

**CAREER GUIDE FOR GRADUATE
STUDENTS AND POSTDOCS**

INTERVIEWING

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INTRODUCTION

After all the hard work of putting together your job application materials, you're likely hoping those documents will get you to the next stage of the application process: the interview! For many graduate students and postdocs, this can be both exciting and nerve-wracking, but with preparation and knowledge of what to expect, you'll be well on your way to acing your next interview.

If you're looking for some guidance ranging from how to prepare for questions about your skills and experiences to what to wear for your interview, this Career Guide will help you present the best version of yourself to the hiring manager/committee. If you're well-versed in interviewing already but have some questions on specific aspects of the interviewing process, feel free to skip around to the sections most relevant to you.

Keep in mind that we'll be talking about behavioral interviews here—interviews where you will be asked questions about what you have done professionally in the past so that the employer can try to predict how you will perform in the future if they hire you. These behavioral interviews are common in most industries, though you may find that certain career fields may involve other kinds of interviews, like case or technical interviews, as well. Speaking of diverse career fields, you'll notice that no two organizations will operate the same way when it comes to their hiring and interview processes, so we're writing this guide to offer general guidance across different industries, including academia and beyond, that can be adapted to your unique interviewing journey. Feel free to set up an appointment with a Career Advisor at Career Services to get answers to any specific interview questions you have.

Now, let's get started!



THE BASICS

WHAT

A behavioral interview is an opportunity for you to speak with a recruiter, a human resources professional, a hiring manager, or members of the hiring committee so they can assess your fit for the position they're looking to hire. This is a time for them to ask you questions, which will occupy the majority of your interview, but it's also a chance for you to ask them questions at the end. Depending on which round of the interviewing process you're at, your interview can range from a 20-minute phone conversation to an hour-long video interview to a day-long event with multiple meetings with different people on-site.

WHO

For a first-round interview, you will likely interview with the hiring manager, who is usually the person supervising the role, someone from human resources, a recruiter, or someone from the hiring committee. For a final-round interview on-site, you'll likely interview with other stakeholders at the organization in addition to the hiring manager. Whom you'll speak with will depend on your specific industry and organization.

WHERE

First-round interviews can take place in person, by phone, or by video. Final-round interviews are usually held on-site. The logistics involved can therefore vary from making sure you have the right video conference app downloaded on your computer, or phone number to conduct your interview, to making sure you have your flight and hotel booked so you can physically be there!

WHEN

Interviews take place after the recruiter, hiring manager/committee, or human resources professional has had a chance to review applications for an open position and before they extend a job offer. The specific timing depends on the career field and industry and the needs of the organization.

WHY

Interviews allow recruiters and hiring managers/committees to get to know you more beyond what they're reading on paper. Whether it's by phone, video, or in person, an interview shows how you speak about your relevant skills and experiences, conveys your enthusiasm and interest for the role, and sheds lights on your personality and what kind of person you are! Your interviewers will be asking you questions as they evaluate your "fit" for the role, but it's also an opportunity for you to evaluate the organization, too. Remember, you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you!

HOW INTERVIEWING FITS INTO THE HIRING PROCESS

Before making a decision to hire anyone, organizations have a lot of incentive to get to know you as best as they can, so that they know they're making the best decision and hiring the right person. How do they make sure that they get the hiring right?

First, they read your resume and cover letter. If you have a referral from someone they know or someone who already works at the organization, they not only can see what your qualifications are and why you are a good fit for the position, but they will also know that you've been recommended by someone they trust.

Next, they interview you, either by phone, video, or in-person, or some combination of these modes. Are you who you say you are on paper? Are you professional, collegial, and friendly? Will you be able to succeed in this role? Your interviewers will be trying to answer these questions, and many more, for themselves when they talk to you. In some, but not all cases, employers may feel that you meet the desired qualifications for the role based on your resume and cover letter and, for the purposes of the interview, are not as interested in grilling you further on your qualifications than they are in evaluating whether you would be a good colleague to have on their team, whether you have good interpersonal skills, and most of all, whether they like you, can imagine you in the role, and hang around you for many hours of the work day.

When you pass through one, two, or three rounds of interviews, some, but not all, organizations will contact your references. At this stage, they need to hear from others about you, ideally from former supervisors or colleagues. What's it like to work with you? How are you as an employee or teammate? Are you coachable? Are you a quick learner? Can you

handle the job they're hiring for? What areas do you need to grow in? Anything else that future employers need to know about you? Once these questions, among others, have been answered satisfactorily by your references, organizations will likely move to a background check and then a job offer. See our suggested steps for keeping your references updated on your job search at the end of this guide.

As you can see, the interview is a crucial part of this hiring process, and **it is often the last stage where you are in total control of what happens to your candidacy in a job search**, so it is important to be prepared and to do your best if your goal is to get the offer!

LOGISTICS AND DIFFERENT MODES OF INTERVIEWING

When you get invited to interview, one of the key pieces of information you'll have is whether you will be interviewing by phone, by video, or in person. While you'll have the same goal for any of these modes of interviewing—making it to the next stage of interviews and/or securing the final job offer—your preparation in terms of logistics will be slightly different for each. **Be sure to have all the details of your interview pinned down before your actual interview.** If you don't know the time, location, duration, or platform of your interview, or who's calling who, for example, don't be shy to ask your main point of contact ahead of time.

VIDEO CONFERENCE INTERVIEWS

Many employers prefer conducting interviews with job seekers through online video platforms like Skype, Zoom, WebEx, GoToMeeting, and BlueJeans. As this medium of interviewing becomes more ubiquitous, interviewing well on camera requires a slightly different approach to preparation than an in-person interview. Here are a couple of suggestions to help you present the best version of yourself on screen, so you can create a positive impression on your potential employer:

BACKGROUND AND LIGHTING

Use your background to help convey your professionalism. A plain background works just fine; a professional background with a bookcase and plants might be even better. Just be sure to put away anything distracting or embarrassing! Additionally, try to have natural lighting in your room or office to enhance your video quality. After all, you don't want to appear like you're interviewing in the dark. Conversely, you wouldn't want to blind the committee by having too much light either. You should face the main source of light in your room to put you in the best light!

CAMERA ANGLE AND FRAME

It's important to look straight at the camera when you interview. Think of it as making eye contact with your interviewers so that you can establish rapport with the people you're speaking with. If it's helpful, you can put sticky notes or arrows pointing at their camera to help your eyes stay focused. You can also move the video of your interviewers up to the top near your camera, so when you look at them, they won't see you staring down or to the side. It's also good practice to elevate your laptop or screen a little (by propping it up on a book or two) so that the camera is at or above eye level. If the camera is too low, it will look like you're looking down at your interviewers. If your interviewers can see your ceiling behind you on the screen, then your camera is likely too low.

USE OF NOTES

Many grad students and postdocs wonder if they can use notes during their video interview. If you could benefit from a few sticky notes strategically placed on your desk or laptop and maintain strong eye contact by looking into the camera most of the time, then sure! Just be careful, though. You don't want to be seen (or heard) ruffling papers or appear as if you're reading from prepared statements.

SCREEN SHARING

In some circumstances, a video interview may involve you sharing your screen with your interviewers. If you are doing so, remember to clean up your desktop background and icons, turn off any kind of automatic notification, and close all unnecessary tabs in your browser before your interview. You don't want anything embarrassing or unprofessional to pop up on the screen! Make sure to complete all updates to your operating system prior to your interview as well. And of course, bring up documents or websites that you want to share with your potential employer ahead of time.

ATTIRE

Wear what you would normally wear to an in-person interview. Just because an interview is by video doesn't mean you can dress more casually. In case you have to stand up for any

reason, it's always best to be dressed in interview attire from head to toe. Patterned clothes can be a little distracting on screen, so opt for a solid colored shirt that's not too bright. It is OK to wear headphones. This can improve the quality of the call by eliminating feedback and ensuring you can hear the interviewers clearly. You may want to practice talking with headphone on before the interview, as this can feel/sound strange if you are not used to it.

Always be sure to test your internet connection and the platform (if possible) before your actual interview. If your internet is too slow for video communications or you can't log into the video platform because security settings prohibit downloading necessary software, for example, you'll want to know that before your interview! Confirm ahead of time who will be initiating the video call, so there isn't any confusion.

At the time of your interview, **make sure to minimize any distractions.** Go ahead and turn your cellphone off completely to avoid any disruptions, and find a way to keep your pets in a quiet place. If video technology isn't working and you can't see or hear anyone you're interviewing with, don't panic! You can always use the good old phone as a backup. Just make sure you have a phone number to call, or at the very least, an email address, so that you can let someone know if you're having tech problems.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Some organizations prefer the more old-fashioned but reliable mode of interviewing by phone. If this is how you're interviewing, make sure to test out your cell phone reception ahead of time. You'll also want to be sure your phone is fully charged (or even plugged in) when you're speaking with your interviewers. With a phone interview, you can probably get away with having more notes in front of you since they will not be able to see you. However, just keep in mind that they will likely be able to hear other sounds from your end such as the clicking of your mouse or turning of pages from a notebook. Silently scrolling on a document on your laptop may work, but try to rely as little as possible on your notes, since reading from them may make you sound too overly rehearsed and unnatural.

IN-PERSON/ON-SITE INTERVIEWS

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily put on hold the practice of in-person interviews, meeting in real life for an interview is pretty common, especially at the last interview stages. For any in-person interview, consider the following:

TRAVEL AND ACCOMODATIONS

If you are flying into your interview destination or driving a long distance for the meeting, clarify reimbursement details before making any plans. Whether you are traveling to your interview by plane, train, or car, be sure to give yourself some extra time. If your interview is local, consider making a test run just to see how long it would take to arrive at the office, and check out any logistics like parking or public transportation details. If your interview is first thing in the morning and you're flying in from afar, consider travelling the night before and staying overnight so you'll be more relaxed and ready for your interview. Be sure to pack your interview outfit in your carry-on bag if you're travelling by air in case checked bags get lost. Bad weather can delay or even cancel your well-set travel plans, and if that's the case, don't panic. Just keep your contact person posted if you may not be able to make your interview. You'll be able to reschedule your interview for another time by videoconference or phone.

Make sure your phone is off or silent, and avoid checking it throughout the day. It still may be helpful to have extra copies of your resume with you, just in case someone asks for a copy. However, since you are a better version of yourself than your resume is, try to communicate your skills, experiences, and interest verbally in conversation with your interviewers.

THE BASICS OF MAKING A GOOD IMPRESSION

We all know that you need to make a good impression on your interviewers, but how do you do that? Besides good preparation, which we'll talk about in the next sections, it's essential to carry yourself as a professional in the ways you interact with your interviewers. Whether you interview by phone, video, or in person, the following aspects of professional behavior will be important to consider:

DEMEANOR

Most employers want to hire people who are polite, respectful, kind, warm, friendly, and collegial. When you arrive at an interview, do you greet your interviewers with a smile and a "hello"? Do you ask them how they are doing? Simple things like engaging in small talk, smiling, maintaining good eye contact, and reading your interviewer's cues on when to wrap up the conversation, for example, can help your interviewers imagine you as a likeable colleague.

Our previous advice for in-person interviews would be to practice a strong, professional handshake as you greet your interviewers. While the handshake may or may not go away in the long-term, you may find people are less receptive to handshakes in the short-term. Some companies, in fact, have policies in place that try to limit unnecessary contact with candidates. In the short-term, you are welcome to reach out to the point person coordinating your interviews for clarification on their policies. In lieu of a handshake, many professionals are greeting others warmly with a hand wave, a hand on the heart, or simply no hand gesture at all as they say hello and introduce themselves. Whatever your preference may be, an enthusiastic smile as you meet your interviewers will help you make a good first impression.

COMMUNICATION

Your ability to communicate well is essential. Your communication skills are often evaluated even before you begin an interview. When you communicate with your interviewers via email, are you demonstrating email etiquette? Do you respond to their questions in a timely manner? Are your messages professional and polite and written with the right tone? When you give answers to interview questions, are you speaking clearly and confidently? If you're speaking on the phone or by video, do you sound enthusiastic about the role? If the interview is in-person or by video, do you show proper body language to demonstrate your engagement in the conversation? Your interviewers will be paying close attention to the way you communicate and relate to them.

ATTIRE

The way that you dress and present yourself has a large impact on how others perceive you. When you interview in person or by phone, you want to dress professionally and adhere to the dress code that is standard in your industry. In many office settings, the dress code can vary from business attire to business casual to casual. Pay attention to how professionals are dressed in your industry when you conduct informational interviews, or feel free to ask those in your network on what is appropriate to wear to an interview if the industry is particularly casual (like tech). At the very basic level, your interview clothing should fit well, appear clean, and be comfortable for you. Your overall appearance should be neat, tidy, and polished. If you are ever in doubt, err on the side of being slightly overdressed than slightly underdressed.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

Although you've likely done some research when you assembled your written application materials, getting an invitation to interview means that you will need to do even more research into the specific organization and team/unit to which you've applied. Why? Because employers want to know that you understand what they do, what their mission is, what challenges they face, and how you would be able to contribute to solving their problems. Only then can they evaluate whether you would be a good fit for the role. Similarly, it is important for you to do the research to understand the organization and division that you might join for the next stage of your career. Is this an organization you'd like to be employed at? Are they focusing on issues that you care about? Will this organization take advantage of your skills, help you grow professionally, and in general offer the career you desire? In other words, do you know what you're getting yourself into? Doing this kind of research into organizations is especially helpful if you have multiple job offers to choose from down the line, so you can decide where you want to work most.

RESEARCHING YOUR EMPLOYER

The best way to research organizations is a combination of scouring online resources and talking to people. Take notes to help you prepare for your interview as you do some of the following:

READ THE WEBSITE

Review the website again, especially the "about us" section. In general, click on everything that is clickable. Know the mission statement, the leadership and organizational structure, and any recent news, publicity, and announcements. You'll almost certainly be asked

questions directly or indirectly to assess your knowledge of the organization.

CHECK OUT SOCIAL MEDIA

If you haven't done so already, follow the organizations you are interested in working at on LinkedIn and other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. LinkedIn, the professional social media platform, will often feature content including news coverage of the organization and their work, important announcements, events, blog posts, articles, podcasts, and videos. If an organization is on Instagram, this medium can sometimes give you insight into organizational culture. If they're on Twitter, pay attention to the hashtags to see what topics and trends they are in conversation with.

SEARCH ONLINE

It's always helpful to Google the organization to see what you find, particularly if the organization has been in the news lately. You can glean a lot of information to see what their online presence is—past and present. If you see that the organization just received an award for outstanding work, for example, you can integrate that information into your interview. If you find anything controversial, however, you can decide how important it is to you to bring up related questions.

LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK

Ideally, you will have conducted informational interviews with people who work or have worked at the organizations that you're applying to before you apply for any positions there. (If you don't know what informational interviews are, check out the guide for graduate students and postdocs [here](#).) These networking conversations can give you insight into the mission, culture, and priorities of the organization. When you have an interview lined up, it's a good excuse to get back in touch with your networking connections at the organization and ask any questions you may have.

REVIEWING THE JOB AD AND ANTICIPATING QUESTIONS

As you prepare for your interview, read the job ad again to remind yourself what the role is and what the responsibilities and qualifications are for the role. Pay attention to keywords that appear often throughout the description and any information about the specific team or unit the role will be situated in and what the reporting structure is. There's usually a brief description of the organization included as well.

Taken together, what questions do you think your employers might ask you in your interview? What else might they want to know about you that isn't addressed in your resume or cover letter? It is often helpful to take each of the bullet points under qualifications and responsibilities in the job description to flip them around into questions. For example, if one of the responsibilities is "design and execute research projects using machine learning and statistical techniques," turning that into a question means: "how have you designed and executed research projects using machine learning and statistical techniques?" Your interviewers may not ask all of their questions based on the job ad, but this is a good way to anticipate some questions you may get.

REFLECTING AND PREPARING STORIES FROM YOUR PAST

Chances are, you have more to say about why this job you're interviewing for is perfect for you than what you put on your job application. What stories did you wish you had room to include in your cover letter? What else did you want to put on your resume? What would you like to say to your potential future employer given this chance to speak with them? This part of the process will take some time, as it requires you to **reflect on your prior accomplishments and come up with stories from your professional past that are relevant to the job at hand**. Imagine that you turn up for an interview, and they have no questions for you – what stories would you want to tell them about your research, academic projects, or past experiences that would get them excited about you? These are some of the stories you will want to prepare ahead of time.

USING STAR TO FRAME YOUR STORIES

The STAR (Situation, Task, Action, and Result) method of interviewing follows a simple framework of answering behavioral interview questions that allows you to tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

S: the **situation**, including the context of where you were and what you were doing

T: the **task** or challenge you have to overcome

A: the **action** you took to resolve the problem

R: the **result** or outcome of your work

As you can see, STAR helps structure a narrative so it's logical and easy to follow. Using STAR also ensures that you are being specific in answering your questions. You can use the STAR Interviewing Worksheet on page 38 to help you prepare your stories.

RESEARCHING YOURSELF

Just as it's important to research the organization, it's important to reflect and understand what your work values and career priorities are when it comes to evaluating the job opportunity. Reviewing your submitted job materials is a good first step in this process. It may have been a while since you submitted your resume and cover letter, so take a look at those documents again as you prepare for your interview. Why are you interested in the organization and the role? What excites you about the opportunity? What skills would you contribute to the role? What in your education, experience, and skills match with what they are looking for? You will almost surely be asked to elaborate on your answers to these questions, so review these job documents to ensure that the stories you tell in your job documents align with the ones you tell in your interview.

ASKING FOR ACCOMODATIONS

For many people, it is understandably nerve-wracking to disclose a disability and to ask for accommodations for an interview due to fears that doing so can cost you the job. However, remember that job seekers are legally protected from discrimination under the Americans with Disabilities Act. It doesn't mean that employers won't discriminate; unfortunately, some do. The timing and the extent to which you share your disability during your job search will ultimately depend on how comfortable you feel conveying such information to a potential employer.

Our advice is to frame your request in a positive way so that asking for accommodations can be seen as a win-win situation for you and your potential employers. If you need to ask for an accommodation due to a disability to maximize your chances of success, be sure to mention this to your interviewers before your actual interview and not during it. From asking for your interview location to be wheelchair-accessible to asking for sensory or cognitive accommodations, it is helpful to give your interviewers a heads up so they have time to make arrangements before your interview. If you have a physical disability that may not be evident on a phone or video interview, it is oftentimes practical to notify your interviewers before you show up for an in-person meeting so that they won't be surprised.

If you are expecting a child while interviewing for jobs, remember that pregnant women are protected by the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in all aspects of employment, including hiring. There's no hard and fast rule in determining *when* to disclose your pregnancy; it depends on how comfortable you feel sharing that information. If it is apparent that you are pregnant at an in-person interview, you may want to simply acknowledge that fact up front so that you can focus the conversation on your qualifications, fit, enthusiasm, and potential

contributions to the role and organization.

If you are a nursing mother, it's perfectly normal to request a private space for lactation purposes and time built into your interview schedule to use it.

Since the interview process allows you to evaluate your potential employer as well, you may want to consider your interviewers' response to your requests when you weigh different job offers. It is likely that you'll gravitate toward an organization that was understanding and accommodating, which can bode well for your future professional success there.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND HOW TO ANSWER THEM EFFECTIVELY

There's no way to know all of the questions that you will be asked at your interview (unless the organization tells you ahead of time, which is rare), but you are bound to get some or all of the following interview questions, so it's best to be prepared for them.

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

This is a question that stumps a lot of people, but a little bit of preparation ahead of time can go a long way. A lot of interviewees tend to give either a very short answer to this question by saying their name, where they're coming from, and what they do, or they give very long-winded answer by telling their entire life story. Aim for something in the middle—usually about two minutes long, give or take. A strong answer starts with some basic information about who you are, but then segues into a short story about how you became interested in the line of work you're in or hope to be in. Don't list out every educational institution, degree, certificate, and experience you've had, but instead, focus on these questions: What inspired you to pursue this career path? What kind of impact do you want to have with your experiences and skills? Why are you motivated to make that impact? Telling your unique story shows the interviewers why you care about the work you do. Your narrative then naturally allows you to transition into why this job at this organization you're interviewing at is a great fit for you, and how all of your experiences have led you to apply to this position and why you are happy to be chatting with your interviewers today. Now, isn't that a great way to end your answer?

WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN OUR ORGANIZATION?

This question will almost always come up in an interview, and you should have a good answer that isn't: "I need a job, so I applied to this one." Your answer should demonstrate that you've researched the organization, you know who they are, what they do, and that you

actually want to work there. Ideally, your answer should also show that you've done more than just read about them online. Have you reached out to a former classmate or done an informational interview with someone who works or worked there? Did you meet with a recruiter or chat with their representatives at a career fair? Have you engaged with the organization before in your research or in other aspects of your life? If you can answer yes to any of these questions, be sure to mention that in your answer, and how those interactions have made you even more excited to be part of the organization.

WHY DO YOU WANT THIS POSITION?

This is a great opportunity for you to make your case on why you deserve this job! But instead of focusing on what getting this job will do for you and your career, think about this question from the employer's point of view. What you bring to the table and what you can contribute to the organization is certainly at the top of their minds, so it's a good idea to start with that first. You can let them know how you imagine applying the combination of your education, skills, and experiences to make a difference in their operations. Be as specific as you can so they can truly envision you being in the role and being successful. After sharing these ways in which you can help them solve their problems, then you can include how this position would benefit your career and professional development.

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS? WHAT MAKES YOU QUALIFIED FOR THIS ROLE?

Everyone has a lot of strengths, but in the context of an interview, it is helpful to identify the strengths that are most relevant to the job. Ideally, your strengths will align well with the skills and qualifications they're looking for. Whether you're asked about your one greatest strengths or a few of your greatest strengths, be prepared to come up with at least three or four distinct strengths and prioritize them. You will also want to have good, concrete examples to back them up. If, for example, one of your strengths is being able to synthesize lots of complex information and communicate them in accessible formats to novices, think of examples of how you've done so in your academic or professional work. Have you distilled your research into digestible blog posts for wider audiences or given presentations about your work to high school students? The STAR framework can be used here to help structure your examples.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?

No one likes the “weakness” question, and many people are often at a loss for what to say. Avoid giving a strength that is manifested as a weakness in your answer. Characteristics and traits such as perfectionism or “caring too much” can be interpreted as being disingenuous, and so can giving a weakness that is completely irrelevant to the role. On the other hand, if your greatest weakness is one of the core responsibilities of the role you’re applying for, you may want to rethink whether the job is a good fit for you. For most people, however, they may have weaknesses that make it harder for them to be the most effective at their jobs, and that is completely normal and expected. After all, no one is perfect, and everyone can find ways to improve as a professional. So, another way to reframe this question in your mind is: what do you want to be better at? A good way to answer this question is to state what your weakness is and then use the STAR framework to explain how you’ve begun to overcome that weakness. Let’s say your weakness is your fear of public speaking. Be specific in what steps you’ve taken to address your weakness and what has resulted thus far. Did you find ways to put yourself out there by doing presentations, volunteering to speak to groups, or joining an extracurricular to improve your public speaking skills? And if so, have you felt more comfortable now when speaking in front of others? By the end of your answer, the goal is to convey that you are well on your way to surmounting your greatest weakness.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS?

Some people answer this question by stating that they’d like to assume a specific job title at a different (bigger/better) organization in 5 years. As you can imagine, employers would not like to hear that you are thinking of them as a steppingstone to something else even before they’ve offered you the job! While organizations do not expect that you will stay with them for your entire career, it’s likely that they would want you to stick around for at least a few years if everything works out. So, think about the following questions instead: what do you want to be better at in 5 years? What new areas of work do you want to be exposed to? What kind of skills do you want to acquire? What different greater impact would you like to have? Answering some of these questions will give your potential employer an idea of your future professional development as well as your commitment to the career field.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here are some questions that have been asked at real interviews in which Penn graduate students and postdocs have participated.

- When did you know you wanted to be an XYZ?
- Describe yourself in 3 adjectives.
- How would your friends describe you?
- What motivates you?
- Why did you decide to go to Penn?
- Why did you choose your field of study or this field of work?
- What has been the most difficult thing you've done?
- What contributions could you make to our organization?
- What do you expect from a job with us?
- 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?
- How do you relieve stress?
- How do you define a good work environment?
- If we hired you, what is the top position you see yourself holding?
- What is your proudest accomplishment?
- What do you think is the most important/difficult ethical dilemma facing our industry today?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges facing our industry?

- What future trends do you think are most relevant to our line of work?
- How do you get people to do things they don't like to do?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As you prepare stories to tell at your interview, consider some of the following 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 are hard for you to collaborate 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?

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR INTERVIEWERS

At the end of every interview, your interviewers will almost always ask if you have any questions. You must say yes! If you say no, it gives the impression that you are not interested in learning more about the organization and the role. But what if you can't come up with any questions to ask? Below are just a few that you can consider. Of course, your questions will be tailored to your specific organization and position, and they will depend on what research you've already done. **When you ask a question, it's always helpful to preface it with what you already know.** That way, it won't come across as if you haven't done any prior research.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ROLE

- What is a typical day or week like for someone in this role?
- What does the onboarding process look like?
- How will the person in this role be supervised?
- How does this position interact with other divisions or teams at the organization?
- Can you tell more about how this role would collaborate with other members of the team?
- What accomplishments would you expect from the first three months (or six months or a year) of being in this position?
- What qualities or attributes would make for a successful hire in this position?
- What new responsibilities or areas would you like to see the person in this role take on?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

- Can you tell me more about the future direction or priorities of the organization?
- Can you tell me more about the organizational culture here?

- What kind of people do well in this organization?
- What opportunities exist to support professional development?
- How do you envision growth for this organization in the next few years?

You can also feel free to ask some questions about the personal experiences your interviewers themselves, like how they came to their current position in the organization and how they have grown professionally in their roles. However, avoid turning the “questions” part of your interview into a full-on informational interview where you ask multiple questions about their individual career paths and prior experiences. Your interview is a chance for you to make a good impression on your interviewers and convince them that you’ll be a great fit for the position at their organization. You want to show them that you know the industry well and will be a great colleague to be around. It’s not really a time for you ask questions in way that can possibly undermine your credibility to succeed in that career field. That being said, asking your interviewers about their own personal experiences can be a great way to build rapport with them; just don’t go overboard.

QUESTIONS TO AVOID ASKING

These questions generally fall under the category of “salary and benefits.” Although you may be eager to know about what the salary is, how much vacation time you get, and how many hours you have to work, save those questions for after you get the offer. To be clear, these are very important questions that should be answered at some point before you accept an offer; you do, in fact, need to know how much this job will pay you, how much time you get to have off, and whether you’ll work 40 hours a week or 70! But at the interview stage, you are still in the process of convincing the organization that they should give you the job offer. Questions about salaries and perks you can unfortunately give the impression that you care more about those things than the job itself, which is what your potential employer is thinking about most. Furthermore, asking these questions at the interview stage can get you into the dilemma of negotiating before having an offer, which is a scenario to avoid if you can. Likewise, if your interviewers ask you about your expectations for salary during the interview, we suggest that you deflect the question as much as possible. One strategy is to emphasize that learning more about the role and organization is your main priority at this stage of the process. The caveat to this advice is if you truly do not want to waste your time going

through a long interview process if it's not worth it. This can be the case for alums who are currently employed, those who have had previous careers, or those are generally senior-level professionals. But bottom line, **wait until you get the offer before asking about salary and benefits.**

Before you put the phone down, leave a video call, or exit the building, **be sure to ask about the timeline of the rest of the search process if it's not clear.** You will want to know when to expect to hear back from your interviewers. It's often a good last question to end your interview with.



FOLLOWING UP AND THANK YOU NOTES

After your interview is over, it's essential to send thank you notes to your interviewers, ideally within 24 hours, to express your gratitude for the opportunity to meet and to wrap up the interview process on your end. You should send a brief email to everyone who interviewed you to thank them for their time, mention something specific that you appreciated learning about or discussing with them, and reiterate your interest in the position (if you are indeed still interested). Be sure to follow up on anything that you may have promised to follow up on, and send any documents that you may have promised to send. If you'd like to use your thank you email to salvage an inadequate response to an interview question, you can also do so briefly. The reason why it's essential to send your thank you notes within 24 hours is because many organizations can start their deliberation process right after the last interview of the day or right after the last interview scheduled. You'll want to send your thank you note in time so that you can continue to impress the search committee with your professionalism and collegiality. After doing so, the process is now out of your hands. You have done everything you need to do, and it's time to be patient in hearing back from the organization.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PREPARING YOUR REFERENCES

After successful interviews, some employers will contact your references before proceeding to extend an offer. How do you prepare your references to ensure that they will provide a ringing endorsement? Aside from making sure that you've selected the best people to serve as references who can speak to your skills and experiences and to your suitability for the jobs you're applying to, let them know what kinds of roles and organizations you're applying to. You can send them a resume for their convenience at the beginning of your job search; it's not necessary to send them every job posting or cover letter. Usually employers who conduct references will give the job applicant notice that they will reach out to their references. This usually happens after interviewing the candidate. At this stage, you can let your references know that they can expect a call from the organization you've interviewed at, send along your job documents and the job posting, and summarize for them all the reasons you'd be a great fit for the job at hand. If you have chosen your references wisely and have prepared them well to speak on your behalf, then you've done a good job in managing your references. After receiving job offers, be sure to thank your references for all the time and support they've provided you!

CAREER SERVICES RESOURCES, CHECKLISTS, AND WORKSHEETS

Preparation is key to having a successful interview. Although there are many things that are outside of your control in the job hunt, there are things that you *can* control in terms of your preparation. Penn Career Services is here to help and support you as you prepare for your interviews. Below are some of the resources and action steps that we recommend.

SCHEDULE A CAREER ADVISING APPOINTMENT

Log onto Handshake or give our office a call (215-898-7530) to make an appointment to talk about interviewing strategies. This is a great step to take before you have any interviews actually scheduled.

MAKE A MOCK INTERVIEW APPOINTMENT

If you have an actual interview scheduled, schedule a mock interview to practice your interview skills. You can send along your submitted application materials and the job posting, and we'll come up with behavioral-based questions tailored to the role and organization you're applying for.

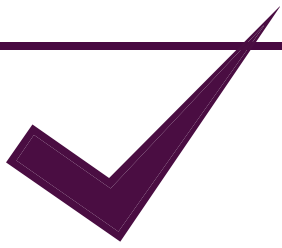
REVIEW THE MOCK INTERVIEW PREP SHEET

Take a look at the mock interview prep sheet that is sent to you after your confirmed appointment. Take some time to review the questions on there before your mock interview with us. The more prepared you are for your mock interview, the more helpful advice and feedback we can provide.

PRACTICE YOUR INTERVIEW SKILLS WITH BIG INTERVIEW

If you'd like to prepare answers to standard interview questions, check out Big Interview, an online interview preparation resource that you can take advantage of in the privacy of your own home. On Big Interview, you can select questions you'd like to practice and record yourself for a set amount of time as you give your answer. This tool is especially useful if you have to submit one-way recorded videos as part of your interview or if you have a video interview coming up and would like to get comfortable looking into your camera.

Good luck on the interview trails. You've got this!



CHECKLIST: OVERALL INTERVIEW PREPARATION

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Confirm all logistics of the interview, including the names of those who will interview you.
- ☐ Review your application materials, including resume and cover letter.
- ☐ Reread the job posting, make note of all keywords, and turn some of the main qualifications and responsibilities into questions to help you anticipate questions.
- ☐ Research all available online resources about the organization, including the website and any social media platforms.
- ☐ Leverage your professional network and reach out to those you conducted informational interviews with for any advice they may have.
- ☐ Prepare relevant stories you want to tell at your interview and use the STAR framework to help you structure those narratives.
- ☐ Brainstorm answers to the 5 most common interview questions.
- ☐ Prepare a list of questions you'd like to ask your interviewers.
- ☐ Conduct a mock interview with Career Services and review the Mock Interview Prep Sheet before your appointment.
- ☐ Use Big Interview to practice your interview skills.

ON THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

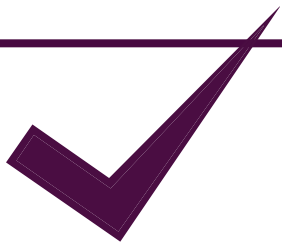
- ☐ Limit the amount of time that you spend reviewing notes or doing research for your interview.
- ☐ Focus on doing one or two things that can get you mentally prepared for your interview.
- ☐ For in-person and video interviews, dress in professional and comfortable attire that is appropriate for your industry.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Greet your interviewers, ask them how they are doing, and take their cue in engaging in any small talk before the interview begins.
- ☐ Listen attentively to their questions before answering; feel free to take notes if you are asked a multipart question.
- ☐ Ask for clarity if you did not understand a question.
- ☐ Exhibit positive body language by smiling, sitting up straight, and leaning forward slightly in your seat.
- ☐ Maintain strong eye contact with your interviewers.
- ☐ Keep your answers to around 2-3 minutes if possible.
- ☐ Be sure to say “yes” if they ask if you have any questions, and show your interviewers that you’ve done your homework when you ask your questions.
- ☐ Take notes when they share important information with you.
- ☐ Ask about the timeline of the search process as your last question.
- ☐ Be mindful of the time and pay attention to any cues from your interviewers when they are eager to wrap up the interview.
- ☐ Thank your interviewers at the end of the conversation.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Send a thank you note by email within 24 hours and provide any necessary follow-up discussed in your interview.
- ☐ Be patient as you wait to hear back from your interviewers. If you have not heard by the timeline they provided you, you are welcome to follow up.



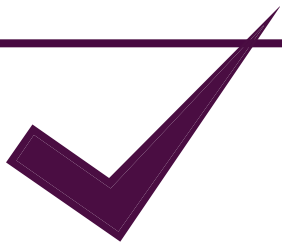
CHECKLIST: IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Confirm the time, date, and location of your interview.
- ☐ Clarify all reimbursement policies regarding travel logistics, such as flight, hotel, and rental car, before making any plans.
- ☐ Make sure you have the name and contact information for the main person who is coordinating your interview.
- ☐ If your interview is at an unfamiliar but local location, do a test run so you know how to get there, how long it may take, and any related transportation information (such as parking) that could be useful before the actual interview.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR INTERVIEW

- ☐ Give yourself plenty of time to arrive to your interview location.
- ☐ Gather any materials you may need, such as a copy of your application documents, and bring a notepad and pen for notetaking.
- ☐ If you are running late for any reason, let your main contact know as soon as possible.
- ☐ Arrive early at your interview location and check in to the office where your interview will take place around 5-10 minutes before your scheduled time.
- ☐ Turn your phone off, or at least silence it, before you arrive, and then leave it in your bag/pocket until you leave.



CHECKLIST: VIDEO INTERVIEWS

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Confirm the time, date, and video platform of your interview and who will initiate the video call.
- ☐ Provide your phone number to your interviewers as a backup, and ask if they can send you their number just in case.
- ☐ Download and/or install the video platform and test it out before your interview.
- ☐ Identify a room where you will conduct your interview and ensure that the internet connection is strong enough to support video calls.

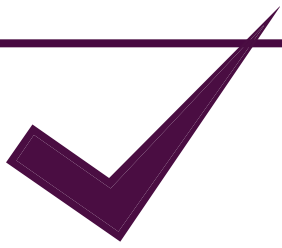
ON THE DAY OF YOUR INTERVIEW

- ☐ Check that all software and operating system updates on your computer are complete and up-to-date, turn off all notifications (banners and sounds), and clean up your desktop background.
- ☐ Test the mic and camera of your computer and check the video and audio connection on the platform you're using if possible.
- ☐ Check that your lighting is sufficient and that your background on screen will appear professional with minimal distractions for your interviewers.
- ☐ Make sure your laptop is elevated if needed so that the camera is at eye level.
- ☐ Reduce the echo in your room if necessary.
- ☐ Ensure that your interview environment will be free from any distractions; silence your cell phone.
- ☐ If you anticipate sharing your screen during the interview, prepare any documents and/or webpages you may need.
- ☐ If you are initiating your interview, call promptly at your interview time.

- ❑ If you are receiving the video call and don't get a call within 5-10 minutes of your scheduled interview time, send an email to your interviewer to let them know that you are online and ready to speak with them; provide your screenname (if needed) or a backup phone number where you can be reached.
- ❑ Look into the camera as often as possible to establish eye contact with your interviewers.
- ❑ Show your engagement with your interviewers using body language, such as nodding or smiling when appropriate.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ❑ Ensure that your interviewers can hear and see you clearly before beginning the interview
- ❑ If you cannot hear a question clearly, you can ask your interviewers to repeat it, or restate the question and ask if they can confirm you understood correctly.
- ❑ If the video or audio cuts out or if the quality is too poor for you to communicate effectively during your interview, use the chat feature (if available) to let them know what's going on and login into the video platform again.
- ❑ If the technology fails, stay calm. It happens! Send an email to your interviewers to let them know that you can be reached at your phone number, or better yet, give them a call if you already have their number.
- ❑ At the end of your interview, wait until there is a clear exchange of goodbyes and hand waves between you and your interviewers before you hang up.



CHECKLIST: PHONE INTERVIEWS

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- ☐ Confirm the time and date of your interview and who will initiate the call; provide your phone number to your interviewer, and ask for their number just in case.
- ☐ Identify where you will conduct your phone interview and ensure that your cell phone reception is strong.

ON THE DAY OF YOUR INTERVIEW

- ☐ Gather your notes and have them ready if you are using them.
- ☐ Ensure that your interview environment will be free from any distractions.
- ☐ If you are dialing your interview, call promptly at your interview time.
- ☐ If you are receiving the phone call and don't get a call within 5-10 minutes of your scheduled interview time, send an email to your interviewer to let them know that you are ready and provide the number where you can be reached.

DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

- ☐ Pauses are natural on a phone call, so don't feel rushed to fill the silence; you can take a few seconds before you begin talking to ensure your interviewers have finished asking the question.
- ☐ If you have to think about an answer – let your interviewers know that you are thinking, otherwise they may start to think you have become disconnected. A simple response like “that’s a great question, let me think about that so that I can give you a good example...” is fine.
- ☐ If your interviewers speak over you, let them finish and then wait to speak.
- ☐ At the end of your interview, wait until there is a clear exchange of goodbyes between you and your interviewers before you hang up.

STAR INTERVIEWING WORKSHEET

Use this worksheet to fill out your stories for behavioral interviews using the STAR method.

<p>SITUATION</p> <p>The situation, including the context of where you were and what you were doing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taught "Introduction to Research Methods" which had over 200 undergrads enrolled • Inherited a course that typically had low student reviews • Previous students wrote in their evaluations that they often did not understand the material and were not motivated to learn, which was a major barrier to declaring a major in this discipline
<p>TASK</p> <p>The task or challenge you have to overcome.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping students become and stay engaged in the course material as the subject matter became progressively more difficult
<p>ACTION</p> <p>The action you took to resolve the problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented several check-ins with my students throughout the semester, including the use of clickers in class and online discussion forums to understand where they needed the most help • Based on these assessments, I designed several review sessions tailored to student needs and ensured that my lectures had enough flexibility to devote more time to units needing more explanation
<p>RESULT</p> <p>The result or outcome of your work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A higher number of students who visited office hours • Decrease in the number of students who dropped the course • The most favorable ratings this course has received in the last ten years in the department

SITUATION	
TASK	
ACTION	
RESULT	

SITUATION	
TASK	
ACTION	
RESULT	

SITUATION	
TASK	
ACTION	
RESULT	

SITUATION	
TASK	
ACTION	
RESULT	

**HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT
INTERVIEWING?**

**MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO SPEAK
WITH A CAREER ADVISOR**