



Interview Guide 1

Prepare, Prove & Follow Up

An interview for an internship or job is usually a **conversation between at least two people**: a hiring manager and an applicant for a position at the hiring manager's company. This conversation usually involves the hiring manager asking multiple questions of the applicant.

What Should You Expect?

- As an applicant, your goal is to **help the employer see the value you would bring to the company and the skills you would bring to this particular role**. However, you should also ask questions to evaluate whether the company is a good fit for you.
- Some job interviews happen **in-person**, but some may take place **via telephone or video conference** (i.e., Skype, Zoom, etc.).
- Sometimes a candidate may have to go through **several steps in an interview process**, perhaps starting with a phone interview and then progressing to a second or possibly even a third video or in-person interview.



MULTIPLE PEOPLE

While some interviews are a conversation between two people, other interviews involve **more than one person from the company interviewing the candidate**; at times, a group interview may involve **a few candidates interviewing at the same time** with one or more individuals from the company.



Do Your Homework!

- Before your interview, be sure you are prepared to answer the question, **"What do you know about this company?"**
- Spend time on the company's website, Googling the company, checking out its official social media pages, and/or talking to people who have worked there. Learn as much as you can about the organization's history and background, services or products, locations, and future growth prospects.
- Be prepared to share **1 to 2 things you admire** about the company, its mission, its values, or its culture.
- Also do some research on the **field/industry**. All Northwestern students have access to the **IBISWorld** database through the NWC library. Browsing this database can provide helpful information about the industry to which you have applied, and it even offers sample questions you might want to ask about the industry in your interview. Reach out to a Compass Center staff person for more help navigating IBISWorld.

First Impressions

IT STARTS IN THE PARKING LOT

- Are you **early** – not just on time?
- Are you ready to **smile** and make good **eye contact**?
- Are you prepared to **engage in small talk**?
- Are you **friendly and respectful to everyone** with whom you come in contact?
- Are you **dressed for success**?
- Is your **phone silenced**?
- Do you have a pad of **paper and a pen** to write down notes, names and other important details?
- Do you have **extra copies of your resume** to offer?
- Are you ready to extend a great **handshake**?

FOR A LENGTHY INTERVIEW

- Bring your **toothbrush** and **toothpaste** to freshen up after a meal.
- Bring a **water bottle** to stay hydrated.
- Wear **comfortable shoes**.

BODY LANGUAGE

Body language is very important. Besides having good eye contact and a smiling, relaxed face, be sure to rest your hands casually in your lap; arms folded across your chest indicate that you are less open and more guarded. If you normally move your hands around a lot when you talk, tone it down a bit. Sit up straight in your chair so you convey a poised, confident persona. Consider asking your trusted friends if you have any traits or habits you should curtail for an interview.

INTRODUCTIONS

Practice introducing yourself in a concise and confident way. Some hiring managers start an interview with the request: "Please tell us about yourself." Open-ended questions are your opportunity! Have a brief but thoughtful response ready that tells the hiring manager the most relevant aspects of who you are while answering the question, "Why should we hire you?"

Prove It!

As you prepare for the interview, **consult the job description**. Whenever possible, **PROVE** you have the skills and background highlighted in the job description.

- Instead of saying that you are hardworking, prove it by telling a story about your job as a forklift operator or as a door thrower in a warehouse.
- Instead of saying that you value teamwork, describe your experience as part of an athletic team or theatre troupe.
- Instead of saying that you have strong writing skills, talk about your experience working as a Writing Fellow for First-Year Seminar students.
- Instead of saying that you have leadership experience, tell about your role as a Resident Assistant, a Discipleship Group leader, or a founder of the Business Club.
- Instead of saying that you are enthusiastic and approachable, tell about the time you worked at a children's party and kept the kids entertained all day!

Do not underestimate experience you have gained from volunteer work, campus activities, church involvement, and even hobbies. Experience is valuable regardless of whether someone paid you for it. If you are short on experience, **stress your potential**—your ability to learn and be trained.



Attitude is Everything

In addition to evaluating your professional potential, a hiring manager is judging your **attitude and personality** during an interview. Are you the type of coworker with whom they want to work?

- Are you convincing the hiring manager that **you would enjoy** being at this company and doing this kind of work? Even if you have all the right answers, you still need to convey enthusiasm and a positive, sincere attitude.
- Additionally, when it comes to an entry-level job, are you conveying the idea that you would be **willing to do a little grunt work** to climb the ladder?

Dress Professionally!

Dress professionally for the job and company for which you are interviewing. For most interviews, men and women should both wear a suit. However, some industries are less formal, and employees tend to dress casually; if this is the case, still aim to dress more formally than your interviewers, but do not wear a suit if everyone else will be in jeans.

Professional grooming is imperative. Your hair should be neat and stylish, and your nails should be well manicured. If you choose to wear nail polish or accessories, keep them subtle. Avoid fragrances and heavy makeup.

Telephone, Video Conference, or Recorded Interviews

FOR ALL OFFSITE INTERVIEWS:

- Go to a very quiet place where no one will be able to interrupt you. If having a telephone interview, consider using a landline to ensure a good connection. Similarly, if interviewing via video conference (i.e. Skype, Zoom, etc.), make sure you have a stable internet connection.
- If the interview is with a company that is not local, confirm the time of the call and the time zone.
- Wait 2 to 3 seconds after the interviewer stops talking to make sure you do not interrupt.

FOR VIDEO CONFERENCE/RECORDED INTERVIEW:

- Dress as professionally as you would for an in-person interview—all the way down to your shoes!
- Be sure to position the camera on your computer in such a way that the camera is between you and your primary light source. You do not want to sit right in front of a window so your face is shadowed.

- Download any necessary software (Zoom, Skype, etc.) ahead of time. Also, be sure to test the audio and video.
- Sit in front of a neutral background for your interview. Consider reserving a small group study room in the DeWitt Learning Commons, or choose a background that is not too distracting for the interviewer. You want their focus to be solely on you and what you are saying.
- Change your online display name to first and last name.
- Consider covering your own image with a post-it note so you focus on maintaining eye contact with the camera.
- Silence your cell phone and computer notifications.
- If you are submitting a recorded interview, practice recording your answers as many times as possible before sending the final version to the employer. Also, confirm the interview “rules” (i.e. how long your responses can be, how many recording attempts you have, etc.).

“Phone interviews aren’t like talking to a good friend (though, wouldn’t that be nice!). The conversation can be awkward unless you’ve planned accordingly, so try practicing with a friend over the phone. For the real interview, you’ll want to demonstrate your ability to interact well over the phone without body language or other social cues to go by. Pick a quiet spot to have the interview, and remove any distractions (turn off your computer, put away random objects on your desk, etc.). The only things you need are a copy of your resume, a list of talking points and answers to common interview questions, a list of important info about the company and your interviewer, and a phone. Smile and use your voice to convey enthusiasm. Don’t be afraid of pauses or short silences, and just try to relax. The more relaxed you are, the better the interview will go!

- Sara Sutton Fell, CEO/Founder, FlexJobs

Additional Tips

- If you know who your interviewer(s) will be, do some **research** on them so you can engage in impressive small talk about their interests or background if the opportunity presents itself.
- **Do not bring a parent with you.**
- Show your **enthusiasm**, but do not overdo it.
 - *If you are usually a calm and laidback person, try to do something active to get a surge of energy before walking into an interview or beginning a virtual interview.*
 - *If you are usually someone who talks fast or gets over-excited, try to consciously slow down, take a deep breath, and remind yourself to “listen more, say less.”*
- A first job interview is not usually the time when you want to ask about **salary and benefits**. Save this question for after you have received a job offer or in a follow-up conversation.
- Do not be afraid to **pause** before answering a question. It is also fine to say, “Hmmm.... That is a good question. Let me think for a moment.”
- If you do not understand a question, say, “I’m sorry. I don’t think I understand what you’re asking. Do you mind **repeating or rephrasing** the question?”
- Do not be afraid to say, “**I don’t know** the answer to that;” but explain how you could go about finding the answer.
- If the interviewer asks you about problem areas in your background, always answer in a **positive way**. Never speak negatively about previous bosses or coworkers.
- In case an interviewer asks you about your greatest weakness, be prepared with an honest answer. Nevertheless, choose something that is harmless and can be turned into a positive.
- If a potential employer asks you about one of the following topics and then makes a hiring decision based on your answer, this is **illegal**: race/color/national origin, religion, sex/gender identity/sexual orientation, pregnancy status, disability, age or genetic information, citizenship, and marital status or number of children. If an interviewer asks you a question about any of these topics, simply state that the answer is unrelated to your ability to do the job.
- Be sure to **shake everyone’s hand and thank them** at the end of the interview.



HANDSHAKES

Be sure to practice your handshake with your peers before your interview. You want a strong handshake that denotes confidence because a “dead fish” handshake makes a terrible impression. On the other hand, you do not want to break anyone’s finger bones. Practice until you get it right!

“When talking about weaknesses (which many interviewers refer to as ‘developmental opportunities,’) provide better examples than the clichéd ‘I work too hard’ or ‘I’m too detail-oriented.’ When I’m conducting interviews, and someone is unwilling to admit any weakness, it gives me the impression that they are either lacking self-awareness or are being disingenuous. To answer this question effectively, pick something you are truly working on, talk about what you are doing to address it or how you monitor it, and give examples of the progress you have made. Hiring managers do not expect you to be perfect, but they do want to know that you are well-suited to the job.

- Patricia Thompson, Ph.D., Corporate Psychologist and Management Consultant

Always Have Questions

An interviewer will often ask you, “Do you have any questions for me?” You should **always** have a list of questions you are prepared to ask. Here are some examples:

1. Can you tell me about the day-to-day responsibilities of this position?
2. What 2 to 3 skills are most important for succeeding in this role?
3. What would you like to see me doing 3, 6 or 12 months from now?
4. What does success look like in this position, and how do you measure it?
5. Are there opportunities for professional development? What do they look like?
6. With whom will I be working most closely?
7. Please describe the culture of the company.
8. Where do you think the company is headed in the next 5 years?
9. What are the biggest opportunities or challenges facing the company/department right now?
10. What do you like best about working at this company?
11. What is the typical career path for someone in this role?
12. What are your next steps for filling this position?

AN INTERVIEW GOES TWO WAYS!

Just as someone is interviewing you, you are simultaneously evaluating the hiring manager, the position, and the company to determine if they are the right fit for you. Just because you apply for a job and accept an interview, this does not mean you are obligated to accept a job offer. Therefore, ask questions that are important to you, especially if you may need to choose between two or more job offers:

- Does this company offer educational or training programs? Tuition assistance for graduate school for employees? Teleworking options?
- What is the typical promotion track like?
- Do you offer mentoring or peer-to-peer programs?
- To whom will I directly report (if not listed in the job description)?
- What will be the biggest challenge for the person who takes on this role?
- What are the two best things you like about working at this company?
- What two things make your CEO most proud?

And Always Follow Up

- Immediately after your interview, send a **hand-written thank you note** to everyone who interviewed you. However, if you know the hiring manager is making decisions about candidates before a mailed note will reach them, at least send a **thank you email**.
- This follow-up provides a good opportunity to **briefly remind** the interviewer how your skills and achievements can help the company meet its goals.
- You cannot send a thank you if you do not **know the names** of the persons with whom you interviewed. Make sure you have this information before you leave the interview.
- If you have not heard back from the hiring manager within two weeks of your interview (or within the timeframe the hiring manager described for making a decision), **follow up with an email or telephone call** in which you reiterate your interest and qualifications for the position. Without being overly aggressive, inquire into when you should expect to hear back.