



# Command your brand: Acing the interview

An interview is an opportunity for an employer to determine if a candidate's skills and experience will match well with the position and organization. It is also an opportunity for the candidate to determine if the organization is a good fit for their skills, values, and goals. Interviewing formats and styles will vary from employer to employer and from interviewer to interviewer. Whatever the interview situation or style, you'll need to be able to communicate your:

- strengths
- skills
- experience
- knowledge
- value to the interviewer

An interviewer will also be trying to determine what type of colleague you will be and whether or not your personality and interpersonal skills will fit well in the organization. The chart below lists some of the questions an interviewer will be considering during an interview—along with some of the questions you, as interviewee, should be asking yourself as you evaluate the job and the company and whether it is the ideal fit for you.

Employer- Is the candidate a "Fit"?	Candidate - Is the Company the "Right Fit"?
Can you do the job?	Does the company culture fit my values?
What value do you bring?	Do I think the job fits my skill set and strengths?
What are your strengths?	What were my initial impressions of the employees?
What are your major accomplishments?	What aspects of the job do I think I will enjoy?
Will you fit in?	Are there opportunities for growth within the organization?

# Types of Interviews

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## Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are typically utilized to get to know each candidate, and most recruiters will ask traditional interview questions. The length of a phone interview can vary from as little as 10 minutes to possibly up to an hour. Your performance in a phone interview will likely determine if you will be invited to continue on to the next step of the hiring process. Take each interview seriously, and become as well prepared for it as possible.

A challenge of the phone interview is that it can be difficult to gauge how the interviewer is reacting to your answers because you are unable to assess visual cues. Also, there may be pauses in conversation, during which your interviewer may be taking notes or determining the next question or direction s/he would like to go in. Be prepared for this ambiguity because it does not mean the interview is not going well.

### Phone interview tips

- Ask your roommates to give you alone time and space during the designated time of your phone interview, or utilize an office space on campus. The CCPD can provide an office space for your phone interview. It is best to call the CCPD (610-758-3710) a few days in advance to reserve a spot.
- Have your resume in front of you to refer to when speaking about your work experience.
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes.
- Take a moment to think about the question, and then respond, speaking slowly and clearly.
- Dress the part for the interview. Experts say that if you are dressed in a professional manner, you will speak that way.
- Smile during the phone interview to project a positive tone in your voice and your image.
- Stand up while speaking. Your body position affects the quality of your voice. If you are sitting down or relaxing, you do not project the same readiness and intensity as when you stand up.
- Because you will be lacking the visual cues of body language, it is okay to mark the end of your response with a question, such as “Would you like more details about my experience as an intern with XYZ Company?”
- Let the employer end the interview. Then you should say, “Thank you for your time,” and reiterate your interest in the position.
- Write a thank you note to anyone who participated in the phone interview. It is appropriate to ask for the contact information (email) of those individuals who participated in the phone interview process.

## Skype or Online Interviews

- Dress in business attire for a Skype/online video interview. The interviewers will be assessing your responses as well as your professional image.
- Find a quiet spot that presents as an office-like setting. Have a plain white wall behind you, with nothing that could be distracting. The CCPD can provide office space for your Skype interview. It is best to call the CCPD (610-758-3710) a few days in advance to reserve a spot.
- Try out the software ahead of time. Ask a friend to Skype with you so that you can practice.
- Smile! Even though you are not in front of your interviewer, you still need to convey your enthusiasm for the job.
- Communicate that you are listening, by nodding your head and saying an occasional “yes.”
- It is okay to have your resume and notes in front of you, but be sure to maintain good eye contact with the your interviewer.
- If you experience any technical glitches where you can't hear your interviewer, let him/her know so that you aren't missing anything in the conversation. If the problem persists, you might suggest stopping the call and trying a redial.

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## Recorded Interviews

A recorded (or video) interview is new to the hiring landscape, and students should prepare thoroughly for this kind of experience. Understand that a recorded interview is convenient and efficient for hiring managers. It is in your best interest to treat this type of interview as seriously as an in-person interview in order to convey your skills effectively.

- The video interview is conducted via video without the job candidate interacting with the interviewer on the screen. In this case, you will be given a predetermined set of questions in text or video form.
- Below are some tips to keep in mind while preparing for and conducting a video interview:
  - Treat it like any other interview.
  - Dress professionally. Your interviewer will still be able to see you via video feed.
  - Prepare and anticipate questions you may be asked. It is acceptable to have your resume and notes available. However, remember that you are being recorded, so make adequate eye contact with the webcam.
  - Make the most of your allotted time. Most one-way interview software programs allow the student to start recording after taking a few moments to think through a response.

# Before the Interview

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## Research the Company

Prior to an interview, one of your first steps is to research the company. Begin with the following:

- Review the company's website.
  - Check the press releases and events page.
  - Pay attention to the language throughout the website to understand the company values, mission, and goals.
  - Understand the work done at this company, the clients, and the types of products and services offered.
- Check the company's social media accounts (LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook).
- Look at Glassdoor.com: What are other professionals saying about the company?
- Google any recent news on the company.
- Talk to Lehigh alumni who work at the company.
- Find out who will be interviewing you, and review the interviewer's LinkedIn profile.

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## Prepare Your Own Questions to Ask During the Interview

It is very important to ask your interviewer questions during and at the end of the interview. Create a list of at least 10 to 15 questions prior to your interview, and take the list with you. There's no set number you need to ask. It will depend on what you feel you need to know. You won't get a chance to ask them all, but it is always best to be prepared! Some of your questions may be answered during the course of the interview. Do not ask questions that are clearly answered on the employer's website and/or in any literature provided by the employer to you in advance. Never ask about salary and benefits issues until those subjects are raised by the employer.

The following are examples of the types of questions you can ask an interviewer. Be sure to tailor your questions to best fit your interview and your work values.

- What kinds of assignments might I expect during the first 6 months?
- What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
- What are the strengths of the organization or department? In what areas of the company do you expect growth?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff right now?

## Prepare Your Own Questions to Ask During the Interview *continued*

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- What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does the department fit in?
- What is the reporting structure in this department? What are the acceptable channels of communication?
- What is your management style and the type of employee who works well with you?
- Describe the team/project assignments and the mix of people involved.
- What is the management philosophy of this organization?
- What is the company's view on continued education?
- What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, or training so employees can keep up on skills or acquire new skills?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- How is the economic climate affecting your organization?

# Personal Preparation

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## Traditional Interviewing Questions

A traditional approach is used to open the interview and to build rapport. Traditional interviewing questions are often used in phone interviews or first interviews to assess the candidate's personality, goals, and interaction with others. You will have the most effective impact if you respond with examples, the motivations behind your goals and decisions, connections between your background/qualifications, and ways to meet the employer's needs.

The following are examples of traditional interviewing questions:

- **Tell me about yourself.**

While it seems like an invitation to tell your life story, your approach should be to relate your background and experience to the job and company. To prepare for this question, build a framework for how you want to pitch your experience. Start with comparing your experiences, skills, personality traits, values, and educational background with what the employer is looking for along with the employer's needs. Then create a 2- to 3-minute story about how you decided on your current career and why you're applying to the job.

- **What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?**

Share your true strengths, especially those that are relevant to the job (be specific). Follow up with examples of how you have exemplified these in a professional setting. It may seem a little tougher to describe weaknesses, but there's a strategy to it (and it's not to answer, "I don't have any weaknesses"!). Instead, think about an attribute (e.g., a typical behavior or emotion) that you struggle with but are working on to improve. Tell your interviewer the weakness, why you think it's a weakness, and what initiatives you've been taking to improve upon it.

- **Why are you interested in this position?**

If you've done your research on the company, this question shouldn't be hard to answer. What aspects of the company culture, work, or \_\_\_\_\_ did you identify with? What excites you about the company or the role? Companies are looking for candidates who bring the appropriate skill set and who are enthusiastic about the work.

- What do you know about our organization?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How do you balance your priorities?
- Tell me how you organize your day.
- How do you spend your spare time?
- How would a family member or friend describe you? How would a co-worker describe you?

## Traditional Interviewing Questions *continued*

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- What personal factors do you consider most important in evaluating yourself or your success?
  - Why did you choose to study at Lehigh? Why did you choose your major?
  - Can you give me examples of work-related experiences that you felt were satisfying/dissatisfying?
  - Describe when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.
  - What are some recent responsibilities you have taken on? Why did you assume these responsibilities?
  - What have you accomplished in the line of self-development during the last year?
  - What are your career goals for the next five years? How do you expect to accomplish your goals?
  - How do you go about orienting yourself to a new job?
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### Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interviewing is a technique employed by interviewers to evaluate your past behavior in order to predict your future behavior in a particular position. A behavioral interview question is attempting to assess your proficiency with a particular skill. You can identify the skills an employer may try to assess by reviewing the position description. Preparation will be critical in answering behavioral questions successfully. Utilizing the STAR (Situation-Task-Action-Result) Model will help you construct an organized, specific, thoughtful, and concise answer.

Laura Kerekes, chief knowledge officer of the human resources firm ThinkHR, says, “We find that using the behavioral interviewing format elicits the best information to make selection decisions.” She goes on to say, “Screening for the technical skills needed in the hybrid job is the easy part. Screening for how the applicant puts it all together when a variety of hard and soft skills are required is more difficult.”

(Why 2016 Is the Year of the Hybrid Job, Fastcompany.com.)

# Five Steps to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

1. Analyze the position for which you are being interviewed; determine the skills required.
2. Evaluate and reflect on your background to identify your skills and experiences related to the position.
3. Develop brief scenarios, or “STAR stories,” prior to your interview that demonstrate your skills. Each “story” should explain the Situation, Task, Action, and Result (STAR).
4. Be specific in your stories. Employers want to know what you did rather than what you would do.
5. Identify three to five top selling points that set you apart from other candidates, and make sure to take the opportunity to point them out during the interview and incorporate throughout your stories.

## STAR METHOD

<b>Situation &amp; Task</b>	Describe the situation that you were in and the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific project or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from your current position, a previous job, a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<b>Action</b>	Describe the action you took. Be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did – not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do – tell what you did.
<b>Result</b>	What happened? How did the project end? What did you accomplish? If the result was not ideal, what would you do differently in the future to get the result that you wanted? What did you learn?

### Example of a Behavioral Interview Question and Answer

#### Describe a situation in which you led a group of people.

**Situation/Task:** Last year I was the chairperson of my club's philanthropy committee. I led a committee of four people in organizing and promoting events that benefitted Big Brothers and Big Sisters, March of Dimes, and Broughal Middle School's after-school tutoring program.

**Action:** I was responsible for leading weekly meetings, delegating assignments to committee members, and motivating the entire 50-member club to get involved with our philanthropic activities. I ensured that our committee was utilizing effective marketing by overseeing the social media platforms, encouraging entire campus involvement.

**Result:** During the year we held two fundraisers each semester—one for Big Brothers and Big Sisters and one for the March of Dimes—and raised over \$1,000 for each organization. This was a 20% increase over the previous year. While in the position, I not only developed my communication, organization, and management skills, but I also gained a greater awareness of the importance of community.

## Top skills employers are looking for across all industries.

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The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) has identified the top skills employers are looking for across all industries. NACE has defined career readiness as “the attainment and demonstration of requisite competencies that broadly prepare college graduates for a successful transition into the workplace.” These competencies are

- **Critical thinking**
- **Oral/written communication**
- **Teamwork/collaboration**
- **Leadership**
- **Professionalism**
- **Career management**

Develop STAR stories to highlight your competencies in the areas associated with career readiness.

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**Critical thinking:** Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems.

- Tell me about a situation that did not work out as expected. What steps did you take to handle this?
- Tell me about the first job you ever had. How did you learn the ropes?
- Can you tell me about a time when a slow and deliberate approach made a difference in your response to a problem?
- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem with very little guidance or direction.

**Oral/written communication:** Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively to persons inside and outside of the organization.

- Describe a situation you observed or were a part of where you felt communication was handled particularly well by someone else. What did they do? Why do you think it was effective?
- Tell me about a time where you experienced a communication barrier/lack of communication in a group setting. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you provided feedback to someone at school or at work.
- Describe the most significant written document or presentation you’ve written or presented. Who was your audience? What was the outcome of your communication/presentation?
- Have you had to “sell” an idea to your co-workers, classmates, or group? How did you do it?

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**Teamwork/collaboration:** Able to work within a team structure, build collaborative relationships with diverse individuals, and negotiate and manage conflict.

- Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his/her share of the work. How did you work through it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
- Describe a time when you made a decision that was unpopular with the other members of your group. What was the end result?
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?
- Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.

**Leadership:** Able to assess and manage own emotions and those of others, use empathetic skills to guide and motivate, and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.

- Of the people you have encountered or know about in public positions of leadership, to whom do you look as a model and why?
- Give an example of how you have motivated your staff, a team, or a group of co-workers.
- Provide an example of a time when you took on the role of a leader in a committee or group. How did you lead the team, and what were the outcomes?
- What is the most important skill of a good leader? Describe a time when you effectively used this leadership skill on the job. Give a specific example(s) of how you helped your previous organization reach its organizational goals.

**Professionalism:** Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits (e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management) and understand the impact of nonverbal communication on professional work image.

- Has there been a time at work when you disagreed with someone? What did you do about it?
- Give us an example of an important goal you set, and tell us about how you reached it.
- Tell me about a time that you missed a deadline. What happened?
- When you encounter a roadblock, what do you do? Give us an example of a situation.
- Give an example of how you prioritize multiple demands on your time.
- Talk about a time when you worked your hardest. What was the project or task? What was your role? What was the outcome? What was the reward?

# Dress for your interview

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- Demonstrate professionalism in your appearance.
- Have a clean, neat, and well-groomed look.
- Clothing should match the corporate culture.
- Dress in a comparable business level or above it. In most cases, a dark suit is most appropriate with conservative hair style and jewelry
- Men: no white socks!
- Women: no open-toe shoes or heels higher than 2 inches!
- Avoid brightly colored clothing.
- Not sure about the corporate culture? Always best to be conservative.
- Carry a solid-colored portfolio folder containing extra copies of your resume and list of references. Women should carry a purse that looks professional.

## Plan Ahead

- Try on your outfit the day before in case you have to fix anything or want to change the outfit.
- To be conscientious about time, be sure to wear a professional watch as opposed to taking your phone to check the time.
- Know the exact time and location of your interview. Know how long it takes to get there and where to park. Be aware of any parking fees and tolls.
- Gather all of your materials the night before: extra copies of your resume, references, paper, pen, examples of your work if they will demonstrate your experience and accomplishments.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before.
- Practice positive visualization in the days leading up to the interview. Picture yourself sitting opposite the interviewer, relaxed, comfortable, at the top of your game. Play it over and over again in your mind.

# During the interview

Create a Great First and Lasting Impression

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- The interview begins the moment you step foot within the vicinity of the interview location.
- Be courteous and kind to all individuals that you meet. Everyone you encounter will form an impression of you and may be asked to volunteer that information to the interviewers.
- Do not use your cell phone or other electronics.
- Make sure your body language reflects the message you want to send. See the following video for reference:  
Amy Cuddy - “Your body language shapes who you are”
- Make good eye contact, and give a firm handshake when greeting interviewers.
- Portray confidence in the way you physically carry yourself. Relax your shoulders and keep them back.
- Keep your chin up, maintain eye contact (don’t look downward), and keep a pleasant look on your face and energy in your voice.
- Keep arms and legs uncrossed. Lean in slightly while seated.
- Avoid slang (“gonna,” “dude,” etc.) and overuse of “filler” words such as “O.K.” and “like.”
- Express energy and enthusiasm throughout the interview. Recruiters want to hire those who want the job.
- Be proactive and take notes.
- Make sure you understand the employer’s next step in the hiring process. Know when and from whom you should expect to hear next along with what action you are expected to take next, if any.
- When the interviewer concludes the interview, offer a firm handshake and make eye contact. Depart gracefully.

## After the interview

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- Take a few minutes to review any notes you may have made as well as to make note of anything specific that your interviewer(s) talked about that you might want to mention in your thank you note.
- Reflect on your impressions of the company, the culture, and the people, and try to determine if the organization would be a good fit with your personality, values, and interests.
- Send a thank you note within 24 to 48 hours of the interview. Even if you decide you wouldn't want the position if offered, it is always best to maintain professionalism and follow through on this small but courteous and meaningful task.
- Follow up if you don't hear back from the recruiter by the time s/he specified when you asked about next steps. For example, if the interviewer says you can expect to hear back in 2 weeks, then you should make contact in 2 weeks if you haven't heard anything. Send an email or make a call, then wait four or five days and contact the recruiter again. If you continue to do this for 4 or 5 weeks with no response, then it may be time for you to cut ties and move on.