INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Your resume and cover letter got you in the door, now it’s time to impress them!

Office of Public Health Practice and Career Services

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston
School of Public Health
# Table of Contents

What is an Interview? .................................................................................................................. 2
Before, During, and After the Interview .................................................................................. 2
Interview Attire ............................................................................................................................ 4
Introduction to Interview Formats ............................................................................................. 4
Answering Interview Questions ................................................................................................. 5
Traditional Interview Questions ................................................................................................. 7
Behavioral Interview Questions ................................................................................................. 8
Phone Interviews ......................................................................................................................... 10
Skype and Video Interviews ....................................................................................................... 10
Asking Questions ......................................................................................................................... 11
What You Should NOT Do .......................................................................................................... 11
Illegal Interview Questions .......................................................................................................... 12
Follow Up .................................................................................................................................... 12
Tips for International Students .................................................................................................. 13
Health Professions Interviewing ................................................................................................. 13
What is an Interview?

A job interview is a formal meeting between you, as a prospective employee, and an employer. Interviews serve many purposes. The first of these is for the employer to determine if a candidate is qualified, easy to work with, and communicates well. Employers want to know if a candidate is as good “in person” as they are “on paper.” In addition, interviews help employers better understand how a candidate would fit with the culture and environment of their organization.

The interview is just as important for job candidates to understand the position and organization to which they are applying. It is important for you to play an active role in the interview process. This guide will help you to properly prepare for an interview.

Before, During, and After the Interview

Before the Interview

Preparation Tips

- Get directions to the interview site (including the parking location) for an in-person interview.
- If you have scheduled a Skype or phone interview, find a quiet place where you will not be interrupted.
- For Skype/video interviews, test out your computer and Wi-Fi connection and update any software necessary to make the connection.
- Ensure that your interview outfit is clean and neat.
- Review the job description. This can provide insight into possible interview questions.
- Practice your answers to some common questions.
  - To thoroughly think through your responses, write out your answers.
  - Practice saying the answers out loud. This can be in a mock interview format, to a friend, or in front of a mirror. You can also record yourself, if you would like to critique your answers and behaviors.
- Prepare questions to ask at the end of the interview.
  - Make sure that they are pertinent to the job you are applying for.
  - This is where researching the company is helpful. See below.
- Try to find out the format of your interview and with whom you will meet. See page 4 for more about different interviewing formats.

Research the company

- Review the company’s website. Look over everything from the department with which you are interviewing to the company’s mission, vision, and values.
  - You do not want to ask a question you could have found online.
- Google the company. Have they been in the news? Have they produced any interesting or noteworthy research? Is there anything negative that you may want to ask about?

“Beware of relying solely on a resume to hire; skills can be taught. What cannot be taught is a great “can do” attitude.”

— Beth Ramsay
Review the company’s social media sites. Follow them on LinkedIn. Companies often use social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to engage with the public and their employees. They can post material that is not on their website.

Speak with any connections you have at the company.

Online sites such as glassdoor.com can give you some insight into the company culture and salary expectations.

Prepare your “tell me about yourself” answer

This is a staple interview question. It should be primarily about your professional and academic career and should be no more than 2-3 minutes in length. You can include some personal information, like where you are from, but this should be kept to a minimum.

**During the Interview**

At the interview site

- Have both cash and credit card ready for parking.
- Prepare for all weather conditions. Have an umbrella and/or appropriate coat.
- Bring a professional portfolio with you. It’s ok to take notes during the interview.
- Have extra copies of your resume, cover letter, and references printed on resume paper.
- Be courteous to those around you, including the receptionist.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early. Arriving too early can be disruptive. Arriving late gives the impression that you do not care.
- Do not bring coffee, water, or food to the interview. If they offer you something to drink, you are free to accept something. You may want to avoid carbonated or colorful beverages to avoid embarrassing moments later.
- Take deep breaths! Be confident and be yourself!

**Anatomy of an Interview**

I. **Greeting:** Your interview begins the moment you walk through the doors of the building. Be polite and greet each individual with whom you interact, from the receptionist to the interviewer. Shake hands, make eye contact, and introduce yourself to each of the interviewers. Some interviewers use this time to exchange pleasantries and small talk.

II. **Employer Questions:** This is the main part of the interview. The interviewer will ask you questions based on your experiences and the requirements of the position.

III. **Candidate Questions:** This is where you have the chance to ask questions about the organization and the position. This typically occurs after the interviewers are finished asking questions and end with, “Do you have any questions for us?” Sometimes the interviewer will encourage you to ask questions throughout the interview.

IV. **Conclusion:** As the interview comes to an end, it is important to show your gratitude and enthusiasm. Collect business cards, if available. Make sure you shake hands with everyone before you leave.

**After the Interview**

Once the interview is over

- Shake hands with and say goodbye to everyone.
- Respond with a thank you email within 24 hours of the interview.
Express gratitude for the time they spent meeting with you.
Show enthusiasm for the position and your role with the company.

Interview Attire
Making a good first impression is critical. Your appearance is an important part of this overall first impression. Make sure you are dressed appropriately and professionally. Below are a few general tips. Please see our Professionalism Guide for more detailed information.

- It is best to dress one step above the common dress code for the company/industry.
- Attire should be conservative. Nothing too short or low cut. Do not wear loud patterns or colors.
- Typically, navy blue, black, and gray are the best colors for most job interviews.
- Jewelry and makeup should be minimal.
- Brush your teeth and use deodorant/antiperspirant.
- Do not use too much perfume, cologne, or aftershave.
- Hair should be neat.

Introduction to Interview Formats
Here are short descriptions of different types of interviews.

- Informational interviews: A meeting typically set up by a job seeker solely to learn more about a field or company. This can also be a good way to build your network of professional contacts.
- Screening: These interviews tend to be completed by HR representatives and generally include basic questions that help determine if you meet the minimum requirements for a position.
- One-on-one: These are the most common types of interviews and involve one person asking you questions.
- Panel: Panel interviews offer hiring managers more than one perspective on prospective employees. These interviews involve meeting with multiple people at once.
  - Round robin interviews are similar to panel interviews, but instead of meeting with several people at once, you meet the interviewers one after another.

http://www.fullerton.edu/career/students/interviewing/interview-attire.php
In addition, some hiring managers may ask you to meet with some of your potential coworkers.

- **Group:** You are interviewed at the same time as other candidates.
- **Meal:** A preliminary or follow-up interview held over a meal or at a social event. These interviews are typically a way for employers to see how a candidate handles social situations.
- **Working:** You are asked to work on a project as the employer observes.
- **Phone:** Typically screening interviews, phone interviews are sometimes scheduled for candidates who would have to travel long distance to interview in person. These are usually followed by a second interview.
- **Skype or other video:** Allows the interviewers and candidate to see each other. This technology may be used in screening, one-on-one, or panel interviews. These can also be requested if the candidate is unable to meet in person.
- **Second Round:** Narrows down a larger pool of candidates and typically determines a final candidate.

**Answering Interview Questions**

Keep these tips in mind as you answer the interview questions. Be yourself!

- **When you answer interview questions, be thorough, concise, and thoughtful.**
- **Remember that your tone of voice and nonverbal communication are just as important as your words.**
- **Your understanding of the job description will help you tailor your responses to the position.**
- **Answer questions honestly.**
- **Try to relate your past experiences with ones you may have in this new position.**
- **Answer the question that you are asked. If you are unsure of the question, ask politely for clarification. It is ok to confirm that you thoroughly answered the question.**
- **Be considerate of the interviewers’ time and pace your answers appropriately.**
- **Pause to think about your answers before responding. This will help keep you from rambling.**
- **Refer to the job description when you can.**
- **Show a desire to grow in the field and in the position.**
- **Think of examples that showcase your leadership, teamwork, conflict management, and general work ethic abilities.**
- **When answering a question about your weaknesses, do not say a strength is your weakness (“My biggest weakness is that I work too much”). This does not give the interviewer much insight into your work habits. In addition, make sure you mention what steps you are taking to overcome your weakness.**

The STAR method of answering questions is a wonderful way to make sure that you cover the important points of your experience while answering the questions appropriately. This method is particularly suited towards responding to behavioral questions such as those listed on page 8.

**Situation:**

- **Set the scene and explain the background and context for the example you are using.**
- **Be brief.**
- **Think of relevant who, what, when, where, and how information.**
Task (Target):
- Explain the point of what you were trying to do.
- Highlight challenges and constraints (cost, deadlines).

Action:
- Describe what you did to complete the task.
- Be specific.
- Should provide examples of desired traits without you having to state them (leadership, teamwork, initiative).

Result:
- End with the outcomes and effects of your endeavors.
- Make sure to include what you learned from the experience.
- If you can do so, include a quantification of your efforts, such as an increase in profits.

---

Example: Using a STAR Response

Tell me about a time you disagreed with a coworker and how you handled it.

Situation: In my role as the team lead of an infectious disease group, I often oversaw several different specialists coming in and out of our team. At one point, a specialist joined our team and vehemently disagreed with our existing plan for handling a complicated case to the point that it began to impede our meeting productivity.

Task: As the team lead, it was my job to make sure that we continued to stay on schedule, meet the budget, and maintain patient health as our first priority. I made it a point to meet with my coworker individually for 30 minutes despite our conflicting schedules.

Action: During our meeting, I made sure that I approached him without being confrontational. I maintained an atmosphere of openness and understanding. It turned out that he had some great ideas that from his previous position. When I explained to him that we just didn’t have the budget to carry out his ideas, he said that he had not received our budget breakdown.

Result: It turned out, as many things do, that the issue simply stemmed from a communication error and as soon as I offered him the budget information, he completely understood and we were able to move past it. I learned that it pays to take a moment to step back and focus on understanding before becoming angry. It only took a half hour out of both of our days and in the end saved us countless arguments in meetings, allowed us to stay on schedule, and stay within our budget.
Traditional Interview Questions

Traditional interview questions will ask about your educational background, experiences, skills, and goals for the future. These questions help the interviewer learn more about you as a potential employee. Some examples, grouped by common topics, are listed below.

Describing yourself:
- Describe yourself.
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses? What can you offer us that someone else cannot?
- Discuss your educational background.
- Why should we hire you?
- Describe accomplishment you are most proud of.
- What was your biggest failure?
- Are you a leader or a follower?
- How do you handle pressure?
- What was the last book you’ve read for fun? What are your hobbies?
- What are your co-worker pet peeves?
- What makes you uncomfortable?

Previous experiences:
- Why do you want to leave your current company?
- Why is there a gap in your employment between [insert date] and [insert date]?
- What are three things your former manager would like you to improve on?
- What were your bosses’ strengths/weaknesses?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.
- What would your previous coworkers say about you?
- What are some of your leadership experiences?
- What do you like the most and least about working in this industry?

The position:
- Why are you interested in working in this position?
- What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/60 days/90 days on the job?
- Are you willing to relocate or travel? Would you work holidays/weekends?
- Who are our competitors? What is the name of our CEO?
Future goals:
- What are your career goals? Personal goals?
- What gets you up in the morning?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

**Behavioral Interview Questions**

Behavioral interview questions allow the interviewer(s) to understand how you handle various situations. They are formatted to be open ended. Interviewers want to gauge your analytical and coping skills, and your ability to solve problems creatively. You will want to refer to specific examples from your past experiences. Examples are grouped by some common topics below.

**Stress:**
- Describe a time in which you were faced with stresses that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give some examples of ways you minimize stress in your life.
- Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?
- Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?
- Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with the situation?

**Time management:**
- Give me an example of a time when your schedule was interrupted by unforeseen circumstances. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation in which you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time you had to strategically meet all your top priorities.
- Describe a long-term project that you managed. How did you keep everything moving along in a timely manner?
- Sometimes it’s just not possible to get everything done on your to-do list. Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?

**Conflict:**
- Give me an example of a time you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a time when your supervisor was not satisfied with the quality of your work. What actions did you take?
- We all make mistakes we wish we could take back. Tell me about a time you wish you’d handled a situation differently with a colleague.
- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle the situation?
- How did you resolve a conflict between yourself and another person on the job?

**Problem solving:**
- Describe a time when you had to be make a quick decision.
- Give me an example a problem you solved and tell me how you went about solving it. What kind of information did you gather before coming to a solution?
- Describe an experience in which you had to pull together resources that were not under your control.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to think on your feet in order to delicately extricate yourself from a difficult or awkward situation.
- Describe a time when you had to interact with a difficult client. What was the situation, and how did you handle it? Did you meet the client’s expectations? How do you prioritize your customers’ needs?

Team work:
- Can you tell me a time when you were able to effectively “read” another person and guide your actions by your understanding of his/her needs or values?
- Can you tell me a time in which you felt you were able to motivate your co-workers or subordinates?
- When working on a team, what role do you usually take? Why? How do you contribute to a team?
- Describe a time when your supervisor adopted one of your ideas.
- Tell me a time when you had to implement change in your job. How did you handle this challenge?
- Tell me about a time when one of your teammates was not pulling his/her weight. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you worked under close supervision or extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that?
- Talk about a time when you have worked closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.

Communication:
- Tell me about a time when you’ve used your communication skills to get an important point across.
- Describe a time when you have had to speak up to be sure that other people knew what you thought or felt.
- Describe a time when you were the resident expert on your team. What did you do to make sure everyone understood you?
- Give me an example of a time when you have had to explain something fairly complex to a frustrated client. How did you handle this delicate situation?
- Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn’t very responsive. What did you do?

Work Ethic:
- How do you establish priorities? How do you make important professional decisions? Be specific.
- Describe a time when you took the initiative to solve a problem.
- Describe a time when you were able to be creative in your work. What was exciting or difficult about it?

“In most job interviews, people say they are looking for people skills and emotional intelligence. That’s reasonable, but the question is, how do YOU define what that looks like?”

Susan Cain
Tell me about a time you were dissatisfied with your work. What could you have done to make it better?
Tell me about an accomplishment that you are very proud of and why it means so much to you.
Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?
Talk about a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.
Everyone has to bend or break rules sometimes. Recall an example of when you had to do this.

**Phone Interviews**

Phone interviews can be both a blessing and a curse. It can feel awkward to speak to someone over the phone for an extended amount of time without the benefit of visual cues to supplement the conversation.

- Make sure you know the interviewer’s phone number and are available at least 10 minutes before the interview is scheduled to begin. You want to answer the first time they call.
- Find a quiet spot where you will not be interrupted by anyone, including pets.
- If possible, avoid using a cell phone and use a landline. You are less likely to lose a signal or be cut off unexpectedly.
- Keep a copy of your resume nearby. Remember that anything on your resume is fair game in an interview.
- If it feels awkward to be interviewed over the phone, try looking in a mirror so it appears as though you are speaking to another person.
- Smile. It will come across in your voice and ease your nerves.
- Try dressing as if you are going to an in-person interview. This will put you in “interview mode.”
- Speak clearly and ensure that the interviewer can hear and understand you. Be prepared to repeat yourself if requested.
- Don’t be afraid to ask the interviewer politely to repeat themselves if you don’t understand him/her.
- Remember to get each interviewer’s name.
- One advantage to a phone interview is it allows you to use cue cards. Have information about the company, your responses to anticipated interview questions, and your own questions about the position written down. However, do not read directly from the notes.
- Remember the interviewer cannot see you. Your enthusiasm for the job must be evident in your tone of voice and in what you say.

**Skype and Video Interviews**

Many of the tips that apply to phone interviews also apply to video interviews. However, you must remember that the hiring manager or search committee can see you.

- In advance of the interview, find out what technology the interview will be using. If necessary, download new software in advance and test your internet connection, microphones, and speakers. Allow yourself time to troubleshoot technical problems. If possible, test your equipment by conducting a mock interview with a friend.
You must dress up for these a video interview, just as you would a face-to-face interview.

An advantage of video interviews is that you can read people’s expressions.

Make sure you are properly positioned in the center of the camera.

Make sure that you look at the camera. Avoid looking at yourself on the screen.

Make sure you are in a location that is well lit and has a strong internet connection. Ensure the background is tidy and professional-looking. You don’t want the hiring committee to be distracted by what is behind you.

Watch your body language and have good posture.

If you are soft spoken, consider using a headset or earplugs with a mic which will allow you to hear the employer better and allow them to hear you better.

**Asking Questions**

Employers will typically ask if you have questions for them at the end of the interview. Always ask questions. This demonstrates interest in the position and in the company and is a chance to show that you did some research before the interview. Ask questions that help you determine whether the job is a good fit for you. Try not to ask questions about things that you can easily find answers to online. Try to have 3 to 4 question ready. Below are some sample questions.

- Why is the position open? Is this a new or existing position?
- What are some of the upcoming and ongoing projects that I will be working on?
- What are the most important tasks or milestones that you would expect me to accomplish in the first 6 months?
- Does the job involve travel?
- What do you consider to be the greatest challenges for someone in this position?
- When and how often are performance reviews conducted?
- Can you tell me more about [insert project here] that I noticed on the website?
- What opportunities for growth and advancement can this position offer?
- What do you like most about working here?

**What You Should NOT Do**

Below are mistakes that can wreck your chances of landing the job.

- Lying on your application
- Not qualified for the position
- Lack of the basic skills necessary for the job
- Lack of confidence, poise, or enthusiasm
- Poor communication skills and an inability to answer questions properly
- Poor personal appearance and an unhappy or unpleasant demeanor

“Finding a job that is a good fit is as much about you selecting the right company as it is about them selecting the right candidate.”

Miles Anthony Smith
**Illegal Interview Questions**

By law employers cannot ask questions about your nationality, affiliations, marital status, disabilities, military status, and age. If asked an illegal question, you can respond with “I’m sorry, I don’t feel comfortable answering that.” Below are some sample questions.

- Are you a United States citizen? Where were your parents born?
- How old are you?
- Who do you live with?
- Do you plan to have a family?
- Do you have child care arrangements?
- To what clubs or social organizations do you belong?
- How tall are you? How much do you weigh?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Please complete this medical history. Have you had a recent physical exam?
- If you’ve been in the military, were you honorably discharged?
- What branch of the Armed Forces did you serve?
- What religion are you?
- What is your current salary?

Certain questions ARE legal to ask. These can include:

- Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages can you read, write, and speak fluently? (Being able to speak a specific language may be a requirement of the job.)
- Are you over the age of 18?
- Would you be willing to relocate? (This is ok if asked, as long as if its asked to all candidates)
- Do you belong to any professional or trade groups that would assist you in doing this job? (This would include professional associations like APHA.)
- Are you able to lift and carry 50lbs?
- Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job with or without reasonable accommodations? (Once the interviewer has thoroughly described the job in detail)
- What type of training did you receive in the military?

**Follow Up**

Send a thank you email within 24 hours of the interview. Send individual emails to each person who interviewed you. Thank them for their time and for the opportunity to meet them and learn more about the organization. Offer to answer any additional questions they may have. You can also send a thank you note by post.

Let your references know that you have interviewed for the position. Describe the position so they can be prepared to give the best reference possible.

If you are not offered a position, thank the interviewers for their consideration and time. It is appropriate to ask politely if there was anything lacking in your application or interview.
Every interview is a chance to practice and improve your interviewing skills. Reflect on your experience. Ask yourself what went well and what could you have done better.

**Tips for International Students**

Interviewing can be an especially intimidating experience for international students. Cultural norms vary across countries and sometimes even across states. Sometimes interviewers are aware of the differences and sometimes they are not. These are a few additional tips for international students.

- Eye contact is expected. It shows confidence and respect.
- Handshakes should be firm, not tight.
- Don’t slouch
- Punctuality is very important. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview.
- Attire is an important part of your professional image. It should always be freshly laundered, conservative, and a suit is usually best.
- Applicants are expected to speak of their skills and achievements. It is not boastful to promote yourself as a good employee.
- Use a friendly, conversational tone when responding to questions, but don’t ramble.
- If you would like assistance in thinking through your answers, the Writing Center, located in the SPH Library, is a wonderful resource to help you write out answers to sample interview questions.

**Health Professions Interviewing**

If you are looking to pursue a health professions education (medical, dental, etc.), those schools often require interviews as a part of the application process. There are many similarities between these interviews and job interviews, however a few extra points and examples are listed below. This list is more specific to professional school interviews and is not a complete list. Questions will depend upon the type of school to which you apply and the school itself.

**Interview prep**

- Wear professional clothes to the interview. A suit is usually best for a professional school interview. Follow the guidelines above for what to wear.
- Know what courses you’ve taken, volunteer experiences you’ve been part of, and everything else that may be on your CV and application well. Be able to answer how these experiences can help you reach your health professions goals.
- Practice your answers. Be sure not to ramble.
- Research the school.
- Know current events, especially those that are important to your field of choice.
- If there is a blemish on your record, be ready to explain it. Have an explanation that is not an excuse.
- Be prepared to be interviewed by a panel.

**Example Questions**

- What motivated you to become a _____?
- What would you do if you could not become a _____?
Why did you decide to pursue your MS/MPH? How will your public health degree help you in the future as a _____?
What do you feel is the biggest issue currently facing the industry?
How will you deal with not being able to help everyone?
Why would you be a good fit for _____?
Describe three strengths that brought you to this field.
How has your involvement in _____ helped prepare you for this field?
Tell us about a practical experience you had in this field.
Describe one major health problem that our society faces and what you think can be done.
Explain your thoughts on: abortion/euthanasia/physician assisted suicide/obesity/diet supplements for weight lifting/ malpractice suits/ HMOS, etc. (think controversial topics)
   ○ This is usually to judge your general knowledge, not to judge your stance on the subject.
What is the one big thing you want to convey to the admissions committee today?

Questions for you to ask:
What kind of academic support is available to students?
Describe the school’s clinical and non-clinical years.
Is there a mentorship program?
Does this school allow for international rotations?
Are there stable amounts of federal financial aid available for students and substantial university endowment aid?
What kind of student organizations are there at the school?
Are students required to purchase the school’s insurance?
How involved are students in the community?
Is there flexibility in the coursework?
How often do students publish original research?

Information gathered from UTHealth School of Public Health Office of Public Health Practice and Career Services, The Muse, Dr. Tom Denham, Glassdoor, University of Berkeley Career Center, USA Today, Emory University, Salisbury University, Harvard University, University of Illinois at Chicago, and St. Mary’s College of Maryland.