

Interviewing Tips & Strategies



career services
at Saint Paul College

Creating a positive impression in a job interview is essential to receiving a job offer. This guide identifies types of interviews and offers suggestions on how to prepare for interviews.

What to expect. Usually an invitation for an interview is received via phone call or email. Make sure you know the day, time, location and instructions for parking. Interviews vary in length, but a typical phone interview is 15-30 minutes; a face-to-face interview is typically 45-60 minutes. You will most likely be interviewed by the manager recruiting for the role or a human resources representative. It's ok to ask the interviewer their job title and how they fit into the departmental structure. If you have questions about the job interview process, phone the recruiter and ask.

Types of Interviews

1. **Phone Interview:** A screening interview to verify qualifications, with the potential for a face-to-face interview to follow
2. **Structured Interview:** The employer asks questions to determine the candidate's competencies for the role, i.e. skills, abilities, and experience.
3. **Behavioral (Situational) Interview:** The employer wants to know how the candidate would respond to the different circumstances that come with this role
4. **Panel Interview:** The candidate meets with more than one interviewer at one time
5. **Group Interview:** The employer interviews more than one candidate at a time. They want to know how well you interact with others.
6. **Technical Interview:** Also referred to as a "hands-on" interview. The candidate is expected to demonstrate a particular skill as part of the interviewing process

Know about the company including what the company does, their client base, size, philosophy or core values, overall financial status and how long they have been in business. Review the job announcement (download a copy when you apply) so you know the requirements and responsibilities of the job.

Prepare your answers: Before the interview, identify work, academic or other experiences that demonstrate the skills the employer is seeking. Prepare a list of at least 7 skills or accomplishments. These might include a good grade on a class project, public acknowledgment of good work, a promotion or success with a project or program. This will help you give *very specific* examples of how you are qualified for this position, which adds credibility.

Prepare some questions to ask them: An interview is a two-way process, and employers expect you to ask questions. If you don't ask questions in the interview, many recruiters wonder if you are truly interested in the job. They also need to feel satisfied that you have enough information on which to make your decision in case an offer is made. Asking questions is an excellent way to demonstrate the depth of your knowledge of your field, general level of intelligence and your communication skills. Asking questions also enables you to establish an easy flow of conversation and build rapport.

Practice for the interview. Create a list of potential interview questions based on the position description or employment posting. Write down your responses using the STAR method. Proof-read and revise the responses to better enhance the final product in the interview. Practice your answers out loud. Time yourself; your answers should not be less than 30 seconds or more than 2 minutes. Practice nonverbal communication, including a firm handshake, good eye contact and a sincere smile. Ask a good friend, professional colleague, career staff or instructor to help you practice and give you feedback. Practice in front of a mirror can also be very helpful. The idea is not to have "memorized" answers, but to have specific examples of your skills ready to apply to the questions as they are asked.

What you wear should give a positive first impression to the interviewer. Dress more formally than you expect to dress for the job. Refrain from wearing perfume or scented aftershave. Do not make the mistake of distracting the interviewer with obvious fashion mistakes – anything that is loud, old or out of place could count against you. If you're unsure, choose dark or neutral colors and go for a more conservative look.

The Day of the Interview

- **Arrive 10-15 minutes early.** Before the day of the interview make sure you have directions, know where to park, and ask with whom you will be interviewing (including their title).
- **Greet everyone you meet with eye contact, a smile and a firm handshake.** When you greet the interviewer/s, initiate a handshake, as it will make you appear confident and friendly. Make sure your hand-shake is firm and lasts a few seconds. If your culture does not allow handshakes, politely decline and offer a sincere smile.
- **Always act professionally.** Be gracious to everyone, as their opinion of you counts. Do not lounge over a chair or touch items from someone's desk.
- **Maintain positive body language.** Sit up straight, maintain good eye contact and open body language. Lean forward slightly, avoid crossing your arms, and don't slouch in your chair.
- **Avoid fidgeting.** Avoid tapping your feet, shifting in the seat, or fumbling with a pen which can reflect nervousness and apprehension.
- **Ask for business cards.** Request them from everyone with whom you interview. With the card(s), you will have the correct spelling of interviewer's name, title, and contact information, which you can use for thank you correspondence and follow-up calls.
- **Ask for the Job.** Many people are afraid to appear "too eager", and the end up looking apathetic or uninterested. If you want the job, tell the employer in the interview that you are excited about the opportunity, and you hope you will be chosen.
- **Don't bring up the big "S" word.** Never initiate salary questions until the employer broaches the subject.

What to bring

- A padfolio or professional looking satchel with a pen and paper. Feel free to refer to or take brief notes.
- Copy of your resume and list references.
- A list of questions you wish to ask
- A complete list of previous employers with addresses, phone numbers and dates of employment, in case you are asked to fill out an application form
- If you must have your phone with you, turn it completely off (no rings or vibrations)
- If you must bring a purse it must be clean, neat, conservative and not overstuffed

Additional points to remember

- Watch your language. No swearing; no inappropriate or negative comments
- Don't get too personal; this isn't a counseling session
- Pay attention and answer the employer's questions; employers would rather have you answer "I don't know" than avoid their questions
- It's ok to ask when they expect to make a decision.

After the Interview

Say Thank You. A typed or handwritten note should reiterate your interest in the position and organization, and appreciation for the interview. Send it by traditional mail, within 24 hours after the interview. If a decision is imminent, send the thank you by email instead.

Follow-up with a phone call. A few days after the decision is to be made, call to check on the status of your candidacy. Be prepared to talk to the employer or to leave a short, clear voice mail message.