

1. Interviewing Tips: Preparation

Congratulations! You've been selected for the job interview. Time to prepare!

Conduct Your Research

It is essential that you prepare yourself for the interview by doing research on the organization. Interviewers will want to know why you want to work for them as opposed to working for some other organization. You should have knowledge of their services, products, or goals before going into the interview. This is a must for [on-campus interviews](#). UCS also recommends that you research the industry for which you are interviewing (e.g., banking, insurance, advertising, non-profits).

A few good resources for conducting your research include:

- The employer's homepage (if available) - most employers have a website, and you can be certain that they will expect you to have viewed it!
- College professors and people already working in the field.
- Stock brokerage firms for annual reports.
- Online career research tools such as [Vault](#) and [Wetfeet](#) (available through UCS website).
- Job Choices Magazine for basic information on organizations which hire college graduates
- Industry-related magazines or journals.
- Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Business Periodicals Index, F & S Index of Corporations and Industries for magazine articles about an organization, products, or services.

The publications mentioned above, as well as others, are available for reading in the UCS Resource Room.

Practice Makes Perfect

- Schedule a practice interview with UCS [link to page about UCS interview resources.] No time for a practice interview? Drop by UCS during walk-in hours to get last-minute tips from a counselor.
- Make [a list of questions](#) you want to ask about the organization.
- Rehearse answers to [questions](#) that employers are likely to ask you.

The Day of Your Interview

- Dress appropriately! Appearance is the first thing you communicate to others. A suit for both women and men is almost always appropriate for all types of interviews. Visit [What to Wear](#) for more detailed tips on interview attire.
- Know the name of the interviewer. Be ready to greet him/her by a last name and be prepared for a handshake
- Bring a pen and portfolio-style folder containing extra copies of your resume. Don't bring your book bag to the interview.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early. You *never* want to start off an interview with an excuse for being late. Also, you may be asked to fill out paperwork before your interview begins.
- Take a deep breath and give it your all!

2. Interviewing Tips: Sample Questions

Questions that may be Asked of You

Education

How did you happen to choose this major/college/field? What would you change about your education? How has your education prepared you for work in this field? Tell me about your grades. What courses have you enjoyed most?

Work Experience

What jobs have you had? What was your relationship with your supervisor? How has your experience prepared you for a job with our organization?

Knowledge of Career Field

Why have you chosen this career field? What opportunities do you see in this field?

Your Goals

What are your short- and long-term career goals? Do you have plans for graduate study? What do you see yourself doing in five years? Ten years?

Your Work Values

In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable? What type of work appeals to you most? How well do you work under pressure? How would you describe your ideal job? What two or three things are most important to you in your job? What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work? How do you feel about regular hours/routine work/overtime/irregular work hours?

Extracurricular Activities

What leadership roles have you had? What organizations have you joined and what have you learned from them? What activities will you continue after graduation?

Your Limitations

Could you live in a big city/country/suburban environment? What size city do you prefer? What geographical location? Are you willing to travel/relocate? How about overtime work?

Your Personality

What do you read in your spare time? Where do you like to spend your vacations/spare time? What displeases you most about people? What qualities do you admire in other people? How would you describe yourself? What motivates you to put forth your best effort?

Your Communication Skills

Tell me a story. Tell me about a crisis situation and how you dealt with it. Why should we hire you? Define cooperation. How do you determine or evaluate success? Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our organization is located?

Leadership

Tell me about a situation in which you used your leadership skills. Have you ever supervised anyone? What kind of supervisor (committee chairperson, club officer) were you? What did you learn from that experience?

Sales Aptitude

Have you ever sold anything? (If so, what?) Tell me about a time when you had to persuade someone to do something. How did you go about it? Were you successful? Give me an example of a situation in which you had to manage time effectively (or set priorities, or handle many activities at once). Do you have a high energy level? Are you competitive? How do you handle rejection (or criticism)?

Questions You might Want to Ask the Interviewer

- What are the opportunities for personal growth?
- Identify typical career paths based on past records. What is the realistic time frame for advancement?
- How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
- What are the opportunities for personal growth?
- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- Describe the typical first-year assignments.
- Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
- What are the challenging facets of the job?
- What are the organization's plans for future growth?
- Is the organization stable and financially sound?
- What is the organization's record of employment stability?
- What industry trends will occur in this organization?
- How has this organization fared during the recent recession?
- What makes your firm different from its competitors?
- What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you describe your organization's personality and management style?
- Is it organization policy to promote from within?
- What kind of career opportunities are currently available for my degree and skills?
- What are the expectations for new hires?
- Describe the work environment.
- What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?

- Why do you enjoy working for your organization?
- What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?

Possible Answers to Questions Asked of You

What type of job are you seeking?

Response- Give information related to the industry, organization, or type of job to show that you have definite immediate objectives and well-thought-out, long-range plans. NEVER say you "just need a job," or that you "will do anything."

Why do you think you might like to work here?

Response- Indicate that you know the organization and its reputation, that you have long-range goals, and that there is a match between you and the organization. Show that you make logical decisions and plan your future carefully. DO NOT use simple generalizations (good organization, treat employees well, valuable experience, etc.). NEVER say that their organization has the highest salaries in the area.

Tell me about yourself.

Response- Indicate only your experience, accomplishments, and skills relevant to the job you are seeking. DO NOT make the mistake of giving your entire life history.

What kind of salary do you expect to receive?

Response- Until you have a clear understanding of the job, do not offer a figure. Ask for time to mutually explore the position and your qualifications.

Try to determine salary ranges for the position you want BEFORE the interview. UCS counselors, individuals working in the field, or library resources can help you in this determination. Indicate that you would consider a reasonable offer consistent with the area's cost of living and your responsibility and authority.

What is your opinion of your present boss and co-workers?

Response- Indicate the nature and responsibility of your work. Answer objectively and avoid personal opinions-be positive. Do not knock others.

What are your greatest strengths?

Response- Provide work-related strengths and give examples of your success in previous work, school, or community activities. Broad, general statements (hard worker, good education, willingness to learn, good rapport with people, etc.) are not as helpful as specific examples.

What are your weaknesses?

Response- Everyone has at least one liability; you may have several. Be aware of your weaknesses, mention a few, but definitely follow each weakness with a positive statement about what you have done or plan to do to overcome the liability. You may want to mention a weakness you had several years ago but have successfully corrected. AVOID unresolved weaknesses.

With which other organizations do you plan to interview?

Response- This appears to be an innocent question but it is really a probing and loaded question. If you have definite job objectives and future plans this is an easy question to answer. Related organizations have similar products or services and similar interests. Thus they need people of similar skills. Avoid mentioning organizations in unrelated fields unless the positions you are investigating are closely related.

What is the toughest situation you have ever faced?

Response- Think ahead of time about your biggest challenges and how you rose to meet them. Perhaps it was financing 100% of your education. Maybe it was maintaining a 3.0 GPA while working 20 hours a week and being an officer of a campus organization. Another example is a door-to-door sales job you had one summer. Do not say being admitted to college, changing majors, or lasting the four years to graduation (unless there were special circumstances).

What are your future plans?

Response- Try to show logically that the job you are seeking is related to your future objectives. Organizations try to hire employees who will stay with them in order to reduce turnover and hiring/training costs. NEVER give the idea that this job is a short-term commitment. Many students think about starting their own business someday. But no employer wants to invest \$50,000 or more on a management training program for someone who will leave after a few years. An M.B.A. is another common goal. But, will that degree make you more valuable to this employer? They may fear you will leave before you become fully productive. Or that you would not

perform well in a demanding job if pursuing a part-time degree at night. Many MBA's leave their organizations, so your loyalty and commitment may be questioned.

3. Interviewing Tips: During the Interview

Most interviews consist of three parts: Opening, Information Exchange, and Closing.

Opening (5-10 minutes)

The **first impression** is often critical. You should make eye contact, smile and appear eager, and give the interviewer a firm handshake. During the opening minutes, try to **size up the employer** so you can tailor your performance to his/her style and expectations. Observe the interviewer's **nonverbal habits**. Consider statements that act as ice breakers to help you both relax. The opening sets the stage for the exchange of information in the next few minutes.

Information Exchange (questions and answers, 20 minutes)

During the information exchange, be ready to answer questions about your education, work experience, related activities, your interest in the organization, what type of work you are seeking, present and future goals. The employer will be looking for answers that meet his/her self interest. S/he will also be observing your personality, your communication skills, and your nonverbal signals.

During the information exchange, you should also ask any questions you have about the organization. Try to [ask questions](#) that indicate you know something about the organization and want to work there.

Watch for signs of waning interest during the interview. If there is a lag, pick up the tempo, but let the employer lead the interview.

Be honest about your interest. Bluffing can be spotted. Try to avoid giving the impression that you are "shopping around" for the best deal.

Don't worry about slips of the tongue. Most employers realize that people are nervous during job interviews. With practice you will improve. If you are stumped by a question, take a moment to compose your thoughts before answering.

Remember that you are interviewing the employer as much as s/he is interviewing you. Determine whether the organization is the kind of place that really suits you.

Inappropriate questions: There is naturally some concern about questions that may be asked by interviewers that seem to be discriminatory in nature. Such questions are not of themselves illegal, but using the responses to them in the decision-making process may be considered illegal. For this reason, many interviewers make it a point to avoid anything which can appear in the least questionable. Women and minorities, however, should attempt to anticipate any possible discriminatory inquiries and prepare responses in advance of job interviews. Counselors in University Career Services will be glad to discuss this further with you.

Closing (2-3 minutes)

During the closing, *establish when you can expect to hear further from the interviewer.* Be sure you understand all you need to know about the job. Many employers state that they are impressed by the candidate who candidly states at the close of the interview that s/he wants the job. (This is especially important for sales positions.)

NOTE: Interviews for investment banking and consulting jobs may be different from other interviews. We suggest you meet with a counselor if you are interested in these career areas.

4. Interviewing Tips: What to Wear

Win Points with a Positive Image

Appearance is the first thing you communicate to others. Before you have a chance to speak, others notice how you dress and draw conclusions about you accordingly. Appropriate dress is one of the most important factors in your job search. Your dress creates an impression that can complement your credentials and give you an extra edge over a field of other qualified competent individuals.

There are standards of professional dress in all career fields. Some industries are more traditional, such as banking, consulting and business. Let the dress standards in the field(s) in which you are interviewing be a guide to what you wear for your interview. Attire in fields such as advertising, the arts, fashion, communications and entertainment is generally less conservative, so the rules are a bit more relaxed.

Rule of the Game

Business dress

A suit for both women and men is almost always appropriate for all types of interviews. Buy the best quality business suit you can afford. Make sure it fits well, is comfortable, and is pressed before you wear it.

For Men

- **Colors:** The best colors of business dress for men are charcoal gray and dark blue. Pin stripes are acceptable, as are muted plaids and chalk stripes.
- **Shoes and Socks:** Shoes and socks should be in a color that complements the suit and that are not too casual. Leather lace-up shoes are best for men.
- **Shirt and Tie:** A white shirt is safest, with sleeves that extend one-quarter inch beyond the jacket sleeve. There is room for some variation in ties, but conservative patterns and colors are most appropriate.

For Women

For women, business dress has relaxed somewhat. However, there are several rules which still apply:

- **Hose:** Always wear hose
- **Shoes:** Do not wear shoes that are open (e.g. open toe pumps, sandals). The most appropriate shoe to wear with a business suit is a classic pump with closed mid-height heel and toe with little or no decoration.
- **Tops, Dresses, Suits:** Do not wear sleeveless tops or sleeveless dresses. A skirted business suit (same color jacket and skirt) is the best choice for most interviews for women. A classic suit style is best, and your suit should be well-styled and well-fitting. Avoid a trendy look unless appropriate for your field of interest.
- **Colors:** The best colors for women's business suits are gray, medium or dark blue, burgundy, camel or black. A very small conservative check or plaid is also acceptable.
- **Jewelry and Make-Up:** Make sure your jewelry is not too casual or flashy, your wristwatch included. Earrings should be business-like, not long or dangling. Low-key make-up is advised; go easy on the eye make-up, and nail polish should be light or neutral.
- **Handbags and Attache Cases:** You may choose to carry a purse or attache case, but not both at the same time.

General Rules

Err on the side of formality rather than informality, and keep your outfit simple instead of showy.

Fragrance: Go easy on your fragrance - do not let too much perfume, cologne, or aftershave be overwhelming

Semi-casual attire for women is a dress or a skirt and blouse with or without a jacket. For men it is a sport coat and dress slacks, with a tie. A navy blue blazer is a good addition to your wardrobe for both men and women.

Casual dress in a business setting may be khakis or similarly styled pants and a collared sport shirt or sweater for men. For women, a dress or a skirt and blouse or sweater is acceptable. In some business settings, pants are acceptable (although pants are not advised for interviews). Casual dress shoes (e.g., small heels or flats for women; loafers for men) may be worn.

What to Wear When

For most interviews, business dress is the best choice. Remember that you never get a second chance to make a good first impression! Even the best clothes in the perfect color will not look good if they are wrinkled or dirty. Make sure your suit and shirt/blouse are freshly pressed and your shoes are polished.

Traveling to an On-Site Interview

While traveling to an on-site interview, semi-casual attire or business dress (see above), is best. You may meet someone when traveling or be met upon arrival by someone who will have a part in the hiring process.

Evening Events

If you are attending an evening reception or dinner as part of your interview process, business dress is most suitable unless otherwise specified in the invitation.

Employer Presentation/Receptions

For employer presentations/receptions on-campus (Hanes Hall or other campus locations), semi-casual or casual dress is acceptable,

while business dress is most appropriate for presentations or receptions at the Carolina Inn. (See UCS handout, Guide to Employer Presentations.)

Career Fairs

For career fairs, business dress is best if you are prospecting for job leads. If you are looking for internship leads, semi-casual or casual attire is suitable.

Picking Up / Dropping Off Resumes/Applications

For picking up or dropping off a resume or application at an employer's office, it is suggested that you wear semi-casual dress.