



**COLORADO
COLLEGE**

Career Center



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Interviewing Skills

Few words create the mixed upwelling of excitement and fear quite like "interview." While the interview is not the end game of your job search process, you should feel confident in the fact that you are a final candidate. You are one of the individuals who has made it past a series of elimination rounds. ■

Types of Interviews

▶ **Screening Interview**

A brief, surface-level interview designed to eliminate unqualified candidates.

▶ **General Interview**

Thirty minutes to an hour during which the employer and candidate have a conversation involving questions about a candidate's interest, experience, and qualifications.

▶ **Phone or Video Interview**

Increasingly, employers are performing general and screening interviews by telephone or video, often on Skype. Phone interviews in particular can be difficult because you receive no non-verbal feedback from the person asking questions. In a phone interview situation, make sure that you are in a quiet area, can speak freely and clearly, and will have good phone reception throughout. If you are doing an interview via Skype, set up access well in advance and practice looking at the camera, not at the screen.

▶ **Selection Interview**

An hour to an entire day in duration. The employer and the candidate engage in a deeper discussion of qualifications, responsibilities, and other aspects of the position and of the organization. Other members of the staff or selection committee often participate in this, or in individual interviews throughout the day.

Setting the Interview

Make sure you ask the employer the following when they contact you to set up the interview.

- The name(s) and title(s) of the interviewer(s)
- The time and date of the interview
- The location of the interview, including a specific address
- A phone number
- Interview schedule
- Any specific items they would like you to bring (e.g., portfolio, personal documents, transcripts, etc.)

Preparation

Self-Knowledge

Prior to your interview, you should be able to answer each of the following questions in an articulate and concise manner. **Each answer should illustrate your skills and abilities with specific examples.**

- How do your education and work history relate to this organization?
- How do your interests, values, skills, personality, and goals match the job description?
- What are your achievements and accomplishments?
- What are your personal strengths & weaknesses?
- What attracts you to this job? Organization? Field?
- What are your short-and long-term goals?
- What are your salary requirements?

Often, the first question an interviewer will ask is, “Tell me about yourself.” They’re not trying to find out where you were born or where you went to high school; instead, use this opportunity to outline the experiences and skills that make you a great candidate for their company.

Knowledge about the Organization

■ Non-Profit Organization

- What are the objectives of the agency?*
- What are some of its programs?*
- What are its plans for the future?*
- What is the organization's financial status?*
- How does the organization receive funding?*

■ For-Profit Company

- What services or products do they offer?*
- What is their organizational structure?*
- How old is the organization?*
- What are its plans and goals for the future?*
- What is the growth record?*
- What is the organization's financial status?*
- What are its relocation policies?*
- Who are the main competitors?*

■ Higher Education Institutions

- What is the size and nature of the student population, faculty and administration?*
- What major programs and concentrations are offered?*
- What emphasis is placed on teaching, research, and public service?*
- What are the funding sources (private or public)?*
- What is the institution's reputation and accreditation status?*

Whatever the industry, always know the organization's mission statement or guiding philosophy.

Behavioral Interviewing

The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that *past performance is the most accurate predictor of future performance.*

In other words, behavioral questions are those, “Tell me about a time when...” questions. Other sentence cues include: “Describe,” “Tell me about,” and “Give me an example of.”

How to Answer a Behavioral Question

Tell them about a particular situation, not a general one, using the STAR format.



Task refers to the task that needed to be accomplished in the story, and action is what you did to accomplish the task. The result should always be framed in a positive way.

Spend only 2-3 minutes on each question. The interviewer(s) should be able to “see” your story clearly from your description, giving them insight into who you are and how you behave.

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Example | “Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult challenge and how you handled it.” |
| <i>Situation (S)</i> | Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, <i>The Reporter</i> , and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts. |
| <i>Task (T)</i> | As head of the advertising team, I was expected to figure out the root of the problem and increase revenue by the end of the semester. |
| <i>Action (A)</i> | I compared the benefits of <i>Reporter</i> circulation with other ad media in the area and designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet in our next mailing. I also set up a special training session for the account executives with a Business and Economics professor who discussed competitive selling strategies. |
| <i>Result (R)</i> | We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements, and we increased our new advertisers by 20 percent within the first three months. |

Think of examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service, and/or work experience—look over your resume to refresh your memory. In addition, you may use personal examples that you are especially proud of, such as running a marathon, campaigning for student body president, exhibiting paintings in an art show, climbing all of the tallest peaks in the Rockies, etc.

 **You can also give behavioral responses to typical interview questions like, “Do you have good organizational skills?” Instead of saying, “Yes,” give them a behavioral example. Visit our website for examples of common interview and behavioral questions.**

Practice, Practice, Practice

All of the information in the world won’t help you if you bumble the delivery. You can set up a mock interview with a Career Coach or role-play with someone who will provide honest feedback. If the interview has come at very short notice and people aren’t available, sit front of a mirror and practice your answers out loud to yourself. Focus on identifying and changing distracting mannerisms, such as hair fiddling, staring at the floor or ceiling, or punctuating each remark with ‘uh’.

Interview Day: Presenting Yourself

For more detailed information on how to dress for your interview, see our professional dress guide.

1. Learn as much as possible about the company’s culture and how employees dress in advance. It is always better to error on the side of being overly professional and conservative.
2. Pay careful attention to detail: wear shined shoes, neatly clipped fingernails, and neatly styled hair. Keep jewelry and accessories to a minimum. Don’t display other body piercings, and cover visible tattoos. Perfume and cologne should be minimal; shower clean is best.
3. Ease your stress on interview day by preparing your outfit in advance. The Career Center staff provides in-person interviewing dress advice; bring or wear your outfit to our office for feedback.
4. Plan to arrive at the front desk of the company about ten minutes before the interview is scheduled to begin. Make sure to give plenty of leeway; **sitting in the parking lot for forty minutes is much better than arriving five minutes late!** If there is a receptionist, be sure to introduce yourself. This person is often asked for their input about each candidate. **What you do in front of the receptionist will get back to the interviewer.**

Negative Impressions

When interviewers respond to why they disliked a particular candidate, responses often include:

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|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Poor personal appearance | Failure to express thanks | Passive or indifferent manner |
| Tardiness | Overbearing/conceited tone | Immaturity |
| Limp handshake | Tactlessness | Indecisiveness |
| Lack of initiative | Poor eye contact | Cynical attitude |

Questions You Might Ask

Always ask questions of your interviewer(s), *especially* if they ask you if you have any questions for them. This will show your interest in the organization and highlight yourself as an excellent candidate. Here are some examples:

- What are the biggest challenges someone in this position would face?
- How will the work be evaluated?
- What kind of supervision will there be?
- What are the skills and experiences you're looking for in an ideal candidate?
- What opportunities for advancement exist?
- What kind of orientation and training are available to new employees?
- Are there long-range plans for the office or department?
- What is a typical work day like?

PRO Listen to what your interviewers say during the interview to gauge company climate and formulate relevant questions. If you have a question about something the employer said during the interview, ask them to elaborate.

TIP

Illegal Questions

Questions that seek information unrelated to the candidate's ability to perform the functions of the job are inappropriate and might be illegal. These include questions about race, religion, national origin, marital status, children, relatives, age, birthplace of applicant or relatives, and prior record. This does not mean that an employer cannot seek this information indirectly; for example, your age can be estimated from your date of graduation.

Inappropriate or illegal questions are usually asked by inexperienced interviewers, and they are often unaware that the question is inappropriate. Make sure you know whether a question is illegal before you question the interviewer about it. Obviously, these situations can be very awkward, and unfortunately the onus is on you to respond to someone else's inappropriate behavior. Think about how you might respond in advance.

- Answer truthfully if the truth is positive, but keep your answer concise
- Address the issue rather than the facts: "If you're concerned about staff turnover, I can assure you..."
- Move the question on to something else quickly
- Use humor
- Refer to the illegality of a question, and say that you'd rather not answer

Note: If you are interviewing with an on-campus recruiter and they asked you an illegal question, please speak with a member of the Career Center staff so that we can follow-up with the interviewer.

Closing the Interview

If you sense the interviewer is trying to close the interview and you are still interested in the position, briefly highlight your relevant skills and, if you have any pertinent questions, ask them. **Don't use this time to ask questions that you could answer yourself by looking in company literature or online**, including benefits or salary information. Finally, ask what the final selection process will be and what happens next.

Follow-Up

Follow-up your interview with a **thank-you note**. In this note, you should refer to specific issues which were discussed, express your thanks, and restate your interest in the position. Also, provide whatever credentials, references, or employment applications the employer may have requested during or after the interview.

If you can, hand-write your thank-you note clearly and legibly. Be sure to include all of the people that interviewed you. A typed letter or a professional email are acceptable if you are unable to send hand-written notes. If you don't hear back from the employer within the time frame they gave you, follow up with a phone call.

You should also thank the employer after a second interview. Many candidates feel that since they have already sent a thank-you note for the first interview, it isn't necessary to send a second one. **It is always correct to thank someone for extending a courtesy to you.** A second interview usually involves a lot of the interviewer's time and may also include expense for lunch or dinner. The letter may be simply a brief expression of your thanks for their time and consideration.

Common Interview Situations

Anticipate a variety of possible interview situations. Ask yourself, "What am I going to do if...?"

- ▶ **The interview is with a group of interviewers:** A committee will often meet and agree upon the questions to be asked and their sequence. Make eye contact with everyone during your response, but especially with the person who asked the question.
- ▶ **The interview is over a meal with alcoholic beverages:** Discussing your qualifications while eating is not an easy task. Order "bite-sized" food that can be eaten quickly without fear of spilling. **Use your best judgement about ordering alcohol.** Have one drink at most, and don't get drunk. They may be testing you to see how you handle certain situations. Do not become so relaxed that you disclose compromising information. If you're nervous about it, it's probably best to just not drink during the interview.
- ▶ **The interviewer is unprepared:** Individuals who do not conduct interviews on a regular basis might try to wing it. They may not have spent any time examining your resume or cover letter. This is an opportunity for you to take control of the situation. Offer information about yourself and ask open-ended questions of the interviewer. Your time spent practicing and developing solid responses will pay here.
- ▶ **The interview is conducted with a group of candidates:** Employers often use group interviews to disseminate information about the position and to make initial assessments. Listen closely, ask questions when appropriate, and look for opportunities to discuss your qualifications. Most of all, use your interpersonal skills. It is important to show that you are a team player and a leader.
- ▶ **The interviewer is discourteous: If you feel you are being harassed, verbally abused, or being subjected to illegal questions, you have the right to terminate the interview at any time.** Let the interviewer know that you no longer wish to continue with the interview and leave.
- ▶ **The interview is with potential co-workers:** Often, you will have an opportunity to meet with future co-workers. They will be asked for their feedback regarding your candidacy. Remember, you are still being interviewed and look for opportunities to sell yourself. Be yourself so they can get a sense of the type of person you are and the type of co-worker you would be.
- ▶ **The interview is with administrators or managers:** This scenario usually occurs during selection interviews, and indicates that the organization is very interested in you and is close to making a decision.
- ▶ **The interview involves a presentation or response to a situational question:** You may have to give a presentation if the position requires conducting workshops, sales, teaching, or training. The employer is looking for good communication and public speaking skills. It could be an assigned topic or your thoughts about how you would handle the job if you were to get it. Usually, you will be given advanced notice if they require a presentation.
- ▶ **The interview involves role-playing:** To give you an opportunity to demonstrate specific skills (e.g. counseling, advising, etc.), you may be asked to take part in a role-play where one of the interviewers assumes the role of a client and you are asked to counsel or advise that individual. Preparing for a role-play is tough because interviewers typically don't give you advanced notice.

Common Interview Questions

Self-Awareness

How would you describe yourself?
What motivates you to work hard?
How do you evaluate success?
How do you work under pressure?
What led you to this career path?
What characteristics are necessary for success in your field?

Weaknesses, Challenges

What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?
What have you learned from your mistakes?
Did you ever have problems with your supervisor? Explain.

Skills, Abilities, Qualifications

What do you consider your greatest strengths?
Are you creative? Give an example.
What qualifications do you have that will make you successful?
In what ways will you contribute to our organization?
Why should I hire you?
Why do you feel qualified for this job?
What are your own special abilities?
What is your managing style?

Knowledge of the Organization

Why do you want to work for us?
Why did you decide to seek a position with us?
What do you know about our organization?
What job do you want to work toward in our organization?

Values

What is your attitude toward working on weekends?
What are your top two values?
What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
What kind of work environments are you most comfortable in?
What two or three things are most important to you?
How are you evaluating the companies you hope to work for?
Do you have a geographical preference?
How do you feel about relocating?
Are you willing to travel?
Are you willing to spend six months as a trainee?
Describe your ideal job.
Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
What is the highest form of praise?

Experience

What jobs have you held?
Tell me about your experience.
How did your previous employer treat you?
What have you learned from some jobs you have held?
What jobs have you enjoyed most/least? Why?
What have you done that shows initiative?
Describe your current job.
What did you like most/least about your last job?

Goals, Objectives

What are your short term and long term goals?
What do you see yourself doing in five years?
What personal goals have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
How do you plan to achieve your goals?

Education

Describe your most rewarding college experience.
Why did you select your college or university?
Are your grades a good indication of academic achievement?
How has your college experience prepared you for this job?
What have you learned from your participation in extracurricular activities?
Do you have plans for continued study?
Why did you pick your program or concentration?
What courses did you like best and why?
Why did you choose the Block Plan?
What skills have you gained from your liberal arts education?

Interests

What are your interests?
What do you do in your free time?
What are your hobbies?
What types of books do you read?
How interested are you in sports?
How did you spend your vacations while in school?
Do you enjoy independent research?

Salary

What did you earn at your last job?
What do you expect to earn in five years?
What are your salary requirements?

General

What do you think it takes to be successful in our company?
What qualities should a successful manager possess?
Describe the ideal relationship between supervisors and subordinates.
What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
Define cooperation.

Stress Questions

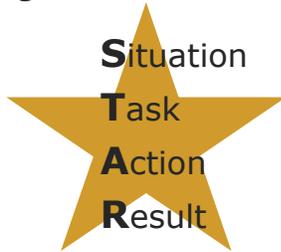
What causes you to lose your temper?
How often have you been absent from work, school, training?
Have you ever had trouble with other people on the job?

For case interview preparation, call us at 719.389.6893 or email us at careercenter@coloradocollege.edu to schedule an appointment.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

These types of questions are often difficult to answer on the fly. Jot down examples of stories in your past that you would use in your answers. Listen for sentence cues like, “Describe,” “Give me an example,” and “Tell me about.”

Don't forget the STAR format!



Task refers to the work that needed to be accomplished in the story, and action is what you did to accomplish the task. The result should always be framed in a positive way.

Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge and how you handled it.

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

Give me an example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

By providing examples, **convince** me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.

Describe a time, in any previous job, in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy that you didn't agree with.

Give me an example of an important goal you set and about your success in reaching it.

Describe the most significant or creative presentation you've had to complete.

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Interview Preparation Worksheet

What can you do? What will you do? How will you fit in? All answers should be no more than 1-2 minutes long.

Tell me about yourself.

- a. Who am I? Major, college, expected graduation date
- b. Interests
- c. Experience

This question is an overview of why you are applying for this position at this organization. Consider what is relevant to the job function.

Why are you applying for this internship/job/program?

Give details of why you are applying and show that you know about their program, etc.

What are your strengths?

Give 1-2 short examples.

What is your greatest weakness?

Give one weakness and explain how you're working to overcome or improve upon it. Don't choose something central to the position and don't offer this unless they ask. Always keep it professional—do not discuss personal weaknesses.

What are your goals?

Describe short (2 year) and long term (5 year) goals.

Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult challenge and how you handled it.

S-

T-

A-

R-

Choose another behavioral question that is relevant to the position.

S-

T-

A-

R-