

Interviewing Strategies

Think of an interview as a conversation... a two-way exchange of information. While the interviewer is interested in learning more about what you have to offer, you should be interested in learning more about the organization and the position for which you are interviewing.

Before the Interview

Research the company. Research will help you learn more about the organization's mission/philosophy, strategies, goals, culture, etc. This will enable you to speak intelligently about the organization and how you could contribute to its success.

Consider your interview attire. First impressions are critical. Dressing properly will give you a competitive edge and make a positive first impression. For additional information on interview attire, review the CCS handout "A Guide to Business Attire."

Never be late to an interview. Identify your travel route and time, your parking options, and the location of the building where the interview will be conducted. At a minimum, arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview time. This will allow you the opportunity to gain your composure and focus.

During the Interview

Be professional... but be yourself. How you carry yourself in an interview will leave a huge impression. Give a firm handshake when meeting your interviewer. Sit up straight and maintain a pleasant demeanor. Maintain eye contact with your interviewer when talking and listening. However, avoid being overly rigid or disingenuous. Give the interviewer the best version of you.

Ask questions. Toward the end of the interview, you will likely be asked if you have any questions. Be prepared to ask questions that show your interest and knowledge about the company. Just as they are assessing you as a potential candidate, you are assessing them as a potential employer.

For strategies on answering interview questions, see the reverse side of this guide.

After the Interview

Follow up. Send a hand-written follow-up thank you note within twenty-four hours thanking the interviewer for his/her time and reinforcing the interview by briefly recounting your qualifications and stating your continued interest in the position. Even if you decide that the position is not right for you, a thank you letter ends the experience on a pleasant, positive note.

The Phone Interview

If you are participating in a phone interview, make sure you are in an environment free of distractions (TV, music, noisy roommates, etc.) and avoid doing anything that might create unpleasant noise on the other end of the line (chewing, drinking, smoking).

Speak clearly and in a normal, conversational voice. If you are worried about hearing the interviewer clearly, wear earphones. NEVER interrupt your interview to take another call.

The Webcam Interview

If you are participating in a webcam interview, know what video technology (Skype, Facetime) you are using. Check connection, settings, and picture quality well in advance.

Dress just as you would for an in-person interview... from head to toe! Don't risk an interviewer discovering you are dressed improperly from the waist down.

Choose an environment free of distractions, and make sure everything else on the computer (email, Facebook) is closed. Also, remember that the interviewer can see everything the webcam picks up. Make sure the room is clean and well lit and that there are no embarrassing or unprofessional items within view of the camera.

CCS offers rooms you can reserve to conduct your phone or webcam interview. Visit the front desk or call 512-471-9421 to check availability and reserve a room.

Answering Interview Questions

Take a moment to collect your thoughts. Once a question is asked, take a couple of seconds to think about how you want to answer it. By giving yourself time to think over your answer, you allow yourself the opportunity to provide a clear, focused response and avoid rambling. It's also a great way to calm nerves if you have them! If you are afraid of creating an "awkward pause," simply ask for a moment to think about the question before answering.

Use concrete examples. Don't just tell your interviewer that you are skilled/knowledgeable in a certain area – PROVE IT. For instance, if you want to convey that you are good at time management, describe an occasion when you had to manage your time well in order to complete a task by the deadline. An interviewer is much more likely to remember your answer if you provide them with a unique, memorable example.

BE HONEST. Never lie about or even embellish your experience and qualifications. True, you don't want to outright admit potential deficiencies, but being dishonest is not the way to go. Moreover, skilled interviewers are trained to detect when someone is bluffing.

Questions to Expect

“Tell me about yourself.” Interviewers many times lead off the interview with this question. However, the interviewer is NOT asking for your life story or your personal preferences, interests, and hobbies. Instead, what they are asking you to do is elaborate on what has motivated you to interview for this job and why you are an ideal fit. Your response may include: your current field of study and past or current jobs/internships or research; what influenced you to pursue that field of study; and how the job matches your professional interests and goals.

Behavioral-based questions. This type of questioning is based on the belief that past behavior predicts future work performance. The interviewer will ask you how you have handled specific situations. When a question begins with "Describe a time when..." or "Give me an example..." you should recognize it as a behavior-based question and respond with a summary of an experience that adequately illustrates the behavior mentioned. So, for example, if an interviewer asks you to provide an example of a time when you faced conflict while working on a team and how you handled it, you might respond by recounting a group project in class where you mediated an argument between two group mates.

Strengths/weaknesses. By having you describe your strengths and weaknesses, an interviewer can gain greater insight into your self-awareness. You should think critically about your strengths and weaknesses beforehand and be able to address both fully. For strengths, focus on attributes that would allow you to succeed in the position and provide examples of when you utilized those attributes. Weaknesses are a little trickier; you don't want to say you don't have any – we all do – nor do you want to give a false weakness like “I'm too dedicated.” What the interviewer actually wants is for you to provide *areas for growth*; that is, areas in which you seek to improve or learn new things. Describe not only the area in which you wish to grow but also HOW you intend to improve in that area. Just avoid mentioning anything that would be considered essential to performing the job.

Career Advisors are available to meet with you to review specific techniques for answering interview questions, as well as additional interviewing strategies. Make an appointment with CCS by logging into STAR or by calling our office at 512-471-9421. For additional online resources, visit the Career Toolkit on our website (moody.utexas.edu/ccs).