



## **Interviewing for Jobs and Internships**

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## Getting prepared for internship and job interviews

When an employer invites you to an interview, he or she generally already thinks you may be qualified to do the job. The interview is the time when both candidate and employer exchange enough information to allow you both to determine whether you and the organization are a good "fit" for each other. Therefore, think of an interview as a highly focused professional conversation. Use the limited amount of time you have to learn about the employer's needs and discuss the ways you can contribute to meeting them.

An important component of any pre-interview preparations is performing some background research on organizations and job types. Any background research you can do prior to an interview will help you to be able to show why your background and expertise makes you a good fit for the position. To do this you have to understand the needs of the employer and the perspectives of the people who you will likely be talking to during an interview. If you can get the names of the people you will be interviewing with, then make sure to spend some time understanding their backgrounds and career paths. This might help you to focus on experiences that you might share in common with one of your interviewers, which can sometimes help to build rapport during an interview itself.

Get to know the organization, the industry, and the position. Spend time reviewing organization websites, and familiarize yourself with the organization's divisions, mission statements, and history. Learn about the industry, what are the most important trends in this field and how is the economy affecting the industry. Get some sense as to who the key players are, and be able to speak the "language of the industry". Employers who recruit on campus typically offer on-campus information sessions where they provide some of this background information, and provide an opportunity for you to ask questions and speak with representatives from the organization.

Your background research into employers will help you to identify the types of interviews and interview questions you can expect. Consider using your network of contacts to see if you can talk with people who have more specific experiences with an employer, or who can offer you some helpful insights into the interview process. Talk to alumni currently working at the organization to get more detailed information about what it takes to be successful there. You are not expected to be an expert in the particular field, but you should have enough knowledge to formulate meaningful questions to present to the interviewer. Thinking about your experiences from the employers' perspectives will help you to be able to talk confidently about them, and show that you can tie in your previous expertise to your future work effectiveness and productivity.

## Phone/video interview best practices

You may have 2-3 separate interviews for certain types of jobs you apply to. In most cases, there is a first round screening interview that happens over the phone (or video), on Penn's campus, or at a conference (for academic jobs). Shortlisted candidates from the first round will then participate in one or more in-person interviews at a future time, often on-site at the employer. The format for screening and in-person interviews can be as varied as the many different jobs out there. Here are some general recommendations for the type of preparations you can make for these different interviews types focusing mainly on the practical and logistical aspects you will face.

### Phone Interviews

If you are using a landline, then choose a quiet location and turn off/silence your mobile phone! If you are using a mobile, then choose a location that is both quiet and has good reception. If there will be several people on the other end of the line, then chances are that they will be using a speakerphone. These do not always provide the greatest voice clarity, and this makes it especially important that you be in a quiet location. Double check the time zone when confirming the call time for interviews with employers from other states or countries. Since the interviewer cannot see you, you do not have the advantage of using visual non-verbal cues to reinforce your answers and convey enthusiasm about the position. Therefore, you must make sure that your tone of voice is as energetic as possible. While notes may be helpful, do not read them verbatim. This can make you sound stilted and less engaging to the employer. If an employer calls unexpectedly and you are not prepared or in a good location to interview, always feel free to suggest setting up an appointment to have the discussion at a later time.

### Video Conferencing

For any video interview there is a lot of work to do to ensure that the image that comes across on the employer's computer screen is a professional one. You will need to ensure that the backdrop, the lighting, and the ambient sounds are all maximizing your professionalism. You should be dressed professionally since the interviewer will see you. If you are conducting the video interview from home, then ensure that your friends, family, and pets are not going to make an appearance during the interview. The fuzzy tail of a cat quivering across the screen, or its pitiful meowing for food, will not make a good impression. Do some practice interviews ahead of time with people you know, and get feedback from them about how you come across and look on their screens. Use InterviewStream to get a sense what you look like when answering questions. Pay attention to the lighting to ensure that your image is clear without being bleached out by the light or hidden by shadow. Remember to double check the time zone when confirming the start time for interviews with employers from other states or countries. As always, make sure that you turn off or mute your phone.

## In-person interview best practices

### In-person (short, all-day, multiple day)

There can be many things to do to prepare for in-person interviews depending on whether they are performed in an On-Campus Interview suite, in the local area close to where you live, or in another part of the country (or another country altogether). When you have to travel to an interview, make sure that you understand who will pay for travel arrangements, how they are to be made, and what records you need for reimbursement. An on-site interview is at least a half-day affair and most are full days, so get sufficient rest the night before. If you are traveling directly to the interview, make sure that you wear clothes that do not wrinkle easily and avoid messy foods. Use your travel time to relax and gather your thoughts. If you will be spending the night before the interview, you may be invited to a night-before reception and dinner. If so, be personable and professional because such events are still part of the interview. One of the most important logistical steps you can take to be prepared for in-person interviews is to know where you are going. If possible, do a dry-run by finding the actual place where you will be interviewing. You do not want to be late to your interview because you were rushing around trying to find where you are meant to be. If you visit the location, think about how long it will take you to get there under different traffic conditions. Find a local coffee shop in case you arrive too early and need to wait for a while. If you cannot do a dry run, use Google maps to get a street-eye view of the building and area so that you are not wandering around lost.

### On the day of the interview

Make sure that you are on time (arrive 5-10 or minutes early for an in-person interview, but no earlier). Bring several copies of your resume, a list of references, and, if appropriate, any work samples. Keep a hold of these until someone specifically asks for them, or you need to illustrate something that you are talking about in an answer to an interviewer's question. Make sure all of your materials are all up-to-date. You might want to bring a pen and notepad to jot down any information you may need to remember between interviews (this can be a good way to keep track of all of the people that you meet during a series of in-person interviews), but avoid taking notes during any of the actual interviews, as you want to be engaging with the interviewers

Think of the interview as a conversation, rather than an interrogation. Be courteous to everyone you speak with. It will not just be the interviewer who is evaluating you anyone you interact with (e.g., administrative assistant) could have a say in hiring you, even if it is just a small one. During your interview experience, make sure that your body language is positive and confident. Greet any interviewer with a firm handshake and an enthusiastic smile. Make eye contact with the interviewer and speak in a clear voice.

## Interviewing Preparation Quick Tips

- 1. Know what to expect.** Make sure that you know the format of the interview, how long it will be, and exactly who you will be meeting with. It will help to do some background research into your interviewers to see if any aspect of your past experience is particularly relevant to them. This may help you choose which illustrations of your skills you use in some of your answers.
- 2. Use your notes.** The downside to phone interviews is that it is not possible to read the body language of the interviewers to know if your answers are coming across well. The benefit of being on the phone is that you can have some notes in front of you to refer to if needed. Don't read any of your answers people can easily tell when something is being read, and you won't come off as sounding very personable. However, just down some key points you want to get across in your answers, and you can refer to these as you are speaking to make sure you have covered everything.
- 3. Clarify reimbursement arrangements.** If you have to travel to an on-site interview, make sure that you are aware of what can be reimbursed. Some organizations routinely pay for travel expenses. Others, such as government agencies or smaller firms, may be less likely to do so. If in doubt, simply ask what the organization's policy is on travel reimbursement when you are scheduling and confirming your interview time and schedule.
- 4. Get practicing.** As soon as you know you have an interview coming, call Career Services to schedule a mock interview. This is a great opportunity to practice answering questions. You can also use online resources such as InterviewStream to practice in the comfort of your own home. There are going to be questions that you know will come up in any interview, and so it is worth making sure you have good answers for questions like: "tell me about yourself," "why do you want this position?," "what is your greatest strength?".
- 5. Make sure you have phone numbers.** If you know you are going to be late for an interview, be sure to call your contact at the employers and let them know. However, try not to be late!
- 6. Making eye contact.** A good tip when meeting with someone new is to make sure that you hold eye contact long enough to be able to discern the color of their eyes.
- 7. Leaving a good impression.** Be aware of signals that indicate that the interview is over. An interviewer may stand or express appreciation for your time. This is your clue to close the interview. Express your enthusiasm for the organization and, if you are interested in the position, ask the interviewer when a decision will be made and when you may call. Maintain eye contact and give a firm handshake. Close the interview with the same enthusiastic and energetic style with which you approached it. Send thank you emails within 24 hours.

## Tips for answering interview questions

Preparation is vital. While you cannot anticipate every question, you can prepare yourself to make the most of whatever you are asked. It is critical to know as much as you can both about the organization/position and industry but also do lots of self-analysis so that you can best articulate your skills and experiences.

### General Tips

- Listen to the questions. While the interviewer controls the flow of the interview, you can control the content. If the employer is looking for specific facts, provide them. If a question is general, refocus it to your advantage.
- Be honest. Let an employer get to know you. Avoid dissembling or comparing yourself to others. You want to be sure that you and the employer know what you are getting if you are hired.
- Be positive. Never say anything negative about past experiences, employers, or courses and professors. Employers, like anyone, tend to generalize: if you didn't like "x", you are a negative person and won't like me either. Figure out what was positive about an experience and talk about that.
- Be enthusiastic and demonstrate interest. If you are genuinely interested in the job, let the interviewer know that. This can be achieved by doing research on the organization prior to the interview. It can also come across by asking questions during the interview about the job, the organization and its services and products. When asking questions, be sure that the answers will give you information that you don't already have (or should have) and that the questions are genuinely of interest to you.
- Silence is OK. Taking a moment to consider your answer is certainly appropriate. It can be a sign of thoughtfulness and intelligence, in addition to giving you time to collect your thoughts. If an interviewer poses a question that catches you so completely off guard that you cannot come up with an immediate answer, then try using some of these responses to buy time and come up with a response: 1) Stall for time - ask to have the question repeated, or paraphrase it yourself; 2) Ask for a few moments to think of the best example; 3) Ask for clarification.
- Convey professionalism, maturity, and poise in all interactions with the organization. In a sense, the interview process extends well beyond your actual interview to include all interactions with the organization, employer presentations, night-before events, and correspondence.
- Use examples to stress your points. For example, if asked, "What three words best describe you?" list three traits and give examples that show how you have demonstrated each.

## General interview questions

All interviewers are ultimately trying to see if a candidate is the right fit for their organization or program. This means that in any interview you have you will always be asked both about your interest in the position/organization as well as what skills/experiences you bring that will be an asset to you in the role. These questions include:

- Why are you interested in this position/opportunity/program?
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- What skills and experience make you a good fit for this role?

Candidates who have prepared responses for these questions will start the interview off on a positive note. Here are some other questions that are very commonly asked:

- Tell me about yourself.
- When did you know you wanted to be an xyz?
- Describe yourself in 3 adjectives.
- How would your friends describe you?
- What makes you tick or what motivates you?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why did you decide to go to Penn?
- Why did you choose your major?
- How did you learn about our organization? What do you know about our organization?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What was the worst thing that happened to you on a summer job?
- What contributions could you make to our organization?
- What do you expect from a job with us?
- What is your greatest asset?
- If you were an interviewer, what do you think the three most important criteria would be for hiring someone for this position?
- Do you like working with people? Is this an important factor?
- Describe a situation when you had to learn a large amount quickly. How did you do it?
- Why are you interested in this field of work?
- How do you relieve stress?
- If we hired you, what is the top position you see yourself holding?
- Of what accomplishment are you most proud?
- What was the best part of your college experience?
- What do you think is the most important/difficult ethical dilemma facing our industry today?
- How do you get people to do things they don't like to do?
- Are you more interested in program development or implementation?



## Behavioural-based interview questions

To answer these types of questions, be certain to describe a SPECIFIC example (don't describe your leadership style in general, but rather recount a specific time you were in a leadership role). After setting the context, describe your role, contribution to, or influence on that situation. Finally, always provide a statement describing the outcome of your efforts (e.g., the grade you received, the percentage increase in sales volume due to your efforts, etc.) so they can evaluate your effectiveness. A common way to approach answering behavioral questions is to use the STAR method:

1. S = Situation: Describe what you were facing
2. T = Target: Describe what you wanted to achieve
3. A = Action: Describe what you did
4. R = Results: Describe what happened, how things turned out, what you learned, and perhaps what you'd do differently if presented the same circumstances :

Sample questions:

- What is the most complicated project you have worked on?
- Did you have any trouble with people in your team during this project? What were they and how did you solve those problems?
- What kind of people do you have trouble interacting with? How do you deal with them?
- How do you deal with difficult clients?
- How important is diversity to a team's output? Can you support your answer with a real life example?
- Tell me about a time in your life when you've demonstrated leadership/have had significant impact.
- Tell me about a time in your life when you've had to influence a peer or superior to do something that they don't initially believe in.
- Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a conflict in a team situation.
- Tell me about the most valuable feedback/criticism you've ever received.
- Tell me about a time where you initiated change in an organization.
- Tell me about a time you persuaded a senior person to adopt your perspective on an issue.
- Tell me about a time when you tried to help someone but felt ineffective.
- How do you feel about working on topics that you don't know anything about?
- How would you handle a situation where you've given a recommendation to a superior and they tell you Thank you but I think we'll go in a different direction?
- How would you present the information you collected to a client or a group of people that knows nothing about the topic.

## Case interview questions

These questions are designed to give you the opportunity to demonstrate your ability to handle ambiguous data. The process that you follow to answer the question is much more important than arriving at the "right answer." Your quantitative ability will be judged. Consequently, it is important to have the figures that you develop in your answer be correct.

Sample questions:

- Estimate the total value of all the personal items on a commuter flight that arrived at La Guardia airport at 8:30 am this morning from Boston given that the plane was approximately 2/3 full.
- You are a manufacturer of toys and you have a product that cost US \$1,000. Estimate how many of those you can sell in Hong Kong.
- How many skis will be sold in the U.S. next year?
- What is the market size for wall paper?
- Estimate the number of airplane flights in a year.
- What is the population of dogs in the United States?
- A Dominican manufacturer of hair care products is looking to expand its current market. What new markets should the manufacturer enter and how?
- A national hotel chain has hired your company to determine whether or not they should keep their frequent guest program. The program is currently unprofitable. Should the hotel maintain the program?
- A national pest control company is considering a new organic pesticide product. The company has hired you to determine market demand and pricing. Is this a viable product?
- If a wine maker were thinking about launching an on-line winery, what would be its estimated annual sales?
- Estimate the size of the bubble gum market in the United States.
- Starbucks is buying a winery. Does this make sense? What should they be thinking about?
- XYZ Corporation has a high cash reserve. How can we best use that money to grow the company?
- Your client manufactures frozen yogurt. It's thinking about entering the coffee market. Is this a good idea?
- How many car batteries are sold in the US each year?
- How many gas stations are there in Chicago?
- How many sheep are there in New Zealand?
- The LA Philharmonic is losing money. What would you suggest they do?
- Toyota is considering the release of a new model. What issues need to be thought about?
- Two engineers want to start an interactive multimedia business. What is your advice?

## Challenging interview questions

Some employers will ask questions that are deliberately challenge. This is done to see how you think on your feet, how you handle stress, and, in some cases, how creative you are. Here are some examples:

- I see you received a very low grade in XXXX. Why?
- What was your worst subject in school?
- Why do you, an xyz major, want to go into business?
- You don't seem to have done as well academically in college as you did in high school. Why?
- How do you feel about working with numbers? What is 12% of 69? How did you figure that out?
- What do you think of our organizational structure?
- How do you feel you work without direct supervision? Are you prepared right now to work without supervision?
- Would you prefer to work independently or as part of a team? Why?
- What is your greatest liability?
- What is one of your weaknesses? I know you had one prepared, so give me another one?
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Of what activity are you least proud?
- Why should we hire you rather than one of the 200 other applicants?
- How much do you expect to earn?
- Highlight the one thing on your resume that separates you from everyone else on Penn's campus.
- What don't you do well?
- Tell me about a time when you failed at something.
- Tell me about a time when you made a mistake and what you learned from it.
- Describe a group work situation where you and your partner were having trouble getting along with each other. How did you resolve the problem?
- Describe a situation when you were faced with a deadline that you couldn't meet. How did you handle it?
- How would someone who dislikes you describe you?
- Who else are you interviewing with? What do you think of those organizations?
- What characteristics/traits do you most dislike in a person?
- If you could be a fruit, what type of fruit would you be?
- You work in a library, and a book has been misshelved. How do you find it?
- What is the one question you don't want us to ask you?
- What is the biggest risk you ever took?
- If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?
- Tell me something that is not on your resume.

## Questions to ask your interviewers

Almost always, your interview will end by your interviewer asking if you have any questions for them and these questions are also being evaluated. You should always have questions. Be responsive to what has gone on in the interview. If you have listened well, you should be able to come up with thoughtful questions which impress the interviewer. You may want to prepare a few questions in advance, but an insightful comment based on your conversation can make an even stronger statement.

- What areas need the immediate attention of the person you hire?
- What are the major responsibilities of this position?
- How long have you been with the company?
- What attracted you to this company?
- What qualities and skills are most valued at this firm?
- What characteristics must one have to thrive at this organization?
- What are the company's growth projections?
- Whom do you identify as your major competitors?
- What are your plans for new products or services?
- How would you describe a typical patient/client/customer in this organization/facility?
- How would you define your management philosophy?
- What are you looking for in the person who will fill this job?
- Describe a typical day.
- Describe the ideal candidate for this position.
- What kind of training would I receive?
- What activities could I engage in now that might help me on the job if I'm hired?
- How centralized is the organizational structure?
- What do you like most about your job and the company?
- Whom could I speak with who has the position now or who has been promoted from the position recently?
- What are the avenues for advancement?
- What is the turnover rate?
- Who would be my supervisor and what is that person's supervisory style?
- What do you see as the key issues/challenges facing the person in this job?
- How has this organization/facility been affected by all the changes in the xxx industry?
- What is the time line for filling this position? (Will there be additional interviews? When can I expect to hear back?)

Ask role-specific questions that help the interviewers picture you in the role you are interviewing for – this will make it easier for them to advocate for you as they decide on the best candidate for the job