INTERVIEWS

Interviews are conversations with potential employers to tell them more about the skills, interests, and qualifications you briefly highlighted on your cover letter and resume. They also enable you to learn more about the organization and position to determine whether the job is in line with your personal goals and interests.

What are interviewers looking for?

Be confident in the fact that you already have the basic skills and qualifications an employer is seeking - otherwise they would not be spending time interviewing you. In an interview, an employer is looking to determine factors such as skills and abilities, experience, company fit, and personal qualities and interests.

Handling different types of interviews?

1. One-on-one
   The most common interview format, where you meet individually with an employer or recruiter.
   - Make good eye contact
   - Break the ice by asking casual questions or making small talk at the start of the interview - this will help you relax and connect with the employer

2. Panel
   Panel interviews consist of two or more interviewers taking turns asking questions.
   - Make eye contact with all interviewers when answering a question, not just the individual who asked it

3. Group
   Employers may hold group interviews to screen multiple candidates at once. These interviews may also involve a group activity that requires applicants to work together to solve a problem or complete a task.
   - Listen to your fellow interviewees and be open to their ideas
   - Don't think of it as a competition, but rather an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to work in a team environment

4. Telephone
   Typically used as pre-screening but also when interviews take place in other locations. Verbal communication skills are especially important because the employer can't see your facial expressions or gestures.
   - Smile when speaking into the phone to help convey enthusiasm through your voice
   - Dress professionally as you would for an in-person interview to help put yourself in an interview frame of mind

Before the interview

1. Do your research
   - Review the position posting and highlight specific skills or personal qualities that the employer mentions
   - Prepare stories and responses to address these concerns
   - Research the company or organization to gain a better understanding of who they are and what they do
   - Prepare questions about the organization to ask during the interview

2. Practice
   - Interviewing is a learned skill that can be improved with practice
   - Practice your responses to typical interview questions with a friend or family member. Get comfortable telling your stories and answering questions about your experiences

3. Plan ahead
   - Plan your route to the interview beforehand. Double-check the location and map your route via public transit or figure out where to park before the interview
   - Arrive 5-10 minutes before the start of your interview. Arriving too early can be bothersome to employers, who may have other interviews and appointments before you. Waiting too long can also increase your nervousness

4. Dress the part
   - First impressions count! In general, dress one step up from what the organization's employees wear on a typical day. When in doubt, dress more formally
   - Be conservative and detail-oriented (e.g., polished shoes, dark socks, neat hair, no colognes or perfumes)

5. Come prepared
   - Bring extra copies of your resume
   - Have a list of your references on a separate sheet of paper ready
   - Bring something to write with and a notebook or clipboard to take notes on

a place of mind
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THE INTERVIEW

You made it! Here are some tips for the interview itself, and best practices for follow-up.

General tips

- Great interviewer(s) with a firm handshake, good eye contact, and a smile
- Monitor the messages you send with your body language, e.g., hand gestures, slouching, fidgeting, etc.
- Monitor the body language of the interviewer(s). If they stop writing notes and look ready to move on, finish your point quickly
- Be honest with your responses
- Avoid slang expressions such as “ya know” or “like”

Don’t be afraid to:
- Seek clarification if you are unsure what the interviewer is asking
- Ask to have a question or parts of a question repeated
- Request a moment to think about your response or to return to the question later on in the interview

Introduce yourself

Employers often begin an interview by asking you to say something about yourself. Respond using the PAWS formula
- Personal: Who you are and why you’re interested in this position
- Academic: Your academic interests and how your education/training relates to the position
- Work: Previous relevant work or volunteer experiences you have, and what you accomplished or gained from these experiences
- Skills: Skills you developed or demonstrated in previous experiences and how they relate to the position you’re applying for now

Typical questions

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What do you know about our organization/company?
- What is your greatest strength/weakness?
- What are your long-term/short-term goals?

Illegal questions

Under the Employment Standards Act of BC, questions pertaining to age, race, ancestry, religion, colour, sex, marital status, physical/mental disability, place of origin, political beliefs, family status, and sexual orientation are illegal (unless directly related to the position). You should not answer questions about these subjects.

Behavioural-based questions

These questions require you to tell a “story” from your past experience to demonstrate how you handled a particular situation. Employers ask these questions to assess how you might act in similar situations in the future. You should prepare stories beforehand to respond to questions like the following (and highlight the skills they are assessing):
- Describe a time you made a difficult decision in the absence of your supervisor? (Judgment, Independence, Decision-making)
- Tell me about a time you had to work as part of a team. What was your role in the team? What did you do to ensure that the group functioned effectively? (Teamwork, Leadership)

Answer behavioural-based questions by using the STARR formula:
- Situation: Background on the scenario, with enough detail for the interviewer to imagine the scenario in his or her mind and understand that the event did actually occur
- Task: The task you had to complete or the problem you faced
- Action: The steps you took to deal with the task or problem
- Result: The impact of your work. Was the problem solved? How did others react? What feedback did you get from your supervisor? What did you learn or accomplish?
- Relevance: How the skills you showed or gained from the experience relate to the position you are applying for

Questions for the employer

You should have some questions ready to ask the employer at the end of an interview to demonstrate your level of preparation and interest. Discover if the organization and position is a good fit for you by asking questions like:
- What kind of training will I receive?
- What do you (the employer) like most about working for this company/organization?
- Will I have an opportunity to take on new responsibilities once I get comfortable in my position?

After the interview

Be careful not to ask too many questions about salary and benefits. Some employers prefer to disclose this information in a subsequent interview or discussion.

Send a thank-you card or email to your interviewer(s). Address each interviewer individually by name. If you are unsure or have forgotten their names, look online or phone to find out.

For more help with interviews

Book an advising appointment or attend an interview workshop. Sign up online at students.ubc.ca/career or by phone at 604-822-4011.

students.ubc.ca/career
Interview Questions

COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOUR BASED

a. Describe a time when you were having difficulties communicating with another person. How did you go about improving the situation?
b. Tell me about a presentation that you have made and how you went about preparing for and delivering it. What oral communication skills helped you to make it successful?
c. Tell me about a communication challenge you had recently. How did you ensure that someone understood what you were saying?
d. Describe a time when you had to express your thoughts or feelings even if they were different from the other members of the group. How did you go about expressing your opinion and what was the group’s reaction?

TEAM WORK/CONFLICT BEHAVIOUR BASED

a. Tell me about a time when you were part of a team that wasn’t working very well together. Describe the situation and what methods you used to improve the situation.
b. Tell me about a time when you had a conflict or disagreement with another team member and the steps you took to correct the conflict. What was the outcome?
c. Describe a situation in which you were able to influence the actions of others in a desired direction. What was the situation and what was the outcome?
d. Describe a time when you had to work as part of a team to complete a task. What was your specific role, and what did you learn about working in a team?

ORGANIZATION/INITIATIVE BEHAVIOUR BASED

a. Describe a specific situation that demonstrates how you are able to manage several tasks and responsibilities at one time. What was the situation and what was the outcome?
b. Tell us about a time when you had to make an important and quick decision without input from anyone else. Describe the situation, the steps you took, and the outcome.
c. Describe a time when you had to come up with creative ideas and concepts to develop a solution to a problem. What were the specific ideas you contributed and what was the outcome? How were you able to manage your time effectively?
Interview Questions

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Why should I hire you? / Why do you want to work for us?
- What would you like to be doing in five years? Ten years?
- What academic areas do you like the most? The least? Why?
- Which of your accomplishments makes you most proud?
- What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
- How do you deal with stress?
- How do you manage your time?
- What are your long-term goals? Short term goals? When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- How would a previous supervisor or co-worker describe you? / How would your current or former colleagues describe you?
- How do you work with other people? What work have you done as a member of a team? What kind of people (and work environment) do you work best with?
- What are the qualities of a great team? What do you bring to a team?
- What kind of boss or supervision do you prefer?
- Can you supervise people? How do you know?
- Briefly describe your research as though you were talking with someone without a technical background or expertise in your field.