

Interview Guide

A job interview is your opportunity to showcase the value that your skills and experiences can provide to the employer. This guide will walk you through the interview process from start to finish.

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Act 1: Practice Selling Your Value

Four steps to get ready for your interview

Step 1: Do your homework on the company

Do research to answer the following questions about the company:

- What are their key products and services?
- What are their mission and goals?
- Who are the key leaders and what are their backgrounds?
- What is their history, reputation and standing industry standing?
- Who are their major competitors?

Use multiple sources for your research:

- **Visit the employer's website:** review their Mission Statement, About Us section, and Employment information page.
- **Talk to contacts at the organization:** consider friends, UNC Asheville alumni, and search for connections using LinkedIn.
- **Google 'em!** Look for news articles and read updates on their social media sites.
- **Use [GlassDoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com),** a database of company reviews, salary reports, interview questions, and more.

Step 2: Nail the First Question

“Tell me about yourself?” - This is the single most common interview question, and it’s often the very first question asked. Prepare your answer by filling in the script below.

1. My name is:
2. I am a: (example: senior at the University of North Carolina)
3. I major/specialize in: (example: Marketing, Customer Service, Social Media)
4. A recent accomplishment that is relevant: (example: I planned and organized a fundraiser for my the math club that raised \$750 for Habitat for Humanity)
5. Why you’re the best (skills/qualities/experience): (example: I am organized, enthusiastic, punctual, and eager to make a difference in the community)
6. In my free time I enjoy doing: (examples: knit, hike, volunteer and read)
7. Your call to action (what are you looking for?) Example: I’m looking for a part time job at (company name)

My name is... (1) _____, and I am a... (2) _____

majoring in... (3) _____. Recently, I... (4) _____
_____. I am.... (5) _____.

In my free time I enjoy.... (6) _____. Right now, I am looking for...
(7) _____.

Example:

“I am a senior at UNC Asheville and majoring in Health & Wellness with a minor in Management. I have 3 years of customer service experience working in restaurants and retail stores. I’m most proud of by public speaking ability that I largely developed in a summer marketing internship at WNC Magazine. Aside from my professional skills, I compete in club soccer and enjoy photography. As a May graduate, I am looking forward to discussing how I may bring value to Biltmore’s Human Resources department.”

Feel free to customize the script so it fits it feels natural and comfortable. Being prepared to nail the first question will help you make a good first impression and allow you to settle into the interview.

Step 3: Prepare Five Back Pocket Stories

Everyone claims they have skills. Using stories, you can demonstrate your skills in action. Use this page to prepare your answers to Five Essential Questions:

1. Tell me about a time you failed?
2. What is your proudest accomplishment?
3. Tell me about a time you overcame a huge obstacle?
4. Tell me about a time you handled conflict?
5. Tell me a time when you used your greatest skill(s) to get results?

Take some time to think about specific examples that answer the above questions. Use the STAR Method to prepare each of your stories.

Situation: Set the stage.

Where were you working or volunteering?
Who were the key players?
What was your role?

Task: Define the challenge.

What was the specific assignment or challenge you faced?
What were the obstacles you had to overcome?

Action: What did YOU do? Be specific.

Step 1- How did you decide upon and plan your action:
Step 2- First action taken:
Step 3- Second action taken:
Step 4- Third action taken:

Results: What did you accomplish?

What happened? Did you win? Was the problem resolved?
What did you learn?

Tip: Be specific as possible and focus on results. The results are what truly demonstrate your skills!

Tip: Quantify your results! Did you increase/decrease/save/profit/improve money, percentage or time?

Example of a STAR Answer

Situation: During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events.

Task: I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

Action: I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

Result: We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year

Why do stories work in interviews?

- Stories provide depth and context. They are a great way to convey who you are, what you've accomplished and what you are capable of doing.
- Preparing your stories in advance often helps candidates avoid nervous ticks such as "ums," fidgeting and poor eye contact.
- All candidates "claim" they have skills, but stories "demonstrate" your skills in action.
- Stories always sound better with practice. Having trouble constructing your stories? Need more practice? The Career Center can help; schedule an appointment through RockyLink.

Step 4: Prepare for the Most Common Interview Questions

1. What attracted you to apply for this position?
2. How would a supervisor or friend describe you?
3. In what ways have your college experiences prepared you for this job?
4. What led you to select your college/university and your degree program?
5. How do you handle pressure?
6. Describe a situation when you worked as part of a team. What role did you take on? What went well and what didn't?
7. What qualities do you think a successful _____ should possess?
8. What are your long and short-term goals?
9. What are your strengths, weaknesses and interests?
10. What have you done that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
11. What do you know about our company?
12. What motivates you?
13. How do you personally measure success?
14. How do you spend your spare time?
15. What makes you the ideal candidate for this position?

Step 5: Prepare Questions to Ask the Employer

Employers typically provide candidates an opportunity to ask questions near the end of the interview. Be prepared!

1. What are the main responsibilities of this position?
2. What is a typical working day like?
3. What are the most significant challenges facing your staff?
4. What key challenges and/or problems face the person in this position?
5. What have past employees done to succeed in this position?
6. What have you enjoyed most about working here?
7. What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next three months?
8. What are the qualities of successful people in this company?
9. How much travel is involved?
10. What is the next step in the hiring process?
11. What are the normal hours? Are the hours flexible or fixed?
12. How, when and by whom would I be evaluated? What are the performance criteria?
13. How much contact is there with management?
14. What opportunities for advancement exist?

Tips:

- Until you've been offered a position, please avoid questions about salary and benefits.
- Avoid questions that are clearly answered on the employer's web page.
- The best questions are open-ended. Avoid questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no."
- Write down your questions in a padfolio or notebook and bring it to the interview.

Act 2: Get Dressed

How to Dress for an Interview

Dressing for an interview or any meeting with an employer can be a make or break experience when it comes to your job or internship search. It is critical to wear appropriate attire to demonstrate your image as a person who respects both the employer and the interview process. Even if you know that employees at the company dress casually, you should dress up for the interview unless told otherwise by the employer. Take note that dressing up for an interview or employer/business event is not the same as dressing up for a social event. Dress professionally to make a good first impression.

Grooming

Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all. Be sure you don't smell like smoke, either. Males should make sure that hair and facial hair are well-groomed and nails are clean. Females should pull hair back if it is distracting to you or others. Apply minimal/subtle makeup. Use a conservative or clear nail polish and make sure fingernails not excessively long.

Business Casual vs. Business Professional

Business casual is appropriate for networking events, employer information sessions, and most part-time job interviews. Business professional attire is best for most full-time job interviews and job fairs.

Males – Business Professional Attire

Shirt: White dress shirt (i.e. collared, button up).

Tie: Conservative color/design. The bottom of your tie should reach your belt buckle.

Suit: Charcoal or navy with minimal pattern (navyhead, small pinstripes, herringbone, very low-contrast glen plaid, etc.)
Choose either a single-breasted 2 or 3- button suit.

Belt: Leather matching shoes and an understated buckle.

Socks: Should be color-coordinated with your suit and shoes. Try over-the-calf dress socks.

Shoes: Wing tips, loafers, or lace-ups. Black leather with navy or charcoal suit; darker brown leather with a navy suit.

Accessories: Carry a small briefcase or padfolio to hold copies of resume, references, etc. Keep contents of pants pockets to a minimum.

Jewelry: Minimize jewelry: think simple and conservative. You don't want to distract the interviewer.

Males - Business Casual Attire

Shirt/Jacket: White or light blue solid, or conservative stripes is your safest bet. Polo shirts (tucked in) or sweaters are acceptable in more casual situations. Blazer or sport coat is optional.

Bottoms: Khaki or dark pants, neatly pressed.

Socks: Dark socks, mid-calf length so no skin is visible when you sit down.

Shoes: Leather shoes. No sandals, athletic shoes or hiking boots.

Accessories: Leather belt that matches leather shoes. Ties are optional.

Females – Business Professional Attire

Shirt: Collared shirt or basic shell/blouse in understated colors.

Suit: Gray, navy and black in almost any style are appropriate. No short skirts (no more than two inches above knee when sitting). Pants suits are appropriate for most industries.

Hose: Neutral colored hose. No runs (carry an extra pair with you).

Shoes: No high heels or open toes. Low heels or flats are preferable.

Accessories: Carry a padfolio to hold copies of resume, references, etc. If you choose to carry a purse, think simple.

Jewelry: Minimize jewelry: think simple and conservative. You don't want to distract the interviewer.

Females – Business Casual Attire

Top: Tailored shirts, blouses or sweaters. Blazer or Cardigan sweater can replace suit jacket. Fit should not be tight or low-cut.

Bottoms: Skirts or pants, but neither should be tight. Colors should generally be solid (navy, black, gray, brown or khaki). No short skirts (no more than two inches above knee when sitting).

Hose: Not essential, but recommended if wearing a skirt.

Shoes: Should be leather or fabric in black, navy, brown, tan, taupe (to coordinate with your other attire and accessories). No sandals, platforms, or chunky heels.

Accessories: Carry a padfolio to hold copies of resume, references and business cards. If you choose to carry a purse, think simple and classic.

Professional/Interview Attire for Creative Industries

For those of you that are interviewing in a creative industry, interview attire expectations are slightly different than more conservative industries. Dress fairly formally to portray professionalism, but pick and choose where you can bring in creative touches to your outfit (i.e. color, texture, accessories). Examples include a tailored blazer with trouser pants or pencil skirt, bright blouse or tie, colored shoes or bag. It's important to know the style of the company you're interviewing with.

For more information and examples, visit our [Interview Attire page on Pinterest](#):

<http://www.pinterest.com/uncacareer/interview-attire/>

(adapted from UNC Chapel Hill's University Career Services, 2013)

Act 3: Showtime

Tips For Your Big Day

Get there.

Print your directions in advance. Don't rely on mobile technology for navigation, as these things seem to fail when we need them most. If you've never been to the location before, consider driving there as a test-run the night before.

Be early.

Plan on being in the parking lot 30 minutes early. This will help account for traffic and weather. Walk in to the designated interview location 10-15 minutes early. Respect the employers time and schedule by being early but not too early.

Leave your phone in the car.

It is poor etiquette to answer your phone or to send text messages during the interview. Your phone can only serve as a distraction, so leave it in the car.

Smile.

It's easy to forget to smile when you're nervous. Remind yourself to smile.

Be nice to everyone you meet.

It is common for hiring managers to solicit the opinions of everyone on the staff. Be cordial and respectful to the receptionist, janitor and all staff.

Stay calm and bounce back.

Somewhere during the interview, you're likely to be asked a question that causes you to stumble. That's OK. You don't need to pitch a "perfect interview" to get the job. Brush off your shaky answer and move on to the next one.

Act 4: After the Interview

You're not done yet! What to do after the interview.

Step 1: Send a Thank You Email Within 24 Hours

Some hiring decisions happen very quickly. Make a good impression with a prompt, appreciative email to the interviewer. If you interviewed with multiple people, consider sending a separate email to each person. See the example email below.

Step 2: Send a Thank You Card Within 24 hours

Handwritten thank you cards have the potential to make a big impression on employers. Most pharmacies and grocery stores carry plain thank you cards. Write a short, gracious note in your best handwriting. The employer's mailing address should be easy to find by visiting the employer's website, or by calling the organization's receptionist. Since mail often takes 2-3 days (or more) to reach the employer, we suggest sending a thank you email in addition to the card.

Thank you notes should:

- Express your sincere appreciation
- Reemphasize your strongest qualifications. Draw attention to the good match between your qualifications and the job requirements.
- Reiterate your interest in the position. Use the opportunity to provide or offer supplemental information not given.
- Restate your appreciation.
- Tip: Research appropriate titles: Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms.

Example Thank You Email

To: armstrongl@acmecorp.com
From: jeverston@unca.edu
Subject: Thank You – Public Relations Assistant position

Dear Ms. Armstrong,

The opportunity to visit with you and the operations team at Acme Corporation has strengthened my interest in the Public Relations Assistant position. I was particularly encouraged to hear you explain the efforts underway to develop a promotional company video and brochures for the department. I am confident that my experiences in videography will enable me to make strong contributions to those projects.

I certainly appreciate the generosity that you and everyone on the staff showed me on Tuesday. I look forward to hearing from you regarding your decision.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Everston

Step 3: Follow Up

What to do when you haven't heard back from the employer:

To find out an employer's deadline for making a hiring decision, be sure to ask at the end of your interview. If that deadline has past and you haven't been contacted, consider following up with a professional and friendly email. It is absolutely imperative that this email is polite and respectful. Remember, the employer does not "owe" you a job. See the example follow-up email below.

Example Follow-Up Email

To: armstrongl@acmecorp.com

From: jeverston@unca.edu

Email Subject: Follow-up – Public Relations Assistant position

Dear Ms. Armstrong,

Please allow me to follow up on my candidacy for the Public Relations Assistant position at Acme Corporation. I remain interested in the position and am checking in on the status of the hiring decision. I can be reached via telephone at 555-555-5555 or via email at jeverston@unca.edu.

Thank you again for your consideration. Wishing you a wonderful day.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Everston

Step 4: After the Offer

Things to consider once you receive a job offer:

- It is appropriate to ask the employers for details about the job offer. This is the time to ask about your start date, salary and benefits.
- If you need time to make your decision, feel free to ask the employer for that time. Asking for two days or even a week is quite common. If you need an extension, let the employer know. Your reason for the request should be a good one. Of course, the employer has no obligation to accept your request. Be polite and act professionally in making any requests to the employer.
- When negotiating your start date, consider the appropriate amount of notice to give your current employer and any time needed to relocate.

Salary Negotiation

When you're negotiating a job, knowing how to negotiate your way to a successful result requires preparation and strategy. Use the following link for negotiation tips and strategies.

<http://www.monster.com/blog/b/how-to-negotiate-a-job-offer-and-salary/>