

# INTERVIEWING

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## Tips & Strategies



CAREER AND  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT CENTER

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

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A job interview is an opportunity to showcase your relevant strengths, experience, and interest in the position for which you're applying. An interview is also a chance for you to ask questions of the employer to find out if the position is a good fit for you. The secret to a successful interview is thorough preparation and effective communication.

- ❑ **Research the organization.** Study the organization's website. Be familiar with their mission statement and values. What is the primary population they serve? Google them. What are people saying about them? Try to access their most recent annual report. Follow them on Twitter and LinkedIn. Employers will expect you to know background information on their organization, so be ready. If you know the name of your interviewer, check to see if he/she has a LinkedIn profile so you can view their professional background.
- ❑ **Understand the position.** If you have not been given a position description, request one from the organization. What specific qualifications are they seeking? If possible, conduct an information interview with a professional who currently holds this type of position to get an inside perspective. You will be expected to demonstrate how your qualifications meet those being sought in the position.
- ❑ **Know what you have to offer.** After reflecting on your diverse experiences, what have you learned and how does this relate to the position for which you're applying? **Write down specific examples** that would illustrate your match for the job description. Study your résumé and be prepared to articulate the transferability of all experiences listed. Anything listed on your resume is fair game for the interviewer to probe.
- ❑ **Be aware of your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.** Take advantage of the mock interview service through the CPDC. A career coach will ask you a list of interview questions and provide you with feedback on your strengths and suggested areas for improvement.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER

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- ❑ **Arrival Time.** Arrive at your interviewing destination approximately 10-15 minutes early. This should give you some time to organize your thoughts and observe the working environment.
- ❑ **Cell Phones.** Remember to turn off all electronic devices!
- ❑ **Professional Dress and Behavior.** For most organizations, typical interview attire includes a well-tailored professional suit. Do your research to know what is most common for the industry you're targeting. Professionalism is more than dress; it's how you present yourself. For example:
  - **Stand** when the interviewer approaches you.
  - **Firm handshake.** Extend a firm handshake to your interviewers.
  - **Eye contact.** This shows confidence and engages the interviewer.
  - **Smile.** Be polite to anyone you meet on the premises. You want to come across as enthusiastic, friendly and approachable. Avoid negativity, both verbal and nonverbal.



# DURING THE INTERVIEW

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## **What to Bring with You**

- Extra copies of your [résumé](#) on high quality paper
- A typed list of at least 3 [references](#) (also on higher quality paper)
- Approximately 5-7 typed questions you would like to ask of your interviewer(s) (samples are at the end!)
- A professional-style padfolio with paper and pen to take notes

## **Interviewing Tips**

- Pay attention to your body language/non-verbal cues.
- Enunciate your words well and slow your speech, particularly if you have a habit of speaking fast.
- Remember that it's okay to take a moment to think rather than blurting something out prematurely.
- Tailor your answers to be concise – no more than 2 minutes - and relate them to the position.
- Answer the interviewer's questions using specific examples from past experiences and your transferable skills.
- When addressing weaknesses, be sure to communicate how you are working to overcome them.
- Be prepared to speak thoughtfully about the experiences listed on your résumé.
- Always ask questions of your interviewer(s) at the end. Avoid asking questions related to salary or benefits during a first interview. Research average salaries for the position prior to the interview.
- Request business cards so you can follow up appropriately with a thank-you note.



# BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEWING

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Behavioral-based interviewing is a style most commonly used by interviewers. According to Katherine Hansen of Quintessential Careers, “The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations...Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate’s experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant’s potential for success.” Behavioral-based questions typically start out with “Tell me about a time when you...” or “Describe a situation where you...”

Behavioral-based questions are often related to skills such as *innovation and creativity, teamwork, decision-making, critical thinking, conflict management, leadership, flexibility, communication and motivation*. These skills can be developed through a variety of experiences – directly or indirectly related to the position; from paid or non-paid experiences.

**Preparation is the key to successfully answering behavioral-based questions. Try using the following strategies to help you organize your past experiences (also known as “stories”) as potential examples.**

- Make a list of skills or experiences which are relevant or transferable to the position being sought. Review any materials from the employer to help you identify these desired skills and experiences (job description, website, company reports, research, etc.).

- Think about situations in which you've utilized the desired skills. Come up with 3-4 stories from college, class projects, jobs, internships, volunteer activities, club involvement/leadership and hobbies. Think also of situations that did not go as planned or were difficult but turned out to be a learning experience.
- Practice telling your examples to others, such as friends and family, or a career coach.
- Make sure your examples are concise, well-told, and interesting. They should create word pictures of what you have done, learned or accomplished that relate to the job for which you are interviewing.
- Don't hesitate to market your accomplishments; this is not the time to be too modest!
- Be aware that some interviewers use **nonsense questions** (also commonly called **off-the-wall questions**), such as "if you could be anyone in the world who would you be?", etc. Though these questions may seem odd, they do have purpose. Interviewers may want to see if you have a sense of humor, or determine how well you can think on your feet, respond to pressure, or handle an unusual situation. While there is no true way to prepare for these types of questions, you can excel at answering them by not appearing rattled, and providing an honest response that is not too "abnormal" in nature.

## The STAR Strategy

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The objective here is to think ahead of time about stories that illustrate the skills and competencies associated with the position for which you're interviewing. The **STAR strategy** helps to organize and prepare your stories and examples.

### ★Situation

- What was the situation?
- What problems or challenges did I face?
- What was the context in which this situation occurred?

### ★Task

- What was my role?

### ★Action

- What did I do specifically?
- What skills did I utilize?

### ★Results

- What were the outcomes/accomplishments?
- What were the unintended outcomes?
- What did I learn?



# ADDITIONAL TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

*(Adapted from "You've Graduated, Now What?")*

## PHONE / VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS:

- Used when a company is considering whether or not to invite you for an in-person interview, or when companies want to screen people quickly; also can be used when the candidate is unable to interview in person.
- Always be prepared for a full-blown interview, not just a quick screening.
- Have a copy of your resume and supporting documents, such as your web portfolio, in front of you.
- Dress in your interview attire. You may feel a bit silly, especially in the case of a phone interview, but this technique works! You will look, feel, and sound more professional.
- Conveying enthusiasm is key. Smile when you talk into the phone or towards the computer screen. It makes a difference!
- Make sure you are in a quiet room with no distractions. Turn off all cell phones, music, or other outside noises. If you are Skyping, make sure your background is relatively plain looking. You don't want their attention distracted from you and your answers.



## GROUP INTERVIEWS:

- Involves several candidates interviewing at the same time, in the same room.
- Treat this as you would an individual interview, but be sure to engage with both your interviewers and fellow candidates. Direct your attention and engagement to whoever is speaking.
- Interviewers are often looking for how you interact with others and work as a team member.
- Be sure to communicate your answers without dominating the conversation.
- Some group interviews involve a group project, which is often challenging to prepare for. Again, demonstrate how you contribute to a team environment, and take appropriate initiative.

## BOARD / PANEL INTERVIEWS:

- Two or more people interview you simultaneously, usually taking turns in questioning.
- Each interviewer may have his/her own separate agenda and the only person really listening to your answer may be the person who asked the question.
- Make eye contact with each of the interviewers at the table.

## SERIES INTERVIEWS:

- Consecutive interviews (in one day) with several people in an organization. You may interview with someone from HR, your potential boss, and some potential colleagues both inside and outside the department.
- Assumes several heads are always better than one. Combined, they see qualities that would make a candidate suitable or unsuitable for the position and come to agreement on the strongest candidates.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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It's not over yet! **Be sure to send a thank-you note within two business days to each of your interviewers.** Thank them and restate your interest in the position. You may want to reiterate something that was discussed during the interview.

Thank-you notes can be in the form of a hand written, professional-looking, thank-you card or a well-crafted email. If you are no longer interested in the position, alert them to that fact.

Follow up with a phone call 1-2 weeks later, unless the employer specifically requests that you do not call or write following an interview. Reiterate your interest, inquire about their hiring timeline if it wasn't already discussed, and ask if they need anything further from you.

## GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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Below are sample interview questions for you to practice. Of course, not all of these questions will be asked, and you are likely to have additional questions which are directly related to the field or position.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position with this company?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- What are your specific strengths, weaknesses, and interests?
- In what ways have your college experiences prepared you for a career?
- What are your long-range goals and objectives?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization? In other words, what value will you add?
- Describe a contribution you have made to a project on which you worked.
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- Describe a situation in which you had to work with a difficult person (student, co-worker, customer, supervisor, etc.). How did you handle the situation? Is there anything you would have done differently in hindsight?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? Describe a situation in which you did so.
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- What interests you about our product or service?
- Why did you select Messiah University?
- What led you to choose your major or field of study?
- What college subjects did you like best/least? Why?
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- How do you work under pressure? Give an example.
- Tell me about a time that you made a mistake and how you learned from it.
- Tell me about a time when you learned something new.
- Describe a situation in which you worked in a team. What role did you assume? What went well and what didn't?
- What two or three things would be most important to you in your job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?

- Would you be willing to relocate?
- What makes you a strong candidate for this position – why should we hire you?
- What do you want us to know about you that isn't on your resume?

## POTENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

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ALWAYS have questions ready to ask. **Type out the questions, and take them with you to your interview.** Adapt the questions below for content and style as appropriate. **Remember to never ask about salary or benefits.** Let the employer initiate this conversation.

- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- How important does upper management consider the function of this department/position?
- What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
- What do you see as the most significant needs of the organization to which I could contribute?
- What would you expect me to accomplish in the first 60 to 90 days?
- Could you explain your organizational structure?
- What are a few things that really drive results for the company?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- Do you provide any training for new hires?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops, and training so employees can keep up their skills or acquire new ones?
- What particular computer equipment and software do you use?
- What kind of work can I expect to be doing the first year?
- What percentage of routine, detailed work will I encounter?
- How much opportunity is there to see the end result of my efforts?
- Who will review my performance? How often?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals in developing career goals?
- How much opportunity will I have for creativity and decision-making in my first assignment?
- What opportunities are available for professional development?
- What are the common attributes of your top performers?
- What is your organization's policy on transfers to other cities?
- Do you encourage graduate study outside of work time? If so, does your organization offer incentives? (tuition reimbursement, for example)
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?

