

# INTERVIEW TIPS

Interviews are how employers evaluate you as a fit for their organization and if you possess the needed skills to perform in a given position. They are also how you communicate your interest in the position and that your skills and personal traits align with the organization's needs.

## Before You Interview

1. Research the company/position for which you are applying.
  - Go to company web site
  - Call alumni
  - Attend information sessions if offered
  - Use Handshake, CareerShift, LinkedIn or similar resources
2. Know yourself
  - Your strengths
  - Your story and career goals
  - Your needed areas of development
  - Your accomplishments
  - Why you should be hired
3. Based on your research and knowledge of yourself, prepare to communicate “your fit” with the company.
4. Prepare to ask and answer questions using specific examples.
5. Prepare appropriate outfit: a suit.
6. Practice initial greeting and handshake.
7. Bring extra copies of your resume.
8. Prepare to give references and to release transcript information if requested.
9. Determine travel time. “On time” is around 15 minutes early.
10. Practice! Schedule a mock interview for a formal “dress rehearsal” with CPAD.

## Interview Wrap-up

- Obtain a business card from each interviewer.
- State your interest in the position and ask for the job.
- Write thank you letters immediately after interviews.

## What is the Recruiter Looking For?

Listen carefully to all questions during the interview. Relax as much as possible and think in terms of “What is this recruiter really asking me?” Do not over-analyze, but listen carefully and think a moment before responding.

**Why did you sign up for this interview?** Demonstrate company research to the recruiter to prove sincere interest.

**What is your greatest strength?** Share that you possess the most important position-related strength. Don't offer an off-the-wall strength that doesn't relate to the position.

**What is your greatest weakness?** Don't focus on a “deal breaker” negative such as “I'm never on time,” but do be sincere and somewhat transparent. Demonstrate self-awareness in areas of

needed growth or how you have grown from past mistakes. Avoid generic answers: “I can't say no.” or “I'm a perfectionist.”

**Why weren't your grades higher than a 2.3?** Prove your ability in spite of average grades. Take responsibility for the GPA, and be ready to explain it.

**Why did you attend this university?** Demonstrate evaluation and decision making skills and note the quality education you received. Do NOT focus on external forces like this: “I couldn't afford Vanderbilt, so I settled for UT Martin.”

## Think about how you impress the following to the recruiter:

- **Presentation** - Are you professional and dressed appropriately? Did you make eye contact and use open body language? Was your handshake confident and firm? Do you appear to be a fit with the image of their company?
- **Preparation** - Do you demonstrate company knowledge and an understanding of the job expectations? Did you demonstrate preparedness for the job? Did you ask pertinent questions? Did you share related work and academic experiences?
- **Verbal Communication** - Are you persuasive/passionate in presenting ideas? Do you quickly grasp concepts? Do you respond directly to questions? Do you use correct grammar and vocabulary? Do you present ideas logically and succinctly?
- **Direction** - Do you have personal and professional goals? Do you show confidence in your abilities? Are you proactive and self-motivated? Do you demonstrate diligence and the ability to produce quality results in timely fashion?
- **Leadership** - Do you hold leadership roles and responsibilities? Do you demonstrate the ability to move others to action? Do you demonstrate sound judgment? Are you self-reliant? Do you set goals and follow through?
- **Sincerity** - Do you communicate a genuine attitude? Are you honest and sincere?
- **Interpersonal Skills** - Are you enthusiastic, energetic, motivated and mature? Are you comfortable around many personality types? Do you have an open, engaging and candid demeanor? Do you demonstrate listening skills and empathy?
- **Flexibility** - Do you achieve goals in face of adversity? Are you easily discouraged or do you strive under pressure? Do you develop effective alternatives to achieve goals?
- **Problem Solving** - Do you resolve problems with a logical approach and come to reasonable conclusions? Do you demonstrate problem solving? Do you show common sense?
- **Productivity** - Do you thrive under high pressure? Are you successful in managing multiple priorities? Do you have a history of high productivity?
- **Teamwork** - Do you work well on a team? Do you effectively inform, inspire and influence others?



## Career Readiness & Competencies

Employers want to know if you have developed the following competencies to ensure that you are prepared to successfully transition into the workforce:

- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Oral/Written Communications
- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Information Technology Application
- Leadership
- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Career Management

Resource: <http://www.naceweb.org/knowledge/career-readiness-competencies.aspx>

## Dress for the Interview

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression.”

You do not need a lot of clothes for interviewing, but what you have should be of good quality, properly fitted, clean and well pressed, and reflective of current business styles.

### Everyone

- Bring a folder/portfolio to hold resume copies and a pen.
- Have clean, well-manicured fingernails.
- Don't wear cologne/perfume.
- Wear shoes that are well maintained.
- Iron/steam your clothing.
- Give yourself five minutes in front of a mirror to ensure hair is neat, shirt is tucked, tie is knotted properly, etc.
- Dress for the job you want, not the one you have!

### Men

- Shave and have well-groomed haircut.
- Wear quality navy or gray suit (avoid brown or sport coats).
- Shirts should be white or blue cotton/cotton blends. Avoid other colors or stripes. Observe other employees' shirts during your interview as you prepare for a second interview.
- Wear an undershirt under your dress shirt.
- Wear over-the-calf socks that blend with your suit, preferably the same color or darker.
- Wear well-shined black or cordovan shoes.
- Match belt with shoe color; no belt with suspenders.
- If you wear an earring(s), remove for the interview.
- Select a conservative tie that coordinates with suit/shirt.
- Button an American-cut blazer/jacket when you stand.
- Guidelines/examples: [quintcareers.com/dress\\_for\\_men](http://quintcareers.com/dress_for_men)

### Women

- Wear conservative tailored suit or suit dress.
- Wear conservative, frill-less blouse (white or cream).
- Skirt length: Just above knee and avoid extreme slits.
- Basic medium/low-heeled pumps, shined; neutral hosiery (Hosiery and shoes should never be darker than hem).
- Handbag: Small and appropriate to outfit.
- Nails: Conservative length and polish.
- Jewelry: Coordinate with outfit, avoid dangles and avoid excess.
- Guidelines/examples: [quintcareers.com/dress\\_for\\_women](http://quintcareers.com/dress_for_women)

## Phone Interview Tips

A phone interview may or may not be planned. If the first contact from a potential employer is a call, it is an interview whether you want it to be or not. The tips that follow will prepare you for both planned and impromptu calls.

### Preparation

- Create professional voice mail message and turn off any hold music during job search.
- Turn any alerts off so your call isn't interrupted.
- If the time isn't convenient, ask if you could talk at another time and suggest some alternatives.
- Keep resume in clear view, on your desktop/phone, so it's available when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of accomplishments available to review.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Grab a glass of water so it's accessible as needed.
- Clear the room; evict roommates and pets.
- Turn off distractions (e.g. stereo and the TV).

### During

- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or drink.
- Smile to change tone of voice and project positive image.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Use the person's title (Mr., Ms. or Dr. and their last name). Only use a first name if they ask you to do so.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer.
- Take your time. It's perfectly acceptable to take a moment to collect your thoughts.
- Give succinct answers.
- Thank the interviewer, reiterate your interest and ask if it is possible to meet in person.

### After

- Take notes about questions asked and how you answered.
- Write thank you note to reiterate your interest in the job.

## Questions Employers May Ask

Employers want to know if you have the skill set needed to perform successfully on the job and contribute positively to their company/organization. Understanding the job description gives you insight into what type of questions you might hear. If the description is lacking, search for related job titles on O\*Net ([onetonline.org](http://onetonline.org)) to brainstorm typical skills sought.

Before you begin interviewing, review the following questions, rehearse possible responses and discuss them with a career counselor. Practice to be sure you are able to communicate clear, unrehearsed answers to interviewers.

### Personal

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?

- How do you think your friends would describe you?
- Define success. Failure.
- What is your biggest failure? What did you learn from it?
- Of which accomplishments are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How does your college education/experience relate to this job?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- How have you handled getting along with a difficult former professor/ supervisor/co-worker?
- Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What do you know about our organization (products/services)?
- Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
- Do you plan to further your education?

### Education

- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend your university?
- Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?
- In which campus activities did you participate? Tell me about your leadership skills.
- Which classes in your major did you like best? Least? Why?
- If you started over, how would you change your education?
- Which elective classes did you like best? Least? Why?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?

### Experience

- What job-related skills have you developed?
- In what positions did you work while in school?
- What did you learn from these work experiences?
- What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Share a time when you worked under deadline pressure.
- Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- How would a former supervisor/coworker describe your work?

### Career Goals

- What kind of boss do you prefer?
- Would you be successful working with a team?
- Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
- What other types of positions are you considering?
- How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
- Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
- How do you feel about working overtime? Flextime?
- How do you feel about travel?
- How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?

### General

- Why are you interested in our company?
- What are your goals? Where will you be in 5 years?
- What do you consider your strengths?
- What personal weaknesses would you like to improve?
- What experience in your past do you believe has prepared you for your future?

## Behavioral Interview Questions

Recruiters use behavioral-based questions to probe your past behavior in jobs, classrooms, group projects and activities. Listen to the question to identify what quality or skill they are evaluating.

### STAR Method

The STAR Method is an effective strategy to answer behavioral-based questions. When asked this type of question, utilize the following steps:

- **Situation:** Briefly outline background information to frame the situation.
- **Task:** Briefly narrate what you were trying to accomplish.
- **Action:** Give example of how you utilized relevant skills and qualities to resolve the situation/achieve goal/task.
- **Result:** Briefly summarize the positive outcome.

Below are sample questions by category of what skill the recruiter might be evaluating you.

### Problem Solving

- Which classes gave you the most trouble?
- What are the biggest challenges encountered in college?
- Give an example of when you refused to give up.

### Adaptability

- How was your transition from high school to college?
- When your priorities are changed by someone else, how do you adjust to such situations?

### Time Management

- How do you manage priorities?
- Tell me about a time when you planned an event and what steps you took to make sure everything went well.
- Tell me about your method for personal organization and time management.
- Tell me about a time you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine your course of action?
- Tell me about a time that managed multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?

### Leadership

- Tell me about a time you helped someone else be successful.
- Tell me about a time you were suddenly called on or forced to be a leader.
- Tell me about a time you experienced initial failure in convincing someone else to do something. What ultimately happened? What did you learn?
- Share a time when you recruited someone to help you with a project.
- Give a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others.
- Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful?
- Tell me about a time you inspired someone toward some goal achievement.
- Tell me about a time when you were dissatisfied with the performance of someone who worked with you on a project. What did you do? How did they react?

## Communication

- Describe a time a presentation went extremely well. How did you know it went well?

## Interpersonal

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?

## Teamwork

- Tell me about a time where you had to work with a difficult manager, classmate or peer.

## Decision Making

- Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision?
- Tell me the most unpopular decision you had to make and why you chose to make it. What was the outcome?

## Stress Management

- Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude.

## Below are sample questions with suggested strategies to answer the questions:

*Briefly tell me about the highlights of your educational and work experiences that are relevant to this job.*

- Share a related educational, work or life experiences when you prioritized your time and completed tasks with “too much to do in too little time.”

*Imagine that you are on a team with a person whose behavioral style is different from yours. You find it hard to work together because you disagree about how things should be done. How would you handle this situation?*

- Share a time when you were in this situation, dealt with it directly, succinctly and successfully.

*Share a time when you sacrificed or put your personal goals aside to achieve an overall goal for the group.*

- Share what it means to be part of a whole and how you do and do not contribute to that group.

*Tell me about a time when you took on a significant new challenge at school or a job in order to achieve personal or professional growth.*

- Share an example that pushed you outside your comfort zone where you can note growth.

## Handling Illegal Questions

Various federal, state and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. An employer’s questions, whether on the job application, in the interview or during the testing process, must relate to the job you are seeking. For the employer, the focus must be: “What do I need to know to decide whether this person can perform the functions of this job?”

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

1. Answer the question, if you wish. However, remember you are giving information that isn’t related to the job, and you may be giving the “wrong” answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
2. Refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational, hardly words an employer would use to describe the “ideal” candidate.
3. Examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. Here are two examples:

Q: Are you a U.S. citizen?

A: I am authorized to work in the United States.

Q: Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?

A: I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires.

Resource: [jobweb.com/resources/library/Interviews/Handling\\_Illegal\\_46\\_02.htm](http://jobweb.com/resources/library/Interviews/Handling_Illegal_46_02.htm)

## Questions to Ask Employers

It is typical in an interview for the recruiter to ask, “Do you have any questions for me?” You should have questions. These questions demonstrate a sincere interest and awareness of the company and position. Here are sample questions:

- I’m excited about the job, are there any additional expectations not outlined in the job description?
- What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
- Does your company encourage further education?
- What products are in the developmental stage now?
- What are your growth projections for next year?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff?
- What do you like best about your job/company?
- Once the probation period is completed, how much authority will I have over decisions?
- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
- What skills are really important for this position?
- Is there a lot of team/project work?
- Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?
- How much travel is involved in this position?
- What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

## What NOT to Ask Employers

- Do NOT ask salary questions during initial interview.
- Avoid questions asking about flextime.