

**MASTERING**

**THE**

**INTERVIEW**

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# Ways to Prepare: Before

ways to prepare: before

## Prep Your Knowledge

### **Know about the organization**

It is super important that you have done your homework before the interview. Nothing will eliminate you from consideration faster than being uninformed about the company or organization's business.

Research the employer with whom you are interviewing. Look for the 'About Us', 'Mission', or 'Philosophy' pages to learn more about the size and scope of the organization. Is the company regional, national, or international? Where are they located, and who are their clients or customers? What trends are happening in this industry? What is their goal/purpose?

Checking out the company's LinkedIn page is beneficial as well. Through LinkedIn, you can see who works for the company and what their experience level is. If done ahead of time you could try to connect with someone who works there. Connections can often improve your chances of getting an interview. You can even find out if a MICA alum works there!

Try searching within the company website or LinkedIn profile page for your interviewer's name; there may be a helpful bio. Of course, an informational interview prior to doing an actual job interview is a great way to gather inside information.

# Prep Your Portfolio

## Do some research on yourself

Think about your previous experience in relation to this employer, their business needs, and what skills and abilities you bring. Develop a list of 5 to 7 of your strongest skills or qualities for this particular position. Think about a time you demonstrated that quality and be prepared to tell a story. Also think about what you will say if they ask you to describe a weakness.

Go through the questions on pages 21 and 22 and practice your answers beforehand. Even better, practice with a friend in a mock interview!

Know something about your values so that you can match them with the organizations with which you are interviewing. It is important that you select a position with an employer whose values are similar to yours.

What do you want to gain from the experience? Where does this fit into your short and long-term plans? Employers are impressed when they can see what you will get out of the experience.

**Relax and remember**—they wouldn't be interviewing you if they didn't want to hire you.

## Interviews for Creative Positions

If you are interviewing for a creative role—whether for an internship, job, or freelance position—it is expected that you bring a portfolio relevant to the position. Review this section for best practices on preparing your creative work.

## Portfolio Reviews

Portfolio reviews, while similar to an interview, do not always have a clear end result such as a job or exhibition. It is an excellent way to gain an insider's perspective on what to consider if pursuing positions in specific industries.

While interviews are guided by the employer's questions, portfolio reviews are more conversational and guided by the work you choose to show. A portfolio review is not a typical interview Q&A, but you should still be prepared to answer questions about your work and process.

Preparing for a portfolio review is very similar to that of a traditional interview. See page 8 for tips on how to prepare.

## 1. Presentation/Discussion:

- Remember, this isn't a critique. Don't explain every detail about every piece. You have a short amount of time to talk about everything in your portfolio.
- Develop a concise (1 or 2 sentence) statement for each project.
  - What parameters were you given
  - What was your process
  - What were the final deliverables
  - Don't point out your weaknesses
- Point out the things that are relevant to your audience.
- Be prepared to deconstruct 1 or 2 projects to show your process—ideation, sketches, research, iterations, ending with the final product.
- Prepare questions you want to ask your interviewer about your artwork.

## 2. Quantity:

- How long is your review? The length of the review will determine how many pieces you can show.
  - 10–20 images (1 hour)
  - 5–7 for shorter reviews (15–30 minutes)
  - Time based work—demo reels, video or animation pieces (2 minutes maximum)

## 3. Quality:

- Make sure the documentation of your work is professional.
- Be strategic with order. Put your strongest work first, but also end on a high note.

## 4. Customize:

- Tailor the work you show to your audience.
- Highlight relevant skills, styles, concepts and approaches.
- Consider having multiple versions of your portfolio for different employers/galleries.

## 5. Table Friendly:

- Do not rely on Wi-Fi. Create a PDF or presentation that does not require internet.
- Consider which format works best for the type of work you're presenting.
  - Original prints or photographs—put into a nice presentation binder with sleeves to protect your work.
  - Digital—use a tablet or computer to display photographs or PDFs of your work.
  - 3 Dimensional—bring photographs including possible detail shots to convey scale.
  - Time-based—a demo reel or short film might be the best way to show highlights of larger projects.
- If using technology—don't forget to charge your battery!

## 6. Get it Clean:

- Physically clean your computer, tablet, portfolio.
- Organize/clear your desktop.

## 7. Consider a Leave Behind:

- Business card
- Post card
- Small object
- Portfolio Sample—either a small version of your work or a digital version.

## 8. Online Presence:

- Have your work available to view online for the interviewer's future reference.
- Be sure the work you're showing in the review is also in your online portfolio.

# Prep Yourself

1. Consider buying new interview appropriate clothes ahead of time (if you need them). Don't save this for the day before!
2. Look at trade magazines, websites, or blogs to be sure you are up-to-date on what's happening in your field.
3. Visit the interview site if you can. This will tell you how long you will need to arrive a little bit early.
4. Check your gas, the bus or subway schedule, and/or alternate routes to minimize anxiety the day of the interview.
5. Review your research and make a few notes in a notebook. Add your list of questions for them.
6. Practice your handshake with a friend. It should be firm, but not over-powering. A limp handshake is a sign of weakness in US culture.
7. If using video chat, send a request to add them as a contact if they have not done so already. Test your connection with a friend, and check how your position looks on screen.
8. Lay out your clothes.
9. If your portfolio is digital, make sure that the device you're using is clean and presentable. Set up your portfolio. Clean your desktop and make sure your files are accessible.
10. If it's physical, wipe it down inside and out with a "dryer sheet" to shine it up and remove static.
11. Consider leaving extra jewelry or potentially distracting visible piercings at home.
12. Do not party or drink the night before an interview. Even if you think it will calm your nerves, it's a bad idea. Alcohol and smoke aromas linger. You want to impress interviewers, not overwhelm them.
13. Take a shower, clean your nails, and groom your hair and facial hair.
14. Go to bed early.

## What to Bring

- ❑ Directions to the interview site  
(print in case tech fails!)
- ❑ Extra resumes
- ❑ Self-promo piece or leave behind and business cards
- ❑ Portfolio (if appropriate)
- ❑ Notebook and pen
- ❑ Names and contact info of people you are meeting
- ❑ Questions for employer

# Ways to Prepare: The Day of

# Presentation & Etiquette

It's important to put your best foot forward in an interview. You only get one shot at a first impression, so make it count!

## In person

1. Read your favorite news site for relevant breaking news which might be part of an “ice breaking” question.
2. Review the examples of professional experiences you will use during the interview. Be sure to cite multiple experiences, not just one!
3. Bring several copies of your cover letter and resume.
4. Make sure your portfolio is ready to go. If using technology, be sure the battery is charged.
5. Include only your best work and be sure to have pieces that reflect the type of position you are applying for.
6. Eat a high protein, high-carb meal to boost your energy.
7. Arrive at least 5–10 early. Budget your time to visit the restroom for last minute touch ups, check for animal hair, lint, flakes and static cling. Wash your hands. Make sure you don't have coffee breath—brush your teeth or eat a mint!
8. Turn off or silence your phone.
9. Take slow deep breaths to help you relax. Be yourself! Confidence, a positive attitude, and willingness to learn can go a long way.
10. Always be polite and courteous to everyone you meet, including security guards and support staff. You never know who is providing input to the search process.
11. When you arrive, wait to be directed about where to sit. While you are waiting, people watch and pick up clues to the office culture. Will you feel comfortable working here?
12. Make eye contact, give a firm handshake, and be respectful in your body language. Don't forget to smile!
13. Be honest; don't lie about your skills or qualifications to get a job. Learn to “spin” your weak areas into areas for growth. Share your enthusiasm to learn, or discuss a project/program you are currently working on to improve in this area.
14. Always stay positive with your comments. Never criticize a former employer or coworker if you had a negative experience at a former position.



## By video chat

1. Make sure to have an appropriate username and user photo.
2. Avoid using your phone as the connection may vary and a hand-held image will be unsteady.
3. If using a laptop, plug it in, or make sure your battery is fully charged.
4. Use reliable internet. Ethernet is more reliable than a wireless connection.
5. Do a test call to make sure your microphone and webcam are functioning properly.
6. Close all other programs on your computer to avoid the slowing of your system or unexpected distractions.
7. Prop your laptop up on books so that it is at eye level. Sit up straight and close enough to the camera that your shoulders and head are visible.
8. Situate yourself in a comfortable, quiet, distraction-free, and well lit environment.
9. Make sure you have an appropriate background that isn't distracting, messy, or unprofessional. Move anything you don't want seen out of site!
10. Avoid wearing bright colors or dense patterns.
11. Look into the camera, not at the screen. You can hide your own image with a sticky note to keep focus.

12. Avoid interruptions. Turn off your phone and make sure that everyone in your household knows you are interviewing and won't interrupt. If you have a pet, make sure they won't interrupt either.
13. Log on at least 15 minutes early and set your status to 'available' so your interviewer knows you are ready.
14. Have PDF versions of your resume and portfolio available to share via email. Have a notebook and pen around to take notes.
15. Take notes throughout the interview of things the interviewer says that you don't want to forget. Write down the the names of everyone you are meeting with so you can follow up with a thank you.

## By phone

1. Choose an area with good reception.
2. If using a cell phone, make sure you have a fully charged battery.
3. Pick a quiet space for the interview (no cafes or public spaces).
4. Silence incoming calls, text messages, and notifications to avoid unexpected distractions.
5. Make sure that everyone in your household knows you are interviewing and won't interrupt. If you have pets be sure they won't interrupt either.
6. Never talk and drive.
7. Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
8. Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.

# Fashion Dos

When you're doing preliminary research, pay attention to what attire is appropriate for the job. Some places are comfortable with a chic-casual ensemble, and some require a formal outfit. If you are in doubt, remember it's safer to overdress!



1. A tasteful dress is a smart choice.
2. You can't go wrong with a classic suit and tie.
3. Nice shoes make the outfit. Try a pair of loafers or oxfords.
4. Go the extra mile with a charming sweater over a dress shirt.
5. Pair a blazer with slacks or pencil skirt for instant polish.

# Fashion Don'ts



1. Unless you're applying to be an umpire, take off the baseball cap!
2. Stay away from graphic and statement tees.
3. Footwear should always be professional.
4. We know you love them, but leave your parents and pets at home.
5. Distressed fashion is only for the weekends; if it's full of holes, pick something else.

# Employer Questions

## Questions employers might ask:

- |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p>1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your work.</p>   | <p>such as Adobe Creative Suite, Office Suite, Mac/PC, programs, etc., or any skill/ experience you have listed on your resume).</p>                   | <p>15. What is your ideal work environment?</p>  | <p>20. How would you describe your organizational style?</p>  |
| <p>2. Why are you interested in working for us?</p>  | <p>9. Describe your creative process.</p>  | <p>16. Do you work best on your own or in a group?</p>   | <p>21. What sets you apart from other candidates?</p>   |
| <p>3. Why did you choose to be a _____ major?</p>  | <p>10. What are some of your personal interests and how might they help you in this role?</p>  | <p>17. Can you tell us about a time you needed to educate yourself on a topic/issue and how you did so?</p>    | <p>22. If I were to call one of your classmates/colleagues, what would they say it is like working with you?</p>      |
| <p>4. Walk me through your work, what were your two favorite projects?</p>   | <p>11. What skills do you have that you could bring to the position?</p>   | <p>18. What are a few things that are important for you to gain from this job experience?</p>                  | <p>23. What do you like to do for fun?</p>  |
| <p>5. What are some of your short term and long term goals, and how will this position help you?</p>                           | <p>12. Tell us an experience where you had to work under pressure?</p>   | <p>19. Give an example of dealing with an angry customer or client. Describe how you handled the conflict.</p> | <p>24. Tell us something that is not on your resume that will give us a different perspective of you as a person.</p> |
| <p>6. What about this position are you most excited about? What part of the position will be the most challenging for you?</p> | <p>13. Describe a time when you had to juggle multiple responsibilities/deadlines at once.</p>   | <p>25. What questions do you have for us?</p>  |   |
| <p>7. Describe your greatest strengths and what areas you would like to improve.</p>   | <p>14. Tell us about a recent project you are proud of. Discuss how you prioritized your work, met deadlines, and included others in this process.</p> |  |   |
| <p>8. Briefly describe your experience, if any, with the following: (specific skills required of the position</p>              |  |  |   |

## Questions employers cannot ask:

Employers cannot legally ask you questions relating to your **age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, health, disabilities, marital status**, if you're **pregnant**, or if you have **children**. Employers cannot ask about your **citizenship**, however they are allowed to ask if you are authorized to work in the US. These questions are not relevant to the job and could be used as discrimination. Career Development's "Working With Diversity" handbook is a helpful reminder of your rights as an employee.

# Your Questions

You should be prepared with your own list of questions about the employer. After all, an interview is a two-way selection process and there are things (besides salary) that you need to know if you are going to accept a job offer. Most importantly, you need to be comfortable with the work environment and culture.

Having some questions prepared highlights your interest in the company and shows you've done your homework. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

## Interview

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. What skills do you consider essentials for someone to succeed in this job? | 6. What is the day-to-day like of the person in this role?           |
| 2. Can you describe an ideal employee?  | 7. How would you describe the working environment?                   |
| 3. Could you explain your organizational structure?                           | 8. How do you measure employee performance and provide feedback?     |
| 4. Who are some of your current clients?                                      | 9. Will I be a part of a team? What is the composition of that team? |
| 5. Are there any projects in the wings that you are looking forward to?       | 10. How does your company value diversity in the workplace?          |

## Second interview or job offer stage

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Is there travel or relocation involved with the position?                                    | can sharpen skills and acquire new ones?                              |
| 2. What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops and training so that employees | 3. Is there anything you would change about the company if you could? |

## Questions to avoid

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. What does this company do? (you should know this) | 4. How many vacation days do I get? |
| 2. How much am I going to get paid?                  | 5. Can I work from home?            |
| 3. What benefits will I receive?                     | 6. How quickly will I be promoted?  |

While salary and benefits are important in helping you decide if you want to take a position, this discussion should wait until **after** you are made a job offer. Refer to other Career Development resources for tips on salary negotiations.

## In conclusion

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Is there anything else you'd like to know?                               | 3. What is the ideal start date?                                   |
| 2. What is your time frame for reaching a decision regarding this position? | 4. What would be the best way for me to follow up? Phone or email? |

# The Day After

the day after

## Follow-up

1. Follow up all of your conversations with an email the same day thanking your interviewer for their time and reinforcing your interest in the position. Get the business card of each person you spoke with, or write down their name so that you can research their contact information later. You may be judged on whether or not you do this: it's important! So, bring a notepad and take notes!
  2. Even with all the advice as to the importance of sending a thank-you note, very few candidates do so. You will stand out from the crowd when you send one.
  3. Don't feel like you have to accept a position if offered on the spot. Thank them graciously for the offer, reiterate your interest, but ask if you can get back to them within the next few days.
  4. Do ask at the end of the interview when they expect to make a hiring decision.
  5. Consider follow-up techniques as a strategic part of the interview process, and use them to continue to show your enthusiasm.
  6. Be persistent but also very polite so you are not perceived as pushy.
  7. Employees sometimes use candidate initiated follow-up as a screening device. If you don't follow-up, you may be considered disinterested.
  8. Do alert your references that they might get a phone call. Brief them on the position you're seeking.
  9. Don't stop job hunting even if you are confident the interview went well.
- Congrats! You did it!**

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