



FOLLOW YOUR

PATH:

INTERVIEWING

GUIDE

Paul Smith's College  
Career Center and Academic  
Success Center

## Interview DOs


- ✓ Dress appropriately for the industry.
- ✓ Know the exact time and location of your interview; know how long it takes to get there, park, find a rest room to freshen up, etc.
- ✓ Arrive early; 10 minutes prior to the interview start time.
- ✓ Treat every person you encounter with courtesy and respect. Their opinions of you might be solicited during hiring decisions.
- ✓ Offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, and have a friendly expression when greeted by your interviewer.
- ✓ Listen to be sure you understand your interviewer's name and the correct pronunciation. Even when your interviewer gives you a first and last name, address your interviewer by title (Ms., Mr., Dr.) and last name, until invited to do otherwise.
- ✓ Maintain good eye contact during the interview.
- ✓ Sit still in your seat; avoid fidgeting and slouching.
- ✓ Respond to questions and back up your statements about yourself with specific examples whenever possible.
- ✓ Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- ✓ Be thorough in your responses while being concise in your wording.
- ✓ Be honest and be yourself.
- ✓ Exhibit a positive attitude.
- ✓ Have questions prepared to ask the interviewer. Having done your research about the employer in advance, ask questions which you did not find answered in your research.
- ✓ Make sure you understand the employer's next steps in the hiring process; know when and from whom you should expect to hear next. Know what action you are expected to take next, if any.
- ✓ When the interviewer concludes the interview, offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, and depart gracefully.
- ✓ After the interview, make notes right away so you don't forget critical details.
- ✓ Write a thank-you note or email to everyone you met during the interview process promptly.

## Interview DON'Ts

- ✓ Don't make excuses. Take responsibility for your decisions and your actions.
- ✓ Don't make negative comments about previous employers or professors (or others).
- ✓ Don't falsify application materials or answers to interview questions.
- ✓ Don't treat the interview casually, as if you are just shopping around or doing the interview for practice.
- ✓ Don't give the impression you are only interested in salary; don't ask about salary and benefits issues until the subject is brought up by your interviewer.
- ✓ Don't act as though you would take any job or are desperate for employment.
- ✓ A job search can be hard work and involve frustrations; don't exhibit frustrations or a negative attitude in an interview.
- ✓ Don't take cell phone calls during an interview. If you carry a cell phone, turn it off during the interview to be sure it doesn't ring.
- ✓ Don't break the rules for proper interview dress.

## What to Wear...

**Business Casual vs. Professional**  
Have an interview or professional event coming up? Learn how to decode dress code.



Labels for the illustration:

- Suit Jacket or Cardigan Can Be Added for a Classy Look
- More Colors & Patterns Acceptable
- Khaki Pants, Nice Trousers, or Fingertip-length Skirt
- Flats or Heels Acceptable
- Keep Colors To: (Color palette)
- Suit Jacket or Business Dress
- Suit Pants or Slacks
- Skirts & Dresses Extend to Knee
- Low-Heels Acceptable

**Tips for Success in Any Business Situation**

- 1 When in doubt, dress conservatively.
- 2 A suit (suit & tie for males) will suffice in most situations
- 3 Make sure your outfit is wrinkle-free.
- 4 Stick with solid colors and tighter-woven fabrics or simple patterns.
- 5 Accessories should be kept simple: basic pumps, modest jewelry, light make-up & light perfume.
- 6 Wear a belt and a watch.
- 7 Be sure your hair is neatly trimmed or groomed. Avoid the "messy" look.
- 8 Shirts with lettering or graphics should not be worn.
- 9 Check your outfit for missing buttons, lint, or a crooked tie.
- 10 A skirt should be no shorter than the tips of your middle fingers' above the knee.

**PURDUE CCO**

## General Guidelines

- You don't want your clothes to be noticed more than your thoughts or accomplishments.
- Wear clean, nicely fitted, and flattering clothes.
- Wear something you feel comfortable and confident in!
- Minimal skin should be showing.
- Err on the formal rather than the casual side of dress.
- Dress conservatively while still showing a bit of your personality with an accent color or piece of jewelry.
- Try to avoid strongly scented perfume or cologne.
- Make sure your hair is neatly trimmed and groomed.
- Be sure to turn off your cellphone.
- Carry a bag, briefcase, or pad folio to leave one hand open to shake hands.

## Specific Advice for Women

- Do not wear jeans, leggings, or jeggings.
- Jewelry and makeup should be kept minimal.
- Follow the rule of 13 (count earrings, necklace, rings, watch, bracelets, scarf, belt, pins, etc.).
- Dresses and skirts should be no shorter than the knee.

## Specific Advice for Men

- Keep any facial hair neatly trimmed.
- Consider wearing a coat and tie.
- Wear dark colored socks and dress shoes.

## Commonly Asked Interview Questions

- Relax and tell me a little about yourself.
- Why do you want to work as a...?
- What qualifications do you have?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Tell me about your current (or last) job.
- Did you ever have a disagreement with a boss? Why? Why not?
- Tell me about your education or training.
- Do you plan to continue your education?
- Give an example of a problem you faced at work and how you solved it.
- In your lifetime, what was your proudest accomplishment? What did you learn?
- What is your biggest strength? And weakness?
- Tell me about your key skills.
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- Would you rather be in a charge of a project or work as part of the team?
- Tell me about a time when you delivered more than what your boss or teacher expected?

### ***“Tell me about yourself?”***

Make a short, organized statement of your education and professional achievements and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.

### ***“Why do you want to work here?” or “What about our company interests you?”***

Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company.

### ***“Why did you leave your last job?”***

The interviewer may want to know if you had any problems on your last job. If you did not have any problems, simply give a reason, such as: relocated away from job; company went out of business; laid off; temporary job; no possibility of advancement; wanted a job better suited to your skills.

If you did have problems, be honest. Show that you can accept responsibility and learn from your mistakes. You should explain any problems you had (or still have) with an employer, but don't describe that employer in negative terms. Demonstrate that it was a learning experience that will not affect your future work.

### ***“What are your best skills?”***

If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills.

### ***“What is your major weakness?”***

Be positive; turn a weakness into a strength or mention how you are improving that weakness.

### ***“Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?”***

The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.

### ***“What are your career goals?” or “What are your future plans?”***

The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.

## **The STAR Technique for Behavioral Interviews**

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that “past performance in comparable circumstances is the best predictor of future performance.” In place of asking hypothetical questions (“How would you handle...?”), interviewers ask specific questions (“Describe a time when you had to...”) to elicit concrete examples of desired behaviors from the past.

### **Steps to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions**

1. **Listen to the question carefully.** Commonly, behavioral interview questions tend to be longwinded and may sometimes sound vague.
2. **Ensure you understand the question.** You may paraphrase the question and ask the interviewer if you understand it correctly. If necessary, ask the interviewer to repeat the question.
3. **Organize your answer.** Allow yourself five to eight seconds to collect your thoughts and structure your answer.
4. **State your answer.** Attempt to conclude your answer in about three minutes.
5. **Answer follow-up questions.** These questions can be confirming questions that require simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers or clarifying questions that require brief answers.



And remember, do not think of new details as you answer. Say what you had planned for and end.

**Answering a Question:** In behavioral interviewing, every answer should specifically address the skill being addressed. Your answer should relate an experience from a previous job, class project, community service project, etc. Present a diverse set of skills and experiences. The following are some example questions:

Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a paper. What was the topic? What journals did you use?

Give me a specific example of 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?

Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do?

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?

What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in building and maintaining successful business relationships? Give examples of how you've made them work for you.

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?

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?

Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines?

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 roles did others play?

## What to Ask...

### Your prospective supervisor:

What would be my primary responsibilities?  
What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job? In the first year?  
What are some of the department's ongoing and anticipated special projects?  
How much contact does the department and staff have with upper management?  
If hired, would I report directly to you or someone else?  
What are the hours and expectations of evening/weekend/overtime work?  
Does the job require travel? How often? Where?  
What opportunities are there for growth within the company? Relocation?  
What makes a person successful in this position?  
What skills would I need to be successful?  
What opportunities are there for professional development?  
What type of training and orientation will I receive?  
How will I get feedback on my job performance? How often are performance reviews given?

### A prospective coworker:

What do you like best/least about working for this department/company?  
Can you describe a typical day/week?  
Do you feel free to express your ideas and concerns?  
What are the possibilities for professional growth and promotion?  
How much interaction do you have with superiors, colleagues, and customers?  
Who are the other people I would be working with and what do they do?  
Do you have the opportunity to work independently? In teams?  
How long have you been with the company? Does your future seem secure?  
How would you describe the company culture?  
Does the company support a work life balance?

### The human resource manager:

Why is this position open? Is it a newly created job?  
What type of orientation or training do new employees receive?  
Who determines raises and promotions, and how?  
Are employees encouraged and given the opportunity to share their ideas?  
What do employees like best and least about the company?  
What is the rate of employee turnover?  
What employee benefits does the company offer?  
Could you give me a tour? I'd like to see where everyone works.

### Yourself about the environment:

Do the employees seem happy? Are they friendly? Do they seem helpful?  
Are they enthusiastic about their work and about the organization?  
Do you feel welcome? Do you like the people and the facilities?  
Does it seem like a good place to work?

**Note:** Do not ask about salary and benefits during a first interview. It is best to wait until it is brought up by the employer or an offer is extended.

# Illegal Interview Questions

## Questions Related to:

- *Country of national origin or birth place*
- *Age*
- *Marital/Family Status*
- *Gender or Sex*
- *Sexual Orientation*
- *Disabilities*
- *Religion*
- *Race or Ethnicity*
- *Medical History*
- *Arrest Record*
- *Military History*
- *Affiliations*

## Preparing for Various Types of Interviews

**Phone** – As a first screening, many employers will conduct phone interviews. During a phone interview, the employer or search director will spend approximately 20 – 30 minutes asking you a set of preliminary questions. The interview may be conducted by one individual or a group in a search committee. During a phone interview, follow the protocols below:

- Find a quiet space, free of distractions to conduct the phone interview.
- Use a landline, if possible, rather than a cellphone if your cellphone service is questionable.
- Speak clearly and slowly because it's much harder to communicate over the phone. Standing up while on the phone will allow you to project your voice.
- Have your preparation materials in front of you including your resume, information about the company, and any questions you'd like to ask at the end of the interview.
- Dress for success. Even though the interviewer can't see you, dressing for the interview will help you to take it seriously!
- Have water nearby!
- Have a pen and paper in front of you for notes.

**Skype** – As a first or second screening, many employers will also conduct Skype interviews before deciding who they will invite for an in-person interview. Similarly, to a phone interview, the employer will spend about 30 minutes asking a set of preliminary questions. The interview can be conducted by one individual or a group.

- Find a quiet space, free of distractions.
- Make sure your background is appropriate. For instance, if you are in your dorm room, make sure there are no inappropriate posters on your wall in the background for the interviewer to see.
- Test your connection and sound before the interview.
- Have your preparation materials in front of you including your resume, information about the company, and any questions you'd like to ask at the end of the interview. Also keep a pen and paper in front of you for notes.
- Dress for success. Even though you won't be meeting the interviewer in person, dressing up and creating a good first impression are essential!
- Have water nearby!

**Group** – In some instances, you might be asked to participate in a group interview process. The process of a group interview can be different depending on the organization. During a group interview, you may be asked to complete a teambuilding task with other interviewees, discuss a case study as a group, or be asked questions in more of a panel format.

- Find a balance between standing out and stepping on toes. You want to be sure your voice is heard during a group interview, but you also want to give other interviewees the chance to share their opinions and ideas. This will show your leadership and teamwork abilities.
- Find ways to make connections between what other interviews or interviewees are saying and your own ideas.
- Remain upbeat and positive! Group interviews can be challenging, but your positive attitude will show through.

**Meals** – During some interviews, a meal can be part of the agenda for the day. Don't get too casual during the lunch or dinner because you are still being interviewed!

- Maintain proper dining etiquette!
- Don't expect that you will actually eat too much because you will still be expected to answer questions and continue to hold conversations.
- Carefully consider what you order during the meal. For instance, you don't want something too messy or that will get in your teeth.

## Interviewing Checklist

- ✓ Prepare your resume, cover letter, and professional portfolio.
- ✓ Request any recommendations and compile a reference list.
- ✓ Obtain proper interview attire.
- ✓ Research the position, company/organization, and industry.
- ✓ Practice commonly asked interview questions.
- ✓ Prepare for the various types of interviews you might encounter such as phone, skype, group, job fair, or one on one.
- ✓ Identify who will interview you and in what setting (individual, group). Be sure to get the correct spelling of their names and titles.
- ✓ Determine the intended length of the interview (one hour, half day, full day). Find out if lunch, tours, and/or presentations are included.
- ✓ Obtain the location of the interview and prepare directions. Find out what parking options there are.
- ✓ Send a thank you note to everyone with whom you met following the interview (handwritten or email). Include details from the interview to personalize each thank you note.
- ✓ Reflect on the interviewing process and do a self-evaluation of your interviewing skills.

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BEST  
VERSION  
OF you**

DO THE BEST YOU CAN