

YOUR GUIDE TO

# INTERVIEWING SUCCESS

*An interview guide to helping you present your best self to prospective employers.*

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# INTERVIEWING BASICS

Congratulations on being offered an interview! Now you will want to start preparing for the interview to guarantee that you end leaving a good impression. Use this guide to ensure that you are well prepared for your interview, whether it be via phone, video, in-person, or in a group setting.

## KNOW YOURSELF

The best way you can prepare for an interview is to know yourself. It's important that you really know yourself well so that you are prepared to answer interview questions and you can highlight what makes you a qualified candidate who stands out from others.

- ▶ Analyze your skills, interests, achievements, etc., and be able to provide examples of success from previous experiences
- ▶ Using the **S.T.A.R.T. Method** (see below), tell short stories that describe challenges you've faced and how you were able to overcome them
- ▶ Highlight scenarios of your achievements by focusing on the abilities and skills that allowed you to be successful
- ▶ Make sure that your examples and scenarios are relevant to the job for which you are applying, and if possible, quantify your achievements by providing specifics

## USE THE S.T.A.R.T. METHOD TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

**Situation** - Describe the specific situation or event that you have been in, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

**Task** - What goal were you working toward? What was the purpose?

**Action** - Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on you. What did you do and what did you accomplish? Be careful not to describe what the team or group did when talking about a project. Use the word "I" rather than "we" when describing actions.

**Result** - Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

**Takeaway** - How does this experience communicate that you can do this job well? Reference the responsibilities from the position description and how this example relates to one or more of those items.

## OBTAIN AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE & RESEARCH THE COMPANY

By thoroughly reading and understanding the job description, make sure you know the primary job responsibilities, and the required skills. In addition to knowing yourself, you should also know as much about the company or organization as possible. A great place to start your research is on the company's website and social media sites. While conducting research, keep the following information in mind about the company or organization:

- ▶ Primary products or services
- ▶ Their customers or target audience
- ▶ Mission and core values
- ▶ Locations
- ▶ Organizational structure and size
- ▶ Latest industry or market trends

## Interviewing Basics

### PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK THEM

Use your research to develop a list of 3-5 insightful questions that demonstrate your critical thinking ability. Bring your questions with you to the interview and reference them when the time comes but be sure they are typed or neatly written. Questions can be about the position, the interviewer, the department or the organization, but make sure to only ask questions to which you want to know the answer. Here are some possible questions to ask:

- ▶ What are some goals or objectives for this position?
- ▶ How do you see this position evolving?
- ▶ What types of qualities are you looking for in a candidate?
- ▶ How do you measure an individual's success in your organization?
- ▶ What types of challenges do you see this position facing?
- ▶ What type of professional development opportunities are available?
- ▶ Which characteristics do you possess that have made you successful with this organization?
- ▶ Always inquire about the next steps in the process (i.e., is there a second-round interview, when can you expect to hear back from the employer, etc.).
- ▶ You can ask for business cards from everyone involved with your interview, which will help when you send a personal thank-you.

### WHAT TO WEAR

Unless otherwise specified, it is recommended that you wear professional business attire to an interview. Clothing should be tailored and fit comfortably; avoid wearing clothes that are too tight or too short. Listed below are some suggestions on appropriate interview attire:

- ▶ Dress pants or slacks; Skirt or dress
- ▶ Pressed, wrinkle-free shirt and tie; Pressed, wrinkle-free blouse or dress with minimal jewelry or accessories
- ▶ Suit jacket or sports coat; Blazer or jacket
- ▶ Dress shoes; Close-toed dress shoes
- ▶ Minimal or no fragrances

### ADDITIONAL TIPS

- ▶ Practice out loud your responses to common interview questions. Contact the Knowlton Center to schedule a mock interview, [career@denison.edu](mailto:career@denison.edu), or call (740) 587-6656.
- ▶ Take a padfolio to store extra copies of your résumé and the questions you've prepared.
- ▶ Know exactly where you're going, what time you need to arrive, where you can park (if you are driving), who you will be meeting, etc. If possible, do a test run a few days before your interview. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- ▶ Take the interviewer's contact information so you can notify them if you face unexpected circumstances on your way.
- ▶ **Turn off your cell phone** before the interview; do **NOT** just turn it on silent!
- ▶ After the interview, take a few moments to reflect on your interview. What went well? What are some areas in which you can improve? Which questions highlighted your strengths? Which questions did you struggle to answer? By reflecting on your experience, you can help yourself improve for future interviews.
- ▶ Within 24 – 48 hours, send a simple, personalized thank-you to each person involved in your interview.

# BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWING

Employers typically use behavioral interviews to have candidates provide examples from their previous experiences on how they have used the skills necessary for the position for which they are applying. Questions are targeted to measure a candidate's potential in several key categories, such as communication, leadership, decision-making, collaboration, organization, and problem-solving. Using the S.T.A.R.T. Method (see the Interviewing Basics section), give specific examples of your past performance to demonstrate your potential when responding to each question. Listed below are just a sample of questions employers might ask you to evaluate your abilities and skills.

## COMMUNICATION & CREATIVITY

- ▶ *Describe a situation where you had to persuade another person or group of people with an idea you had.*
- ▶ *Talk about a time you gave a successful presentation. What made it go so well?*
- ▶ *What steps would you take if you misunderstood an important communication?*
- ▶ *Can you describe a time where you worked with someone who was not good at communicating? How did you handle the situation?*
- ▶ *Can you recall a time when you received constructive criticism?*
- ▶ *Describe a time when you had to think “outside the box”. What was the situation and what was the result?*
- ▶ *Tell me about a time when you had to develop a creative approach in order to accomplish a task.*

## LEADERSHIP & COLLABORATION

- ▶ *Can you describe a time where you held a leadership role?*
- ▶ *Can you talk about a time where you worked with others to solve a problem?*
- ▶ *What would you say is your leadership style?*
- ▶ *Can you describe a time when you motivated someone who was unmotivated to perform a task?*
- ▶ *Can you recall a time when you set a long-term goal and how you reached the goal?*
- ▶ *Describe a time when you were flexible in adapting to the needs of others.*

## ORGANIZATIONAL & PLANNING

- ▶ *How do you prioritize your responsibilities?*
- ▶ *Describe a time where you had a major role in organizing an important event.*
- ▶ *Can you talk about a time when you reorganized something to be more efficient?*
- ▶ *Talk about a situation where you had multiple things to do in a limited amount of time.*
- ▶ *Describe a specific situation which demonstrates how you set objectives to reach a goal.*

## PROBLEM SOLVING & DECISION MAKING

- ▶ *Can you recall a situation where you helped solve a problem in a group?*
- ▶ *Can you talk about a time that demonstrates your ability to make a tough decision?*
- ▶ *Talk about a time where you acted as a mediator to help solve a problem between two other people.*
- ▶ *Describe a situation where you used a creative or unique approach to solve a difficult problem.*
- ▶ *Can you describe a time when you failed and what you learned from it?*
- ▶ *Tell me about a decision you made even though you didn't have all the facts.*
- ▶ *Explain a time where you had to learn something new in a short amount of time. How did you proceed?*

## **GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- ▶ *What specifically interested you in this position?*
- ▶ *Why are you interested in our company/organization?*
- ▶ *How does this position align with your career goals?*
- ▶ *What are some potential challenges you see with this position?*
- ▶ *What are you looking to get out of this position?*
- ▶ *What do you consider to be your top 3 skills or strengths?*
- ▶ *Can you talk about a time you faced a difficult situation or challenge and what did you learn from it?*
- ▶ *Why did you choose to attend Denison University?*
- ▶ *What led you to choose your major or career field?*
- ▶ *What has been your greatest challenge in college?*
- ▶ *Describe your most rewarding experience.*
- ▶ *What 2-3 things are most important to you in a job?*
- ▶ *How would others describe you?*
- ▶ *Describe your ideal work environment.*
- ▶ *What do you look for in your colleagues?*
- ▶ *What do you look for in a supervisor?*
- ▶ *What is something we should know about you that is not listed on your résumé?*

## **DIFFICULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

In order for employers to get a better understanding of your skills and abilities, and how they might relate to the position for which you are interviewing, you should expect to be asked some version of the three challenging questions listed below.

▶ **Tell me about yourself.**

*Most interviews begin with this tough question. This is your chance to make a great first impression, so it's important you share the proper information. To formulate your response, review the job description and identify 2-3 skills you possess that the employer is seeking in a candidate. Then provide concise examples from your past that demonstrate you have those skills. Your response should be 60 - 90 seconds in length.*

▶ **What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?**

*It's important that your response turns a weakness into something positive, and that it does not pertain to any requirements listed in the position description. Describe an area you've already begun to improve by explaining the steps you're taking to address the weakness.*

▶ **What do you look for in a job?**

*The purpose of this question is to see if what you are looking for in a position aligns with what the employer is seeking in a candidate. When preparing your response, begin by thinking about what is important to you in a position (e.g., passion, professional and personal development, etc.). To help you construct your answer, review the qualifications and requirements listed in the job description. This will provide you a starting point for finding those areas that are a match.*

▶ **What makes you a strong candidate for this position? Why should we hire you?**

*Begin by highlighting any job requirements the employer mentioned during the interview by matching your skills, accomplishments and qualifications to those items. Connect past experiences that represent your success in achieving objectives. Remember to keep your response concise and brief.*

# PHONE & VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Depending on the position or organization to which you are applying, you will most likely proceed through multiple rounds of interviews. Typically, first-round interviews are conducted via phone. A second-round interview might be in-person, or conducted via video (e.g., Zoom), especially if the organization is outside the local area. Regardless, **ALL interviews should be met with the same level of preparation and professionalism** as in-person interviews. Prior to your interview, be sure you know the details for whom is responsible for initiating the call or video chat session (i.e., will they be calling you or do you need to call a specified number).

## PHONE INTERVIEWS

Many employers use phone interviews as first-round interviews before offering candidates in-person or video interviews. Typically, phone interviews will last between 20 – 45 minutes and cover questions related to the candidate's skills, career objectives and qualifications. Additionally, keep the following in mind:

- ▶ Find a quiet location where you will not be interrupted or distracted, and that also has reliable cell phone reception
- ▶ Make sure that your phone is fully charged
- ▶ Have your résumé, cover letter, position description, and questions in front of you so that you can refer to them when appropriate
- ▶ You can have any notes or outlines of your answers in front of you
- ▶ You may write down notes during the interview
- ▶ When you answer the call, make sure you say “Hello. This is (your first name)”
- ▶ Speak clearly and slowly; your tone of voice, conversation style, and energy level are especially important during a phone interview as the employer cannot see your body language

## VIDEO INTERVIEWS

Video interviews should be met with the same level of preparation and professionalism as in-person interviews. Additionally, here are some tips to keep in mind for video interviews:

- ▶ Dress in the same business professional attire you would for an in-person interview
- ▶ Find a quiet, clean location that will look professional on camera, has enough lighting, and has a reliable internet connection
- ▶ Confirm the interview date and time, and access instructions (i.e., will it be via Zoom or does the employer use a different platform); you may ask for a phone number in the event the connection is lost
- ▶ Test your webcam and microphone to ensure they are working properly
- ▶ Adjust the settings on your computer so that notifications are turned off for computer applications
- ▶ Ensure your computer is fully charged
- ▶ During the interview, look directly at the webcam, not the computer screen, so you are making eye contact with the interviewer
- ▶ Sit up straight in your chair and make sure your body language mimics your enthusiasm
- ▶ Speak clearly and slowly when responding to questions

## ADDITIONAL TIPS & SUGGESTIONS

- ▶ Don't forget to send a thank-you after your phone or video interview
- ▶ Contact the Knowlton Center if you would like to reserve a quiet space to conduct your interview
- ▶ Meet with a Career Coach to discuss interviewing tactics or to schedule a mock interview

# CASE INTERVIEWS

A Case Interview is a scenario that allows employers to assess analytical thinking in a real-time environment which involves presenting a business problem to candidates in order to evaluate them on several dimensions. Although there is usually no right or wrong answer, typically the interviewer will present a real or simulated business problem and will expect you to use your common sense, analytical abilities, and problem-solving skills to identify issues, and structure a logical approach to addressing the problem. Case interviews are typically most common when interviewing for consulting, finance and marketing positions.

## WHAT IS BEING ASSESSED

Employers will often use Case Interviews to assess the following skills of their candidates:

- ▶ Analytical skills
- ▶ Comfort level with numerical data and ability to perform basic calculations of large numbers
- ▶ Attention to detail, organization, and active listening skills
- ▶ Ability to ask clarifying questions
- ▶ Presentation skills and your ability to articulate
- ▶ Leadership skills, maturity, and enthusiasm

## TYPES OF CASE INTERVIEWS

The types of Case Interviews vary based on the types of questions asked and be organized into a few categories:

- ▶ **Market-Sizing Questions:** *be familiar with some numbers such as population*
- ▶ **Industry-Based Cases:** *testing your general knowledge of business terms and concepts*
- ▶ **Quantitative Questions/Brain Teasers:** *looking to see how you think on your feet*

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As with general interviews, it always pays to prepare and practice. Additionally, keep these tips in mind:

- ▶ Take notes and repeat back what you heard
- ▶ Ask questions for more information and actively listen to responses
- ▶ Ask for a minute to collect your thoughts
- ▶ Familiarize yourself with various frameworks for solving problems
- ▶ 3C's (Cost, Customer, Competition), 4P's (Product, Place, Promotion, Place)
- ▶ Articulate your thought process as you go, talk out loud
- ▶ Present your conclusions in a logical manner and summarize

## RESOURCES

There are plenty of available resources that can help you prepare for Case Interviews. All these resources and more can be found in Knowlton Connect. Here are some examples resources:

- ▶ Vault Guide to the Case Interview
- ▶ Vault Case Interview Practice Guide 2
- ▶ Many consulting firms have helpful information on their websites, such as:
  - ▷ Deloitte - [www.deloitte.com](http://www.deloitte.com)
  - ▷ McKinsey & Company - [www.mckinsey.com](http://www.mckinsey.com)
  - ▷ Bain & Company - [www.bain.com](http://www.bain.com)
- ▶ Get some practice by scheduling a Mock Case Interview; log in to Knowlton Connect to make an appointment.

# TRICKY SCENARIOS

Depending on the interview stage in which you fall, you may encounter some tricky or challenging situations. Employers may utilize the situations below to save time and cut down on costs, so being well prepared will help ensure that you leave the interview with a positive and lasting impression.

## SEQUENTIAL INTERVIEWS

You may be asked to participate in a series of interviews, ranging from one-on-ones to group sessions over the course of one or more days. It is important that in any scenario you are well prepared and that you connect with all the interviewers.

- ▶ If one is not already provided prior to your interview, ask for an agenda/schedule so you know with whom you will be meeting, which will help you prepare
- ▶ If there is a presentation request, make sure you get as many details as possible to help you prepare
- ▶ You may also be asked to perform a task, like a writing or coding exercise, that demonstrates a particular skill, requirement, or qualification (i.e., ability to use specific software or program)
- ▶ Plan on repeating yourself a lot; although you may get tired of repeating yourself, keep in mind that this is likely to be the first impression for other interviewers
- ▶ Ask for business cards from everyone you meet so you can send them a personal thank-you letter

## PANEL INTERVIEWS

It is common to find yourself seated across from a hiring committee, or panel of three or more interviewers. Although this situation can be intimidating, this provides the interviewers a chance to see how you fit into a group of people, saves time, and provides you a chance to see the dynamics of the team.

- ▶ Conducting prior research of the position, office/department, and organization will help you prepare questions to ask panelists, as well as be able to respond to questions asked of you
- ▶ Tailor your questions appropriately to the specific panelists or groups members; (i.e., don't pose the same question to someone in a vice president position that you would ask a peer)
- ▶ Make eye contact with all the interviewers rather than just the person who asked the question
- ▶ Ask for business cards from all the interviewers so that you can send a proper thank-you to everyone
- ▶ Make sure you shake everyone's hand and verbally thank them for their time
- ▶ As soon as you are able, write down as many details as you can from the panelist interview so that you can refer to your notes when writing thank-you letters

## SALARY QUESTIONS

Discussions about salary can be intimidating for candidates during an interview. Unless you are asked, do not bring up or ask questions about salary during an interview. However, it is best to be prepared if the employer does inquire or ask questions pertaining to salary and compensation. Ideally, prior to your interview you should:

- ▶ Research the market value of the position based on location (payscale.com and glassdoor.com are great resources to research salary)
- ▶ Create a monthly budget to determine a realistic salary range
- ▶ Avoid giving an actual figure by expressing your interest in the position as it fits with your career goals and mention that you would expect a fair salary based on the job responsibilities, your level of experience and skills, as well as the market value of the position
- ▶ If asked to provide a salary range, be prepared to present reasoning based on the research you conducted



# AFTER THE INTERVIEW


Although you may have responded to all the questions you were asked, thanked the interviewers for their time and even left the organization, your interview is not yet complete. Formally thanking your interviewer and following up with any requests will show your professionalism and enthusiasm for the position. Even after first-round interviews (i.e., phone interview), be sure to follow up appropriately and send a formal thank-you to the interviewer.

## THANK-YOU NOTES

Within 24 – 48 hours of your interview, be sure to send a personalized thank-you letter to each person involved with your interview. In your letter(s), express your appreciation for their time and reemphasize your qualifications for the position by highlighting how your previous experiences apply to the requirements described by the interviewer(s). Additionally, keep these tips in mind:

- ▶ Mention the specific position for which you were interviewed, along with the date and location
- ▶ Refer to something specific about your conversation with the individual to help the interviewer remember your discussion
- ▶ If possible, try to highlight one of the accomplishments you discussed
- ▶ Keep your comments clear and concise
- ▶ Sending letters via email is typically preferred
- ▶ Ensure your letter(s) arrive prior to the final decision
- ▶ The format should be professional; use the appropriate salutation, ensure there are no grammatical or spelling errors, use an appropriate close, and include your signature

### *Sample Thank-You Email*

 Send	To...	samantha.slayter@bigred.com
	Cc...	
	Subject	Thank you

Dear Ms. Slayter,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me on Wednesday for the Marketing Specialist position with Big Red Group. I greatly enjoyed discussing how my experience creating marketing content and using multiple media outlets to promote programs and events align with the responsibilities of the position. I also appreciated learning about how Big Red Group encourages individuals to illustrate their creativity and innovative problem-solving skills.

I am confident that my experience creating engaging and informative marketing content, my ability to collaborate with others in different departments, along with my passion for marketing, will be great advantages for the Marketing Specialist position. Again, thank you for your time. Have a wonderful weekend and I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Sincerely,  
David Alexson  
alexson\_d0@denison.edu  
(740) 587-6656

## *After the Interview*

### **MULTIPLE OFFERS**

Chances are you have applied for multiple positions with different organizations and have participated in several rounds of interviews. It can be stressful to find yourself in a situation where you receive multiple offers and now you have to make a decision. Here are some things to keep in mind for how to approach this scenario.

- ▶ If you receive an offer, you do not need to accept it immediately; rather, show appreciation for the offer and ask about the timeline to give them a response
- ▶ You may take this opportunity to negotiate salary; it is perfectly acceptable to mention that you have received another offer for a higher salary, but your first choice is to work for them
- ▶ Schedule an appointment with the Knowlton Center to further discuss your options

### **Declining An Offer**

Once you have made your decision and officially accepted an offer, it is expected that you respectfully and professionally decline all other offers as soon as possible. Keep the following in mind when declining offers:

- ▶ You may decide to send an email to notify the employer of your decision (which is perfectly acceptable), or to speak with them on the phone; although a phone call may seem more daunting, it offers a more personal touch and can eliminate any chances for misinterpretation that can arise from an email
- ▶ Show your appreciation by thanking them for their time and mentioning something that you really admired about the organization
- ▶ Provide a brief but honest reason for not accepting the position; your reasoning does not need to be too specific but should state a reason why, such as you have accepted a different position that better aligns with your career goals

### **YOU HEAR NOTHING AFTER AN INTERVIEW**

If after the interview the employer says you should be notified of a decision within the next two weeks and it is now several days over two weeks, but no one has contacted you, what should you do? Here is how you can follow up with the employer:

- ▶ Send a brief email to the main contact with the subject line “Follow Up from (Position Title) Interview”
- ▶ Give them the benefit of the doubt by mentioning you recognize it is a busy time for them and that you understand the decision process can take longer than expected
- ▶ Reiterate your strong interest in the position
- ▶ Ask if any updates on the decision timeline can be shared so you can know what to expect

### **MANAGING THE NEXT STEPS**

It's important you take time to reflect on the entire application and interview process so that you continue to be prepared for future interviews. Write down a few notes on what you think went well and what you feel can be improved for your next interview. Additionally, keep the following suggestions in mind:

- ▶ If you didn't receive an offer, be respectful and professional about the decision; send a simple note showing your appreciation for being considered to demonstrate your professionalism for future opportunities
- ▶ Make a positive first impression at your new job or internship by taking initiative, getting to know your new colleagues, learning everything you can about the field or industry, and considering yourself part of the team

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