

Interviews

Purpose of an interview

The interview is a mutual exchange of information between an employer and you, as a candidate for a position. The primary objectives are to:

1. Supplement résumé information
2. Show that you understand your strengths and weaknesses and have a sense of direction
3. Enable the employer to evaluate your personality and attitudes in terms of the demands of the organization and the position
4. Allow you to gain information about the organization and the job that is not available through other sources
5. Give you and the employer an opportunity to discuss the desirability of further contact or an offer of employment

First impressions

First impressions matter whether they be online or in person. Consider conducting a web search on yourself to see what employers could access when pre-screening candidates. Some employers are also registering themselves in social networking groups to collect information on potential candidates. Thoroughly check all sites, blogs, where you are listed to ensure that the information contained is professional.

Succeeding in the interview can depend on your professional appearance and the interviewer's first impression of you. If the first impression is not positive, it will be difficult to change the interviewer's mind during the rest of the interview.

Arrive early dressed in appropriate attire for the type of organization interviewing you. If in doubt, be conservative. Keep fashion accessories to a minimum. Avoid wearing strong scents because many people have environmental allergies. Set cell phones and electronic organizers to vibrate or turn them off.

Research indicates that, on average, an interviewer decides to hire in just 5 1/2 minutes. If the first impression is not positive, it will be difficult to change the interviewer's mind during the rest of the interview.

Greet each person with respect and professionalism. When you shake hands, make eye contact and smile. Handshakes should be firm but not aggressive; try to match the grip of the interviewer. It is good etiquette to wait to sit down until the interviewer invites you to do so.

Don't worry about being a little nervous during the interview; being nervous is normal and expected. Remember, the interviewer wants to hire you if you have the right qualifications and interest in the position. Many interviewers will begin the interview with some "small talk" to help you relax. This may seem irrelevant to the position, but you are still being evaluated; be sure to demonstrate a positive attitude.

Preparing for the interview

Know yourself

To impress an employer, you must be well prepared and understand the value of what you have to offer. To demonstrate effectively your suitability for the position and your value to the organization, you must know yourself. Review the Self-assessment section under Decision Making, starting with the [self-assessment overview](#) page and your résumé. Be prepared to give examples to substantiate all claims in your résumé. In addition to determining your level of proficiency, some interviewers want to see how you have grown over time in areas related to their position(s) (e.g., interpersonal and work skills, motivation). Others will want you to talk about your mistakes and what lessons you learned from them.

Know the company/organization

You must be familiar with the position and the organization so that you can demonstrate your interest in and fit for the job. Refer to the notes you made as you reviewed print and online materials and spoke with people about the position.

A commonly asked interview question is: "What do you know about our company?". If you are unable to answer this question effectively, employers will see this as a sign of disinterest.

Answering interview questions

The next phase of the interview consists of the interviewer asking you questions to try to determine your fit. Having knowledge of possible questions helps you to prepare points to include in your answers. Think about why a question is being asked. What does the employer really want to know?

Behaviour-based and situational/hypothetical questions are increasing in popularity because they are considered to be more valid predictors of on-the-job performance.

Behaviour-based questions

Behaviour-based interviews are designed to elicit information about how you have performed in the past because past behaviour is a good indicator of how you will function in the future. Interviewers develop their questions around the traits and skills they consider necessary for succeeding in a position or organization. These questions usually begin with phrases such as:

1. Tell me about a time...
2. Describe a situation in which...
3. Recall an instance when...
4. Give me an example of...

Some applicants find the format of such questions difficult to understand and have trouble responding. However, if you have done your research and have prepared for the interview, you will have work, academic, and life experiences ready to share. You can prepare for behaviour-based questions by recalling specific instances that demonstrate your accomplishments, abilities, and fit for the position. Be certain to tell the truth, get to the point, stay focused, positive, and be consistent with your responses. Common behaviour-based interview themes include the following:

- Working effectively under pressure
- Handling a difficult situation with a co-worker
- Solving a problem
- Thinking creatively
- Completing a project

- Persuading team members
- Writing a report or proposal
- Anticipating potential problems and developing preventative measures
- Making an important decision with limited facts and information
- Making a quick decision during the absence of a supervisor
- Making an unpopular decision
- Adapting to a difficult situation
- Being tolerant of a different opinion
- Using your political savvy
- Dealing with an upset client
- Delegating a project
- Explaining complex information to a client, colleague, or peer
- Surmounting a major obstacle
- Prioritizing the elements of a complicated project

By analyzing the questions asked of you, you will discover further details about the position. What emphasis does the interviewer seem to be placing on which skills, knowledge, personality traits, and attitudes? That insight can help you tailor your answers.

The STAR approach

The “STAR Approach” is a useful technique for answering behaviour-based questions:

Situation: Provide background and context

- Who, What, Where, When...
- Be brief: you are just providing the context here

Task: Describe what you needed to do

- What goals did you need to reach?
- Include challenges and expectations

Action: Explain what you actually did and how you did it

- Include tools you used
- Focus on one skill
- The action is the main area to focus on and should be the longest part of your response

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions

- What did you accomplish?
- Include any positive feedback/recognition received
- What did you learn?

There are a few things to note with this approach:

It's important to speak in specific rather than general terms. By choosing a specific example, you are better able to convince the employer that you have successfully used the skill in question in the past — and will be able to do so for them in future. Your example can be from a paid or unpaid work experience, academic experience, or extracurricular activity: choose based on relevance to the job sought or simply on the strength of the example in proving your skill.

Prepare in advance: determine which skills the employer will likely be interested in, select your ‘best’ example situations, then write bullet points that capture the main ideas you want to convey. Don't completely script it and memorize it because you will likely sound unnatural. Then, practice!

Ninety seconds. Aim to deliver your response in approximately 90 seconds because that is a typical attention span for interviewers. Don't worry too much if it's 80 seconds or 100 seconds, but practice for the 90. If it's much less than 90, you're probably not giving enough detail to convince them. If you're going on longer than that, they may no longer be listening.

As you tell your story, the employer should be able to see or accompany you through the experience. Choose words that will help the employer visualize your role in it. This will help them to remember you and your story — particularly if they are interviewing many candidates on the same day.

Remember to state what the successful outcome was and include any positive feedback or recognition received. This is a very important component and will further support your claim that you were successful.

Additionally, try to outline benefits transferable to the interviewer's organization. Be specific here as well: general statements such as "all organizations need employees with x" should be avoided.

A sample behaviour based response is presented in the video. Note that the example used is a volunteer experience.

Situational/hypothetical questions

An interviewer will use situational/hypothetical questions to establish how you would react to and handle real-life situations on the job. For situational/hypothetical questions, candidates must have a good understanding of the job and its requirements. Here are some examples of this type of question:

- If you had met your project deadlines and your direct supervisor was unavailable, describe how you would remain busy
- You are the manager of a small software testing team, and one individual is continually late for work and taking extended breaks. How would you approach the issue?
- During construction, a contractor unexpectedly finds a very large object in one of the trenches where he is about to dig. He requests that you tell him how to proceed. How would you deal with this situation?
- You plan a workshop to teach newcomers to Canada how to use word-processing software. Unfortunately, only four people have registered and you are required to have a class of ten. You really feel that the training is important but are worried about the financial consequences. It is five days before the class is scheduled to begin. What do you do?
- You have a conflict with someone who is senior to you and is not your supervisor. Describe how you would handle it

Skill-testing questions

Potential employers often require proof that you have the practical skills and savvy to successfully do the job. Skill-testing questions can be hands-on (e.g., programming on a computer, solving a complex math problem, etc.) and are more common in technical, scientific, and industrial/manufacturing fields. The following are examples of skill-testing questions:

- What is the difference between server-side and client-side scripting?
- Provide a brief description of a diode
- Explain the theory of elasticity
- What is a comma splice?

If you know the answer, great! If not, don't fake it. Instead, indicate your interest and desire to learn. If possible, indicate something else that may compensate for this lack of knowledge (e.g., "I'm not familiar with that programming language but I do have experience with...")

Problem-solving questions

When answering problem-solving questions, demonstrate your ability to process information quickly, think logically, and solve problems creatively. Employers place emphasis on the thought process rather than on

the conclusion. Examples of problem-solving questions include the following:

- Why is a manhole cover round?
- How many automobiles are there in Toronto?
- Estimate the size of the DVD rental market in Tokyo, Japan
- How would you project the future rate of PC game purchases in Canada?
- Describe how you would extract caffeine from coffee beans

The key is not to worry about getting the “right” answer but, rather, to demonstrate your logical thought process in solving the problem. The following five-step process is appropriate for handling most problem-solving questions:

1. Listen carefully to what is being asked
2. Ask clarifying questions to determine exactly what the interviewer is looking for
3. Respond by first explaining how you’d gather the data necessary to make an informed decision
4. Discuss how you’d use that data to generate options
5. Based on the data you’ve gathered, the available options, and your understanding of the position, explain how you’d make an appropriate decision or recommendation

Keep in mind, there is no right answer, only your answer.

Case interviews

Case interviews are used primarily by consulting firms and investment banking companies as part of their interview process to determine if a candidate has the qualifications to succeed. Case interviews are most similar to problem-solving questions as described in the previous section except you will be given many types of case interview questions. There are many resources available on the internet to help you understand and practice the “case interview” approach.

Classic questions

In addition to asking the other types of questions mentioned, many employers rely on a series of standard questions, and you should prepare for them:

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your short-term goals? What about in two and five years? How are you preparing to achieve them?
- What is your vision/mission statement?
- Why do you feel you will be successful in this work?
- What other types of work are you looking for in addition to this role?
- What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
- For you, what are some advantages and disadvantages of working in a team environment?
- What have been your most satisfying/disappointing experiences?
- What did you like/dislike about your last job?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What kinds of problems do you handle best?
- How do you reduce stress and try to achieve balance in your life?
- How did you handle a request to do something contrary to your moral code or business ethics?
- What was the result the last time you tried to sell your idea to others?
- Why did you apply to our organization and what do you know about us?
- What do you think are advantages/disadvantages of joining our organization?
- What is the most important thing you are looking for in an employer?
- What were some of the common characteristics of your past supervisors?
- What characteristics do you think a person needs to work effectively in our company/department?

- What courses did you like best/least? Why?
- What did you learn or gain from your part-time/summer/co-op/internship experiences?
- What are your plans for further studies?
- Why are your grades low?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- If I asked your friends to describe you, what would they say?
- What frustrates you the most?
- When did you last have a disagreement with someone at work, and what was the outcome?
- What could you do to increase your effectiveness?
- What was the toughest decision you have had to make in the last year? Why was it difficult?
- Why haven't you found a job yet?
- How will you be successful in the job, given your lack of experience in _____ (e.g., sales, fundraising, bookkeeping)?
- Why should I hire you?

While responding to questions, use to your advantage information that the employer volunteers about the position and organization. Listen for verbal cues and hints (e.g., what is said, how it is said) and customize your responses accordingly, but be honest. For example, if you are excellent at multi-tasking and skilled at meeting tight deadlines, share this information if the interviewer just stated that the work environment is very fast paced. Furthermore, listen carefully to the question and how it is phrased. If it can be interpreted in more than one way, and if you are unsure what the interviewer really wants to discuss, ask for clarification.

PAWS model

The "PAWS" model is a useful method for answering classic questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The answer should take approximately ninety seconds because that's the typical attention span.

When an employer asks this question, s/he is looking for those aspects of your life that are relevant to the job, such as how you became interested in the field, related experience, and courses taken. "PAWS" stands for Profile, Academic, Work, and Skills. Include all or as many of the four (in any order) to reinforce your fit for the job. As with any interview response, limit your answer to a maximum of ninety seconds.

Here are some examples of what to discuss in each of the four areas:

Profile: Mention how you became interested in this field and perhaps point out any relevant community involvement, extracurricular activities, memberships, and personal interests that further demonstrate your commitment to the field

Academic: Talk about your educational background (degrees/diplomas/certifications) and other related training and professional development initiatives/courses that you have participated in

Work: Highlight paid or unpaid experience related to the job

Skills: Refer to specific technical skills that relate to the position or field (e.g., programming C++, knowledge of GIS) and relevant transferable skills (e.g., time management, problem-solving skills)

Tricky situations

Awkward situations may occur during an interview, and it is up to you to be prepared to confidently handle whatever happens. To increase your confidence and preparation for an interview, practice. Check for quality of information in your answers, and the positive, non-verbal reinforcement of your words. By practicing responses out loud, you can hear your answers and assess their effectiveness. But don't practice so much that you lose your spontaneity and your answers sound rehearsed.

The key to tricky situations is to remember that barriers to employment can often be overcome by focusing on the positive. Circumstances that you may find problematic are:

Salary

If applying for short-term work (e.g., co-op or summer), you will likely have only one interview, so it is acceptable to discuss salary. If you need to know the salary and it has not been discussed, ask about it as your final question.

Employers hiring full-time or contract staff may inquire about salary during a first interview to see if your expectations are compatible with what they are offering and to see how much value you place on your experience, skills, and educational background. Always try to defer the subject until you have been offered the job, but if the employer insists, offer a salary range that you know is realistic based on your research.

Silence

If you answer a question and there is no prompt response or follow-up question try to remain calm and collected. Silence may not be a negative sign; the employer could be taking time to process and record your answer and/or be considering the next question. A few employers create periods of silence during an interview to see how candidates handle stressful and awkward situations.

In response to uncomfortable silence, ask the interviewers if they require any further details regarding your last response, shifting the responsibility to them. Resist the temptation to ramble because you may provide irrelevant information that may hurt your chances of being offered the job.

Note-taking

Although the interviewer will likely take notes, generally you should not. If you have your head down writing, the conversation will be uncomfortable and unengaging because of your lack of eye contact and inability to show enthusiasm.

Making brief notes is acceptable when you need to record information that may be easily forgotten, such as a key word, phone number, or contact information. If you fear you may not recall other pertinent details, document the information immediately after the interview.

Being stumped

You may have difficulty communicating your thoughts clearly and concisely, especially when you are not sure how to respond to a question. The key is to remain calm and positive, focus on the question, and continue to remind yourself that you are doing well. You may request clarification if you are not sure what the interviewer is asking or pause and politely ask for a few moments to consider your response; however, don't take too much time because employers want to see that you can think well under pressure.

After a brief pause, if you still cannot respond to the interviewer's question, you may ask to defer your answer to the end of the interview. The risk is that interviews usually follow a certain structure and the question might be missed entirely, leaving the interviewer with an unanswered question. Of course, if you're stumped because you simply do not know the answer, be honest with the interviewer and demonstrate your enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

When asked a question about a skill that you don't have, demonstrate that you have the transferable skills necessary to succeed in the position. For example, "I have excellent computer skills but I do not have knowledge of that specific software. However, I did learn FrontPage, a similar program, on my own

and quickly applied the concepts by independently creating a website for a project for which I received a grade of 90%.”

Negative questions

Interviewers will often ask negatively phrased questions to assess your perceived weaknesses and strengths. The following are a few examples:

- What are your weaknesses as an employee?
- Recall a time from your work experience when you made a bad decision or mistake. How did you get beyond it?
- Give me an example of a time you did not meet a project deadline. How did you handle the situation?

Be honest and discuss a real work-related weakness or past event that would not negatively impact performance for the job you are applying for. Avoid the popular advice to turn a weakness into a strength (e.g., “I’m a perfectionist...”) because this kind of response is unconvincing and over used. Be sure to end your “weakness” response on a positive note by indicating what steps you are taking to overcome the weakness.

It is important to keep your answers short and to be as positive as possible, even when answering a negatively framed question.

Many short-term jobs and/or gaps in employment history

It is becoming more common to work for shorter periods for a variety of employers, so employers may not place as much emphasis on dates worked as they might have in the past. However, if asked, be prepared to provide reasons that the employer will understand for your frequent job changes or gaps in employment history.

Gaps in your employment history can occur for many reasons, some within and some beyond your control: short-term positions, lay-offs, health or personal concerns, raising a family, extensive travelling, completing a degree, unemployment, or time for career planning. In creating a targeted résumé, you may also have chosen to omit some experiences.

Although you should truthfully explain in a few words the reasons for your job changes or gaps in employment, focus on what you did during the gaps that was related to the position.

Having never worked or no recent work experience

Tell the interviewer about any relevant courses/workshops, volunteer/internship experiences, and/or extracurricular activities. Indicate if you have researched and joined associations/societies in your field to learn and/or stay knowledgeable about industry trends and connect with other professionals. Convey your interest in the position and indicate that you look forward to a long-term association with the company.

Being over/under qualified

Although you may be concerned about your qualifications, the interviewer liked something about your résumé or you wouldn’t have been offered an interview! Counter the interviewer’s fear that you may not be suitable by emphasizing your positive traits and describing how your experience, education, and skills will help you succeed in the position. Demonstrate to the employer your commitment by describing how the position aligns with your career goals and how your decision to apply for the position was carefully planned

Low marks

Low marks can stem from a lack of commitment (e.g., skipping classes, excessive socializing), from enrollment in an unsuitable program, or from dealing with traumatic events (e.g., death/sickness in the family, personal health issue/injury). In any case, explain briefly and honestly what happened and describe what steps you have taken to remedy the situation so that it is no longer an issue: "I know my grades were less than stellar during my third year, but I really improved this term because I attended a series of study skill workshops, and they made a huge impact. I now know how to manage my time successfully, and I'm confident that I will perform well in this position."

Interview talker

It is a pleasure to be interviewed by someone who is enthusiastic about the company and the available position, but it is not desirable if you aren't able to market yourself because the interviewer monopolizes the discussion. Tactfully break into the conversation to help keep the interview focused on the subject you know best: you! You might say, "I had a similar experience..." or "It's interesting that you say that because I am also skilled in..."

Is your body or verbal language contributing to the problem? Without being rude, offer less acknowledgement (e.g., nodding, "that's interesting," "really?"). If you are not given adequate time to market your qualifications and the interview is drawing to a close, request a few moments to summarize your qualifications for the position, highlighting key points you had planned to discuss.

Or summarize when asked "Do you have any questions?" or "Do you have anything to add?"

Ageism

An interviewer can never ask how old an applicant is, and you should raise the topic of age only if you think that age will be a barrier in the hiring process. Whether you feel you are younger or older than the norm for the job you are applying to, you want to present yourself in the most positive light. Redirect the employer's focus from your age to your qualifications. Stress how your age is an asset. How is your life experience of benefit? Can your energy and enthusiasm compensate for a perceived lack of experience?

Disclosure of disability

People with physical, sensory, or learning disabilities, or chronic medical conditions are advised, like all job seekers, to focus on their abilities and interests when choosing a career.

During the self-assessment process and later during interviews, it is important to be up front and honest about your situation if your disability may present a performance barrier or if you need to request accommodation or assistive devices. If you determine that your disability does not pose any risk to you and to fellow workers, you may choose to disclose your disability once a job offer is formally presented. It is not necessary to disclose your disability in your résumé or cover letter, although you may prefer to do so if the company you are applying to has a specific policy to hire people with disabilities or if you are applying to an agency that deals with persons with disabilities.

Employers may not understand what your disability involves and may feel uncomfortable asking; the result is that they may perceive your disability to be more of a barrier than it actually is. During your self assessment, determine how you can overcome or compensate for any perceived or real stumbling blocks to employment so that you can explain your situation more clearly and positively. For example, you may say, "Due to a spinal injury, I have no sensation in my legs. I can get around and travel easily in my wheelchair. My injury does not affect how I think, solve problems, or communicate and will not affect my performance on the job." You may also want to ask if the employer has any additional questions.

If you qualify, the [Ontario Disability Support Program \(ODSP\)](#) offers assistance to help you secure employment. As well as offering job placement programs, the program can provide you with specialized equipment, sign language interpreters, readers, and note takers to help you with job searching and interviewing.

The University of Waterloo's [AccessAbility Services office](#) offers information, academic accommodations, and support services to UW students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors.

Reasons for leaving last job

An employer may inquire about your reasons for leaving a job to determine if concerns from a previous job might impact the organization. Employers like to gauge your attitude toward work, management, organizational change, and policies/guidelines.

Begin your response with a positive statement regarding your previous place of employment. Honestly and concisely state your reasons for leaving. If you left on good terms, offer the interviewer letters of reference that outline your relevant achievements. If the conditions under which you left were negative, focus the interviewer's attention on what you accomplished and avoid speaking negatively about past managers, colleagues, or the organization. Emphasize that you will be able to handle the present job no matter what may have happened in the past.

Poor/no references

If you were unable to obtain a reference from your previous place of employment because you left on bad terms, you must briefly explain why. Read the section above on "Reasons for leaving last job." Quickly follow up your statement to suggest that the interviewer contact other references from your list to obtain a more accurate picture of your previous work experiences. Stress how direct managers, supervisors, professors, and colleagues enjoyed working with you and can attest to your achievements and skills.

If references are outdated, you must decide if they are still appropriate to use. If you feel your referees can still successfully highlight your skills, follow up with them to request their permission to be contacted by potential employers. You will also want to remind them of your previous accomplishments and provide them with an updated résumé. If you do not obtain their permission, you must obtain new references by volunteering, requesting client testimonials, etc.

Proprietary information

If you are asked to provide confidential information about a past employer, it is best to refrain from giving any information that is not publicly available. Revealing information about a past employer, who may or may not be a competitor, could create a breach of confidentiality. Even though you may have worked for this employer some time ago, you are still obligated to keep confidential information private. The interviewer could be testing to see if you divulge any company information because doing so may be an indicator that you will reveal confidential information about the interviewer's company.

If your portfolio includes performance reviews or samples of written work, ensure that no proprietary information is included, such as the names of customers or clients.

Your rights in the interview

There are clear human rights guidelines for employment interview questions. An applicant for employment may be asked to divulge only information relevant to the position applied for. By law, an

employer must focus on gathering information relevant to deciding if an applicant can perform the functions of a position.

Some employers mistakenly believe that they have a right to ask any question they choose since they are paying the salary. Others are simply awkward in their technique, and an unlawful question results. However, human rights law does not distinguish between the interviewer who is asking questions with the intent to discriminate and the one who is just curious or inept at interviewing.

Some questions are appropriate and others are illegal. You do not have to answer questions that are illegal. The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination in employment on the grounds of:

- Race
- Ancestry
- Place of origin
- Colour
- Ethnic origin
- Citizenship
- Religion
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Record of offences
- Marital status
- Same-sex partnership status
- Family status
- Disability

Although it is ultimately the responsibility of the interviewer to know the law, this knowledge may sometimes be lacking. It is to your advantage to be informed on the subject.

Handling illegal questions

What should you do if you're in the middle of an interview and have just been asked what is clearly an illegal question? There is no clear-cut answer. Much depends on you.

In some cases, you may be able to answer the "hidden" question. Think of what information the employer is trying to elicit. For example, "Do you have or plan to have children?" may indicate a concern about an ability to put in the time to work overtime or to travel. In this example, your answer should convey your willingness to maintain a flexible work schedule.

You may elect to say "Why do you ask?" or "Would you explain how this point is connected to the qualifications for this job?" This could cause the employer to reconsider or clarify the question. It may offend some employers, but probably not the majority.

If you feel that you should not answer the question (you shouldn't have to, after all) or that you are not interested in working for the company, you may state, "I don't feel obligated to answer that" or "That question is inappropriate." If you choose this option, you will either enlighten (the employer may not realize it is illegal and will be happy that you pointed it out) or offend (the employer may not consider you for the position).

Ontario Human Rights Commission

Keep in mind that the vast majority of employers strive to hire the most qualified staff and do so fairly. For employers who don't play by the rules, remember that assistance is available through the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) office.

Conflict Management & Human Rights Office, University of Waterloo

If you feel you have been discriminated against in any way during a job interview either within or outside of the University, please speak to staff in Co-operative Education & Career Action and inform them of your experience. You may also approach the [Conflict Management & Human Rights Office](#) regarding the matter.

Verbal and non-verbal communication

Smile when appropriate during the interview. Be enthusiastic and responsive. As you talk about your past and present activities, your passion and energy can be communicated both through your words and your body language (e.g., an excited tone of voice, leaning forward, nodding your head in agreement). Maintaining eye contact is important; failure to do so may imply a lack of confidence or, worse, cause the employer to question your truthfulness.

Sit comfortably, without slouching. Don't put anything on your lap or in your hands if it will restrict your natural body movement or if you may be tempted to play with it. Keep your clipboard, note pad, briefcase, or portfolio on the floor beside your chair for easy retrieval.

Respond to questions specifically and concisely but give sufficient details to enable the interviewer to evaluate your credentials. Interviewers become frustrated when they have to listen to long, rambling answers. Think before you speak. It is quite acceptable to pause before talking in order to organize your thoughts. Avoid verbal fillers such as "um," "ah," "you know," or regularly repeating the question to provide thinking time.

Use business language. Avoid slang. Speak clearly. Watch the interviewer for clues on how the interview is progressing. Is the interviewer's face or body language telling you that your answers are too long, not detailed enough, too boring? If in doubt, ask the interviewer if more or fewer details are needed.

Prepare in advance to talk about any topic that you are concerned or feel uncomfortable about. If there is something that you don't want an interviewer to inquire about, it will likely be raised during the interview. Practice your answer out loud often enough to feel confident. Maintain poise and self-control. Consider a difficult issue as a learning opportunity that has made you a better person.

Questions you can ask

To supplement the information you obtained before the interview, you will want to ask questions during the interview. Some questions will arise naturally during the interview, but it is wise to prepare a number of questions in advance. Asking questions will demonstrate your interest and help you determine if the job fits your personality, skills, interests, and values.

Your questions should pertain to the position and show your enthusiasm and knowledge. By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions that genuinely matter to you, you will convince the employer that you are serious about the organization and the position. If a question has been answered during the interview, do not ask it again; such repetition will suggest that you were not listening. It is important to compose your own questions; however, the following may give you a starting point:

1. What do you see as the priorities for someone in this position?
2. Please describe a typical day on the job
3. What training programs do you have available for your employees?

4. What level of responsibility could I expect in this position?
5. Is there a typical career path for a person in this position?
6. What are the company's plans for the future?
7. I've been reading about trends in XYZ. Given these new directions, is there anything (non-confidential, of course) that you could share with me about some of the opportunities and challenges you see coming for this field/sector overall or even for [company/organization name] in particular?
8. How would you describe your organization's management style, culture, and/or working environment?
9. What do you like most about your organization?
10. How are employees evaluated and promoted?
11. **For Co-op interviews ONLY:** in order to help me arrange my budget for next term, can you tell me the expected salary for this position?

Interview Formats

Individual interview

The most common interview format is one interviewer interviewing one candidate, either by phone, via video, or in person.

Interview with two or more people

Although it is important to have good eye contact with the person who asks you a question, also look at the other interviewers frequently to include them in the discussion. Try to remember each person's name and use his or her name during the interview.

General/group interview or information session

This approach is intended to provide applicants with a large amount of information about the organization and the job. The format is used to save time and ensure that everyone understands the basic facts. This process is usually followed by an individual interview. A well-timed and intelligent question may help the employer to remember you positively.

Competitive group interview

In this interview format, one or more persons interview many candidates at the same time. This type of interview is sometimes used when a position involves team work and the interviewers want to see how you interact in a group setting, when the company wants to see who emerges as a leader within the group, or when people are being interviewed for several similar roles within the company. It is important to thoughtfully and intelligently contribute, be attentive to the contributions of others, and not to monopolize the conversation.

Telephone interview

Telephone interviews are an effective way to quickly and cost-effectively screen or hire candidates. If there will be more than one interview, the first may be conducted by phone; candidates being seriously considered may be invited to a subsequent on-site interview. If you are not ready for an interview when called, politely request that the interviewer call back at another, mutually convenient, time (non co-op interviews only). This request will allow you to refresh your memory on the organization and consider what points you want to make.

All of the usual advice about interview skills still applies. Your attire is your choice, but you may find that dressing professionally increases your confidence and allows you to perform better. Keep your résumé,

organization information, points that you want to highlight, and list of questions handy; in fact, keep these in front of you during the interview for easy reference. (Don't shuffle your papers though!) Have a pen and paper available to note any comments or questions that may occur to you during the interview. Choose your words carefully and be succinct. It is also important to vary your voice tone, tempo, and pitch to keep the employer's attention. Ensure that you are in a private setting to eliminate any distractions or background noise.

Video conferencing or Skype

In this type of interview, recruiters use video technology to conduct interviews at a distance. Use the same strategies as you would if you were meeting in person. Depending on the sophistication of the technology, you may experience short transmission delays. Make eye contact with the camera, which, to the employer, appears as direct "eye contact." Remember to check the monitor periodically to observe the interviewer's body language.

Second interview

When interviewing you for a long-term position, a prospective employer may invite you and other finalists to visit the organization. One purpose is to allow you to meet other staff. The second is to give more people an opportunity to interview you in greater depth to determine whether a good match is developing. Do not assume that a second interview will lead to a job offer; ensure you actively listen, ask relevant questions, and collect specific information about the company so you can elaborate on how your strengths match the organization's requirements. Use the opportunity to observe the work environment (e.g., physical space, relations between employees, work pace) to determine if the setting matches what you are seeking. The visit can take from one hour to an entire day. When an organization offers to pay your expenses to travel to the interview, be prudent in submitting costs. Your choice of moderate rather than luxurious accommodation, food, transportation, etc. will reflect your good judgment.

Approaches to interviewing

Structured interview

The goal of this approach is to reduce bias and assist the employer in making an objective decision. Typically, each candidate is asked the same set of questions, responses are recorded, and ratings are assigned to each response.

Unstructured interview

In this format of interview, questions are based on the applicant's résumé, so different questions will be posed to each applicant. Without structured guidelines, the conversation can be free flowing, thus making this method of interviewing the most prone to bias. Although this type of interview may seem more casual, you must still be well prepared and know the points you want to make. Be careful not to provide information you would not have communicated if the interview was more structured.

Semi-structured interview

This type of interview is a blend of the structured and unstructured formats, with a small number of pre-determined questions that will be asked of all candidates, along with some résumé-based questions.

Ending the interview

When it appears that the interviewer is about to end the interview, you should make sure you have covered certain points before you leave the room. Except in the case of co-op for which the hiring process

is clear, make sure you understand the process that will occur before a candidate is selected for the job (e.g., another interview in the same/another location, meetings with other individuals in the organization, etc.). Ask the interviewer when you can expect to hear about a decision or ask when you should make an inquiry as a follow-up.

Enthusiastically express your interest in the position (unless you are sure that you are not interested) and thank the interviewer for interviewing you. Ask for a business card or ensure that you have the interviewer's name, title, and contact information so that you can send a thank-you email. Make sure your email is sent within forty-eight hours of the interview. In addition to being a standard business courtesy, a thank-you letter may tip the scales in your favour if you are in close contention for the job.

Interview evaluation

After each interview, evaluate how well you did by completing the following [Interview evaluation worksheet](#).

Note

The way in which files open on your machine will depend on the web browser you are using, and the type(s) of software (e.g., Microsoft Word) installed on your device. For example, files may open up in a new window, download to your machine, etc.

If you do not receive a job offer and you felt that the "fit" was very good, for non-coop students, consider contacting the interviewer for feedback on your performance. Did the interviewer hire someone better qualified for the position? If so, what additional qualifications might you need to be hired for a similar position? Did you adequately present your qualifications? If not, stay motivated but learn from any feedback and make necessary changes for your next interview!