

Interview techniques.

Preparing for the job interview

www.careers.utoronto.ca



University of Toronto Career Centre



@UofTCareerCtr



Interview purpose and process

Interviews are an opportunity to show and communicate to an employer why you are the best candidate for the position. Interviews allow you to discuss your relevant skills, strengths, and experiences, then to relate them to the position and the needs of the employer. You also have the opportunity in the interview to determine whether the employer and the position are a good fit for your needs at this time. Interviews are a two-way process and the goal is a mutually satisfying match. To be successful in an interview, there are a number of steps to take before, during, and after the interview.

Before the interview you will be engaging in

- pre-interview research and preparation; and
- thinking about how you will make a good first impression and share your experiences

During the interview you will be engaging in

- answering interview questions
- asking your questions
- closing the interview by thanking the interviewer and inquiring about the next steps in the recruiting process

After the interview you will be engaged in

- following up with the employer to thank them for the interview
- reviewing and evaluating your performance to learn from your experience

Types of interview formats

Interviews don't come in one standard format. Ask what format your interview will take, and who will be conducting it, so that you can be prepared. Here are the more common formats:

Panel, board, and committee interviews

- This type of interview is conducted by a panel of usually three or more people.
- The panel may consist of a supervisor of the department, the person to whom you would report, potential co-workers, supervisors of other departments, and a representative from the human resources department.

Multiple rounds interviews—Often, the interview process involves more than one interview.

1st interview

- Interviewers try to assess that you fit the position requirements by looking at your skills, experiences, and personality.
- Interviewers want to know what you can do for them and how you will add value to their company.

2nd interview

- During the second interview, interviewers focus on making a decision between final candidates which may involve any of the following:
 - a more detailed assessment of specific skills required for the position,
 - an interview may continue over lunch or dinner, in which situations you are still being assessed,
 - a tour of the company if you have not already had one, and introductions to other co-workers and senior staff.

Telephone interviews

- The telephone interview may be more common if you are applying to positions or companies that are located in another city, and typically, the time of the interview is prearranged.
- There may be more than one interviewer. When arranging the interview, ask the number of interviewers, their names, and their position titles.



Pre-interview research and preparation

This step is an opportunity for you to research and understand the needs of the position and organization, anticipate interview questions, and prepare answers. The more research and preparation is conducted, the better you will be able to showcase your suitability for the position and company.

Pre-interview research

Here are some aspects to consider researching:

Position	Organization or company	Industry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What skills, qualifications, experience, education and other qualities are required for this position? • What are the core duties and responsibilities? • What are the hours of work? Is overtime or weekend work involved? • Will there be travel involved? If yes, how frequently? • What is the salary range for this type of position? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are their products or services? • What is their organizational structure? • Who are their clients and competitors? • What is their organizational mission and vision? • What is their organizational history, present state of business and future goals? • What is the work environment like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any trends occurring in the industry that may have an impact on the organization? • What impact do global and economic trends and current events have on the industry?

Record your research information below:

Position	Organization or company	Industry



Pre-interview preparation—anticipating questions

There are several ways to anticipate the types of questions you may encounter in the interview.

Ways of anticipating questions	Example questions
<p>From the analysis of the position criteria, make a list of skills, qualifications, duties and responsibilities required for the position. This list will allow you to begin to anticipate questions that could be asked during the interview.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the position requirements indicated that they are a team-oriented environment, then some types of questions that you may be asked include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give an example of a time you worked on a team, what was your role and contribution? • In your opinion, what key characteristics make a team successful, please elaborate. • If the position is requesting leadership skills, a possible question may be, can you provide an example of where you have demonstrated leadership qualities?
<p>Review your documents, such as, your CV, resume and/or cover letter, as any content you have included in these documents can be turned into potential interview questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You may be asked to elaborate on your educational background with questions such as, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you decide to study environmental science? • Tell us more about the independent project you completed in your fourth year political science course. • Other examples of questions could focus on the different experiences you have listed on your resume or cover letter such as, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did your experience as a volunteer coordinator entail? • What did you like best about your role as a teaching assistant? • As a summer intern with Company X, what would you identify as two key accomplishments?
<p>Review commonly asked interview questions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See examples of commonly asked questions of open-ended, behavioural and situational questions on the next page.



Examples of interview questions

There are numerous types of questions employers could ask you in an interview. However, these questions can be categorized into the following types.

Open-ended questions- cannot be answered by yes or no. Below are some examples of open-ended questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- Why are you leaving your job?
- What motivates you?
- What do you find are the most difficult decisions to make?
- What are you passionate about?
- How do you evaluate success?
- Why are you the best person for the job?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- What previous experience has prepared you for the responsibilities of this position?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Describe a previous experience that you feel is most relevant to this position.
- What are your short term/long term goals in this field? Where do you see your career in five years?
- Why are you interested in this industry? Organization?
- If I talked to your co-workers, how would they describe you?
- What does initiative mean to you?
- What are your strengths? Describe a weakness that you have and what are you doing to improve it.
- What are your salary expectations?

Behavioural questions - focus on asking for specific examples of where you have demonstrated a particular skill, or how you have handled a particular situation in the past. The rationale behind such questions is that your past behaviour is a good indicator of how you will respond to the demands of the position.

- Describe a team project that you have undertaken. What was your role? What did you learn?
- Give an example of a time when you demonstrated creative problem solving.
- Give an example of where you have demonstrated leadership qualities.
- Can you give me an example of a time you demonstrated initiative?
- Describe a situation in which you had a disagreement with a supervisor or co-worker. How was it resolved?
- Discuss a major paper you have written. What was the model you used and why? What were your results?
- Think of a time you faced a challenge. How did you react? What were the results?
- Discuss a major project that you undertook. What are some of the challenges you encountered. How did you overcome them?
- Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
- Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.
- Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction?
- Give me an example of a time when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or colleagues?
- Tell me about a specific occasion when you complied with a work policy even though you did not agree with it?



Situational questions - are hypothetical, problematic scenarios that require solutions. When answering these types of questions, it is important to demonstrate your critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills.

- You have been working on a project for over a month and are about to finish writing the report. Suddenly you realize some very important facts that should be included in this project have been overlooked. What would you do in this situation?
- You are working on a group project with your colleagues. While the deadline is getting closer, the group still cannot agree on how the project should be completed and one of the members is simply not doing his/her share. What would you do in this situation?
- You have heard that one of your colleagues has complained to your manager because s/he is dissatisfied with your work. What would you do in this situation?
- If our organization were to change its focus in terms of target client market, what target market would you suggest?
- Your colleague was repeatedly making mistakes that affect customer service and your ability to do your work. You talked to this colleague about the problem but he kept making mistakes again. What would you do next?
- You figured out that an employee was stealing from the company. What would you do?
- You believe strongly in a recommendation you made in a meeting, but most of your co-workers do not agree. What would you do in this situation?
- Who would you talk to if you discovered that a co-worker was disclosing confidential information that should not be divulged?
- You don't have the information you need to prioritize your projects. Your co-workers and supervisor are unavailable for you to ask for assistance. How do you handle the situation?

Field specific knowledge/technical questions— are questions related to your subject matter expertise and your academic area of study. They may be technical, theoretical or situational in nature.

- Discuss three natural resources issues that Canada is currently facing and discuss their policy implications.
- In your opinion, how will Bill 125 impact the manufacturing industry?
- Describe your experience in using database systems such as SQL, Oracle and MS Access.
- Give an example of a SWOT analysis – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
- Which financial models did you use to interpret data in your research project? Which of these would you recommend for risk management?

Track your interview questions

As an additional way of preparing for your interviews, use the space below to keep track of interview questions you come across for the types of positions you are interviewing for.



Pre-interview preparation—preparing your responses

Steps to preparing your responses

1. Analyze the question: What is the interviewer really trying to assess about you? From the research you have done about the position, organization and industry you will be able to determine which particular skills, qualities and/or experiences the interviewer may be trying to assess through asking you that question.
2. Describe your experience(s) and use a relevant example ensuring that you are highlighting the key skills and qualities that you have analyzed and determined are being asked in this question. These examples can come from your volunteer, internship, extracurricular, academic and /or paid experiences. Highlight results wherever possible and show evidence of having researched the position, company and industry.
3. Organize your response in succinct manner. Use the S.T.A.R. method to organize your answers and to create a detailed picture of your skills and experiences to help the interviewer remember you.
4. Link your skills and experiences to the needs of the position and the employer.

S.T.A.R. method—sample question

Tell me about a time when you were working on a team and encountered a challenge. How did you respond? What were the results?

What's behind the question? What does the interviewer really want to know?

- Analytical, problem-solving, teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills

S—situation In 2011, I was working as a research assistant at the Political Science Department at the University of Toronto as part of three-person team and we ran into a problem on what method to use to analyze the data we had gathered.

T—task We were analyzing election results in electoral districts of Canada deriving from demographic variants and other contemporary political topics. We needed to come to a consensus as to how to analyze the data in order for the project to be completed.

A—action I and the team acknowledged that each one of us had different ideas on how to analyze the data.

- We met and each one of us presented our ideas and reasoning behind it.
- Everyone listened respectfully and asked for clarifications if needed.
- We decided individually to consider the various methods and their merits and to meet in a few days.
- We met again and discussed openly and respectfully the various methods highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- Over two meetings, we brainstormed how to blend the valuable parts of each method and negotiated a new analysis strategy which was an amalgamation of the methods proposed.

R—result

- Prevented delays in project's completion.
- Maintained a collegial working relationship with team members.
- Arrived at a method of analysis that was superior to ones proposed.

Linking Statement

“This experience further strengthened my ability to collaborate closely with colleagues utilizing effective communication skills to solve problems efficiently. These qualities will be key to my success in this position.”



Pre-interview preparation continued

Preparing questions to ask the interviewer

During the interview and typically towards the end of the interview you will have the opportunity to ask questions of the interviewers and share any concluding comments regarding your candidacy for the position. Based on your pre-interview research, prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered in order to determine if the position and company are right for you. Your questions should demonstrate:

- your understanding and research of the position, company, and industry;
- your interest in learning more about the position and company.

Here are some sample questions to ask at the interview

- I have read on your website that the work culture in your organization has a strong focus on working together and playing together. Can you tell me a little more about that.
- I have read on your website that you are focusing your new projects in Asia. Can you tell me a little more about your initiatives?
- What are your expectations in the first three months, six months, or a year?
- Can you tell me about how will I and my work be evaluated?
- How is the work, schedule, or day organized? Is it flexible? Could I customize it?
- Can you please describe the opportunities for further training and continuing education.
- Would you be able to tell me which projects I would be involved in?
- Will there be opportunities to collaborate closely with other departments?
- Can you share with me the next steps in the process? When are you planning on making a hiring decision?

Ensure that you are well prepared to make a great first impression and conduct yourself professionally

- You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Creating a good first impressions involves a variety of things such as dressing appropriately, arriving on time, and treating everyone you meet with courtesy.
- More information about creating great first impressions and professional interview behaviour can be found in Appendix 1 and 2 on page 11..

Closing the interview and post-interview follow-up

As you close your conversation thank the interviewer(s) for their time, and ensure that you find out about the next steps in the interview process (i.e., will there be second round interviews) and when they expect to reach a decision. After the interview you may want to follow up with the employer to demonstrate your interest in the position and to reiterate some of your key qualities.

- Send a thank you email or letter to the interviewer(s) highlighting your interest in the position along with 2-3 key qualities that make you a good fit.
- If you are not invited back for the second round of interviews, or are not selected for the position, ask for feedback from the interviewer(s) so that you can improve your interview skills and or evaluate any gaps in your qualifications.

Assessing your performance by reviewing what went well and areas where you can improve, will help you improve your interview and presentation skills for future meetings with employers. Here are some tips.

- Create an inventory of the types of questions you were asked and make notes of your responses, and assess them for improvement. Did you encounter questions that you did not anticipate? Add these to your list for further preparation and practice.
- Set up a practice interview at the Career Centre for further practice and feedback.



There are some additional interview formats and interview components that you may also encounter in some interview situations:

Case interviews—are typically used by management consulting firms whereby the interviewer describes a business problem from the perspective of a client and asks how you, as the consultant, would solve the client's problem. The interviewer is trying to assess your problem-solving and analytical skills rather than looking for one right answer. Listen carefully, ask questions to clarify the problem, and draw out the critical aspects of the issue before making your recommendations. There are many different types of case questions depending on the company you are meeting with. Some are short business cases that refer to market size and estimation and some examples of this include:

- Estimate the market for basketballs in New Zealand.
- How many lightbulbs are sold in Toronto in one year?

Other cases are longer and feature a full business case problem focusing on helping a client solve their business issues. An example of this would be:

- You are consulting for a small manufacturer of motorcycles. They handcraft their motorcycles and are well reputed for having some of the best quality on the market. A large multinational competitor has announced that it will begin selling high-end motorcycles incorporating the newest engine technology. What should your client do?

A key consideration for this type of interview is that it will require extensive preparation and practice well in advance of your interview. Some resources that will help you develop strategies for the case interview include mbacase.com and [The Vault Guides to Case Interviews](http://www.vault.com).

<http://careerinsider.vault.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/recordurl.aspx?nid=9781581319903gp&wid=148184>
<http://careerinsider.vault.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/recordurl.aspx?nid=9781581315462gp&wid=148184>

Interviews can also feature certain components that you may need to prepare further for:

Written tests—candidates may be asked to complete a written test assessing different skills required for the position. Some examples may include assessment of language proficiency, math, computer or technical competency and/or administrative skills. When setting up your interview, it is important to ask for details about the type of written assessment you will be involved in, the length and any advance preparation that might be required.

Presentation—you may be required to prepare and deliver a presentation as part of the interview. Once again, it is important to prepare and gather as much information as possible regarding the topic of the presentation, length, audience, availability of audio-visual resources. Consider what, if any, materials might be necessary to bring to your interview and to practice your presentation beforehand.



Next steps

As you begin to prepare for upcoming interviews, refer to this checklist to keep yourself on track.

- ◇ Research the position, organization, and industry.
- ◇ Anticipate questions that may be asked in the interview.
- ◇ Prepare responses to questions (using the S.T.A.R. method where possible).
- ◇ Prepare questions to ask the interviewer.
- ◇ Prepare your attire.
- ◇ Prepare any additional materials for the interview:
 - extra copies of résumé
 - list of references
 - portfolio and writing samples (where applicable) or technical portfolio (where applicable)
 - notepad and pen
- ◇ Practice! Attend an interview workshop or book a practice interview at the Career Centre.
- ◇ Visit the Career Centre website at www.careers.utoronto.ca or cln.utoronto.ca for a full list of services, workshops, tutorials, and print and online resources and e-learning modules, to book an appointment please call: 416.978.8000



Appendix 1: First impressions

Punctuality

Be on time whether it is for interviews, meetings, or lunch. Give yourself extra time to get there; get specific directions or visit in advance to familiarize yourself with the location of the interview. We recommend arriving 15 minutes early.

Dress code

Dress appropriately for the industry for which you are being interviewed. Your company research should guide you in this; if unsure, ask the Human Resources person who arranged your interview about the dress code of the company. If an office's dress code is business casual, employees often dress in slacks, casual dresses or skirts, sometimes topped with blazers or cardigans. Jeans and athletic wear would be out of place in this type of office. If a work environment is business formal or business professional, employees dress in suit jackets with pants or skirts. Suits are usually in solid dark and neutral colours, worn over lighter coloured shirts or blouses. Formal, close-toed, clean and shined dress shoes are worn. Regardless of the dress code, clothes should be well fitting, in good condition and wrinkle-free and footwear should be neat and clean. Err on the side of formality. It is always better to be slightly overdressed, rather than slightly underdressed, for an interview. Lastly, be comfortable. Your comfort will be reflected in your body language so do not wear clothing that restricts your movement or footwear that is difficult to walk in.

Professionalism

The co-curricular record (ccr.utoronto.ca) explains professionalism as "Commitment to, demonstration of and accountability for the appropriate behaviour, character, attitudes, skills, conduct and integrity corresponding to a given circumstance or environment." When presenting for an interview you want to convey an appropriate level of professionalism for the industry and this means taking into account all the factors listed above.

Appendix 2: Interview Meals

Being asked to join a future colleague or employer for a meal is at times a part of the hiring process. Dining practices vary in different cultures and different settings, so be sure to do your research before the interview meal. We suggest being observant of the individuals you are eating with and taking into account their conduct (behavior, food/drink order) during this part of the interview. As with your first impression, maintaining a strong level of professionalism is important.

Some resources that highlight North American dining practices include:

<http://www.career.vt.edu/diningetiquette/qanda.html>

www.dartmouth.edu/~csrc/docs/dining_etiquette.ppt



Appendix 3: Know your rights

The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination in employment on grounds of:

- race
- colour
- marital status
- sexual orientation
- ancestry
- age
- citizenship
- place of origin
- ethnic origin
- family status
- record of offences
- handicap
- creed
- sex

Consequently, employers cannot screen applications based on any of the grounds listed above unless the factor is a genuine qualification for the position (e.g. for some positions within government agencies, you are required to be a Canadian citizen).

Although some employers may ask direct questions about the above items, you are not required to answer them on an application form or during the interview. To find out more about employment laws, see the Ontario Human Rights Commission site at www.ohrc.on.ca.

Additional Resources

Career Centre ebooks including 101 Smart Questions to Ask on Your Interview, The Essential Digital Interview Handbook, 201 Knockout Answers to Tough Interview Questions and more

<http://uoft.me/interview>

Career Centre YouTube videos about preparing for job interviews

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU-ogR5bTDDKJUjuEzf4hJMWOUbjLwrla>

The Vault's Sample interview questions

<http://careerinsider.vault.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/recordurl.aspx?nid=102220&wid=148184>

