



The KatieCareer Guide to Interviews

What is an interview?

A job interview is a formal meeting with an employer to determine if you are a good fit for a position or opportunity. An interview is usually structured as:

1. Introductions
2. Opening questions
3. Specific questions
4. Candidate's questions
5. Closing/next steps

Types of Interviews

Screening Interview

- **Who?** Usually one-on-one with a human resources staff person.
- **What?** Questions are about your background and skills, and you reply to their questions and “sell” yourself.
- **Where?** Often conducted by phone, but sometimes takes place virtually via video calls.
- **When?** Typically 15-30 minutes, but can last up to an hour.
- **Why?** If all goes well, you'll be invited for a longer follow-up interview, usually at the employer's offices.
- A popular pre-recorded interview platform is Hirevue. Click here for the [Hirevue candidate help center](#).

One-Way Interview

- **Who?** These will be conducted on your own.
- **What?** These are a type of screening interview, where you will be recording video responses to questions online.
- **Where?** Conducted over video, on specialized websites.
- **When?** You are given a set amount of time you can answer the question for, and the number of times you can attempt to record your response.
- **Why?** If all goes well, you'll be invited for a longer follow-up interview, at the employer's offices or online.

Classic Job Interview

- **Who?** A representative from HR and a hiring manager from the department. Other personnel may also be included—co-workers, other managers, a vice-president, etc. Some organizations might schedule a group interview where you meet with two to five people simultaneously.

- **What?** These interviews include common interview questions, and behavioral interview questions. They may also include demonstrations of skills (e.g. presentation, role-play sales call, etc.), depending on the industry.
- **Where?** Takes place at the employer’s work site, or virtually via video calls.
- **When?** Interview(s) may be 1 hour to several hours.
- **Why?** If all goes well, you’ll be invited for another interview, or will be offered the position.

Preparing for Interviews

Preparation is vital to help you conduct a successful interview and to help you feel self-confident. You can use [this form](#) to help you prepare.

Know the job requirements. Identify the key skill, qualities and experiences that the position requires. Review your work, volunteer, and academic background to identify experiences where you have developed and displayed these skills and abilities.

Be ready to ask questions. Prepare some general questions prior to the interview: To whom will I report? How will my work be evaluated? In what new directions do you expect this organization to grow in the next few years?

Practice for the interview. By anticipating types of questions and practicing your responses, you will be better prepared to articulate your skills and strengths during an interview. Forms of practicing:

- A friend, a professional colleague or a professor can give clear, honest feedback about your answers and your nonverbal behavior.
- [Make an appointment](#) for a mock interview or interview coaching with the Career Development Center.
- Practice online with [Interview Stream](#) using the QR Code:



Researching The Company

Researching the company allows you to get an understanding of your audience so you can best tailor your answers in an interview. It is hard to make the argument that you’re the best candidate for the position if you don’t know about the place you’d be working at!

Places to Look:

- Job posting
- Company website
- [Handshake](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Glassdoor](#)
- [Talk with Alumni](#)

What to look for:

- Organizational structure
- Potential career paths
- Office locations
- Products/Services
- Competition
- Mission, Vision, Values
- Candidate reported interview questions ([Glassdoor](#))
- Diversity of staff/administration

Interview Best Practices/Tips Based on Modality

In-Person:

- Arrive five minutes beforehand.
- **Know where to go.** Find out exactly where the interview will be, when to be there and, if needed, where parking is available. Verify directions, and plan for traffic.
- Know how you would like to greet people—if comfortable, greet everyone with a firm handshake and a smile.
- Remember to maintain good **eye contact** throughout the interview. In group interviews, make eye contact with each interviewer when responding to questions.
- **Apparel:** You should feel comfortable wearing the clothing that represents you. In almost all cases, “business formal” will be appropriate for professional positions. Attire can vary by field and professional options for candidates.
 - Religious & Cultural Attire—Wear what you typically wear that reflects your cultural beliefs.
 - Need new clothes? Visit Katie’s Closet in Mendel 100 or on Instagram [@stkates_katies_closet](#) for free professional clothing.

Virtual:


- Find a location where you can talk undisturbed, if at all possible.
 - Have a background that is neat, professional, and not distracting.
 - Place lighting behind the camera to ensure that your face is visible.
 - Learn [How To Set Up for a Video Interview](#)
- Make sure to **test your technology** beforehand to ensure everything is working.
 - Ask for an alternative way to reach your interviewer in case there are technical issues with video connection.
- Make **eye contact** with the camera, not the people on the screen.
 - Minimize and place your video platform window right under your webcam to help you maintain virtual eye contact.
- Put your **prep notes in bullet points in a Word doc** and have it ready on the screen. This makes it easier to reference it if you need them.
- **Apparel:** You should feel comfortable wearing the clothing that represents you. In almost all cases, “business formal” will be appropriate for professional positions. Attire can vary by field and professional options for candidates.
 - Need new clothes? Visit Katie’s Closet in Mendel 100 or on Instagram [@stkates_katies_closet](#) for free clothing.

Phone:

- Have a copy of your resume and the job posting in front of you for easy reference.
- Make sure you are in a place without any background noise.

Managing Nerves

- It's okay to be nervous.
- If you get the interview, the employer believes you are qualified. Have faith in yourself! (Even when you don't see it)
- Take 5 deep breaths before your interview.
 - Here's a [helpful visual guide](#)
- It's okay to ask for time to think, especially if it's a question you didn't prepare for. You may say:
 - *"That's a great question. Let me take a minute to gather my thoughts."*
- Sometimes naming it and sharing that you are nervous could be helpful. You may say:
 - *"I'm feeling a little nervous because I'm really excited about this opportunity. Let me take a step back and quickly check on my notes."*



Common Questions + How To Answer Them

The following examples are typical types of interview questions with suggestions about how to answer them:

"Tell me about yourself."

What they are looking for: What interests you about the position, and what relevant skills you have to offer that make you qualified for the position. You'll want to start with the present (who you are professionally- student, role, education status, etc.), then move to the past (relevant roles, experiences, and accomplishments), and then discuss the future (why this role is a logical next step).

Note: If you are making a career transition, find commonality between the experience you have and the role you're hoping for, and discuss the transferable skills.

Example: *"I'm currently a second-year student at St. Kates, where I am majoring in graphic design with a minor in Digital Humanities. I'm currently serving as an R.A. in one of our dorms, where I've been able to put my passion for content creation to use when designing resources for the students I assist. I'm excited to merge my passion for graphic design with my interest in community development in this role."*

"Why are you interested in this position?"

What they are looking for: Talk about what responsibilities and components of the job are attractive, and how you have developed the skills to meet the requirements of the job.

Example: *"The first thing that caught my eye when I saw the position posted was definitely that it was at Target Corporations. I have spent countless hours shopping at your store. But, the part that really spoke to me was the chance to combine the customer service skills I gained from being a waitress and my knack for organization in a position that lets me engage with my growing interest in investing and portfolio management. I'm really excited to learn more and see how I'll be able to contribute to the firm."*

“What makes you qualified for this position?”

What they are looking for: Articulate your skills with examples of situations where you demonstrated the abilities they seek and the successes you have had.

Example: *“From my understanding, this role will involve a lot of testing of new ideas. In my senior biology research project, I learned the importance of testing hypotheses in new and unique ways. My research on stem cell growth, for example, showed a new growth pattern through my innovative idea for measurement. I received an ‘A’ for the project, and it was submitted to a national college competition. I hope to use this type of innovative creativity when helping solve complex problems with clients.”*

“What background (from work, internships, volunteering or the classroom) do you have that would help you in this position or field?”

What they are looking for: Examples of your experiences and how they demonstrate the skills they are seeking.

Example: *“I understand this role has a lot of project management. I have extensive experience in data collection and translating that information into actionable items. As an intern I contacted 200 customers by phone and collected data for a survey to evaluate how the new company brochure displayed the products and articulated their value to our customers. I was able to take this information and relay it in a concise way to our team, along with suggestions for future edits.”*

“What are your weaknesses?”

What they are looking for: Honesty, and how you have worked to overcome obstacles. Be ready to share an example of something that is not a terrible problem, but rather something that you have been working to improve. An example here can be very helpful, but avoid sharing very negative examples—being late for work, conflict with coworkers, etc.

Example: *“I have received feedback that I need to be more assertive when working on projects and to ask more questions. I have been doing that for the last few months in my internships and feel more comfortable requesting information and assistance.”*

“What are your goals?”

What they are looking for: Goals that align with the work and company, both short and long-term. Longer-term goals may include continuing your education and planning for management positions.

Example: *“I hope to begin in this position, demonstrate my abilities and do quality work. I plan to learn as much as I can in the position, and eventually qualify for positions with even more responsibility.”*

“What areas in school or work have been the greatest challenge to you?”

What they are looking for: A time where you overcame an obstacle and demonstrated resilience.

Examples: Think of times when a difficult college assignment, or a big project at work or an internship was due, and how you successfully accomplished the task. Successes might include an “A” on the assignment, increased customer satisfaction, or meeting an important deadline that was vital to a department.

“Why do you want to work here?”

What they are looking for: A passion for the work and organization. Do not focus on salary or benefits.

Example: See the answer for: “Why are you interested in this position?”

“What motivates you in a work situation?”

What they are looking for: Motivations that are associated with the new position, indicating you will be motivated to work in this position.

Examples: public speaking, being creative, problem solving, working with teams of people to solve problems, working with technology, etc.

“Why did you leave (or plan to leave) your past (present) employer?”

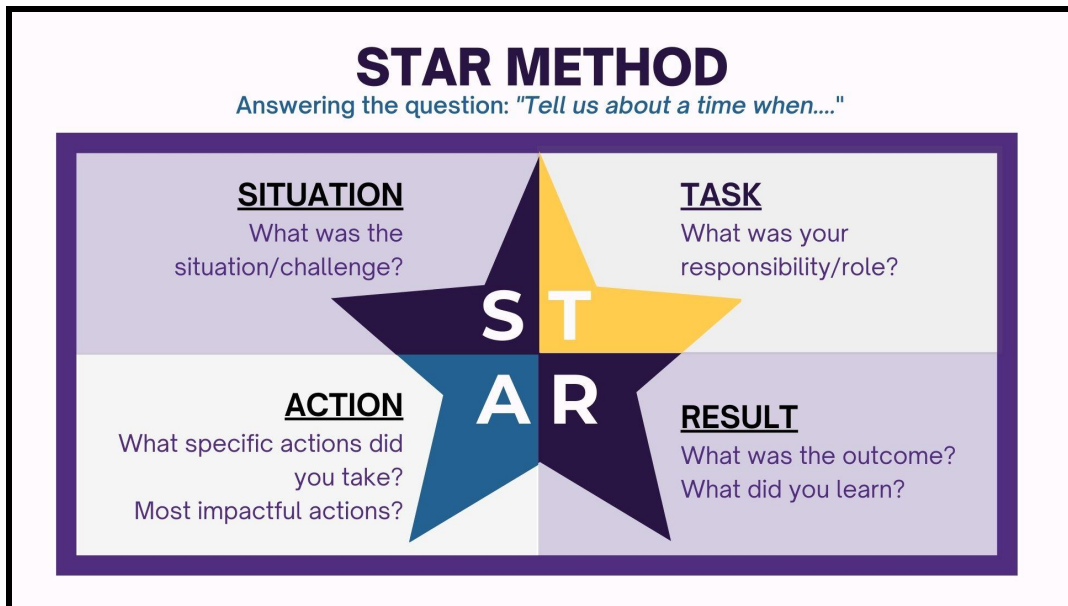
There are many legitimate reasons to leave a position or company. You may have had a lack of promotional opportunities or you were looking for new challenges. Refrain from speaking badly of a present or previous employer in an interview—even if your boss was awful or the company didn’t treat you fairly. Speak to a Career Counselor about how to provide a solid response to this question based on your experiences.

Behavior-Based Questions

How to answer the question that starts with “Tell me about a time when...”

What they are looking for: Details about how you behave in certain situations. Think about what skills and attributes the employer wants to see in a successful candidate (e.g. communication, problem-solving, leadership, etc.).

To successfully structure your answer to a behavior-based question, include each of the following elements: **Situation, Task, Action, Results.**



Common Behavioral Questions:

- Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.

- Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure at work or at school. What was going on, and how did you get through it?
- Give me an example of a time you had a conflict with a team member. How did you handle it?
- Describe an occasion when you had to manage your time to complete a task. How did you do it?
- Tell me about a time you went beyond the call of duty. Why did you do this, and what happened?
- Describe a time when you had to do something you weren't trained to do. How did you handle it?

How to prepare stories: Choose based on key skills required by the job . Prepare 1 story per each key skill/experience listed in the job description.

Example: If you are asked to describe a situation in which you had to work as a member of a team, your answer might include the following elements:

Situation: I was taking a biology class last semester, where we put together a presentation on our experiment. My group was struggling to communicate, and was beginning to stress about the upcoming deadline.

Task: As the group leader, it was my responsibility to help the group get on the same page, so we can finish the project on time.

Action: I organized a special group meeting to discuss what was keeping our group from effectively collaborating, and realized that some group members were not feeling heard. By bringing the topic out in the open, we were able to discuss it and move forward with the project.

Results: We were able to finish on time, receiving an 'A' on the project and solid feedback from classmates on the presentation.

Common Mistakes:

- Spending too much time on the background information, and not enough on your actual actions, such as how you got to the solution or what you did to resolve the conflict.
 - Think of STAR like a burger: The S and T are the top bun, the A is the patty, and the R is the bottom bun. You don't want a bun to overpower the burger—keep it *just large enough* to make it easy to grasp. You want the A to be the most detailed—it should be juicy and informative. The R should be just big enough to wrap things up.
- Forgetting about the result. It can be just 1-2 sentences.

Questions to Ask At the End of An Interview

Prepare 3-5 questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview. These questions are just a few examples of the type of questions that you can ask:

First-Round Interview Questions:

1. Is the [open role] you currently have listed more focused on [some function or aspect of the company] or [some other function or aspect of the company]?
2. In a typical day, what does [open role] do?
3. What's the biggest challenge the new [open role] can help solve?
4. What are some of the challenges you've faced in your role or at [Company]?
5. Who's the manager/direct report for this role?
6. How does the role I'm applying to contribute to the organization's overall success?"
7. What's this team's biggest goal in the next six months?

Second-Round Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me about the most difficult client situation you've faced in the last six months?
2. What gets you most excited about the company's future?
3. Can you tell me about a moment when you thought, "wow, this is a total [company] experience?"
4. I imagine that [innovation at the company or change in the industry] will change how you're working on [project or product]. How are you developing your workforce to keep up with this?
5. What's different about working here than about anywhere else you've worked?
6. How does your organization promote a healthy work/life balance for their employees?
7. What resources has your organization provided to its employees during COVID-19?
8. How involved are employees in creating their own responsibilities and goals?
9. How has the company changed since you joined?
10. Could you describe the opportunities for learning new skills and meeting new challenges, once I've gained mastery of the initial requirements of the position?
11. What types of skills is the team missing that you're looking to fill with a new hire?
12. What qualities are more important for succeeding in this role, or at this organization?
13. What would you expect me to have achieved after 6 or 12 months in this role?
14. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important to know about working here?

Internship-Specific Questions

1. How much time will the intern hired spend working independently versus in collaboration with other interns or employees?
2. What does mentorship and professional development look like for interns?
3. Can you share examples of how the organization prioritizes a culture of equity and inclusion for all employees?
4. How do you maintain relationships with former interns in the long term?

Common Mistakes + How To Avoid Them

- **Talking about the salary or benefits too early.** Salary and benefits are often high on the list of what candidates want to know, but it's encouraged to only ask about the benefits to the HR representative outside of interviews, and to wait to discuss salary until you have a written offer. If the employer brings up the salary before then, here are a few potential responses:
 - *Could you share the typical range for this role?*
 - *I'd like to learn more about the role before I set my salary expectations. As we move forward in the interview process I would hope and expect that my salary would line up with market rates for similar positions in this area.*
- **Badmouthing past employers.** Even if you didn't have a great experience at your previous place of employment, try to refrain from speaking too negatively about that experience. Try to focus on the positive, and the aspects of the new position that appeal to you.
- **Not researching the company before the interview.** Employers are looking for someone who feels like a good fit for the company. In order to make the argument that you're a good fit, you need to actually understand the company.
- **Appearing apathetic/unexcited.** Even if you are not excited about the position, try to find something that you're excited about—e.g. *"I'm excited to learn more about this opportunity."*
- **Not listening to the interviewer.** Make sure to be mindful of the rationale behind the questions you're being asked—*what are they trying to learn with each question?*

Thank You Notes

Sending a professional thank you note is an important courtesy. Try to send the note within 24-48 hours of the interview. The content should be clearly written, professional in tone, and carefully proofread. Try to include specific information that was discussed in the meeting.

Sample Thank You Email

Subject: Thank you!

Dear Mr. Carlson,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview this morning for the Assistant Buyer position in your Junior Fashions Department. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about Good Buy Clothes.

I especially enjoyed talking with you about the new line of summer fashions. The new designs and fabrics were very intriguing, and I would be delighted to get to know more about them.

After talking with your staff and further investigating your company, I am eager to reaffirm my interest in the position. My familiarity with the product line and considerable retail sales experience would help me to do well in this position.

Again, thank you for your consideration. I hope to talk with you soon regarding your final decision.

Best regards,

Katie Student



Additional Resources

[InterviewStream](#): A place to practice virtual interviews.

[Appointments with Career Development](#): Discuss interviewing best practices, conduct a mock interview, or learn more about the

[Candid Careers](#): Watch short videos that give advice on interviewing, including common interview questions and mistakes.

[LinkedIn Interview Prep](#): This feature of LinkedIn shows you common interview questions, what the purpose is, and provides sample responses.

[Interview Cheat Sheet](#): This resource from The Muse allows you to stay organized as you prepare for upcoming interviews. This can also be used as a cheat sheet while you're doing a virtual presentation.

[60-Second Introduction Mad Libs](#): This "Mad Libs" is a great way to brainstorm what information you want to include in your answer to the question "Tell me about yourself."

[Glassdoor](#): This website allows you to see previous questions submitted by interviewees for the company and position that you're interested in. You can also learn information on salary ranges.