

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Steps to a Great Interview

1. Prepare for the interview as if you were preparing for an exam: know what to expect and do your homework (that is, research the organization and the job requirements).
 2. Practice with Big Interview, an online system combining instruction and practice to help in preparation for interviews, and improve interview techniques. Then set up a mock interview at the CLS. We are happy to help you prepare for any kind of interview situation.
 3. Know yourself—the qualities you offer, your goals, and the contributions you would make.
 4. Dress professionally; be polite, punctual, and prepared; and demonstrate confidence.
 5. Write a thank-you note to all interviewers within 24 hours of the interview. Restate your interest in the position and your appreciation for the opportunity to interview.
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Interview Etiquette

- Know the culture of the office and organization: are they formal or casual? Friendly or coolly professional? Bureaucratic or collaborative? Hierarchical or organizationally flattened?
 - In terms of attire, being dressed a bit more formally than your interviewers is ideal.
 - Make sure everything is covered: try sitting, standing, reaching, and moving around in general to be sure your clothes do not reveal too much.
 - Be careful with the number and kind of accessories you sport. Be certain they are culturally appropriate to the position you are seeking.
 - Be aware that standards of good hygiene are much higher in a professional work setting than on campus.
 - If your interview schedule includes a meal, be strategic about what you order. Never order alcohol (even if everyone else does) or meals that are challenging to eat.
 - Be aware of body language so that you project confidence and enthusiasm. (See Amy Cuddy's TedTalks, "Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are.")
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Tips for Answering Questions Effectively

- Listen carefully. If you do not understand a question, it's perfectly fine to ask that it be restated.
- Take your time. You needn't begin answering immediately; a brief pause allows you to gather your thoughts.
- When asked a multi-part question, remember to answer all portions. A good strategy is to repeat and enumerate the questions orally so you will remember what to answer. You may provide your answers in a different order, provided you answer all the original portions.
- "That's a great question" is not usually a great initial response to an interview question—it's typically filler. Better is something akin to "I'm so glad you asked," since it will cause the interviewer's ears to perk up, as if you're about to say something really interesting and engaging. (And then you need to be prepared to say something really interesting and engaging!)
- If you feel your listeners are becoming disengaged during a particular answer, try to wrap up your answer sooner rather than later.
- "I hope I answered your question" is not a very effective conclusion. Better is something like, "I'd be happy to go into greater detail later if time permits."
- Practice, practice, practice! Big Interview and a mock interview at the CLS will help you understand how you may be coming across to your interviewers and should help make you more confident during the real interview.

Common Interview Questions and Suggested Approaches

Below are some common interview questions. Prepare and practice answers for all of these, and be able to answer them naturally, confidently, and engagingly. See the Big Interview platform for a comprehensive list of questions.

Tell us a little about yourself. Answer in about two minutes. Be natural, avoid lengthy details that you will likely address later, and don't ramble. Touch on areas such as educational background, activities you are passionate about (e.g., campus and community involvement), work experiences, and career interests. Make sure to practice the spiel (with a timer), so that you come across as confident and enthusiastic.

Why are you interested in this position/company? Demonstrate that you have done your homework; it confirms your commitment and interest. Pick just a few points to highlight, and strategically select points that you can connect to your skills and abilities. Remember to show your enthusiasm!

What are your strengths and weaknesses? Be prepared for this bugaboo of a question! State your weakness first (you need only mention one), so your response ends on a positive note. Don't try to turn your weakness into a strength; rather, talk about how you have already been taking steps to lessen its impact on your professional life. Do not offer your worst or most minor weakness; try to find one in between. In terms of strengths, provide two to four, and tie them to the position itself. Make sure to be clear and concise: This question is another one you can easily practice.

Tell us about a time when you showed initiative/leadership ingenuity. This open-ended question is a behavior-based question (see section on Behavioral Interviews for more details). You are expected to provide specific examples of experiences that showcase desired qualities. Be clear, concise, concrete, and positive about others. Structure your answer in STAR format: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Why should we hire you? Be confident! Look the questioner in the eye and have an answer prepared to deliver. Make sure you know why you'd be a valuable addition, and believe in yourself.

Questions Appropriate for You to Ask

Make sure you always come prepared to an interview with questions; your research about the organization should stimulate your thinking about timely topics. Other more general questions include:

- Can you tell me a little bit about opportunities for additional training or professional development?
- What sorts of new initiatives are you planning in the coming year that will affect the person in this position?
- How do you give performance reviews?
- What are some typical career paths for individuals in this type of position?
- What is a typical day like for this job?
- With promotion, are transfer—including overseas—opportunities available?
- If you had to name just one area where you'd like the individual in this position to make the greatest impact in the coming year, what area would that be?

Interview Tips from Grinnell Alumni

Avoid being vague and always list your good qualities by referencing a situation that illustrates your virtues. Be confident; you're amazing!

One question I love to ask, "What makes you excited to come to work?" The answers I've gotten have always said a lot about the culture of the work environment and the type of people in it.

Questions matter. While the interview is a big opportunity for a potential employer to ask you questions, it's also equally an opportunity for you to ask your own questions.

Do the homework of researching the organization that you are applying for and be sure you understand the responsibilities of the position.

Remember to assess your comfort level and fit with the organization. It's not just about them liking you—it's a two-way street!