fatigue of a lot of travel? (Read: not overweight.)
A: There’s no task in your job description that I can’t perform.
As an applicant you have the right to reply, “That’s an illegal question and I won’t answer.” That reply may win you that battle, but will probably lose you the war. The answer above side-steps the question while giving the interviewer a response.

Be aware of end runs, particularly on age. The interviewer says, “Oh, I see that you attended Cornell. What years were you there?” The plain fact is that of all questions an employer might ask, the most publicized “no-no” is age. The interviewer simply can’t be offended by your turning aside an age-related question with a query such as, “Did someone else here graduate from there, too?” That answer will divert the interviewer from the subject and get the discussion back on track.
Q: What’s your general state of health?
A: I’ll be glad to take a pre-employment exam by your company physician to be sure I’m able to handle the job. (The employer may be trying to uncover maladies ranging from AIDS to drug addiction. Your answer relieves those concerns without directly replying to the question.)

Q: Is your spouse employed?
A: Yes, and very supportive of my seeking employment here. (Some employers believe that people from dual-income families have less incentive to work, are less dependable, and, therefore, are less productive. You’ve skirted the illegal question, laid to rest the concern and avoided an unpleasant confrontation.)

Q: Have you ever been arrested other than for traffic violations?
A: There’s nothing I’ve ever done that would give your company any concern that I’d breach any trust that the job you have requires. (Some states allow questions about convictions, but not arrests. California forbids both. The interviewer may be concerned about employee dishonesty, hence the question. Your answer satisfies the concern without turning off the interviewer.)

Q: When was your last physical exam?
A: Two years ago. (This is an area in which you decide ahead of time whether to give a direct response to an inappropriate question, one that the employer may be using to learn about physical handicap. Since discrimination for handicaps is illegal, you’re on safe ground to answer directly.)

Q: What hobbies and sports do you have?
A: I collect stamps and coins, ski in the winter and sail with a friend on his boat in the summer. (Is the interviewer trying to find a pitcher for the company’s softball team? There’s no reason not to give a direct answer, although you’re looking for a job based on your business skills, not your sports ability.)

Q: Do you own your own home, rent or live with your parents?
A: I’m not sure how this relates to the job. Can you explain? (The question is plainly discriminatory and against the law. Your answer doesn’t offend and leaves the door open should the interviewer provide some relevancy, though that’s unlikely. Some interviewers are simply nosy.)

Final Thoughts
The secret of replying to questions that intrude on your rights to privacy, or even those that fall into a “gray” area, is to relate to your answers to job performance. When choosing how to answer improper questions, James Nunan, vice president of human resources at SCICON Systems, a software company in Palo Alto, Calif., says, “As an applicant, consider market demand. In Silicon Valley, our applicants are very secure in shopping their services. They can answer improper questions directly. I believe that most of today’s managers ask illegal questions accidentally, not purposefully,” he says. Donald Sweet, an outplacement counselor with Hawkins Associates Inc. in Summit, N.J., says that when interviewing, “You can say, as politely as possible, ‘Can you tell me how that’s pertinent to the discussion?’” Direct answers usually make better impressions. They also avoid showing up an interviewer with your superior knowledge of employment law.

By: James M. Jenks, chairman of the Alexander Hamilton Institute Inc. in New York, is co-author of “Managers Caught in the Crunch: Turning a Job Crisis Into a Career Opportunity” (Franklin Watts, 1988).
INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

What is an informational interview?
An informational interview is a discussion with someone who is knowledgeable about a specific career field. The person you talk to can be a representative from a firm or agency that employs people in the type of position you are trying to learn about, or a person who holds such a position.

What is the purpose of an informational interview?
Your objective is to obtain facts and ideas that will help you in making career decisions. Remember that you are the interviewer, and your purpose for conducting an interview is to request information. An informational interview is not the same as a job interview.

What are the benefits of informational interviews?
- Learn about the duties, qualifications and personality traits required in a career area
- Learn what types of experience you will need to qualify for a specific position
- Gain knowledge of opportunities available
- Narrow your options
- Learn the jargon and current trends in the field
- Expand your network for future reference

Where should I start?
You should always try to contact a specific person. If you do not know an individual who holds the type of job you are interested in, you can contact The Career Center to obtain names of individuals who may be able to help you. You may find former students who are willing to give you information. Additionally, you may be able to have one of your professors arrange an appointment with someone in a career field that interests you.

The initial contact can be made by telephone or by mail, although telephone contact is more immediate. State your purpose and ask for 15-20 minutes of the person’s time.

How should I prepare for the interview?
Before you go to your interview, learn as much as you can about the organization by doing some research. You can find information about employers on the Web; you may also find employer information on the BucCareer Network at www.csuniv.edu/careers.

You should dress professional for the meeting and arrive 10-15 minutes early. Prepare a list of questions that will help you gain useful information.
**What are some questions that I should ask?**

In addition to any note-worthy questions you may have from your online research about the organization, there are more general questions which will give you important information.

- How did you become interested in this field or job?
- What is the best educational preparation for this field?
- How long have you worked in this job?
- What are your major responsibilities?
- Do you work primarily with data, people, or things?
- What do you like most about your work?
- What are the major frustrations in this job?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- How did you gain entrance into this line of work?
- Which professional journals and organizations would I know about in this field?
- What skills are needed in the field, and which ones should I be concentrating on at this point in my education?
- What personal qualities do you feel are need to be seeking a job in your field?
- How would you advise someone to begin seeking a job in your field?
- Do you know comparable job titles I should be exploring in this field?
- Does your organization offer learning opportunities such as internships or summer employment?
  - If so, who should I contact for more information?
- Would you be willing to critique my resume?
- Can you recommend someone else for me to talk to in this field?
  - When I call him/her, may I use your name?

**What should I do after the interview?**

Be sure to send a thank-you letter to each person you interview. Keep good notes and follow up with any leads that you are given. Make sure you keep a record of the title, address, phone number, and company of each of your contacts. These people are now a part of your career network!