

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Career Center

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

The Basics

- ✓ Plan to arrive for your interview 10-15 minutes prior to the appointed time.
- ✓ Ask for directions when making arrangements for the interview.
- ✓ Bring extra copies of your resumes, a list of references and questions you wish to ask the employer. These items can be carried in a professional manner by means of a portfolio notepad.
- ✓ Bring a pen or pencil with you to take notes at the END of the interview (not during).

Conducting Research

- ✓ Your mission during an interview is to link your skills/abilities/accomplishments with what the attributes the employer values in the ideal candidate for this position. To that end, it is necessary to focus on two areas of knowledge.

	Knowing Yourself	Knowing the Employer
What to Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Functional/Transferable ○ Subject Matter specific ○ Self-Management • Accomplishments • Strengths/Weaknesses • Career Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Short Term ○ Long Term • Personal Characteristics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission/Organizational Philosophy • Products/Services • Size (locations, employees, etc.) • Organizational Structure/Career Paths • Last FY statement of Profit/Profit Margin • Current news/stock prices • Senior staff or top management • Geographic locations/headquarters location • Attributes of Organizational Culture (dress code, professional development) • Industry trends
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Background & Performance • Experience (Related and Unrelated) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific examples of successful utilization/development of skills and abilities • Leadership positions in student clubs/organizations • Involvement in community service/volunteer activities • Additional Info from resume or other job search related documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization's website • Printed Employer Literature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Check the Career Resource Room in GW Career Center • Annual Reports • Industry Journals • Newspapers (i.e. Wall Street Journal) • Internet Search Engines • Colonial Connection (alumni mentor directory)

1922 F Street NW (Old Main) • Washington, DC 20052

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Drop-in Consulting Hours

Monday-Thursday 1-5pm; Friday 1-3pm (Summer: Monday-Friday 1-3pm)

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Interview Dress Guidelines

Guidelines for Men and Women

- A two piece suit is always appropriate. (Navy, gray or black tones are considered most conservative).
- Shoes should be clean, polished and appropriate to professional attire. (No flip flops or running shoes).
- Hair should be clean and well groomed.
- Clean, trimmed or manicured fingernails (Personal hygiene must be immaculate).
- Minimize obvious body piercing or body art (tattoos, nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc).
- Wear little or no jewelry, so as not to be distracting.
- If you wear cologne or perfume, use it only very sparingly.
- No gum or candy in your mouth.
- Always remember: It is better to overdress than to underdress!

For Men Only

- Two piece suit should be Navy, dark grey, or black and be made of Wool or Wool blend.
- A conservative necktie is recommended (Silk or other thin fabrics are recommended).
- Ironed/Pressed white dress shirt with white undershirt
- Dark shoes are encouraged (Brown or Black depending on the color of your suit).
- Socks should match tone of shoes and cover calves when sitting down.
- Leather Belt (color of belt should match shoes).
- Hair should be well-cut (short hair is preferred by most interviewers) and any mustaches or beards should be neat and well-trimmed.
- Jewelry should be limited to a wedding ring or school ring (no earrings).

For Women Only

- Women are advised to wear a two piece skirted suit or a matching skirt and jacket. Skirt should be conservatively appropriate length. (Pant suits are not recommended unless position requires extremely casual attire).
- Suit color and fabric should be subdued and conservative in style.
- Blouse should be white or light pastel.
- Wear low heeled, closed-toe shoes. (No stiletto heels).
- Hosiery should be without runs or snags.
- Makeup should be used sparingly.
- Hair should not be a distraction, so avoid unusual dye jobs or high maintenance hairstyles.
- Limit earrings to one pair and rings to one per hand.
- If nail polish is used, use clear or conservative colors.

First impressions count!

Be remembered for who you are and what you say...not what you wear.

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Typical Interview Questions Asked by Employers

- Why did you decide to seek a position with this organization?
- Tell me about a problem you had in your last job and how you resolved it.
- What led you to choose your field or major? Your career?
- Tell me about yourself.
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Your weaknesses?
- If your supervisor were here right now, what would they say about you?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- Outline the contributions you believe you would make to our company.
- Describe a situation when you had to use your creativity to the fullest to complete a project.
- Describe your ideal boss/work environment.
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- Give an example of a situation in which your ethics were challenged. What did you do?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Describe a team/group situation in which somebody dropped the ball. What did you do to help the team/group achieve its goal(s)?
- Give me an example of how you convinced your supervisor to assign you to a project.
- Why should I hire you?
- Describe an experience where you were asked to develop a program.

Typical Interview Questions Asked by Applicants

- What are your company's greatest challenges?
- What are the strengths of the organization or department?
- What is the management philosophy of this company?
- What are the career opportunities in this organization for someone entering this position/department?
- What kind of on-going training is available to new employees? What is your development philosophy?
- To whom would I be reporting, and what kind of communication channels are there?
- What are the prospects for promotions in the future?
- In what areas of the organization do you expect growth?
- Is there an opportunity to transfer between divisions?
- Can you give me more details about this position?
- What will my top priorities be?
- How and when will I be evaluated in this position?
- Is an advanced degree a factor in promotions?
- Can you tell me about the history of this position and why it is open? Any anticipated changes in the future?
- What is the work ethic of this organization?
- What percentage of time will be devoted to individual responsibilities versus team-oriented functions?
- Do you work with daily, weekly, monthly or annual deadlines? Are deadlines negotiable?
- Does the organization have a process for sharing ideas?
- How does the staff interact with their peers? Management?
- How will the selection process proceed from here?
- When might I expect to hear from you regarding a decision?

Tips to Answering Interview Questions

1. For questions focusing on your strengths and qualifications a good answer can typically be seen as the following:

Good Answer = Naming 4-6 skills plus 1-2 accomplishments that prove them

2. Quantify the details of your answers whenever possible. Numbers speak volumes and interviewers certainly enjoy hearing success stories from candidates. (Example: after assuming the position of store manager, I successfully implemented a new marketing plan that increased sales by 60% over a five month period.)
3. Listen carefully to each question as it may contain clues to how it should be answered.
(Interviewer: "The department is currently comprised of only five people. However, because the company is growing so rapidly, I expect that number to increase to 50 over the next few years. Your responsibility would be primarily to create financial analysis and do some forecasting. You'd also help out on special projects. Tell me, would you prefer to work for a small department or a large one?")
Poor Answer: "I'd prefer to work in a small/large department."
Good Answer: "Ideally, I'd prefer to start out working with a small department, and be instrumental in helping it grow quickly over at least the next few years."
4. Be positive: say what you have, not what you don't have. Always start with what you have to offer.
(Interviewer: "Do you have a bachelor's degree in International Affairs?")
Poor Answer: "No, I don't."
Good Answer: "I have a bachelor's degree in International Business and I have completed 16 credits in international economic theory and policy. Along with my internship experiences, I feel that's on par with a degree in International Affairs?"
5. Avoid qualifiers like "maybe", "a little", and "might."
(Interviewer: "Do you have any supervisory experience?")
Poor Answer: "Only a little. When my current supervisor goes on vacation for two weeks a year, I take on the responsibilities of supervisor."
Good Answer: "Yes. Every year for the past three years, I have taken on the responsibilities of my supervisor for two weeks during his vacation. I am responsible for delegating assignments, overseeing work, and handling any crisis situations that arise."
6. Use the STAR method when answering Behavioral Based Interviewing questions.

Situation: What was the problem? How did it arise? What was your responsibility in solving it?

Tasks: What needed to be done to rectify the situation?

Actions: What steps were taken to solve this problem? How were you involved?

Results: What happened? The resolution should always be a positive one unless the interviewer requests otherwise.

Interview Prep Help from the GW Career Center

1. Attend an "Ace Your Interview!" workshop.
2. One-on-one Mock Interviews are also available with Recruiters-In-Residence and the Career Center staff. These sixty minute sessions are videotaped to provide thorough feedback regarding your interview skills. To set up a mock interview appointment, visit the Career Center.

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INTERVIEW PROCESS

Typical Interview Structure

1. During the first few minutes of the interview, an employer often formulates a lasting impression of you. How you greet the employer, how you shake hands and how you are groomed will form an initial impression. Greet the employer with a sturdy handshake and a smile. To help you feel at ease, an interviewer might make “small talk” about shared interests or acquaintances, your travel to the interview or the weather.
2. The interview officially begins when the interviewer asks to ask questions. These questions provide you with the opportunity to learn more about the organization and position. If you are prepared for the interview, you will be able to promote your qualifications effectively as you respond to the employer’s questions. With practice, you will gain confidence and become more polished in your presentation.
3. Once the interview has concluded asking questions, there is typically an opportunity for you to ask questions of the employer. Your questions should be constructed as a result of thorough research and reflect sincere interest and awareness of the organization’s needs.
4. At the conclusion of the interview, next steps should be discussed. You should never leave an interview unless you know what the organization’s next steps are in relation to the selection process, including any responsibility you may have to fulfill those steps (i.e. providing reference information).

Interview Do’s	Interview Don’ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ At the start of the interview, shake hands firmly with the interviewer(s). ✓ Address the interviewer by title unless told otherwise. ✓ Speak clearly and enthusiastically about experiences and skills. ✓ Be professional, but be yourself. ✓ Listen carefully. ✓ Pay attention to your nonverbal behavior. Look the interviewer in the eye, sit up straight with both feet on the floor and control nervous habits. ✓ Small pauses in the conversation are normal. You may need a few seconds to formulate an answer. The interviewer may need time to formulate an appropriate question. It is not necessary to fill every second with conversation. ✓ Be assertive and ask intelligent questions. Interviewing is not only about the employer finding the right candidate, it is also about you finding the right employer ✓ Don’t forget to smile! Smiling can go a long way to relaxing you and demonstrating to your interviewer that you are enthusiastic over this opportunity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Use inappropriate language ❖ Appear aloof or uninvolved ❖ Slouch, sit too far forward or too far back ❖ Stare down the interviewer. It is okay to vary eye contact with the interviewer to the left or right over the course of the interview. ❖ Interrupt the interviewer. Let him/her finish each question before beginning your answer (even if you know what they are about to ask). ❖ Dwell on negative experiences/attributes. If you are asked about a low grade, a sudden job change or a weakness in your background, do not be defensive. Focus briefly on the facts, and describe what you learned from the experience. ❖ Use “Fillers”- Fillers are words such as “um” and “like” that are used to fill space within your interview answers. ❖ Ask questions that could have easily been answered through basic researching. One of the most frequent complaints of employers during the interview process is that the candidate did not research the organization ahead of time. Employers expect all of their candidates to research the company prior to an interview.

Understand Interview Types

Knowing various styles of interviews will help you maintain confidence during the information exchange part of your interview.

Structured: The interviewer will usually have a focused agenda and a list of specific questions.

Unstructured: The interviewer may ask broad, general questions and will not take charge of the interview. The applicant is nonverbally encouraged to present qualifications.

Stress: A stress-styled interview is used to determine how the applicant reacts under pressure. There are many possible forms of stress interviews, which may include timed answers and problem-solving tasks.

Group: A group interview is one where several candidates are interviewed at once. This style is often used to determine how the candidates interact as team members, or may be used if the organization hires in large numbers.

Panel: More than one interviewer, or a search committee, questions a candidate. Direct eye contact is important in establishing rapport with each interviewer.

Screening: The first interview with an organization is often a screening interview, lasting 30-60 minutes. It can be conducted by telephone, at the office or through the On-Campus Recruitment Program (OCR). Prepare to elaborate on experiences outlined in your resume or application and to receive information about the organization and the available position.

Follow-up: Employers often invite candidates to interview at the hiring organization for one or more follow-up interviews before making the hiring decision. The follow-up interview process is longer, lasting from two hours to an entire day. It could include testing, a facility tour and a series of interviews with various employees. In many instances, lunch or dinner is included.

Behavior Based Interviews (BBI): BBI elicits behavioral examples from the interviewee's past experiences that form an individual profile of performance for the interviewer to evaluate. The interviewer asks for specific examples to understand how the candidate responds to situations and challenges. In response, feature your individual skills and accomplishments. This type of interview assesses a candidate's competencies in areas such as confidence, leadership, flexibility, planning and organization, analytical ability, initiative and interpersonal skills.

Case Interviews: Commonly used by consulting firms, case interviews require the interviewee to solve a complex business dilemma. The interviewer presents you with a business "word" problem relevant to the organization and its customer base. Your answer should be detailed in nature and provide a logical framework for a potential solution. There is often more than one solution to the problem. Therefore, the focus of your answer should be the process not the result. This type of interview assesses a candidate's competencies in areas such as analytical thinking, detail orientation, communication skills, and creativity.

After the Interview

Summarize the experience by writing down the names (check spelling) and titles of all your interviewers, recording your impressions about the job and the organization and making a list of questions or items that require clarification. Next, send a thank you letter within 48 hours to reiterate your interest in the position, to summarize your qualifications and to provide additional information overlooked at the interview. Sending a thank you letter reflects your attention to detail and your ability to follow up with colleagues and clients.

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