

INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Congratulations! You have a job interview. Your resume and cover letter caught an employer's eye by illustrating your relevant experiences and skills. The interview process is designed to evaluate in greater detail whether your experience, skills and personality match the needs of your potential employer. The interview is an exchange: the employer is evaluating you, and you should be assessing the employer.

Making the most of an interview requires research and preparation beforehand; a strategy during the interview; and appropriate follow-up after the interview.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Screening:

The first discussion you have with an employer is typically a brief 30 minute conversation. At this stage, the conversation is general, but still important. The recruiter's task is to reduce the candidate pool to a manageable number.

Phone:

The phone interview is a possible substitute for either the screening or second interview, particularly if budgets are tight or the distance is long. If a recruiter calls to conduct a phone interview without prior notification, ask to schedule the call at a later time when you are sure you will have privacy and quiet. You do not have to begin answering questions on the spot. Being polite but assertive in asking to reschedule is key. It is important to be well-prepared for a phone interview, with résumé and writing material at your fingertips and a calm, but enthusiastic state of mind. Your tone of voice, conversational style, and energy level, as well as what you say, will be especially important during a telephone interview.

Call-back/Selection:

The recruiter may want or need second opinions on his/her evaluation of you. The interviewers at this stage are typically those who will directly supervise or work with you and may not be professional interviewers or recruiters. Keep in mind that your audience has changed. Dependant on the situation, the employer's objective at this stage is to identify a few (2-5) finalists for the position or to make a hiring decision. (Note: sometimes employers will have two or more rounds of call-back interviews. Be patient and use all you learn in each round to advance in the process.) This interview typically takes place on-site at the employer's office and involves several interviewers. Questions are a bit more penetrating, often requiring you to apply your experience to job-related situations. You will be expected to ask more sophisticated questions given all you have learned from your previous interview.

Often, second or on-site interviews require that you eat a meal with your interviewers. Being interviewed over a meal is challenging. Do not mistake it as less important than the other conversations during the day. It is a good idea to decline alcoholic beverages even if those interviewing you order them. If you think a drink is part of the work culture, however, one that is slowly sipped is fine.

Group:

You may be interviewed by a group of individuals, perhaps a search committee or management team. The challenge here is to connect with all interviewers by maintaining eye contact with each member of the group as you respond to the questions. Bring several copies of your so that each interviewer can have a copy.

A variation on the group interview is when you are one of a group of candidates. You may be asked to complete a group assignment. Interviewers observe the group to assess your leadership style and your ability to work on a team.

Case:

Most typically used by consulting firms, but sometimes used in other business settings, the case interview evaluates an applicant's ability to carefully analyze a problem and clearly relate his/her thought process. The interviewer presents you with a real or simulated problem to consider. You are not expected to arrive at the "right answer." Rather, the interviewer wants to see how you break a problem down into manageable pieces, how you think under pressure, and your ability to be

convincing and persuasive. It is important to prepare for case interviews by consulting with a Career Specialist. Our office also suggests you use the following resources:

- “The Vault Guide to Case Interviews”: Access the Vault through Trinity Recruiting – <http://trincoll.erecruiting.com>. The link to the Vault will appear on the main page of Trinity Recruiting. We also maintain copies of this Vault Guide in the Career Services Office
- McKinsey & Company website: McKinsey & Company has created a comprehensive section on its site with information about preparing for a case interview, as well as sample questions. To access this information, go to: http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/how_do_i_apply/how_to_do_well_in_the_interview/case_interview.aspx. Also, make sure to check out the video created by McKinsey that contains further information about case interviews: http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/how_do_i_apply/how_to_do_well_in_the_interview.aspx
- Bain & Company website: Similar to McKinsey, Bain & Company has dedicated a portion of its site to helping applicants prepare for their case interviews: http://www.bain.com/bainweb/join_bain/ace_case.asp. They have also prepared a Guide titled “How to Ace the Case Interview” that you can access at <http://www.bain.com/bainweb/pdfs/acethecase.pdf>. Finally, check out Bain’s online practice cases: http://www.bain.com/bainweb/join_bain/case_interviews.asp

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(See also CSO Guide on Interview Questions & Legal Issues)

Résumé-Based:

These types of questions are most common. Questions are based on specific components of your résumé - that is, your internships, summer jobs, activities, etc. These questions are often phrased as "Tell me about what you did (at your internship)?" or "What responsibilities did you take on as (Treasurer of your club)?" To prepare for these, think about each item on your resume and what was important about each. What did you learn? How did you grow? What skills did you gain? Use specific examples from your experiences to answer these questions!

Theoretical:

Questions such as "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "How would you describe yourself?" are also very common questions. You can best answer these questions by anticipating questions based on the job description and preparing some responses, citing examples from your resume. It is important to give tightly-focused, concrete answers to even the vaguest of questions. Accomplish this by relaying real world stories as examples.

Case:

There are several different kinds of case interview questions. The two most typical kinds of cases are estimations (also called numerical cases) and client questions. Estimation questions include questions such as: “How many gas stations are there in Chicago?” and “How many car batteries are sold in the US each year?” These questions may seem completely irrelevant, but the goal in asking an estimation question is not to see whether you are an expert on gas stations or car batteries. Rather, the interviewer wants to observe how you approach problem-solving. Instead of computing an answer in your head, you are encouraged to "talk out" your approach to the problem, step- by- step. The other type of case question – client questions – presents you with a concrete business problem to be solved like “Trinity is trying to reduce summertime energy costs. What can be done?” Again, an interviewer is not looking for a correct answer but rather a cogent thought process. Consult the resources listed at the top of this page for more information about case interviews.

Behavioral:

This type of interview question is based on the theory that past behaviors predict future behaviors. These questions will often be phrased as "Tell me about a time when (you had to be creative to solve a problem)." Preparing for these types of questions can best be done by knowing yourself, your skills and your abilities. Review your resume and understand how experiences you may have had relate to the specific skills required in the position.

BASIC STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW

Greeting:

Make sure you have a firm hand shake and excellent eye contact. This stage is the "how's-the-weather-this-is-a-beautiful-campus" chit-chat. Relax, participate, and enjoy it. You are demonstrating a basic social skill that is important in virtually every job.

Q&A:

The interviewer will want you to talk about your experiences so that he/she can evaluate you on the organization's criteria. You should do most of the talking in this phase. Make sure you emphasize 3-5 prepared key points that you want the employer to know about you.

You will then be asked if you have any questions about the organization, program, or job. Don't ask questions that should have been answered in your research. Ideally you have identified insightful questions to ask through your research and conversations. See the "CSO Guide Interview Questions & Legal Issues" for a list of potential questions to ask during an interview.

Closing:

The interviewer will likely be watching the time and will give overt cues that the interview is approaching the end. He/she often will tell you about the next step(s) in the hiring process. If he/she does not, it is a good idea to ask. Be sure to thank the interviewer for his/her time and restate your interest in the program or position. Ask the interviewer for a business card so that you can write a thank-you letter, which should be sent out within 24 hours of the interview.

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Research the Organization, Position, and Salary:

Before your interview, you will want to find out as much as possible about the employer, the field and the position. Read literature on the employer, including annual reports and their website (if appropriate). Consult periodicals and newspapers to learn of current, newsworthy issues at the organization and, especially, within the field. Researching competing organizations can also give you good information to use as a comparison. Thoroughly understand the requirements of the job or training program. Do not waste time in the interview asking for this information if it is available elsewhere. When conducting your research, make sure to utilize the resources available to you through Career Services, including Spotlight on Careers, the Vault and Career Search (See "CSO's Guide to Online Resources" for more information).

Another great way to conduct research is to speak with alumni/ae or others who work for this employer or at similar organizations. Find out what personal success factors are considered in the organization and be sure your presentation includes them. Use the Bantam Alumni Mentoring Network (BAM) to make contacts and arrange informational interviews.

Know last year's salary range for your discipline and degree level. Consult resources in Career Services for last year's salary ranges, look at www.salary.com (a resource that provides salary information on the web), or talk to alumni/ae in the field for guidance. That being said, NEVER initiate a discussion of salary, particularly during in an initial interview. The employer will discuss salary at or about the time an offer is extended.

Know Thyself:

Understanding yourself is fundamental to successful interviewing.

Based on your research, identify experiences, skills, successes, and personal characteristics that meet the needs of the position or training program. If you are having difficulty identifying your skills, use Optimal Skills Assessment. This online program allows you to analyze your skills and experiences in two different ways. One approach is to explore your experiences – an exercise that is recommended if you are uncertain of those skills you possess. If you are more familiar with your own skill-set, the other approach is to simply describe your skills. Although the Optimal Skills Program

suggests you use this assessment to create a personal website or online portfolio, Career Services discourages you from doing so unless it is appropriate for your career field. Rather, our office suggests you use this resource to better understand your own skills and more clearly convey them through your interview. To access this resource, go to: <http://trincoll.optimalresume.com> and click on "Get Started" to set-up an account.

Finally, review the "CSO Guide to Interview Questions & Legal Issues" and map out a strategy for some of the questions. Think about what is behind the question and address those issues. For example, "What are your weaknesses?" is not a question about your fallibility but, rather, a way to see how you handle stress, how self-critical you are, and how you are working to improve any identifiable weak points in your personality or experience. For each response you make, introduce your point, develop it, then bring your answer to a close. Rambling and going off on tangents are classic interviewing downfalls! Focus your thoughts around these key questions: "Why are you interested in ABC organization?" "Tell me about yourself," and "Why should I hire you?"

Practice:

Know how interviews "feel." Do not use your first interview as a proving ground. Instead, practice in a no-risk situation.

The Career Services Office provides you with a number of different ways to practice and strengthen your interviewing skills:

- Alumni Practice Interviews: Each semester, Career Services hosts practice interviews. On these nights, Trinity alumni/ae volunteer to conduct mock interviews with students in the Career Services Office. Each student is interviewed for approximately 30 minutes and then receives both oral and written feedback. You also have the option to have your interview videotaped. You will be notified of the practice interview dates well in advance and are asked to sign up on Trinity Recruiting. If you are not available on the designated dates, you should email career-services@trincoll.edu. Our office maintains a list of alumni/ae willing to conduct practice interviews both in-person and via telephone.
- Practice Interview with a Career Specialist: You can also call Career Services to set up a practice interview with a Career Specialist. A Career Specialist will spend an hour simulating a "real world" interview and then provide you with immediate feedback. As with the Alumni/ae Practice Interviews, you have the option to have your interview videotaped. To schedule a practice interview, call or email Career Services.
- Optimal Interview: Optimal Interview helps prepare you for interviews with real-to-life, multi-media interview scenarios. All you need is access to a computer with a web cam and microphone. No special software is needed, and you are always welcome to use the computers and web cams available in the Career Services Office.

When you start a new Interview Prep session, the first step is to configure your interview. Select the length of the interview, anywhere from 5 to 20 questions. Then select the type of interview you want to practice: Screening Interview, Behavioral Interview, Hiring Manager Interview, Tag Team Panel Interview, Pressure Interview, Final Interview. You also have the option to build your own interview.

After you begin the interview, you have two minutes to answer each question, and you can accept or redo any answer you provide. When you finish your Interview Prep session, you are able to view your responses in a split screen with the interviewer. You can also meet with a Career Specialist to review your interview and receive feedback.

For more information or to access Optimal Interview, go to: <http://trincoll.optimalresume.com/account/> and click on "Get Started" to set-up an account. If you have any questions about Optimal Interview, please contact Career Services.

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Remember – it is important to practice and prepare, but don't rehearse or memorize your answers. It is virtually impossible to predict the questions employers will ask. You should, however, have several main points or agenda items you want to bring up that link the needs of the organization to your experiences.

INTERVIEW DAY LOGISTICS

Dress:

Dress professionally. Do not be eliminated in the first few seconds of an interview because your appearance is inconsistent with the "culture" of the organization. When in doubt, always wear a navy blue or black suit. Being neat and conservative is the safest bet.

Arrive Early:

Allow a generous amount of travel time and arrive early. Use the extra 10-15 minutes to relax, collect your thoughts, and observe what is going on around you. You need to be polite and professional to everyone you meet. You never know who will be evaluating you. Get a feel for the work environment. Learn all you can now about whether you want to work in this environment.

Travel Arrangements:

Most of these logistical tips apply to on-site visits, second and/or final interviews.

- Clarify travel arrangement prior to your visit. Some companies will prepay tickets or provide you with a travel advance. Make sure you understand the reimbursement procedures for your expenses. Confirm your hotel reservations and/or rental car if the company does not do so for you.
- Ask the company contact for an agenda or at least a general idea of how your day will be structured so you can be prepared.
- Have a contingency plan. If flights are canceled due to weather conditions, what will you do? Ask for phone numbers, in case your departure is delayed, so that you can keep your host informed after business hours.
- Obtain a map of the area, if necessary. Bring extra cash and/or credit cards. Extra resumes, paper, and a pen will be useful as well.
- If you have the opportunity to look around the area while you are visiting the organization, you may feel more comfortable making a job choice.
- Get a good night's sleep and eat an adequate breakfast.

After the Interview:

Ask for a business card from each person with whom you speak or make sure names and titles are printed on your agenda. Think about the interview and make some notes on what you learned about the job, organization, or career field.

Be sure to write the interviewer(s) a brief thank-you note within 24 hours after your interview. See the "CSO Guide for Thank-You and other Business Letters." If you arranged to have the expenses of an on-site interview reimbursed, submit an expense report complete with receipts.

Follow-up:

If you do not hear from the company within the specified amount of time, call. Ask about the status of your candidacy. Talk with your host, the person who arranged the interview.

If you are rejected, you will be disappointed, but do not give up. If an interview does not go well, learn from your mistakes. (Another reason to plan a practice interview!)

If you receive an offer in writing, respond immediately! Offer thanks and suggest a date by which you will inform him/her of your decision. Confirm the terms of agreement in your letter: starting salary, job title, location. (See the "CSO Guide for Thank-You and other Business Letters.") If you receive a verbal offer, it is best not to accept it on the spot. If, however, this is your third or fourth round of interviews, you may be prepared to do so. Typically you thank the caller for the offer and ask about a date by which you can inform him/her of your decision. Always ask for an adequate amount of time for making the decision. Confirm that a letter has been sent detailing the offer. Consult the "CSO Guide to Recruiting Expectations and Responsibilities" for more information about deciding on an offer.

If you have questions about accepting or rejecting an offer or handling any other challenging interview questions or situations, feel free to speak with a Career Specialist at the Career Services Office.