

# INTERVIEWING

Congrats! You got an interview! That's awesome. You're one step closer to employment!

Interviews come in a variety of settings and formats. You might have a phone or Skype interview. There's the traditional one-on-one in-person behavioral interview. Or, you might have a skills testing, case, or group interview. Often, multiple formats will be used in various stages of the interview process.

Regardless of the format, the goal of the interview process is the same: to determine fit. Interviewers are looking for fit in a few main areas: skills, personality, company culture, and work ethic. The company is trying to determine your fit with the organization, job duties, and existing department, but you need to ascertain the same for yourself. In a way, they're trying to impress you as much as you are them. Use the interview (and your research) to learn whether the job is right for you, your skills, your goals, and your work habits.

## PREP

Interviews can be intimidating, but with a few steps, a little practice, (and fingers crossed for good luck) you'll be fully prepared and ace your interview.

**Figure out the details:** What format will the interview be? Where will it take place? Figure out how to get there—public transit, parking, room number etc. If it's a phone/Skype interview, make sure you've exchanged the relevant contact information. Who will be contacting whom?

**Bring the goods.** Print out copies of your resume. Have multiple copies—more than the number of people you'll be interviewed by.

**Know how to get there.** Figure out what stop to use or where to park. Do a trial run if you can.

**Get your outfit ready.** Dress a little fancier than you would for day-to-day work; it's fine to be more dressed up than the interviewer. Conservative is a good bet. When in doubt, go with business formal attire (black, navy, or dark grey suit or skirt suit; button down shirt; dark shoes—no sandals). COM fields can add a little more color and personal touch.

Make sure all pieces of your outfit are clean, well-fitting, match, and in good condition. Shaved face, clean hair and nails, no perfume/cologne, subtle makeup, minimal jewelry, and fresh breath (but no gum chewing or mints during the actual interview).

## PHONE/SKYPE SPECIFIC TIPS & TRICKS:

**Exchange contact info** (email and phone/Skype). Determine who is supposed to call whom. Even if they're calling you, get their phone number and email just in case anything goes wrong.

Add them as a contact to your phone or Skype account beforehand.

Go somewhere **quiet**. Make sure you have a good connection. Place a test call.

**Be early.** Be ready in your spot 15 minutes before the allotted time.

**Be professional.** Dress professionally. Sit up straight. Smile. Although it may feel unnecessary in a phone interview, it'll come through in your voice and speaking style.

## RESEARCH

In a competitive job market, lack of research can be interpreted as lack of interest. You need to know enough about the company to know if you would take the job. And, enough about yourself, your skills, and their needs, to convince them that you're the right fit.

**Know the company.** Learn as much as you can about the organization. Go back to your job application research. If possible, talk to current employees about company culture, goals, and problems. Know the basics of company structure, what they do, who they work with, competitors, and industry trends. Be on the lookout for news, strengths, and challenges. Look at the [company research](#) page for info and ideas.

**Know the position.** Analyze the job description. Understand the basic job duties. Check LinkedIn for people with similar positions and read their job descriptions.

Find the salary range for that position and location. You may not be asked your salary expectations at first, but you should be prepared with an answer if they do ask.

**Know your contact.** Who will be interviewing you? Look them up on LinkedIn and the company website. Read staff bios. Understand their role in the organization, find some background info.

**Know your skills** (and yourself). Review your resume. Know why you're interested in the job. Understand your work ethic, how you do your best work. Be prepared to talk about yourself.

Go through your work history and think of things you can use as stories. Come up with basic answers for questions like: "tell me about yourself", "tell me how you dealt with a difficult customer/co-worker", "give me an example of a situation in which you worked through a problem to find a solution."

Remember details. Have specifics for each of these mini-stories. Come up with engaging (true) ways to convey the narratives.

Look over the list of common interview questions (pages 5-7) and be prepared to answer any of them.

## PRACTICE

From your resume and cover letter, they've already determined a basic fit on paper. Now they want to know how you as a human will do good things for the company.

**Tell stories.** Most questions will require short but elaborated answers. Usually, there is no right or wrong, and the interviewer wants to see how you communicate, deal with difficulties, and think on your feet.

It's more important to be genuine, authentic, and engaged than tailored exactly for the position. But, if you're asked a seemingly inane question, think about their underlying purpose of the question: what are they really trying to discern? Most likely, the question is not random and they're trying to figure out how you think on your feet and solve problems. Think back to your company research. What overarching skills, qualities, goals, and traits are they looking for in a candidate?

**STAR method:** The idea is that past experience is the best indicator of future success. It's used in behavioral interviewing. With STAR, describe the:

- **Situation:** Describe the situation in which your example occurred. What was the context and problem? Who were you working with? What were you working on? What role did you have?
- **Task:** Explain how the situation had changed, and how you were expected to address the change. What needed to be done? How were you involved? What problem were you trying to solve? What goal did you want to accomplish?
- **Action:** Clarify the steps you took to address the task. What did you do to resolve the problem? What and how did you contribute? Demonstrate skills you used in each step. What was your method?
- **Result:** Explain how your actions contributed to the overall end product. What was the outcome? What did you learn? How did the situation end? Quantify the results if possible.

**Mock Interviews through Career Link** (access under the Resources tab at the top, click on Mock Interviews). Here, you can do general industry mock interviews or you can create your own with questions from a variety of fields and topics. Record your answers with a webcam and send the answers to others for feedback.

**Mock interview with COM Career Development:** Schedule a mock interview with a COM Career Development member to get some additional practice and feedback.

**Practice practice practice.** Practice by yourself (out loud, not in your head). Practice with your friends. Practice with your family. Practice in front of a mirror. Practice online with CareerLink's mock interviews. Practice with us! Call us at (617) 353-3490 to set up an appointment.

## PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST:

- ✓ Do you know why you want the position? How do your skills and experience fit the company's needs?
- ✓ Do you know the names of your interviewer(s)?
- ✓ Do you know what you're going to wear? Does it fit well? Is it clean, pressed, and shined?
- ✓ Have you thoroughly researched the organization?
- ✓ Do you have questions prepared for the interviewer?
- ✓ Do you have several copies of your resume printed out? Do you have a list of references ready?
- ✓ Do you know how to get to the interview location?
- ✓ Do you feel calm, confident, and collected?

## DURING

**Be on time.** Arrive between 15-30 minutes early (wait outside if you're any earlier than that). To be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late, and to be late is to not get the job.

**Be polite** to everyone you meet. Stand up when the interviewer comes to meet you, [shake hands firmly](#), smile, maintain eye contact. Avoid filler words (um, uh, you know, like, well). Don't cross your arms, don't slouch, don't fidget.

**Bring copies of your resume.** Don't assume that your interviewer remembers it, has a copy of it, or even has read it. Bring along a list of references. Bring a pad and pen, but only take notes during if necessary. Ask permission before taking notes, "would it be alright if I took notes?"

**Be clean** and well groomed. Have nice breath, but no gum or mint chewing during the interview. Don't smell like smoke or drugs (legal, decriminalized, or illicit). And stay away from perfume or cologne.

**Listen.** Pay attention. Respond to the question at hand. Be engaged, ask questions, show interest.

**Be positive.** Don't bad talk any past employers, co-workers, or supervisors.

**Figure out what the underlying question is** and make sure you address that in your answer.

**Be confident! You've got this!**

## AFTER

**Reflect on the interview.** What went well? What could you improve upon? What surprised you? What did you learn? What did you forget to mention? How do you feel about the position now? Is it a good fit for you? Would you take the job if it were offered?

**Send a thank you note** within 12 hours. Keep it short. Thank them for the interview. Address something that was mentioned. Reiterate your ability to provide further information if needed. Close with something professionally personal (if it came up in the interview). Sending as an email is fine, but for extra oomph, send a handwritten note as well.

**Follow up promptly.** If you promised to provide references, samples, or further information by a certain date, make sure it's on time (and early is better).

**Tell your references** that someone might be in touch soon. Give them the name of the company, position, and interviewer.

## TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTION EXAMPLES

### PERSONAL:

- Tell me about yourself
- What are your hobbies?
- How did you hear about this organization?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What other organizations have you been interviewing with?
- Why do you want this job?
- What do you find most and least attractive about this position?
- What do you know about our products/services?
- Why do you want to follow this career path?
- What distinguishes you from other candidates?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
- What would a close friend say is your greatest weakness?
- What personal development strategies have you used to overcome any of your weaknesses?
- Define success. Failure.
- What is your major accomplishment?
- Of which accomplishments are you most proud?
- Do you think you've achieved what you wanted to?
- What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?
- Describe how you handle stress. Give an example.
- Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume.
- How do you keep up with trends in the field? What's the most recent article you read?
- What was the last book you read, film you saw, or off-campus event you attended?
- Describe your personality in three words.
- Tell me a joke.
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- Why should I hire you?
- How do you define leadership?

### EDUCATION:

- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend BU? In retrospect, how do you feel about that decision?
- How would your education be relevant to the work you would do with us?
- In which campus activities do you participate?
- What classes did you like best? Least? Why?
- Do your grades reflect your ability? Why or why not?
- Were you financially responsible for any portion of your college education?
- What is your math proficiency?

EXPERIENCE:

- What job related skills have you developed?
- Give an example of a situation in which you worked through a problem to find a solution.
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work and attitude?
- How would a former co-worker describe you?
- What job-related skills have you developed?
- How do you handle criticism?
- What kind of supervision gets the best results from you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- Do you prefer working alone or with others?
- Describe your experience using xxx software/equipment.

CAREER GOALS:

- What other types of positions are you considering?
- How do you feel about travel?
- How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?
- What qualities are you looking for in a boss?
- Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten?
- What are your career goals—both short and long term?
- How do you feel about working overtime?
- How long do you think you'll be in this position? Can you commit to two years?

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS:

- Give me an example of a team project you completed.
- What would your marketing plan be for xxx product?
- Tell me about the most difficult customer you've ever dealt with.
- What is the most challenging team you've ever been part of? What was your role?
- Describe a situation in which you persuaded someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time you failed.
- Give us an example of when you've shown your leadership skills.
- Describe a time you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Describe a time you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem.
- Convince me you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- Tell me about a decision you had to make quickly and without much information.
- Describe a specific instance that you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about an important goal you set in the past and how you attained it.
- What would you do if you saw a co-worker doing something unethical?
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation you've ever given.
- Tell me about a time you went above what was expected of you to get the job done.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person even with that individual might not have liked you (or vice versa).
- Describe a situation that required you to act under pressure.

**Illegal questions:**

Interviewers are not allowed to ask about race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, disabilities, age, arrest records, military discharge, sexual orientation, or citizenship.

These questions are unlikely to come up, but if they do, either try to find out the underlying cause of the question and respond to that part, or politely inform the interviewer that the question is inappropriate.

**Good questions for you to ask the interviewer:**

- Please describe the duties of position X for me.
- What is a typical day like in this position?
- What kinds of assignments might I expect in the first six months on the job?
- Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?
- Is there a lot of team/project work?
- To whom would I report to in this position? Who would my co-workers be?
- Is this job an addition to the staff or a replacement of a past employee?
- Tell me about the types of projects past employees/interns have participated in.
- Tell me about immediate projects the person coming into the job will be responsible for.
- Where does the position fit into the organizational structure?
- What qualities are you seeking in the person for this job?
- What distinguishes a great candidate from a good candidate for this position?
- What would you add to or subtract from the background of the previous person?
- Can you tell me more about the structure of your training program?
- Does your company encourage further education?
- What is the company culture like?
- What are the metrics the company uses to measure performance?
- How do you define success?
- What do you like best about your job/company?
- What attracted you (the interviewer) to this organization?
- Is your company environmentally conscious? In what ways?
- What are your growth projects for the next year?
- What exciting or challenging directions do you anticipate over the next few years?
- What challenges are currently facing your organization/industry? What will be the role of the person you hire in facing these challenges?
- What is the next step? When should I expect to hear from you? Or should I contact you?
- When will you make your selection?

**DO NOT ASK**

- What does your company do? (you should already know this)
- What can your company do for me? (focus on what you can do for them)
- What is the salary? (this will come up later)
- What types of benefits do you offer?
- How much time do I get for vacation? (uh... lazy!?)
- How much is the signing bonus? (c'mon. Don't be greedy)