INTERVIEWING AND PROFESSIONALISM:

How to prepare for an interview, present yourself professionally, and answer tough interview questions

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INTERVIEWS 101
WHAT IS A JOB INTERVIEW?

A formal meeting between a job candidate and an employer to help determine if the candidate is the best fit for the job.

Interviews can take place in-person, over the phone, or online.
TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Screening Interviews
- Often conducted by phone
- Narrows down a large pool of potential candidates

One-on-One Interviews
- With the hiring manager, your potential supervisor, or other representative of the organization

Panel Interviews
- With representatives from different departments or groups within the organization
TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Peer Group Interviews
• With your potential coworkers

Follow up Interviews
• A 2nd (or 3rd) interview to narrow down a smaller pool of candidates

Lunch or Dinner Interviews
• Conducted over lunch or dinner
• Could be a “test” to see how you handle yourself in social situations
# Job Search Goals

## Employer

To find the *best possible* candidate. One who is:

- Qualified
- Reliable and trustworthy
- Dedicated
- Eager to learn
- Communicates well
- Easy to work with
- Worth the investment of time and resources

## Candidate

To find the *best possible* job. One that provides:

- Good salary and benefits
- Stable employment
- Fair, trustworthy supervisor and co-workers
- Safe and ethical work environment
- Manageable work hours
- Opportunities to learn
- Support for your career goals
PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

• The interview helps the hiring manager determine if you are really as good “in person” as you are “on paper.”

• The interview is even more important for YOU! It is your best opportunity to
  ✓ Explain your qualifications and interests
  ✓ Learn more about the job
  ✓ Get an up-close view of the organization’s work environment, culture, and people
  ✓ Meet with your potential boss and assess his/her personality
  ✓ Find out if this position can help you grow in your career
The interview is important for YOU because sometimes…

BAD Jobs

Happen to

GOOD Employees!
APPROACH TO A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

• Don’t get overwhelmed by thoughts of “being judged” by others or of “selling” your professional self to an employer.

• Approach the interview as
  ✓ an opportunity to learn more about a potential job and organization;
  ✓ a formal conversation with a potential supervisor or coworkers in which you get to talk about your “professional self” and interest in your field.

• Most interviews, even successful ones, don’t always lead to a job offer. Each interview provides you with good practice and insight into your field.
PREPARATION
REVIEW YOUR RESUME AND THE JOB POSTING

• Review the job description, your resume/CV, and cover letter.

• Match your past experiences, education, or skills with as many of the position’s responsibilities/expectations as possible.

• Be prepared to explain
  ✓ Gaps in your work history
  ✓ Why you left a previous position
  ✓ Changes in your career or focus
  ✓ How your education/training prepared you for this job
SELF ASSESSMENT

• As you review your professional history, identify
  ✓ At least 3 skills that make you an outstanding candidate for this position
  ✓ How you have demonstrated these skills
  ✓ Your professional accomplishments
  ✓ Don’t forget your practicum experiences
  ✓ Your professional weaknesses or areas of improvement
    - Steps you’ll take to overcome these
  ✓ At least one difficult situation that you’ve encountered in your professional life and
    - How handled this situation
    - What you learned from the experience

• What type of work environment do you thrive in?
RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER, THE POSITION, AND INDUSTRY

• Review the organization’s and/or department’s website.

• Talk to others in the same position at a similar organization.

• Visit online profiles of professionals in the same/similar position.

• Find out whom you’ll be interviewing with.

• Think about how your career goals and interests align with the organization’s and/or department’s mission or vision.

• Identify important trends, advancements, key leaders, or challenges in the industry.
INTERVIEW LOGISTICS

• Be sure you know where to go for the interview, where to park, and how long it will take you to the location. Plan to arrive ~10 minutes early.

• If you are interviewing virtually, be sure you know how to connect and that your computer/phone is capable of handling an online meeting.

• Schedule adequate time off for the interview: it could go over the allotted time.

• Let your spouse, partner, roommate, or a friend know where you are going for the interview and about how long you’ll be gone.
OTHER PREPARATIONS

• Have your interview clothing ready to go before the morning of the interview.

• Print a list job references to take with you.

• Make copies of your resume/CV, references, and other application documents on nice resume paper. Put your documents with a pen and notepad in a neat portfolio to take with you to the interview.
DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

(Don’t wear a top hat!)
INDUSTRY DRESS CODES

• What is appropriate for the interview depends on the industry, organization, and type of job.

• Generally, employees in finance or law or those in executive positions dress more conservatively than other professions.

• Dressing professionally is especially important if the job requires you to represent the organization to clients or to the public.

• Dress better than the industry’s or employer’s dress code for the interview.

• If in doubt about the employer’s dress code, dress more conservatively.
# DO’S AND DON’TS

## DO’S
- Clothes and shoes should be clean, pressed, fit well, and match well.
- Fingernails and hair should be clean and neat.
- Nail polish (if used) should be neutral or clear.
- Cover visible tattoos. Remove body piercings.
- Have an umbrella or raincoat handy.

## DON’TS
- Wear scuffed shoes, very high heels, or shoes with an open toe.
- Wear gaudy or noisy jewelry.
- Wear clothing that is too tight, short, revealing, see-through, or distracting.
- Carry a backpack unless interviewing for a student position.
- Use heavy perfumes or colognes.
**DRESSING PROFESSIONALLY: WOMEN**

**MORE CONSERVATIVE SETTINGS**
- Skirt or pantsuit in navy, gray, or black
- Gray, white, neutral, or pastel-colored shirt
- Low-heeled (2.5” or less) dress shoes in black, navy, or gray
- Simple, matching handbag

**LESS CONSERVATIVE (BUSINESS CASUAL) SETTINGS**
- Skirt or pantsuit of any subtle or neutral color; jacket and skirt or pants can be a different color
- Matching blouse or shirt
- Sheath dress with matching jacket (no armpits)
- Stay away from loud colors or animal prints
- Matching dress shoes (no open-toed shoes)

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**DRESSING PROFESSIONALLY: MEN**

**MORE CONSERVATIVE SETTINGS**
- Suit (navy, black, or dark gray)
- Long-sleeved, button-down white or light blue dress shirt and matching tie
- Matching belt and dress shoes
- Matching dress socks
- Little or no jewelry (watch, wedding ring)

**LESS CONSERVATIVE (BUSINESS CASUAL) SETTINGS**
- Trousers or dress pants (dark or neutral color)
- Long-sleeved, button-down dress shirt with collar in a subtle, flattering color
- Matching sports coat and tie
- Stay away from bold patterns or short sleeves
- Matching socks, dress shoes, and belt
- Little or no jewelry
THE JOB INTERVIEW
# General Do’s and Don’ts

**Do’s**

- Introduce yourself to the receptionist. Thank this person for directing you to the meeting.
- Smile.
- Introduce yourself and shake hands with everyone in the interview room.
- Make eye contact.
- Be courteous, respectful, and positive.
- Sit up straight but appear comfortable.

**Don’ts**

- Chew gum. Bring coffee or food to the interview.
- Interrupt or talk over someone who is speaking.
- Focus on only one person if others are participating in the interview.
- Talk a lot about personal stuff.
- Fidget or slouch.
CELL PHONE ETIQUETTE

Turn off or completely silence your phone.

Put in your purse, briefcase, bag, back pocket, or tucked inside your portfolio.

DO NOT

Leave it on vibrate.

Place in sight on top of the table.

The *only* time you should have your phone out is if you are using it as a visual aid during the interview.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

• Answer questions honestly.
• You’ll likely be asked questions that you did not anticipate. That’s OK.
• Pause before answering, if you need time to consider the question.
• Better to answer thoughtfully, than quickly.
TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Questions about your Qualifications & Work History
- Questions about your Career Goals & Interests
- Behavioral Questions
- Industry or Job Specific Questions
- Challenge Questions
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK HISTORY

Questions about your work history, skills, education, and training that help determine if you are qualified for the job.

Examples:

• What skills/experiences do you have that are applicable to this job?
• Please explain this gap in your employment history.
• Are you experienced using STATA software?
• Why do you want to leave your current job?
• Why should we hire you?
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK HISTORY

What skills/experiences do you have that are applicable to this job?
Think of at least 3 major skills or experiences from your resume that match the job description. Be specific. Avoid general statements like “I am very organized.”

Please explain this gap in your employment history.
Answer this question honestly. Usually, a brief answer is all you need.

Are you experienced using STATA software?
If you are experienced, provide an example to demonstrate your experience level. If you lack experience, follow with a statement about your willingness/ability to learn quickly. If you’re experienced using a similar type of software, say so.
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR QUALIFICATIONS & WORK HISTORY

Why do you want to leave your current job?
Avoid making overly negative statements about a previous employer or supervisor. End with a positive comment about why you are interested in this job.

Why should we hire you?
Highlight your best qualifications for this job. What makes you stand out from other candidates with your education or background? Reference a past accomplish that would be particularly attractive to this employer.
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CAREER GOALS AND INTERESTS

These questions can be a bit more challenging and assess your interest and dedication to the job and your field.

Examples:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Where do you see yourself 3 years from now?
- What do you like most about [your field, your studies]?
QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CAREER GOALS AND INTERESTS

Tell me about yourself.
Respond with a brief summary of your education, training, experience, skills, or expertise. Focus on qualities applicable to this job.

Why are you interested in this position?
Explain why you are interested in the job, field, or employer. Make specific references to the job description.

Where do you see yourself 3 years from now?
Respond in a way that demonstrates a desire to grow in your field. Avoid overly ambitious statements or goals. You don’t have to specify a future job title.

What do you like most about [your field, your studies]?
Discuss an interest that aligns with roles and responsibilities of the job.
BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

These questions assess how well you can handle challenges or stress on the job. They also assess your accountability and ability to learn from mistakes.

Examples:

• What do you consider to be your greatest strength/weakness?
• Describe a time when you’ve had to work with a difficult person.
• Describe a time when you made a mistake or failed at something.
• What qualities do you want in your future supervisor?
• How would you respond if your supervisor asked you to do something that you disagreed with?
BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?

Don’t say that you have no weaknesses. Everyone has professional weaknesses. Try to identify a weakness that won’t be a “deal breaker” for this job. End with a statement about the steps you’ve taken to improve.

Describe a time when you’ve had to work with a difficult customer/co-worker/client/boss.

Think of an incident that demonstrated your perseverance, accountability, or patience. Avoid overly critical or derisive comments about others.

Describe a time when you made a mistake or failed at something. How did you handle this mistake/failure?
Describe how you took responsibility for the mistake, what steps you took to resolve the issue, and what you’ve learned from the experience.
BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

How would you respond if your supervisor asked you to do something that you disagreed with?
It depends: If the issue is over something that is illegal or against the organization’s or industry’s policies or ethics, then the best answer is to state that you’d follow the policies, regulations, or standards of the organization or industry. If it is a disagreement over something less serious, a good course of action is to respectfully discuss the issue with your supervisor and propose a mutual solution that you both agree with.

What qualities do you want in your future supervisor?
Describe qualities of a good leader that are important to you: communicates well, respectful of others, willingly provides guidance, seeks your ideas, advocates for his/her team, trustworthy. Be careful of responding with statements such as “allows me to work at my own pace” or “rewards hard work.”
INDUSTRY OR JOB-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

These gauge your knowledge and attitudes about the industry, profession, or employer.

Examples:

• Why do you want to work here?
• Tell me what you know about our organization/department?
• What are your salary expectations for this job?
Why do you want to work here?
Talk about how the organization’s or department’s goals align with your interests or background and how you can benefit them.

Tell me what you know about our organization/department?
Based on your research, talk about what products or services they provide, their size, key leaders, and accomplishments. Describing positive news—such as a recent discovery, acquisition, large research award—is a really good way to answer this question.

What are your salary expectations for this job?
Try to avoid citing a specific amount: you don’t want to take yourself out of the running by citing an amount that might be too high or limit your potential salary by citing an amount that is lower than what the employer might pay. You could respond by stating that your salary is negotiable and that you wish to receive compensation commensurate with your qualifications and skills. If you feel pressed to provide an amount, try responding with a range that corresponds with your research of the position.
CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

Silly questions that are intended to assess your personality, how you might want others to perceive you, and/or your ability to think creatively.

Examples:

• If you had to be an animal, what type of animal would you be and why?
• What is your favorite movie and why?
• If you stepped on an elevator and everyone on the elevator is facing backwards, what would you do?
CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

If you had to be an animal, what type of animal would you be and why?

What is your favorite movie and why?

If you stepped on an elevator and everyone on the elevator is facing backwards, what would you do?

One approach to these questions is to answer in a way that you think best fits the personality type of the job. The only really bad response is to say, “I don’t know.”
ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Potential employers are prohibited by law from asking questions to ascertain your race, nationality, sexual orientation, martial status, health status, religion, military status, or age.

Examples:

- Do you have children? Do you plan to have children?
- Are you married?
- What country are you from?
- What is your native language?
- How old are you? (Note: Employers are allowed to ask if you meet a minimal age requirement).
- What church do you go to?
ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

If someone asks you an inappropriate question, how should you respond?

“I can assure you that my [nationality, sexual orientation, religion, family status] will not affect my ability to do this job.”

Rephrase the question or ask for clarification. For instance,
  “Are you asking if I am legally authorized to work in this country?”
  “Are you asking if I am fluent in [a language required for this job]?”
  “Is belonging to a particular religion a requirement for this job?”

“Excuse me, but I don’t think you should have asked me that question.”
“Don’t believe I should answer that question.”

If you prefer to just directly answer the question, you may do so.
QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

Always have questions. Having no questions sends the message that you either don’t handle stress well or are not serious about the job.
QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

Examples

• What do you consider to be the most important day-to-day responsibilities for this job?
• What do you consider to be the most important qualities for someone in this position?
• What do you consider to be the greatest challenges for someone in this position?
• What are the most important tasks or milestones that you’d expect me to accomplish in the first 6 months?
• Why is this position vacant?
• What opportunities for growth and advancement can this position offer?
• What do you like most about working here?
• How has this organization helped you grow in your career?
• What is the next step in the hiring process for this job?
QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD NOT ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW

Wait until after you’ve been offered the position to ask the questions below.

• What is the salary for this position?
• How much vacation time will I have in the first year?
• What benefits do you offer?
• Do you offer flex time?
• Can I work from home?
• How long before I can expect to be promoted?
LEAVING THE INTERVIEW

• Thank the interviewers.

• Invite them to contact you with additional questions.

• Ask for business cards from each person participating in the interview. Try to at least get their names and e-mail addresses.

• Smile and shake hands!
FOLLOW UP
FOLLOW UP

- Within 24-hours of the interview, send a thank-you e-mail to all the interviewers. Encourage them to contact you with additional questions. For additional impact, also send a typed or handwritten thank you note via post. It’s hard to ignore a piece of paper.

- Notify your references that you’ve interviewed for a job. Briefly describe the position to help them prepare to be contacted.

- Reflect on your experience and what you’ve learned in the interview.
CELEBRATE!

Regardless of the outcome, feel good about having a(ner) job interview under your belt!

Interviewing for a job is challenging, but a necessary, accomplishment in your career.
THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?

For further assistance or to make an appointment with our office, contact SPHCareerServices@uth.tmc.edu.
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