

INTERVIEW GUIDE

PURPOSE

The purpose of the interview is to determine whether you are right for the job and whether the job is right for you; think of the interview as a conversation between you and the employer where you are both learning about each other.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

PRACTICE

It is important to review common interview questions and practice articulating your values, knowledge, skills, experience, and interests as they relate to the position and company you are interviewing with. The more you practice, the more comfortable and confident you'll be during the interview. You can find several lists of common interview questions online and check out our tips for how to answer these questions on the next page.

You will also want to familiarize yourself with the various interview formats (in-person, panel, virtual, phone interview) and try to practice in that environment if you can. If your interview is virtual, log on to the software application a day or two before to make sure your camera, microphone, etc. are working properly.

We also recommend scheduling an appointment for a mock interview with Career Development. We're here to help you practice and fine-tune these skills.

PREPARE QUESTIONS

Remember that you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you! It is important to come prepared with questions that you will ask at the interview to help you better understand the position and to show the interviewer(s) that you are interested and knowledgeable about their organization. You can find great examples online or stop by the Office of Career Development for help!

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Researching the prospective employer can help you come across as interested and knowledgeable during an interview. Spend time on the organization's website, read news articles, and gather as much information about them as you can. Doing your research can also help you prepare insightful questions to ask at the end of the interview.

GATHER YOUR MATERIALS

Make sure you have everything you need to feel comfortable and confident during the interview. We recommend preparing the following a day or two before the interview:

MATERIALS

- **Dress for Success**—Make sure the outfit you've chosen to wear is professional, clean, and modest. While interview attire does vary by field, the best practice is typically dressing business professional which includes a suit jacket with matching slacks or skirt. **Check out Career Development's Professional Dress Guide.**
- **Bring your Resume**—Have a few printed copies of your resume and cover letter to refer to, or to provide the interviewer if they don't have it handy.
- **Bring the Position Description**—In addition to your resume, it may be helpful to have the position description with you to refer to.
- **Bring Notes**—Remember that an interview isn't a memory recall test, it's open-note! **Never go into an interview empty handed. Have something to write with/on during your interview.** Have notes for yourself to serve as reminders should you get a curve ball question. You should also take notes during the interview about things you want to remember or circle back to later.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early for your interview
- Be friendly and courteous to everyone from the moment you arrive. This includes the interviewer(s) but also any support staff you happen to meet during the day.
- Shake each interviewer's hand at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Sit up straight and speak clearly.
- Reference the job posting or the organization as it relates to your background, skills, values, and knowledge.
- At the end of the interview, be sure to ask about the timeline and any follow up steps in the process. This will give you an idea of when you can expect to hear from them and allow you to follow up appropriately.
- Make sure to collect the contact information for your interviewer(s) so you can follow up.

ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTION

When answering interview questions, be sure you are providing sufficient detail in an organized manner. You don't want to run too long or too short. To keep your answers detailed, relevant, and concise, consider using the STAR method:

Situation: What was the situation you/your previous employer faced?

Task: What tasks were involved in that situation?

Action: What actions did you take?

Results: What were the results of those actions?

CHALLENGING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

You should be prepared to answer these common and challenging questions at every interview

1. **Tell me about yourself.** Keep the answer to this question around one minute in length. Consider the PAWS acronym when answering the "Tell me about yourself" question

Personal—Why are you interested in/passionate about this opportunity and this organization? What made you decide to apply for this opportunity?

Academics—What are you doing here at Salve that relates to this position?

Work experience—What practical hands-on experiences do you have outside of the classroom and how do they relate to this position?

Skills Overview—What other skills and experiences do you bring to the table? Touch on the important aspects of the position description here.

2. **What is your greatest weakness?** A strength disguised as a weakness (ex. perfectionism) can come off as disingenuous. The reason employers ask this question is because they want to know where you may need additional support. The best way to answer this question is to use the STAR method above. Provide a real weakness (Situation), give an example of how that weakness has shown up in the past (Task), explain how you addressed/are continuing to address that weakness going forward (Action), and describe how you are able to manage this weakness for yourself (Result). This lets the employer know that you are aware of the areas where you need to improve, and are able to address them yourself. If there is reasonable additional support the employer could offer, you may also consider mentioning that as well.
3. **What do you know about our company?** For this question, the company is testing your preparation and research. Discuss what you've learned about the company and this position through your research and what excites you the most. You may also be able to use this as a jumping off point to ask a few of your questions you happened upon in your research.
4. **How has your past experience prepared you for this role?** Do not feel the need to run them through your entire resume for this question. Pick the highlights and talk about one or two past experiences. The STAR method can also be helpful here. Discuss the past experience, but in this case the **R** is the most important component—how will you use these experiences in *this* position.
5. **Why should we hire you?** It's safe to assume the other candidates they are interviewing have similar backgrounds, skills, and qualifications as you, so this question is really about fit. Interviewers want to find someone who is interested and invested in their organization, will fit in with the culture. Talk about what excites you the most about this opportunity, why this position in particular is a good fit for you, and how you can offer a unique perspective to their work.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It is important to follow up with the employer by sending a thank you note or email within 48 hours. We recommend sending these via email for the sake of time, but some employers do appreciate and remember a handwritten thank you.

THANK YOU NOTE TIPS

- Address the email to the person who interviewed you and make sure you spell their name correctly. If you were interviewed by multiple people, you might consider sending individual thank you notes.
- Start by thanking the person for their time and consideration.
- Briefly highlight your continued interest in the position and reference something specific you discussed in the interview. If you are no longer interested in the opportunity, now is also an appropriate time to let them know.
- Offer to answer any questions/provide any additional information.
- Reiterate your contact information.

PLAGIARISM AND USING SAMPLES

If you are using a sample thank you note to help you start writing, be sure to **use your own words** and show your unique personality. Do not simply remove the words from the sample thank you note that do not apply to you and plug in your own. A quick Google search will alert an employer that the writing is not your own. **There is an example thank you note provided on the following page, with the understanding that you will use it as a reference only and your writing will be your own.**

REFERENCES

As part of the application process, most jobs will ask you for 3-5 professional references. If they haven't already, now may be a great time to provide them to the employer. At this time, you'll also want to reconnect with your references to update them on the position you are interviewing for and ensure they each have a copy of your resume.

ADDITIONAL FOLLOW UP

At the end of the interview, you should get a good idea of what the next steps are in the interview process. If the employer provided a time frame by which you should expect to hear from them and you haven't yet, it's a good idea to follow up. Reiterate your interest in the position and ask the employer where they are in the process. You can do this by phone or email depending on how you've communicated with the employer in the past. It's a good practice to follow up 2-3 times, but after that continue your search elsewhere.

NEGOTIATING AN OFFER

If you get an offer, you shouldn't accept right away. Make sure you do your research and ask any remaining questions you have before committing to a position.

KNOW YOUR WORTH

You can expect to be asked about salary requirements at any point in the job search process, in the application, during the interview, and in the offer. If the job description offers a range, you should likely target the upper-middle of that range especially if you have some additional qualifications that will allow you to argue for the highest end. If the salary range isn't provided to you, be sure to research salaries for the roles you are applying to. Keep in mind that salaries can vary significantly by geographic area. Websites like Glassdoor, Indeed, and the O*Net, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics can provide you with salary ranges. You can also tap into your network, faculty, advisors, recruiters, and industry professionals who are familiar with your field and can offer you insight into what range you should be targeting.

NEGOTIATE BENEFITS

Even if the organization can't match your salary, they may be able to offer additional perks like health care, retirement contributions, moving expenses, professional development opportunities, tuition remission, flexible work schedules, etc. Don't be afraid to ask about benefits and perks and consider setting up a meeting with their Human Resources department get a comprehensive overview of the benefits package before committing to a position.

WEIGH YOUR OPTIONS

No job is going to be perfect and it's important to weigh your options. If you have other opportunities you are waiting to hear from, it's appropriate to ask for a little time before making a decision (keep in mind they might say no). While no job is perfect, you should be hoping to find a position that is going to provide you with the experiences, pay, and benefits you are looking for. It may be beneficial to take a position at a lower pay than you were targeting because of the experience, the environment, or the additional benefits. Conversely, if a position isn't going to pay you a sustainable wage or the environment doesn't feel like a good fit for you, you may consider walking away. Weigh your options carefully and know other offers will come along.

EXAMPLE THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Mr. Turner,

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for speaking with me today about the Sustainability Internship position at Clean Ocean Access. As a passionate advocate for sustainability, I admire the work you are doing to expand composting initiatives across the state and am excited by the opportunity to contribute to these efforts through continued research, public outreach, and education. I appreciated learning more about your Healthy Soils Healthy Seas initiative and the ways your organization works to engage the local community in sustainable practices.

Through my academic coursework in Environmental Science at Salve Regina University, and my involvement with our hydroponics lab, I have gained a passion for environmental research and hope to continue expanding on my research skills at Clean Ocean Access. As promised, I've attached my hydroponics research project from last semester that we discussed during the interview for your reference.

Should you have further questions or need any additional information from me, please don't hesitate to reach out to me via phone at (401) 555-5555 or via email at cory.matthews@salve.edu. I look forward to following up with you in the near future!

Sincerely,
Cory Matthews