

Interviewing

Put your best foot forward!

- ✓ Prepare
- ✓ Practice
- ✓ Be a STAR!

Career Services & Professional Development

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Interviewing

There are several types of interview questions: general, behavioral, technical and case. Behavioral and technical questions require more preparation. Case interviews assess your critical thinking and problem solving abilities. This guide will focus on key interview techniques and will show you how you can best prepare for answering interview questions. Regardless of the type of interview, your goal is always the same: present your qualifications and demonstrate why you are the best candidate for the position!

THE STAR APPROACH TO INTERVIEWING

The STAR approach helps you paint a picture for the interviewer of your skills and experiences. There is an art to telling a good story, and this method will guide you as you prepare to tell your story in an interview.

STAR stands for Situation/Task/Action/Result. Spend some time creating your STAR stories and you will be able to give the interviewer the examples they need to see that you can do the job they are hiring for.

S ituation	Set the stage and paint a visual picture for the interviewer. Briefly mention the experience you are referencing.
T ask	Describe the task you performed. Use enough detail so that the interviewer understands the context.
A ction	What action did you take based on the situation or task? If it was in a group setting focus on what YOU did. Describe what you actually did, not what you might do.
R esult	What results did you achieve? What was the outcome? What did you accomplish?

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

You can use examples from internships, work experience, activities, class projects, team participation, community service, hobbies, travel, study abroad, student organizations, and more. Reflect on your experiences and choose stories that highlight specific characteristics such as initiative, innovation, leadership, working with others / teamwork, critical thinking, communication, problem solving, overcoming obstacles, creativity, dealing with ambiguity, and flexibility.

You can also use examples of special accomplishments, such as winning the election and becoming president or treasurer of your student organization, raising money for charity or getting awarded a special scholarship for your academic accomplishments. Be as specific as possible when you answer the questions.

HOW DO YOU PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW AHEAD OF TIME?

1 Find out who is conducting the interview

When you are called to schedule your interview, ask who you will be interviewing with. Get the interviewer's name and job title, and write it down along with the date, time and location of your interview.

- Once you have the interviewer's information, find out what you can about them: Search for them on LinkedIn | Google the interviewer's name | Look on the company's website

2 Do your career homework - review the job description and research the company

Employers expect you to know about their organization and industry. Chances are high that they will ask you questions designed to test whether you did your homework.

- Review the company's website and any literature you have, know the latest "news" about the company
 - The UIW Library databases can help you conduct this research: [Factiva](#), [Reference USA](#), and [Business Journals and the Book of Lists](#)
- Talk to other students who have interned or worked with the company, find out if you know anyone currently employed at the company and speak to them
- Generate insightful questions to ask the interviewer about the company based on what you've read and heard. Don't just ask questions for the sake of asking them – make them count!

3 Identify the skills, projects and characteristics you want to communicate

Review your resume again to make sure you are prepared to answer any questions pertaining to the content

- Think about your skills and how you can showcase them
- Identify which experiences you want to feature (hint: tailor them to the job description)
- Come up with at least six to eight experiences that demonstrate your skills and personal characteristics

4 Create Your STAR Stories

Write out your STAR stories and develop your answer to the guaranteed question – **Tell me about yourself?** You can use the attached worksheet or create an excel spreadsheet to write out your STAR stories. We suggest identifying six to eight examples where you demonstrated behaviors and skills that the employer is seeking based on their job description.

- Think in terms of examples that will showcase your top selling points.
- Half of your examples should be positive, such as accomplishments, goals and results
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively, but either ended positively or clearly communicate how you “made lemonade out of lemons”
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life or from one experience
- Use fairly recent examples, examples that showcase you can do the job
- Your stories should be no longer than one to two minutes each

5 Select Your Interview Outfit

During the job search process, first impressions are critical. Remember, you are marketing a product -- **yourself** -- to a potential employer, and the first thing the employer sees when greeting you is your attire. Your outfit should be appropriate to the occasion and should not overshadow you. The employer should remember your positive attributes, not what you were wearing.

How should you dress? Dressing conservatively is the safest route. Investigate your prospective employer and match your outfit to the company culture. An important caveat: if the company is known for its casual environment, dress one degree more formal than the norm. If t-shirts and jeans are standard; dress business casual. Remember you are making a first impression and trying to LAND THE JOB. Everyone else at the company has a job and already passed the test – you need to earn the right to be casual in the future. If you overdress (which is rare, but can happen) or underdress (the more likely scenario), the potential employer may feel that you don't care enough about the job to take the time to learn about the company's culture and dress appropriately.

6 Practice and Become Mentally Prepared

- Practice will help you reduce interview anxiety, improve your interview skills and, in many cases, gain important feedback about how you interview. It will also help you sharpen your verbal communication skills which are extremely important. According to a Society of Human Resource Management survey, poor communication skills were the number one turn-off for hiring managers.
- Set up a mock interview with a Career Counselor

- A Career Counselor can help you improve your presentation skills, give feedback and suggestions, and hone your interviewing skills to help you get that all important job offer
- Wear your interview outfit to the mock interview so the Career Counselor can evaluate if it is appropriate
- Practice in the mirror, or with a friend or relative

DO's and DON'Ts

DO

- Answer questions honestly, thoroughly, and sincerely – if you don't know the answer, indicate that
- Make good eye contact and have a firm, but not rough or limp, hand shake
 - The key ingredients to a good handshake are: hold the person's hand firmly; Shake web-to-web; three times maximum; Maintain constant eye contact; Radiate positive aura
- Even though the interviewer already has your resume, bring extra copies to the interview just in case you meet with additional people and they request it
- Be polite, tactful, and sincere
- Be neatly and appropriately dressed in business attire (conservative, not trendy)

DON'T

- Don't try to tell the interviewer what you think he/she wants to hear
- Don't be afraid to discuss your successes and most positive traits
- Be careful about saying negative things about past experiences (e.g. insult a company that you interned with)
- Don't display a negative or arrogant attitude
- Don't be late unless there is an emergency!
- Don't miss the interview

WHAT DO YOU DO AFTER THE INTERVIEW?

*Follow-Up

- Email or write a "thank-you" note to the interviewer – email is perfectly acceptable
- Provide the interviewer with updated contact information if it has changed since you last communicated
- If you have received other offers or have deadlines and need to hear back from the company, contact the interviewer to give them an update and explain your timeframe. If you have accepted an offer remove yourself from their consideration immediately

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of typical behavior-based questions, from The Ultimate Job Search Kit by Damir Joseph Stimac. Competencies sought by the interviewer are listed in parentheses:

1. Tell me about yourself. (what would qualify you for this job/what talents do you bring to the company)
2. Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read? (research / written communication)
3. Give me a specific example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticized your work in front of others. How did you respond? How has that event shaped the way you communicate with others? (oral communication)
4. Give me a specific example of a time when you sold your supervisor or professor on an idea or concept. How did you proceed? What was the result? (assertiveness)

5. Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused? (commitment to task)
6. Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play? (creativity and imagination)
7. Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor. How did you approach the problem? What role did others play? What was the outcome? (decision making)
8. Describe a time when you got co-workers or classmates who dislike each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome? (teamwork)
9. Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn? (time management)
10. Describe a time when you put your needs aside to help a co-worker or classmate understand a task.
11. How did you assist them? What was the result? (flexibility)
12. Describe two specific goals you set for yourself and how successful you were in meeting them. What factors led to your success in meeting your goals? (goal setting)

INTERVIEW PREP CHECKLIST

YES	NO	
		I can list five things about myself that make me a good candidate for this job
		I have prepared my STAR Stories for my interview
		I have practiced my interview skills by attending a mock interview with a Career Advisor in Career Services
		If I am asked for personal references, I have the names, telephone numbers and email addresses of three people who have agreed to be my references and I have contacted them about this particular position
		I am dressed properly for the job I am applying for
		I've got directions, have made transportation arrangements and will get to interview on time
		I have researched the company and prepared questions to ask the interviewer

STAR/STORY WORKSHEET

Interview Question: _____

1. Situation

2. Task

3. Action

4. Result