

Three Steps to Prepare For an Interview

Step 1: Research the Employer and Industry

Conducting research on prospective employers is essential to a successful interview. Employers want to hire candidates that can demonstrate solid knowledge and genuine interest in their organizations. So, what things should you know about an employer before the interview? Simply put: as much as possible.

You should be knowledgeable about the organization's mission, history, growth, products, competitors, locations, etc.

Step 2: Know Yourself

Keep in mind that anything and everything on your resume or CV is fair game for the employer to ask. Carefully review your resume and make sure that you can speak in detail about everything on it.

It is important that you are able to adequately communicate your skills, interests, and goals during the interview, and match them to the position you are pursuing.

Step 3: Practice, Practice, Practice

Like any other task you have mastered, interviewing is a skill. If you have ever been on a team, played an instrument, or performed in public, you probably didn't just show up to the event and expect to deliver a flawless performance. Instead, you probably spent many hours beforehand practicing, rehearsing, and visualizing what you would do and say. Well, interviewing is no different; it is a skill that requires preparation and practice.

Practice answering the interview questions listed on the next few pages of this workbook. Think about examples and stories about your experiences.

Identify Helpful Resources

1. Organization website & social media
2. Career Insider by Vault
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Identify Helpful Resources

1. Career Center Counselor
2. STAR/BAR Method for framing responses
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Identify Helpful Resources

1. On-line Big Interview Practice Tool
2. Career Center Mock Interviewer
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Interviewing is a two-way street; it is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your career ready competencies; as well as for you and the interviewer to get to know each other. Interviewers do not want to intentionally ask you difficult questions just to see you make a mistake. In fact, employers want you to do well during the interview. Think about it: they invest a lot of time and money screening and recruiting candidates. The sooner they can identify the right person, the sooner their job is done.

What Do Employers Look For During The Interview?

Employers typically want to know three things:

Can you do the job?

Will you do the job?

Will you fit in with the organization?

Your job is to provide enough solid information to answer an unequivocal “YES!” to all three of these questions. To do so effectively, you will need to be aware of the specific characteristics employers seek in new hires. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), who surveys hundreds of employers each year, the attributes most highly sought after are:

1. **Communication skills**
2. **Honesty/integrity**
3. **Interpersonal/teamwork skills**
4. **Motivation/initiative**
5. **5. Strong work ethic**

Career Center Interview Resources

Online resources for interviewing are located at career.berkeley.edu. **Big Interview** is an interactive tool that enables students to prepare for interviews using pre-recorded interview questions and webcam recorded answers. Use your CalNet to log-in to Handshake to access resources.

What Should You Look For During The Interview?

Just as employers interview you to see if you are a fit, you are interviewing them as well. By being attentive and thoughtful, you can learn important things about an organization during the interview. Some things you may want to consider include:

- How does the organization’s mission match with your interests?
- Does the nature of the job sound interesting?
- How is the organization run; does it seem well-organized?
- How do the other employees interact with each other?
- Are you excited about the possibility of this position?
- Does the job match your career interests?

What To Bring To The Interview?

- A professional portfolio with a pad and pen
- Several copies of your resume or CV
- Letters of recommendation (optional)
- Work samples (optional/based on industry)



A **chronological resume** is the most commonly used resume format. Listing your experience in reverse chronological order (with the most recent experiences first), this resume format accommodates all industries and levels of experience, and is preferred by the majority of employers and on-campus recruiters. Because a chronological resume presents your experience from most recent (relevant) to least recent (relevant), this format works especially well for students and entry- to mid-level applicants to demonstrate a vertical career progression. See the resume section of our website for examples of effective chronological resumes.

Although a chronological resume is often a safe bet for all levels, established professionals who have multiple gaps and/or unusually large gaps in their employment history, who are aspiring to make a career change into a new industry, or who want to promote a specific skillset may consider a skills/functional resume format or a hybrid/combination resume format as alternatives to the chronological resume format. If appropriate, established professionals may also move beyond a one-page resume.

While resume templates may be tempting, they tend to be inflexible; also, employers are often familiar with them and may perceive you as lacking ingenuity. Find a format that works for you, and use your own words to develop content that is unique to you.

THE RESUME BULLET: HOW TO SAY IT

Resume bullets should describe your skills and accomplishments, reflecting the order or priority that the employer has stated in their position description and requirements. Write bullet points for jobs, internships, volunteer experiences and activities where you've developed skills. Consider how these bullet points highlight skills and experiences that match the position requirements. Action-oriented statements highlighting your accomplishments should use concrete language and could include:

- **What:** What task (transferable skill) did you perform? Use action verbs! (See p. 18)
- **Why:** Why did you perform this task? e.g. to fulfill a goal, serve a need or make your organization/company better?
- **How:** Specifically how did you perform this task? What equipment, tool, software program, or method did you use to accomplish this task?
- **Result:** What was the positive result you achieved or impact you made by performing this task (quantitative or qualitative)?
- **Adjectives:** Spice it up with descriptors; sell yourself... go for it!

RESUME TIPS FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

- You may include work, leadership, and academic achievements from high school. By your third year in college, more recent experiences should replace those from high school.
- Don't worry about having limited work experience. Instead focus on transferable skills developed through other kinds of involvement or accomplishments.
- Your first "college resume" may require extra time to assemble. Expect to spend a few hours creating a rough draft, and make an appointment with a Career Counselor or see a Peer Advisor to review your document.
- Be patient with the process! Resumes are always a work in progress.



Career Tip: View many sample resumes on the Career Center website at:

<https://career.berkeley.edu/Tools/Resume>

NON-VERBAL Messages

Much of how and what we communicate is done through non-verbal communication.

Handshake

You should be comfortable offering a firm, dry, confident handshake. Avoid bone-crushing grips as well as a spaghetti arm.

Posture

Sit up straight with legs crossed or feet firmly on the floor; your back should be straight, head up and looking forward. Don't slouch!

Facial Gestures

Smile! There is no overstating the positive impact a simple smile can have during the interview. Don't be afraid to show your interpersonal skills and natural warmth during the interview.

Eye Contact

Maintain a good balance of eye contact with the employer, as this conveys honesty, confidence, and interest. Engage in eye contact when the employer is asking you a question or when you are responding. When you are thinking of your answer, it is okay to break eye contact.

Nerves

Work on controlling any nervous behavior before you meet with the employer in person. Avoid twirling and playing with your hair, tapping your feet, and wringing your hands. Also keep in mind that chewing gum is never appropriate in a professional setting.

The Nose Knows

Before your interview... Avoid smoking – it stays with you and on you. Eating strong foods such as garlic and onions. Avoid alcohol! Save the celebration for AFTER you get the job. offer! Avoid wearing strong fragrances.

VERBAL Messages

It's not just what you say but how you say it. The tone, speed, and length of your responses play a very important part in the effectiveness of your answers.

Take Your Time

- Employers are interested in how well you can answer their questions, not how fast you can answer them.
- If you are asked a difficult question, take a moment or two to collect your thoughts, rather than blurting out the first answer that comes to your mind.
- You can buy a little extra time by repeating the question aloud while you think.

Answer the Question (and then be quiet)

- While it's important that you answer each question thoroughly, it is equally important that your answers do not go on too long.
- Pay attention to the interviewer's non-verbal cues to make sure you are not losing your audience.

Remain Professional and Positive

- Regardless of how friendly or laid back the interviewer may appear, your language and vernacular should be completely professional and appropriate.
- Avoid using any slang, profanities, or stereotypes.
- At no time in an interview should you voice any negative comments or opinions about former supervisors, professors, or classmates. This can only hurt your candidacy.

“Like, Um, Uh, You Know”

Though these filler-type words may be overlooked in casual conversation, you definitely want to avoid using them during the interview. Be aware of these habits and practice to eliminate them.



Career Tip: If engaging in eye contact during an interview or conversation feels awkward, try looking at the bridge of the other person's nose, an eyebrow or just below the eye. These give the illusion of direct eye contact.

Dressing For An Interview

How you dress for an interview is important!

Here are some guidelines for traditional professional business attire to help you make a good first impression.

Professional Dress

- Well-tailored pant and skirt suits should have a good fit.
- Stick to dark and neutral colors such as black, navy or gray.
- Skirt should fall just above the knees and not be too tight.
- Coordinated blouse avoiding bold colors or patterns.
- Shirts should be white or blue button-down worn with a silk tie in a conservative pattern.
- Flats or low-heeled shoe (comfort is important).
- Dark shoes, cleaned and polished.
- Belt should match shoes.
- One set of earrings only. No more than one ring on each hand.
- Conservative hosiery at or near skin color.
- Dark, non-bulky socks.
- Makeup can be worn, however, stick to a neutral palette and slight application. Manicured nails with neutral polish.
- Religious dress or garments (such as a hijab) should be worn in neutral colors when possible.
- Groomed and neat facial hair. Hair should not be a distraction. Pull it back if you think you may play with it during your interview. Avoid bold hair colors.
- Portfolio or briefcase. (Do not carry an oversized purse)

Avoid:

- Casual wear (jeans, sweat suits, shorts, t-shirts, tank tops).
- Floral, plaid, or other “busy” designs. Wrinkled, untucked, pilled or linty clothing.
- Tattered, faded, stained or dirty clothing.
- Revealing fabrics.
- Excessive jewelry.
- Cleavage, chest hair. Open-toed footwear and athletic shoes.

Business Casual/Smart Casual

For more insight on different types of work attire, check out our on-line resources including [Youtube](#) & [Pinterest](#).



Types of Interviews

Phone and Virtual Interviews

Many employers will conduct their first round interviews via the phone or virtually. These interviews are used as a precursor to an in-person interview.

- Make sure you are in a quiet, comfortable environment where you will not be disturbed.
- Smile! Regardless of whether the employer can see you, it can help you come across as personable.

Phone Interviews

- Use a landline, rather than a cell phone, if possible.
- Have your resume or CV, job description, and notes in front of you to glance at but minimize the sound of shuffling papers.
- Be prepared for pauses and silence. If there is an extended silence between questions, you can ask confirming questions such as “Was my answer clear?”

Virtual Interviews

- Check your internet connectivity, sound, and any applications before the interview to make sure they are working properly.
- Dress as if you are at an in-person interview. Look straight into the camera when talking to maintain eye contact.

Panel/Group Interviews

Though most interviews tend to be one-on-one, some employers will ask that you interview with several members of their organization in a group setting. Be sure that your responses address everyone on the panel.

On-Site Interviews

These interviews tend to be much more in-depth than the phone or campus interview, lasting anywhere from one hour to a full day or longer. However, the preparation process for an on-site interview remains the same: know the employer, know yourself, and anticipate and practice possible questions.

- Give yourself plenty of time to travel to the site, taking into consideration possible traffic delays. If possible, you may want to take a test drive over to the site a few days before the interview.
- Be friendly and courteous to everyone you encounter. You never know who has input in the hiring decision.
- Employers will typically (but not always) reimburse travel expenses if your interview is in another city or state. It is important that you clarify these details with the employer when arranging the interview.

On-Campus Interviews (First-Round)

Each year, hundreds of employers come to the Career Center at 2440 Bancroft to interview students for jobs and internships.

All students participating in on-campus interviewing are responsible for knowing the OCR policies, which can be found on career.berkeley.edu.

Employers who wish to interview students on campus post their open positions in Handshake.

Case Interviews



Case interviews focus on the way you think and how you go about addressing complex issues and problems. Typically, you will be presented with a challenging scenario (or case) with varying background or details.

Cases may come in the form of a brainteaser, market-sizing scenario, financial analysis, or management/ strategy issue. Interviewers want to see your ability to be analytical, logical, quantitative, and creative.

Your listening skills, insight, communication style, and persuasive skills are key to a successful case interview. There are many strategies that go into attacking a case interview question, and the best way to prepare is to practice.

Many of the global consulting firms have extremely helpful, interactive practice case interviews on their websites. Case Questions Interactive offers a variety of samples to practice such questions and can be found under Resources by logging into Handshake.

Interviews with a Meal



The point of the meal interview is for you and the employer to get to know each other, and for him/her to see how you conduct yourself in a social setting.

Employers will be assessing your conversational and interpersonal skills to determine how well you would fit in with the organization.

- Demeanor, language, and behavior should all be 100% professional.
- The meal you order should be in the mid-price range; not the most or least expensive item. You may want to ask the interviewer what he/she recommends on the menu to get a gauge.
- Avoid items that are challenging or messy to eat, such as pasta or dishes with a lot of cheese.
- Even if the employer is drinking alcohol, you should still refrain.
- If the service is slow or the food is not exactly how you ordered it, avoid complaining or making an issue of it.
- It is customary for the employer to pay for the meal. Make sure you show your appreciation.

Types of Questions

Traditional Questions

These types of questions help the employer get a better sense of who you are. Similar to the bullets on your that describe your experiences in detail, you need to back up your interview answers with specific, tangible examples.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose your field of study?
- What are your greatest strengths and areas of challenge?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment/ set back?

- Which class did you find most challenging/enjoyable?
- Do you feel your GPA adequately represents your abilities?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- How will you add value to our organization?
- Why are you interested in this field/our organization?
- What do you know about our organization that isn't on our website?
- Who are our key competitors?
- What do you think it takes to be a good leader?

Behavioral Questions

Behavioral questions are designed to help the interviewer get a clear understanding of how you handle different situations. Unlike traditional questions that can focus on hypothetical situations, behavioral questions rely solely on your past experiences. The premise is that past behavior can be used to predict future behavior.

"Tell me about a time when you..."

- Made a difficult/ethical decision
- Dealt with a difficult team member or customer
- Failed to meet a deadline
- Demonstrated leadership skills
- Received negative feedback
- Overcame an obstacle
- Had to have an uncomfortable conversation with a co-worker

- Went above and beyond what was expected of you
- Persuaded someone to change their mind
- Had to stick to a decision that you did not agree with

Responding to Challenging Questions

Tell Me About Yourself

This is often the first question you will be asked and can often be the most difficult to answer. It is not an invitation to share your life story (age, birthplace, family information, etc.) but should focus on where you've been and where you're going regarding your education and career goals.

Example: "I will be graduating this May with a degree in Anthropology. For the last two summers, I have served as an intern with a local non-profit organization teaching reading skills to children in communities across the East Bay in California. I have also been very active in my sorority, serving as both the marketing chair and vice-president. My goal now is to join a non-profit organization such as XYZ that will allow me to continue to develop my leadership skills while providing support to underprivileged children."

What Are Your Salary Expectations?

You should do your homework and know what a typical starting salary is for the job to which you are applying. Cal has salary information for internships and entry-level jobs on our website.

Rather than a fixed number, give a salary range and justify it by mentioning the research you have done.

Example: "Based on the research I have done and the nature of the position, I am targeting a starting salary in the \$55,000-\$60,000 range."

Interviewing

Answering Tough Questions

What Are Your Greatest Strengths

Support your answers with detailed examples that relate to the job at hand.

Example: “My greatest strengths are leadership, communication, and team-building. For the past two years, I have been a Resident Advisor, where I oversee the safety and wellbeing for 64 students. In this role, I serve as a mentor, mediator, supervisor, and program director. I oversee town-hall style meetings for my floor and frequently have to make tough decisions to solve problems among residents.”

What Is Your Greatest Weakness

What the employer is really questioning here is your self-awareness and self-improvement. They are not interested in hearing you confess your flaws, nor are they looking for a perfectionist with “no weaknesses.” The best strategy is to pick a related example from your life that demonstrates growth, and ideally, your ability to turn a weakness into a strength. Your answer should be genuine, honest, and professionally related (nothing too personal).

Example: “One area that I am continually working to improve is my public speaking skills. When I first began college, the thought of speaking in front of a large group giving a presentation was enough to cause me stress. However, over the last two years, I have challenged myself to get out of my comfort zone and overcome this fear. In addition to taking a public speaking class, I became a peer advisor in the Career Center where I have the opportunity to present to groups often. These experiences have helped me become more comfortable addressing large audiences.”

Why Should I Hire You?

This is a chance to reiterate the skills and qualities you would bring to the employer, as well as an opportunity to explain why you are the best candidate for the job. It is challenging because although you don’t know your competition, your answer needs to reflect how you are unique among the candidates they are considering. This is often the last question asked, so make sure you “go for it” by showing enthusiasm for the job and how you will contribute.

Example: “As I mentioned earlier, I have strong skills in communication, leadership and teamwork. I can make immediate contributions to your organization because I know the sales territory I would be responsible for and my demonstrated abilities to build rapport with people would increase your clientele.”

Practice answering tough questions with our on-line interview tool called Big Interview.

Log-into Handshake and check out the Resources section to access hundreds of practice questions and interview lessons.



STAR/BAR Prep

Behavioral interview questions help interviewers understand how you may behave in certain situations. Interviewers like behavioral questions because the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. When answering behavioral interview questions, use the BAR Method– SITUATION/BACKGROUND, ACTION, and RESULT.

SITUATION/BACKGROUND (OR TASK): What was the specific job or activity you (and/or group) were to accomplish or what problem were you solving? Who was involved? Where and when did this occur?

ACTION: What steps did you (and/or team) take and how did you go about completing them? How did you involve or manage others during the process?

RESULTS: Did you accomplish the job the way it was originally defined? Was the result an improvement or change? What lessons did you learn? What might you do differently? Because of your actions did you create, improve, or maintain good interpersonal relationships? What were the benefits of your actions for the organization or for other individuals? What core skills did you acquire? What did you learn about yourself?

Use the space below to create STAR/BAR answers to the following behavioral questions.

Tell me about a time you used your leadership skills to bring about change within a group or project?

Tell me about a time you used creativity and analytical skills to solve a problem.

Asking Questions During the Interview

When an employer gives you the opportunity to ask them questions, take advantage of it! Asking questions demonstrates your sincere interest in the position and organization. **NOT** asking questions gives the impression that you aren't interested in the position.

Organizational Culture Questions

- Formal career planning with supervisor/mentor
- How/how often performance reviewed (especially in first year)
- Flex-schedule; telecommuting Socializing/team-building
- Communication and leadership style of managers
- Opportunity for new challenges/growth opportunities
- Dress code Community involvement
- Support networks, mentoring, diversity initiatives

Interviewer's Professional Background

- Why interviewer chose employer
- What keeps interviewer working with employer
- Roles interviewer has held
- How has employer helped interviewer prepare for roles



Inquiries That Stem From Your Pre-Interview Research

- Training/professional development for new hires
- Detailed questions about job Future focus for employer
- Employer responses to challenges (ask tactfully)
- Horizontal (generalist) training/ vertical (promotions) movement
- What it is like to live in employer location; relocation

Things NOT To Ask About:

- Salary and benefits (wait until you are given a formal offer)
- Personal information about the recruiter or other employees

Concluding The Interview

- As the interview draws to an end, be sure to:
- Ask about next steps
- Understand the employer's time frame
- Thank the interviewer
- Get business card for follow-up
- Reiterate your interest in the position

After The Interview

You should always send a thank you letter to everyone who interviewed you within 24 hours of your interview. Not only does this convey your professionalism, but it can also help make that extra push to enhance your candidacy. Depending on the organization's culture, you may email or mail your thank you letter. Your letter should summarize what impressed you most about the organization and position as well as highlight your experience or skills that appeared to interest or impress the interviewer(s). Be sure to also include any additional information that was requested (e.g., transcript, writing sample, references).

A week after sending the thank-you, you may contact the employer to show your continued interest and ask if there is any additional information you can provide.

If the employer does not respond within the expected time frame, you may phone or email the person who interviewed you to ask about your status.

Sample Thank You Letter:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for the opportunity to spend last Thursday at your manufacturing facility in Sunnyvale. The discussion we had was very informative, and I really enjoyed the tour of your plant and the informal conversation with your engineering staff. I was impressed with the effective manner in which Consolidated Engineering has adapted the management-by-objective system to their technical operations. This philosophy aligns well with my interests and training.

The entire experience has confirmed my interest in joining the team at Consolidated Engineering, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
James S. Moore

Every interview is a learning opportunity. After the interview, ask yourself these questions to prepare for your next one:

- How did it go?
- Did I feel at ease with the interviewer after any initial nervousness?
- How well did I highlight how my experience and skills would fulfill their requirements?
- Did I ask questions which helped me clarify the position and showed my interest and knowledge?
- Did I take the opportunity to mention my strengths and show what I have to offer?
- Was I positive and enthusiastic?
- How did I make myself stand out?
- What did I learn that I can apply to my next interview? How can I improve for next time?

Evaluating An Offer

Typically, employers will make a verbal offer over the phone followed by email/mail. Read over these documents closely. You should be enthusiastic when an offer is made. If you need some time to think it over, it is fine to ask. Remember that once you accept a position, it is unethical to continue looking for other opportunities or to renege (back out of your acceptance). Students who participate in OCR that accept and then renege on a job offer are at risk of losing their Handshake access. Please see the Principles Of Professional Conduct on page 3 for more information.

Things To Consider

Consider different factors in making a decision regarding the acceptance of a job offer. Few, if any, organizations will provide all that you would like to have in your “ideal” job, and you should know on which factors you can make comfortable compromises and which must be met.

1. The Industry

- History of growth
- Predictable future needs
- Degree of dependence on business trends or cycles
- Degree of dependence on government regulations or actions

2. The Organization

- Prestige and reputation
- Growth potential
- Size and company culture
- Financial stability
- Strong management team



3. The Job Itself

- Training and development opportunities
- Day-to-day activities
- Amount of stress or pressure, pace of work
- Requirements to relocate, travel, or work long hours
- Responsibility, autonomy
- Opportunity for advancement and/or individual achievement
- Salary and benefits package Involvement with good supervisor, peer associates
- Physical environment
- Social significance of work

4. General “Lifestyle” Factors

- Comfort with goals, philosophy of organization
- Geographic location
- Recreational and educational facilities, cultural opportunities

Salary Negotiation

Apply these tips to maximize your effectiveness in the negotiation process.

Prepare – Consider the four factors above and determine how these fit with your budget needs. Calculate the market value for the position based on the industry and location.

Practice – Negotiation is a skill. Make sure to practice before you negotiate!

Negotiate – Ask if the offer is negotiable. When you choose to negotiate, be positive to maintain a strong relationship with the employer. After you come to an agreement, make sure to get the final offer in writing.



Career Tip: When making a decision on a job or internship offer continue to use email etiquette with the employer whether accepting, rejecting or asking for an extension. You never know when your paths will cross again.