Interviewing Guide

Part 1: When to Expect an Interview

When most people think about an interview, they think about the last step in an application process where they either get the job, internship, or are accepted to a program. The truth is, you are interacting with people on a regular basis that are interested in your future goals, why you want to pursue a certain career, or what skills you possess. While the remainder of this handout will be related to formal, professional interviews, it’s important to know that these tips can also be applied to more informal interviews that can occur when you’re:

- Pursuing a volunteer position
- Meeting with a Principal Investigator about a research positions
- Discussing a shadowing opportunity with a healthcare or industry professional
- Speaking with professionals at networking events like a job fair or CBS Alumni Networking Event
- Attending a professional meeting or conferences
- Even just running into people at random who may able to support you in your professional goals!

It’s also important to remember that not every interview process is the same. You may be asked to participate in an interview early on in an application by phone or online video chat, or asked to participate in more than one in-person interview. You may also be asked to interact with individuals who aren’t on the formal interviewing committee. For example, you may interact with current students during informal events held during the interview process, or you may work with office coordinators to arrange the logistics of your interview. While these folks may not be on the official committee, they will be sharing their perceptions of you with the interview committee, and so it’s important to treat them respectfully and professionally.

How to briefly introduce yourself and your experiences to others: the elevator pitch

This type of introduction, often referred to as an elevator pitch, is great to use in a formal or informal professional setting. It’s a way to present yourself in an organized and relevant way to someone, and allows you to answer the question “Tell me about yourself” & “Walk me through your resume” when you meet someone for the first time.

One strategy for structuring your elevator pitch is to use the “Present-Past-Future” model:

The *present* - where you are right now (Name, Major, Year in School)
The *past* - a little bit about the experiences you’ve had and the skills you’ve gained. Focus on experiences that are relevant to this particular opportunity.
The *future* - why you are really excited for this particular opportunity

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Example: “I am currently a senior at the College of Biological Sciences and plan to graduate this May with a degree in biology. This past summer, I completed an internship working for a medical device company, where I worked on a process improvement map for the receiving of raw materials that ended up saving the company $150K annually. In this experience, I learned a lot about what it means to work on a multigenerational, diverse team. Outside of work and my studies, I am currently a member of the Twin Cities’ Big Brother Big Sister program which allows me to give back to the community. Based on your job posting, your company seems to be offering a work experience that will help develop my biology lab skills, which is why I am excited to be meeting with you today.

Part 2: How to Prepare for an Interview

Some aspects of your interview preparation may differ depending on the type of interview you’re doing, and where you are in the interviewing process. If you have an interview, we recommend connecting with a member of the career team to ask specific questions related to your upcoming interview experience.

Research the organization, lab, graduate school, company or health professional school
One of the first steps in preparing for any interview is to do some background research into the organization. You want to be able to demonstrate that you understand what the organization does, and that the goals of the organization align with your interests. Be sure you have an understanding of their:

- Mission Statement
- Products or Services Offered
- Target Market or Demographics of Clients or Individuals Served

Prior to your interview, you should also plan to review the specifics of the position for which you are applying, and put together a list of questions you have about the position and the organization.

Identify appropriate attire for the interview (the CBS Career Team can you help decide!):
Every organization will have certain expectations about the attire of their employees. You want to be sure you dress accordingly for your interview. Even if you are conducting a phone or online interview, dressing up can often help you feel more confident during the interview. Additionally, you don’t want to be stuck wearing pajama bottoms during a video interview in which you unexpectedly need to stand up from your computer.

There are two types of attire that are common for professional interviews:

- **Business Professional:** Blazers, pant or skirt suits
- **Business Casual:** Slacks, khakis, skirts, button down or collared shirts, blouses or sweater

If you have questions about choosing the appropriate attire for your interview, the CBS Career Team can help you decide!

For Phone Interviews:

- Identify a quiet location with a strong wireless signal where you can speak without being interrupted
- Practice with a friend or family member to make sure you sound clear, are speaking into the microphone, and are pausing appropriately for others to ask questions or clarify information
- Outline your main talking points for common interview questions. Remember- you don’t want to read responses directly from the page, but the benefit of a phone interview is that you can refer to notes regularly throughout the interview
Online Video Interview (Skype, Google Hangout, Zoom etc.)

- Identify a quiet location with a strong internet connection where you can speak without being interrupted. If you need help locating a good spot or need access to technology such as a laptop with a webcam, reach out to a CBS Career Coach for help.

- Practice with a friend or family member to make sure the lighting and background is appropriate, you sound clear, are speaking into the microphone, are demonstrating appropriate eye contact (looking into the web camera, not at the screen)

- Communicate with your interviewer about their username, and what the plan is if the technology isn’t working properly. Often an employer will want to call you, so it’s important to you have your phone with you.

In Person Interview -

- Generate new examples of how you have experience with the skills necessary to be successful in this next step. You may be speaking with the same people who interviewed in the first round so it’s more interesting if you have new stories to share- it’s okay to have similar responses to why you are interested in the job or about yourself

- Have copies of your references available and connect with your references in advance of your interview so you can confidently say, “Yes,” if you’re asked if they can contact your references

- Research starting salaries for this type of position through sites like glassdoor.com or salary.com so you are prepared if you’re asked about your salary expectations

Part 3: Interview Questions

Depending on the interview setting, you may be asked a variety of types of questions. Below is an outline of some of the different style of questions you may be asked. For help with determining what style of interview you may want to prepare for, meet with a CBS Career Coach!

Introductory/Overview Questions
These questions include:
- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your resume.

Using the approach outlined in the elevator pitch section can be helpful in outlining a response to this type of question.

Behavioral Interview Questions
Most interviews will consist of behavioral interview questions based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior. With these types of questions, you will walk your interviewer through “stories” which illustrate how you have behaved in the past. These stories can and should be from a range of experiences: work, internship, extra-curricular activities, classroom, research, etc.. You want to give interviewers an idea of how you perform in different settings; so be careful not to focus your answers from only one area of your life.

One approach to answering behavioral questions is to use the “STAR technique,” by describing the situation, task, actions, and results:

- **Situation** - Describe the situation so that the interview understands the context of the story. Keep this fairly short.
- **Task** - Describe the task at hand. Give enough information for the interviewer to understand, but don’t include all the nitty gritty details
- **Action** - This is where you can describe the skills and knowledge that you used to address the task. In addition, be sure to include the steps and process you took to complete the task. This is normally the longest part of your answer.
Result – Describe the outcome of the situation. Did your action help resolve the task? If possible, try to quantify your result as much as possible.

When answering a question using the STAR technique, your answers should generally not exceed 2-3 minutes.

Example 1: Tell me about a time you had to be a team player in order to meet a goal.

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<td>Describe the situation. Keep this fairly short.</td>
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<td>One of the core classes in my college curriculum is Foundations of Biology. This course is team-based and teaches the fundamentals of biology through solving real-world problems. Our team was tasked with coming up with a proposal to address the fungal disease white-nose syndrome affecting bats.</td>
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<td>Describe the task at hand—give enough information for the interviewer to understand but not the specific details.</td>
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<td>Our team was struggling to connect because of our busy academic schedules and we were starting to get behind on our project because we were only meeting for 10 minutes before class.</td>
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<td>Think of skills and knowledge that were called on to address the task. In addition, include the steps and process you took to complete the task. This is normally the longest part of your answer.</td>
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<td>I decided to create a doodle poll to gain a better understanding of when our group could meet weekly outside of class and also created folders within Google Docs to upload and share aspects of the project with one another. I also used the doodle poll to book study spaces and created a weekly meeting schedule.</td>
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<td>This is the outcome of the task and action stated in quantifiable terms, if possible.</td>
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<td>As a result, we were able to use google docs to write and comment on our project when it was convenient for each of us and allowed us to make progress on our project in-between our weekly meetings. We successfully completed our project and each team member felt we had all contributed equally.</td>
</tr>
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Example 2: Video of the STAR Technique

Visit [z.umn.edu/startechnique](z.umn.edu/startechnique) to see the STAR Technique demonstrated by the St. Paul Career Center at the University of Minnesota. When preparing for behavioral interview questions, it’s a good idea to think about what skills and qualifications are important to convey for the particular position. Review the job description or admission requirements and pick out the key qualifications and skills that are stated. These will be things like leadership, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, teamwork, resilience, critical thinking, quantitative and qualitative reasoning, etc. For more ideas of skills to practice with, you can also look at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)’s Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)’s Career Readiness Competencies.
Once you identify key skills, practice formulating an answer to different behavior based questions using the STAR technique. Visit z.umn.edu/behavioralquestions to see a list of examples of behavioral based questions you could be asked in an interview.

**Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) Questions**

Students applying to health professional school may be required to engage in multiple mini interview (MMI) style questions. This unique style of interviewing challenges candidates to answer questions or perform tasks that are ethically ambiguous and do not have a right or wrong answer. The University of Minnesota Medical School utilizes this method and describes it as “a circuit exercise, where applicants are presented scenarios that will measure non-cognitive characteristics such as communication skills, professionalism, ethical decision making and moral behavior.” The CBS Career Team can help students practice this method of interviewing in mock interviews and workshops.

Students who want to learn more can review the University of Minnesota Medical School’s and Pre-Health Student Resource Center’s MMI information:

http://z.umn.edu/medschoolmmi
http://z.umn.edu/phsrcmmi

**Technical Questions**

Technical questions are used to understand your knowledge of specific skills or scientific theories or models. You may be asked to walk someone through a specific lab technique and what it’s used for, explain a scientific concept, or demonstrate your ability to do a lab technique or use a specific computer program.

**Improper Questions:** You may end up in a situation in which interviewers ask improper or inappropriate questions, and you may be unsure of how to respond. It is illegal to ask questions about a candidate’s race, color, sex, religion, national origin, birthplace, age, disability or marital/family status. For more information: https://z.umn.edu/illegalquestions

**Questions for the Interviewer**

Asking questions about the company, job position, or graduate/professional school is one way of expressing your interest in the organization and letting the interviewer know you’ve done your research on the organization. In addition, think of this part of the interview as a way for you to find out if this job/spot is right for you! You will be expected to ask some questions; never say, “I do not have any questions.”

- Prepare 3-5 questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview.
- Ask questions that can’t be answered from the organization’s website or job/school description.
- Keep it conversational; ask follow-up questions if you find the topic interesting

**Part 4: Giving a Closing Statement**

Your closing statement should be a convincing statement about why the organization should select you. Not all candidates will give a closing statement. If you do give a closing statement, you can leave a lasting impression on the interviewer. It’s alright to repeat a skill/strength you may have mentioned earlier in the interview. It will just reiterate that you have the skills needed for the job/school/program. Below are some points to consider:

- Key strengths or skills
- Significant work experiences that are relevant to the desired position/school
• Out of the box education experiences, such as study abroad
• What’s the value you will add to the organization?

Example: Finally, I’d like to mention that I have a consistent history of leadership activities at school and in the workplace. Also, I am great at working with ambiguous project goals, seeking the key aspects that need to be worked on, organizing projects, and following through to completion. This is exemplified by my experience as the Service Engagement Leader for the Biochemistry Club when I coordinated 6 service events over the course of one semester. I believe with my past experiences and eagerness to learn I will be a great asset to your company.

Part 5: Sending thank-you messages

Sending a thank you to your interviewers within 48 hours after your conversation indicates your continued interest in the opportunity. It is acceptable to email your thank you note. Mention something unique about your conversation, and express appreciation for their time/information (be specific about what you talked about).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Interview Question Resources for Graduate School:
Emory Graduate School - Division of Biological and Biomedical Sciences: https://z.umn.edu/practicequestions
Sociobiology: Impressing us on your Graduate School Interview: https://z.umn.edu/impressus

Interview Resources for Health Professional School:
Pre-Health Student Resource Center’s Interviewing for a Health Program: https://z.umn.edu/healthinterview

Interview Question Resources:
Live Career: Job Interview Questions for College Seniors/Recent Grads https://z.umn.edu/recentgradquestions

InterviewStream:
• Using a webcam, record your mock interview and review it on your computer (must access through a GoldPASS account) http://umn.interviewstream.com/

Have Questions?
We invite you schedule an appointment to talk about interviewing or to have a practice interview with a Career Coach. For additional assistance with interviewing, contact CBS Student Services at 612-624-9717 to schedule an appointment with a Career Coach.