

# INTERVIEWING AND OFFER GUIDELINES

Preparing and practicing for interviews will help you improve your interview performance. After you have taken a career assessment, practice describing your experiences, characteristics, skills and qualifications related to the position. Research employers and review their job descriptions to help you choose the employers best suited for you.

## INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

### **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: Prepare and Practice**

- › Schedule plenty of time to practice and prepare before every interview.
- › Research employers and review job descriptions to prepare questions you will ask.
- › Interviewers ask questions to measure your experience, knowledge, and skills to determine your suitability with an organization – anticipate potential questions.
- › Identify your top 5-10 skills, traits, characteristics, experiences and qualifications as they relate to each position for which you are interviewing.
- › Prepare detailed examples of two specific situations where you used each skill.
- › Practice describing your education, experience, accomplishments, and skills.
- › Practice answering questions out loud with someone else or in front of a mirror. Consider using [InterviewStream](#) to customize a virtual mock interview for yourself.
- › Your answers should flow easily and not sound memorized or too rehearsed.

### **DURING THE INTERVIEW: Presentation**

#### **Arrive early and check in 10 minutes before your interview.**

- › Turn your cell phone off– do not wait in the lobby and talk or text on your phone.
- › Greet interviewers by name and clearly state your name when you shake their hand (web-to-web).
- › Smile and maintain eye contact. Nod your head appropriately. Be poised and expressive.
- › Use an open seating position (unfold your arms, uncross your legs, lean slightly forward).
- › Bring resumes, lists of references, applications and/or any other documents related to this job in a dark padfolio with paper for notes and a nice ink pen.

#### **Dress business professional to make a positive impression and to feel confident.**

- › Your interview attire should fit you well and you should feel comfortable and confident in what you wear.
- › Dress appropriately and conservatively and when in doubt, err on the side of overdressing.
- › Wear a plain colored, two-piece pant or skirt suit that is at or below knee length, in black, gray, tan, or navy.
- › Classic cut suits and natural suit fabrics that don't wrinkle, such as wool gabardine.
- › Try on your suit before the interview to be sure it fits you properly and have it altered if necessary.
- › Along with your suit, wear an ironed, long sleeve collared shirt in white, beige, or blue, preferably without a pattern and cuffs extending ¼" below jacket sleeve.

#### **Accessories should be conservative and kept to a minimum.**

- › Conservative silk ties should complement suit and be as wide as your lapels (2¾" to 3½").
- › Bottom tip of your tie should land in the middle of your belt when you are standing.
- › Your dress shoes should match the color of your belt and wear dark long dress socks.
- › If you choose to wear heels, they should be no more than two inches high and be closed-toe and heel.

- › Hygiene: use deodorant but not cologne or perfume. Carry breath mints.
- › Jewelry and other distracting items should be minimal or excluded, such as bright colored nail polish.
- › Hats and similar fashion accessories are generally not appropriate for an interview, however, if you wear head coverings for religious or cultural reasons, it's acceptable to do so for an interview.
- › Have well-groomed hair pulled back from your face so you won't touch it when you talk.

#### **Exceptions to the business professional rule.**

- › Some companies or fields may allow and expect you to be more creative and colorful in your interview dress. For example, in creative or artistic fields, you may have more leeway to express your personal style.
- › Do your research or the company may give you direction if they do not expect traditional interview attire.
- › Consider contacting someone you know who works for the organization, but when in doubt, always go for a more professional look.

#### **You'll need to adapt to the company's culture not the other way around. Finding a natural fit is very important.**

- › If your ability to fully express yourself in the workplace is really important to you, make sure that you are interviewing with companies that give you the space and freedom to do so.
- › Depending on the company, tattoos and piercings could distract your interviewer. Although they may be accepting of these, it's a good idea to take them out or cover them up for the interview until you find out the company culture and dress code. If you are unable to remove your piercings go with nude or neutral jewelry.
- › If your everyday attire doesn't conform to traditional gender norms, present yourself in a way that aligns with your identity. If you are seeking interview attire advice, check out resources like [Owear](#) for gender-non-conforming styles. Your attire should be professional, fit properly, and something that you feel confident in.
- › Bright, unconventional hair color is generally not recommended for an interview. If that's your style, you'll need to adjust to meet the company's requirements or research the company's culture to decide if you're okay with that.

#### **DURING THE INTERVIEW: Performance**

##### **Listen attentively. Focus and answer the questions that are being asked.**

- › Demonstrate knowledge of yourself, interest in their organization and skills for the job.
- › Give specific examples of past situations where you demonstrated the job skills and desired behavioral competencies required for the position you are seeking.
- › Be honest, friendly, cooperative, enthusiastic, positive, and professional.

##### **Two-way street. Decide if the company/employer is right for you.**

- › Use the information from your employer research to develop insightful questions designed to show your knowledge of the employer and interest in the job you are seeking.
- › Ask questions about what you want to know about the job and the organization.
- › Topics to ask about might include the job, management, training, and staff.
- › Go to every interview with a pocketful of questions because near the end of most interviews, the employer will say something like: "What questions do you have for me?"

##### **Your questions can cover a wide range of topics. Examples of questions:**

- › What type of projects and assignments could I expect as a new employee?
- › What challenges will need to be addressed first by the person you hire?
- › What criteria and procedures are used in performance evaluations?
- › How would you describe your management style and organizational culture?
- › What are the goals and objectives of the company's training program?
- › What are your organization's plans for expanded services or future products?
- › What do you like most about your job and working for this organization?
- › What do you like about living in this community?

**Thank the interviewer, express interest in the position, shake hands and leave.**

- › Ask about the next steps in the interviewing process and their hiring timeline.
- › When and how should you contact the employer next? Ask for a business card.
- › Write down what was discussed.

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW: Evaluate and Reflect**

**Evaluate your interviewing skills.**

- › Make each interview a learning opportunity and continuously improve your skills.
- › What worked? What could have been stronger?
- › Determine what questions you did well on and what you could have answered better.
- › Continue to refine your answers to support your skills and accomplishments with specific examples.

**Mail or email a professional thank you letter within 24 hours to the interviewer.**

- › Mention the date of your interview and something that was discussed during your interview.
- › If this was a first screening interview, state that you would appreciate a second interview.
- › If this was the final interview, state your interest and qualifications for the position.

### **WHAT WILL INTERVIEWERS ASK?**

Interviewers ask questions to assess your educational preparation, relevant skills, work experience, campus involvement, and personal characteristics. No two interviews will be the same, although preparing for common interview questions may help you to learn to focus your answers on the information most important for you to convey. Practice describing in detail the situations where you demonstrated the skills and competencies required for the position you seek.

#### **Topics, skills and competencies interviewers often question students about:**

knowledge in academic discipline	education (major, classes, projects, grades)
career experience (jobs, internships)	leadership and strategic decision making
goal orientation, achievement, work ethic	initiative, flexibility and adaptability
group and team project experience	teamwork and team building
community service and campus involvement	analytical and quantitative skills
communication skills (verbal and written)	problem solving, logic, critical thinking
interpersonal skills	time, stress and change management
integrity and ethical behavior	computer and technical skills

### **ASSESS YOUR SKILLS**

Identifying your skills will help in preparation for writing your resume and answering the typical questions interviewers might ask. Describe your experiences, skills, knowledge, and qualifications as they relate to the position you are interviewing for. Review the employer's job description to identify their specific skill requirements and qualifications for the positions you are seeking. Practice talking about how and where you have demonstrated the required skills, competencies, and characteristics through your education and experiences, using the skills focused STAR approach.

**Situation:** challenges, problems, concerns, issues, and conflicts

**Tasks:** your responsibilities and role in the situation (and who was involved)

**Actions:** focusing on your behavior and the skills you used (and alternative actions you considered)

**Results:** outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed and learned, how you were effective

### **Skills focused approach to answering interview questions**

- › Recall 10 successful experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well.
- › Identify 10 challenging experiences where things did not go as planned or you were not pleased with your performance or the outcome.
- › Use various situations to describe your experiences from college, jobs, internships, community service, campus activities, student involvement, class projects, teamwork, research, labs, volunteer roles, leadership roles, committees, etc.
- › Evaluate skills you used and how you were effective during each experience.
- › Focus on measurable skills and specific examples where you can cite evidence of your related skills and knowledge that you demonstrated in an experience.
- › **List your top 10 skills with two situations where you demonstrated each skill, using the STAR method to describe what you did and how you were effective in 20 situations.**
- › Consider that a strong story demonstrates use of multiple skills in one situation.

**Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Situation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Tasks:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Actions:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Results:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **QUESTION AND INTERVIEW TYPES**

### **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Behavioral-based interviews involve questions asking you for examples of past situations demonstrating you have the skills, competencies, and work behaviors the employer wants to find in the “ideal” candidate. This popular questioning style focuses on using your past behaviors to predict your future behaviors and your potential for success. Analyze the skills and qualifications required for the job you are seeking as outlined in the employer’s job description. Identify and practice talking about specific situations where you demonstrated the competencies, skills and qualifications required for the position you are seeking.

Interviewers ask for *examples of past situations with positive or negative results*. You may be asked to describe a time when you contributed to a team, solved a problem, demonstrated leadership, dealt with an ethical decision, took a risk, overcame an obstacle, etc. You will need to describe the situation, what you did, the challenges you faced, and the outcome.

Give examples using the **STAR Approach** to tell your story by describing:

- › Describe a time when you volunteered or worked as a member of a team. Describe your role. What did you contribute to the team? What challenges did you face with the team members?
- › Tell me about a time you performed well in a stressful situation. What did you do?
- › Tell me about a time you believe you made a difference with another person.
- › Describe a problem you had in a work setting. How did you go about solving it?
- › Tell me about a situation when you were part of a team and a team member was not performing their role as expected. What did you do? What were the results?

- › Describe a recent problem you attempted to solve using a systematic and logical process.
- › Tell me how you handled a conflict with a co-worker. What did you learn from that?
- › Tell me about a weakness you used to have. What did you do to improve that skill?
- › What would you do if you had knowledge of a fellow student cheating on an exam or assignment? Describe a popular decision you made. Describe an unpopular decision you had to make.
- › Tell me about a time when you were in a new situation -- how did you develop professional relationships with others? Be specific.
- › Tell me about a time when you handled many responsibilities at the same time. How did you prioritize what you needed to accomplish?
- › Have you ever been on a team/group with an unproductive person? How did you handle that?
- › Tell me about a recent time when you found errors in your work. When did you discover the errors and how did you resolve them?
- › Tell me about a time when you made suggestions for improving a process or procedure on a job.

### **TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- › Tell me about yourself. (related to your interest and qualifications for the job)
- › How has your college experience prepared you for this job?
- › What career related skills have you developed through your education and experience?
- › Why are you interested in working for us? What do you know about us?
- › How would this job fit into your short term and long range career goals?
- › How do you believe you could make a contribution to this organization?
- › What have you learned from your work experience during college?
- › Describe the two accomplishments that gave you the most satisfaction in college.
- › What are your top five strengths? Provide examples of each.
- › Name three of your weaknesses (or skills and qualities you need to improve).
- › How do you measure success? How do you handle disappointments?
- › What would be an ideal job for you? An ideal employer? An ideal supervisor?
- › Describe the three most important events during your education and related experiences.
- › Is there anything else you want to tell me? What questions do you have for me?

### **Examples of Career Specific Questions**

- › Engineering: What factors need to be considered when building a traffic signal system?
- › Teaching: What is your experience with and knowledge of standards-based education?
- › Nursing: What steps do you take to ensure safe working conditions?
- › Marketing: What process would you use to develop a marketing strategy for our new product?
- › Film and Television: Describe your experience working on production teams.
- › Speech: What is your experience using standardized assessments with children?

### **TELEPHONE AND VIDEO INTERVIEWS**

**Many employers conduct preliminary interviews with candidates by telephone or video. Your objective is to sell yourself in order to receive an invitation to an in-person interview.**

- › Telephone: Prepare for unexpected calls by keeping your resume, paper and a pen by your phone. Stand up and speak as if the interviewer could see you!
- › Video: Test the equipment and internet connection beforehand. Make sure you have good lighting and no clutter in the background or interruptions. Look at the camera, not your screen.
- › Smile! Speak loudly and project enthusiasm in your voice.
- › Avoid “yes” and “no” answers - provide detailed answers with specific examples.
- › Be polite - never interrupt your interviewers when they are speaking.
- › Write down the details if you are offered a next interview - who, where, and when?
- › Close the interview politely and thank the interviewer for their consideration of you.

## **SECOND INTERVIEWS**

After an initial screening job interview, you may be invited to a second interview. This is a cause for celebration because you did well in your first interview and now the employer is seriously considering you! Now, you must prepare for an even more intense interview.

There are many second interview formats, including two to six individual interviews, panel interviews, office or facility tours, testing, group activities and meals. Organizations vary greatly in how they arrange and conduct second interviews and office visits. The length of the trip, number of people who interview you, level of people conducting the interviews, types of tests conducted and degree of formality differs with each employer. If the interview is conducted outside of Tucson, the employer will let you know about travel and hotel arrangements and the process for reimbursing you for expenses.

Second interviews allow employers to make in-depth assessments of your qualifications to ensure a good match with your career goals. Second interviews allow you to meet additional employees within an organization and learn details about the potential job. It is important for you to continue to market yourself and to have questions to ask so you may gather more information to help you decide if you would like to work there if offered the job.

## **TABLE MANNERS DURING INTERVIEW MEALS**

A formal breakfast, lunch or dinner may be part of your interview. Your hosts are evaluating your social graces, dining etiquette, and communication skills. Participate in the conversation by asking pertinent questions and contributing to the discussion. Stay with safe conversational topics and be cautious about discussing politics, religion, health, or personal issues.

### **Remember your best table manners during interview meals:**

- › order food that is easy to eat with a knife and fork so you do not eat with your hands
- › place and keep your napkin in your lap throughout the whole meal
- › wait until everyone is served before eating and always taste your food before using salt or pepper
- › your glasses are to your right and your bread plate is to your left
- › pass to your right; salt and pepper always travel together - even if only one is requested
- › only cut your food one bite at a time (never cut up all your food at once)
- › butter one bite of bread at a time (not the whole roll or slice of bread at once)
- › keep your elbows off the table and never talk while you are chewing
- › to signal servers that you have finished your meal, place your silverware at the 4 o'clock position on your plate; when you leave the table, place your napkin to the left of your plate

## **SALARY**

In preparation for your interviews, research the **fair market value of your skills and experience** along with the typical competitive salary range for employers within this industry and geographic region. **As a general rule, don't bring up compensation and benefits until employers extend you a job offer or the interviewers brings up the topic.**

Not all students negotiate salaries as many employers offer new college graduates a fair starting salary and expect to base future raises on performance. If you negotiate, the **negotiation process should be cooperative**, never confrontational or adversarial. It is OK for you to ask if there is room to negotiate, possible for the employer to say no, and alright for you to still accept the job offer. Always show that you are interested in the employer and enthusiastic about the job offer.



Salary information is included on the Career Services website under “Resources and Tools.” You may use *CareerBeam*, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, *O\*NET*, *Ferguson’s Career Guidance Center*, *Glassdoor*, and *PayScale* to conduct your research.

Do your research, know the fair market salary range for the position you are seeking, practice what you will say, and know ahead of the negotiation what you are willing to accept. If you are asked about salary before a job offer is extended, you may:

- › Give a well-researched number (e.g. “With my background and qualifications I hope to be making...”)
- › Salary you give should be realistic and at the fair market value based upon your research of salaries in the industry, relative to your degree, level of experience and skills.
- › Politely postpone answering (e.g. “I am sure that if you make me an offer it will be commensurate with my qualifications and the salary structure of your industry.”).

**Once you receive a job offer, it is appropriate to ask about salary.** You may also ask about and negotiate other factors and benefits: start dates, signing bonuses, relocation/moving expenses, insurance, retirement, stock options, flex time, performance bonuses, vacation and sick leave, etc. If you are pleased with the offer, then you might accept it as is. If you choose to negotiate the salary, the appropriate time to negotiate is after a job offer is extended, but before you accept.

## **EVALUATING JOB OFFERS**

When you receive an offer, evaluate everything about the job, not just the salary and benefits.

- › Does this job match your skills, interests and career goals? Will the job challenge you?
- › Would you be working with potential co-workers and supervisors you like and respect?
- › Are the values and culture of the organization in line with your personal perspective?
- › Can you use your strengths and continue to develop skills through professional development?
- › Would you like doing this job and living in this city? Would you be happy working here?

**If you decide to accept a job offer, it is recommended that you accept by phone and also in writing.** You might receive a job offer during the final interview, the next day or within 2-6 weeks after your interview. If you want the job, you may accept immediately in person or by phone, but you should also write and mail a formal acceptance letter. You may also ask for more time if you need more time to evaluate a job offer (2 to 6 weeks is a reasonable period of time for you to consider an offer, although many employers prefer a decision from you in much less time). Asking an organization when they need your decision about the job offer shows you are treating their employment offer seriously.

**Accepting a job offer with an employer, and then reneging on that job offer, is considered *unprofessional and unethical behavior*.** Accepting a job offer should be done in good faith. Once you have accepted an employment offer, professional ethics suggest that you withdraw from further interviews with all other employers. Politely inform other employers who have offered you positions that you have accepted employment verbally and in writing.

If you have not heard from an employer by the indicated date or you have an offer from another organization that requires a decision from you very soon, you may contact the human resources representative to inquire about the status of your application and timeline of their hiring decision. You can then make the most informed decisions for your future. Decide what you will say ahead of time. For example: *“Hello Mr. Morrison. I interviewed with you last month through UA Career Services. I am calling to inquire about the status of my application. I am very interested in the position with your organization. Could you tell me when you expect to make your hiring decision?”*