Interviewing

The interview is your opportunity to convince the employer that you are the right person for the job. Your resume gets you the interview, but the interview gets you the job, so it is important for you to be able to articulate your past work experiences and accomplishments and your future career goals, all while demonstrating your professionalism, communication skills, personality, and confidence. Therefore, you must be comfortable with the idea of marketing yourself to an interviewer.

Interviews in the U.S. are generally conducted over the phone, by video, or in person. Before you arrive for your interview, be sure to carefully review all available information about the company, reread the job posting, and prepare to answer questions about your goals, values, education, and experience.

If you are an international student, you should also be able to explain your visa status during an interview. Your educational background and work history may indicate that you are an international student, and hiring managers will ask the appropriate questions during the recruitment process. You must always be honest about your visa status, and about what your employment sponsorship needs may be.

Preparing for the Interview

For a successful interview experience you must demonstrate both self-awareness (an understanding of your own skills, abilities, values, and qualifications), as well as awareness about the employer.

Self-Awareness

Start by taking a personal inventory and assess your skills, education, experience, and personal qualities. By knowing your own values, interests, and skills, you will be able to determine whether a company or organization is a good fit for you. By doing a thorough self-assessment, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What are my career goals and objectives?
- What are my skills and abilities? How do they relate to the job for which I am interviewing?
- Where do I want to work and what types of positions interest me?
- What variables am I willing to negotiate (e.g., salary, geographic location)?
- What are my weaknesses? Am I prepared to address those weaknesses in an interview?

Employer Awareness

You must research the potential employer in order to be considered a conscientious candidate. The research will help you understand what skills and qualities the employer is looking for, and you will be able to anticipate what kinds of questions may be asked during the interview. Your research should include:

- Type of organization, its function, and its industry
- Structure and size of the organization
- Company history, mission, vision, and goals
- Leading competitors
- Product lines and services
- Geographic locations
- New trends in the field
- Local or national news reports that affect the company
Interview Format
Most interviews fit a general pattern lasting approximately 30-45 minutes, and a typical structure is as follows:

• **Greeting, introduction, and small talk (5 minutes):** The interviewer will build rapport with you to create a more relaxed atmosphere for the interview.

• **Discussion of your background and credentials (15-30 minutes):** The interviewer will ask you questions about you, your skills, your personal qualities, and your credentials.

• **Candidate questions (5 minutes):** You will have the opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer about the position and the company. Your questions should allow you to clarify information not answered in the interview or through research, and they give the interviewer an opportunity to assess your interest in the position. It is not okay to not have questions!

• **Wrap up (5 minutes):** The interviewer will explain the next steps in the decision-making and hiring process. You have the opportunity to restate your interest in the position, to thank the interviewer for his/her time, and to ask about what the next steps are or when you can expect to hear back from the organization. Be sure to get a business card so you can send a thank you note.

During the discussion of your background and credentials, the interviewer will ask questions about your past experiences, both within the classroom and in professional settings. Types of questions include:

• **Behavioral:** In the past, how have you applied your skills in particular situations? (“Tell me about a time when…”)

• **Situational:** How would you behave in a hypothetical future situation? (“What would you do if…”)

• **Technical:** What is your technical knowledge? (“Design a code that does X…”)

• **Off-the-Wall:** How do you think outside the box? (“If you could be a superhero, what would you want your super power to be?)

**STAR Technique**
In preparing for the interview, you should identify examples of situations where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks. During the interview, focus on a particular situation, not a general one, which relates to the question at hand. Describe the situation, tell what you did specifically, and articulate the positive result or outcome. Organize your response according to the **STAR technique** in order to answer the question effectively.

**S – Situation:** Describe the situation you were in by briefly providing context for your story.

**T – Task:** Explain the task that you needed to accomplish.

**A – Action:** Describe the various actions you took (and why) that led to accomplishing the task.

**R – Result:** Explain the results that followed because of the actions you took. If you would do things differently in the future based on what you learned, tell them that!

**Example:**

• **Situation:** Last year, I served as the vice president for my student organization, and I was responsible for planning a charity fundraiser.

• **Task:** My goal for the event was to raise $3,000 for a specific non-profit.
• **Action:** To maximize efficiency, I organized the volunteers into subcommittees and delegated assignments to each group so that each group was responsible for reaching out to a different demographic of constituents (local businesses, alumni, faculty/staff, etc.).

• **Result:** Due to the targeted approach to fundraising, we raised $3,750 and engaged the entire organization’s membership in participating in the fundraiser.

### Possible Interview Questions

- **Tell me about yourself.**
- **What do you know about us? Why do you want to work for us?**
- **What technical skills do you have that fit our position?**
- **What strengths do you offer?**
- **What is your greatest weakness?**
- **What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?**
- **Tell me about a team project of which you were particularly proud of your contribution.**
- **Describe a leadership role you have held, and tell me why you committed your time to it.**
- **What is your greatest accomplishment?**
- **What three trends do you see in the future of our industry?**
- **What characteristics do you think are important for this position?**
- **Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your future goals?**
- **What has been one of your greatest disappointments, and how did you respond to it?**
- **What challenges are you looking for in a position?**
- **What work experience has been most valuable to you and why?**
- **Describe your ideal supervisor.**
- **What is informatics?**
- **What is your greatest accomplishment?**
- **What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?**
- **Tell me about a team project of which you were particularly proud of your contribution.**
- **Describe a leadership role you have held, and tell me why you committed your time to it.**
- **What is your greatest accomplishment?**

### The Meaning Behind the Question

It is important to know that some employers ask questions that seem very simple. However, the meaning behind the questions may not be simple at all. (Adapted from the book *Money Jobs.*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When Interviewers Ask You...</th>
<th>What They Really Want to Know Is...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe yourself. How does your background qualify you for this job?</td>
<td>Can you take an incredible amount of information, organize it quickly in your head, and present it in a concise and articulate fashion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?</td>
<td>Are my perceptions of your strengths and weaknesses the same as yours? How mature are you in dealing with your weaknesses? Can you identify methods for self-improvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you want to be in five years?</td>
<td>What motivates you and what do you want out of life? Is this job merely a stepping stone to something better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why this job? Why this organization?</td>
<td>Have you done your homework? Are you analytical?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would your peers describe you?</td>
<td>How do you see yourself? Are you a leader or a follower?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes you think you will succeed in this organization?</td>
<td>Have you accurately identified the skills and expertise needed to succeed? Can you prove you have them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why should we hire you? What do you bring to this job?</td>
<td>How are your promotion and persuasion skills? Are you believable? If you can’t sell yourself, how will you be able to sell our products/company/ideas?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions to Ask the Interviewer

- What are the specific duties or specific projects assigned to a person in this position?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- How is job performance evaluated?
- Who would I report to? What kind of supervision would I receive?
- What is the supervisor’s management style?
- What are some short and long-term goals of the organization?
- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- What kinds of opportunities are available for professional growth?
- What is the skill set that the company is looking for in the person who fills this position?
- What do certain individuals like about working for the organization?
- What is the next step in the hiring process?

Salary should not be discussed during the early stages of the interview process, unless the employer introduces the topic. Before you interview, you should decide what your financial expectations and financial needs are and find out what the general salary range is for a similar position.

Legal and Illegal Questions

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Act, certain questions cannot be asked if the answers will disqualify a significantly larger percentage of members of a certain group than others. Before you go into an interview, be aware of what kinds of information you cannot be required to provide. The questions must be job related and necessary to judge an applicant’s competence for the job.

While most individuals will not encounter these questions at larger companies and organizations, you should be prepared with a response should you be asked inappropriate question. Practice your response with a friend or a career advisor. It is your choice whether or not to answer an illegal question. Your response can range from:

- Answer the question directly (it is not illegal for you to answer).
- Answer the perceived underlying question without answering the question directly (if asked “Do you have kids?” you might respond, “If you are concerned about my willingness to travel, I know that travel is an important aspect of this position, and it is something I look forward to.”)
- Ask how the question is relevant to your qualifications for the position.
- State that you do not think the information is relevant to your qualifications for the position.
- State that the question is an illegal question and/or you would prefer not to answer.
- Terminate the interview if you are uncomfortable and illegal questions continue.

Notice that the more in depth you go, the more defensive you might make the interviewer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Illegal Question</strong></th>
<th><strong>Legal Question</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Origin/Citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you a U.S. citizen?</td>
<td>Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your “native tongue”?</td>
<td>What languages can you read, speak, or write?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your (or your parents’) nationality, birthplace, etc.?</td>
<td>Will you now or in the future require sponsorship for an employment visa (e.g., H-1B)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age* (*These questions can be asked after you are hired.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When did you graduate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your birthdate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marital/Family Status</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your marital status?</td>
<td>Would you be able and willing to travel for this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you plan to have a family? When?</td>
<td>Would you be willing and able to work overtime if necessary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your child-care arrangements?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrest Record</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever been arrested?</td>
<td>Have you ever been convicted of a crime? (Asking for details is permissible, if the crime could be related to the job.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If you have been in the military, were you honorably discharged?</td>
<td>In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What type of training or education did you receive in the military?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affiliations and Memberships</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?</td>
<td>List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any disabilities?</td>
<td>Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the following medical history.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How is your family's health?</td>
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<tr>
<td>When and how did you lose your eyesight?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Description</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How tall are you?</td>
<td>Are you able to lift 50 lbs and carry it 100 yards, as part of the job?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How much do you weigh?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Tips for a Successful Interview**

- Confirm the time and location of your interview. If you are unfamiliar with where the company is located, check it out ahead of time.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Bring copies of your resume, references, and work samples.
- Ask the interviewer for contact info so you can send a thank you.
- Bring a pen and pad of paper to take notes if needed.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, make good eye contact, maintain good posture, and smile.
- Be ready to answer common and specific interview questions, and draft a list of questions to ask.
• Avoid talking negatively about former employers or coworkers.
• Don’t be afraid to talk openly and honestly about your full range of strengths and abilities.
• If you are unsure about your English-speaking skills, practice by speaking up in class, making presentations, or expanding your circle of native English-speaking friends.
• Frame your cultural background, your international experience, and your multilingual abilities as an asset.
• Avoid carrying too much with you. Bring only your keys and a portfolio if you can. Leave your phone behind.

Dress for Success
Your appearance during an interview is very important, as you never have a second chance to make a first impression! You should dress according to your own style and budget, but your clothes should be professional looking.

Women
• Suits: A well-fitted solid color navy, gray, or black pantsuit or skirt is recommended. Business dresses are acceptable in less formal or less conservative fields. A skirt should be knee-length and should cover your thighs when you are seated.
• Shirts: A solid or light colored blouse is ideal.
• Hosiery: Plain, non-patterned. Choose a light, natural color.
• Shoes: Choose low to medium heels, basic pumps with a closed toe. Avoid strappy, multicolored shoes. Color should complement the color of the interview suit.
• Makeup and nails: Minimal or natural-looking makeup. Avoid bright colors. Use a neutral or clear nail polish on clean and manicured nails. Nail length should not be excessively long.
• Hair: Should be freshly cleaned and neatly styled. If you are worried that your hair will fall in your face/eyes, be sure to pull it back securely and neatly before you interview.
• Accessories: Minimize jewelry – avoid dangling earrings; wear no more than one or two rings per hand and a dress watch, no dangling or distracting bracelets. Avoid purses; carry a portfolio or briefcase instead.
• NOTE: Be absolutely certain to shower and apply deodorant before the interview. Personal hygiene is important and body odor is unacceptable. However, perfume should be minimal, not overpowering.

Men
• Suits: A two-pieceed, well-fitted matching suit in navy, dark gray, or black is best. Color should be solid, invisible plaid, or subtle weave.
• Shirts: A pressed long-sleeved white or light blue dress shirt.
• Ties: Choose a good quality silk tie that coordinates with the suit (solid color or understated pattern). Be sure the knot is neat and centered on your neck, and the bottom of the tie should just reach your belt.
• Shoes: Clean and polished lace-up or slip-on shoes in black or dark brown.
• Belt: Wear a black or brown belt, with no large buckles, that matches your shoes.
• Socks: Dark, mid-calf so that no skin is visible when you sit down. Sock color should match your pant color. DO NOT wear white athletic socks.
• Hair and nails: Clean, neat, and well groomed. Beards and mustaches should be neat and trimmed. Fingernails should be trimmed short.
• Accessories: Avoid flashy cufflinks, rings, gold chains, or earrings. A wedding or college ring is acceptable. Do not carry a backpack; bring a portfolio or briefcase.
• NOTE: Be absolutely certain to shower and apply deodorant before the interview. Personal hygiene is important and body odor is unacceptable. However, cologne should be minimal, not overpowering.
**Video Interviews**

In addition to phone and in-person interviews, a number of employers are utilizing online communication tools, such as Skype or Google Hangout, to conduct “face-to-face” video interviews. While the medium is different, you should prepare for a video interview in the same way you prepare for an in-person interview – do your research, know the job description, prepare responses to interview questions, and have questions to ask the interviewer.

Follow these other tips to ensure you have a successful video interview.

**Before the Interview**

- **Make sure you have a professional username and picture**: Just as your email address should be professional, your online usernames should be as well. Make sure your username and picture are interview appropriate. Be careful about including personal information such as your birthday or year (e.g., IU_Student1998, Hoosier-Guy122596)

- **Dress professionally**: Treat your video interview like an in-person interview, and dress professionally from head to toe, not just head to waist. Blues, blacks, and grays look best on video and they do not create any distractions. Stripes or plaids can look overly busy on a screen, and flashy jewelry can also look distracting.

- **Test your technology**: Allow plenty of time to test your internet connection, camera, and microphone to ensure they are all working properly. Make sure that your computer is fully charged and plugged in, so that the battery does not die in the middle of the interview.

- **Prepare your surroundings**: Find a quiet place to interview, and make sure that your background and surroundings are clear and distraction-free. You, not the piles of laundry behind you, should be the focal point of the video. Check the lighting to ensure that you do not show up as a shadow on video.

- **Place your camera at eye-level**: Keeping your camera at eye level will create a more flattering shot of you.

**During the Interview**

- **Look at the camera**: It is tempting to look at the screen or at yourself during a video call. Looking directly into the camera is the best way to maintain eye contact with the interviewer.

- **Speak clearly**: You do not need to shout, but you should speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard.

- **Be aware of non-verbal cues**: Even over video, non-verbal cues and body language make an impression on interviewers. Be sure to smile and sit up straight – slouching can make you seem disengaged. Avoid the temptation to fidget, look bored, or allow yourself to be distracted. Act as if you are sitting in the interviewer’s office.

- **Stay focused**: Close all other programs on your computer, and avoid typing or clicking during the interview.

- **Have notes**: While it is important to be familiar with your materials and your talking points, you can have copies of your resume in front of you, and sticky notes or notecards can be to the side of the screen to remind you of important things you want to cover.

- **Address technical problems immediately**: If you are having persistent problems with your connection, you can bring it to the interviewer’s attention and suggest stopping the call and trying to reconnect.
Interview Follow-Up

Thank You Note

After the interview, always send a thank you letter to the employer. Many candidates overlook this thoughtful step in the job search process.

- Send thank you letters within 24-48 hours of the interview.
- Thank everyone that interviewed you.
- Be professional and make sure there are no typographical errors.
- If sending by mail, use a block or modified block business letter format.
- A handwritten note is a good way to add a personal touch, but not if you have poor handwriting.
- Use the letter to reiterate your interest in the position and mention something specific you learned during the interview.

Example:

September 24, 2013

Mr. Trevor Technology  
Senior IT Director  
ACME Technologies  
1140 Maine Street  
TechTown, IN 47520

Dear Mr. Technology:

Thank you for interviewing me for the software developer position yesterday at the School of Informatics and Computing. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about ACME Technologies.

The position offers an incredible opportunity to learn about the entire software development process in the context of a larger company. I believe that my education at the School of Informatics and Computing as well as my software development internship experiences with Dot, Inc. and IT, Inc. fit ideally with the job requirements outlined. I am very eager to work in your team environment, so I was pleased to learn about the culture of collaboration at ACME Technologies. I know that I could make a significant contribution to the projects that you described.

I would like to reiterate my strong interest in the software developer position and in working with you. Please feel free to call me at (812) 855-5555 or contact me at jmatics@indiana.edu if I can provide you with any additional information.

Thank you again for the interview and for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

John Matics