

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Congratulations! You put together a great resume and got the interview! You have the employer's attention, so take this opportunity to make a great impression.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1) Know your resume

Many employers will use your resume as a source of questions during the interview. Review your resume beforehand so you're ready to answer questions relating to your employment and educational experience. Be prepared to discuss gaps in employment. If called upon, you must be able to demonstrate the skills you stated on your resume. Focus your answers on the skills and experience most applicable to the position for which you are interviewing and be able to provide specific examples of times you used your skills and experiences.

2) Review the job posting carefully

Before the interview, read the full job posting carefully to understand the position requirements. Consider how the position relates to your talents and goals. Reviewing the job posting can help you anticipate potential interview questions. For example, if the job posting states the person in the position will "generate concepts, prepare digital illustrations and layouts" you may anticipate a question similar to "Tell me about a time or project where you had to generate an original concept, and how did you bring the concept to life."

3) Research the company

Employers have indicated that not knowing the company/industry is one of the most common mistakes they see when interviewing candidates. Before the interview, do some research to learn the basics about the position, company, and industry.

You can research the company utilizing many different sources:

- Company website and social media activity
- The job posting
- Company brochures and year-end statements
- Industry-specific news sites or publications
- Networking – ask friends, relatives, teachers, social and business contacts
- LinkedIn – view the company page and employee profiles

You do not need to know everything about the company, but it is generally good to know the following:

- Company mission/values/leadership
- Product manufactured or service offered
- Organization size/locations
- Sales/key competitors/general industry knowledge
- Recent company and industry news
- Workplace culture

Use these [research strategies](#) from [CAREERwise](#) to learn more about potential employers.

4) Prepare and practice your responses

In an interview, employers seek evidence that you have the skills to do the job. In addition to job-specific skills, employers look for soft skills when hiring new employees. Soft skills include effective communication, problem-solving, collaboration, and so on. Communicating these skills and sharing examples will improve your chances of getting the job.

To identify your strengths and experience, interviewers ask behavior-based or situational questions such as “Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker and how you resolved it.” This type of question is common in interviews.

You can’t possibly prepare or anticipate every question an interviewer may ask, but you can prepare a few answers or stories that can work for multiple questions. Use the below resources if you need help creating your STAR stories:

- [The STAR Interview Method](#) – The Muse
- [How to prepare for a behavioral-interview \(video and article\)](#) – Indeed.com

Make sure to offer examples when asked open-ended questions. Answering with just a “yes” or “no” does not provide enough information for the employer to assess your skills or experience.

5) Prepare questions to ask the interviewer about the position/company

Come prepared with a few questions for the interviewer. The interview is an opportunity for you to learn about the employer too. You want to determine if the company/position is right for you.

Tailor your question to the person who is interviewing you. For example, don’t ask the HR person what a typical day looks like since they would not be able to answer that question.

Sample questions to ask in an interview

- What is a typical day like for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next few months?
- What skills/qualifications are you looking for in your ideal candidate?
- Is this a new role or will I be replacing an employee who is leaving?
- What does the onboarding/training process look like?
- How would you describe the work environment here?
- What do you like best about working for this company? What is challenging?
- Can you tell me about the performance review/evaluation process?
- What are the company’s current goals, and how does this team/position contribute to those goals?

Do not ask about salary or benefits in an interview. Only discuss your [salary expectations](#) if the interviewer brings it up first. Human Resources will likely review employee benefits with you once a job offer is made.

Other tips on preparing for your interview:

- Know where you are going BEFORE the interview. What is the company address? How long should you plan for travel time? Drive by the company ahead of time to ensure you know how to get there and how long it will take. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- If it’s a virtual interview, test out the technology ahead of time and plan to log in 5-10 minutes early.
- Obtain the contact information of HR or the person you are meeting in case an emergency arises.

- Dress appropriately for the interview. DCTC has a Professional Clothes Closet if you need assistance with an interview outfit. To set up an appointment to “shop” the closet email kasey.meyer@dctc.edu
- Review these [interview tips and resources](#) from Minnesota State’s [CAREERwise website](#).

DURING THE INTERVIEW

The interviewer has, on average, 30-60 minutes to learn more about you and decide how you would fit in at their company. The better you present yourself in this short time frame, the better your chances are of being hired.

Fact: Interviewers often decide within the first 2 minutes if they’re interested in hiring you.

Virtual Interviews

More employers are conducting interviews via video conferencing, such as Zoom, WebEx, MS Teams, so it is important to prepare for this type of interview. Here are a few helpful tips unique to virtual interviews:

- Dress the same for a virtual interview as you would for an in-person interview.
- Test the technology platform before the interview. For example, if it’s via Zoom, practice a Zoom meeting with a friend or family member. Make sure you know how to turn on your camera and microphone. Make sure your computer is charged or plugged in.
- Use your space to create a solid first impression. Ensure your background is professional, clean, and uncluttered. A blank wall or a professional-looking virtual background (not beaches, outer space, etc.) can be good choices.
- Check your lighting. You want to light yourself from the front. Don’t sit with a window or light behind you - light from the back will make you appear dark and difficult to see.
- Sit in a quiet place where you will not be interrupted or distracted.
- Practice using your webcam. Make sure you look into the camera, check how your outfit appears on video, monitor your hand gestures, facial expressions, speaking rate, and so on. Be sure to smile!
- Having a few notes is okay, but reference them minimally and don’t read from them directly. Let the interviewer know you’re just checking your notes, so they don’t think you’re scrolling on your phone. Notes can be distracting, so use them sparingly.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

- Focus on the skills and qualities you’ll bring to the organization, but don’t rehash your resume.
- The experts at *Big Interview* recommend this formula: share who you are relevant to the position (I’ve spent the last 6 years as a Senior Accountant at...), highlight relevant expertise (specializing in tax preparation which I really enjoy), and why you want this role (I’m really excited to move into a role where I can share my experience and train others in the industry).

What do you consider your greatest strength(s)?

- Select a strength you have that matches a qualification for the position. For example, if the role requires good organizational skills, which is a particular strength of yours, emphasize that fact. However, always be honest about your strengths.
- Always give an example of a situation where you successfully utilized this skill.

What do you consider your greatest weakness(es)?

- Be honest, no one is perfect, and there is always room for improvement. An interviewer does not want to hear, “I don’t have any weaknesses.” However, don’t pick a weakness that is an essential qualification for the position.
- You can say, “an opportunity for growth is...” and then state what you’re doing to improve that skill (ex. taking a class, asking for a stretch assignment at a previous employer, etc.). Employers want to know your problem-solving skills and commitment to improvement.

Why should I hire you?

- Familiarize yourself with the job posting, and discuss how you specifically meet their top 1-2 key requirements.
- If you have a non-traditional background or are a career changer, share how those skills can add to the team/position.
- Confidence in your skills is important during this question. Convince them that you will add value to their company – sell yourself!

Why are you leaving your current position?

- Be honest but stay positive. NEVER complain or say negative things about your current or past employer.
- If you are leaving due to a negative situation, prepare an answer that focuses on what your current employer does not offer that you hope this employer will offer. An example could be a more collaborative work environment or more opportunities for growth.

Tell me about a time...

- This is an example of a behavior interview question discussed earlier in this guide. Review the linked [resources on creating STAR stories](#) to prepare for these types of questions.

Other tips for during the interview:

- Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question.
- Never argue or debate with the interviewer.
- Do not ramble, as you could potentially talk yourself out of the job. Keep your responses to under 2 minutes.
- Think before you respond, gather your thoughts so you can give a quality answer that is to the point.
- Stay positive in all your answers.
- Keep all your answers related to your job qualifications. When asked “Tell me about yourself” try to keep the answer related to your goals, education or work experience.
- Be aware of your body language. If you are slouching, swinging your legs and playing with your hair, you may be perceived as unprofessional.
- At the end of the interview, ask the interviewer when they will be making their decision. This allows you to leave the interview knowing when you should expect to hear from them.
- Thank them for their time and consideration.
- Remember...being a little nervous is normal and expected.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Remember to review the job posting before the interview get an idea of the types of questions you may be asked in the interview. For example, if you're applying to a leadership position, you may be asked about how you motivate employees. If you're interviewing for a project manager role, you will likely be asked about how you prioritize time and resources.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- Why do you feel you are the best candidate for this position?
- What made you decide to go into this field?
- Tell me about a time you made a mistake and how you handled it?
- Give an example of how you worked on a team.
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years?
- What is your idea of a good manager/supervisor?
- What did you enjoy the most/least about your most recent job?
- Why did you leave your last position?
- Have you handled a difficult situation? How?
- Give me an example of a time you handled a conflict effectively.
- Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.
- What would a former co-worker say is your greatest weakness?
- What would a former manager say is your greatest strength?
- How does your work experience relate to this position?
- How do you prioritize your time if you have multiple projects?
- Do you have any questions?

For more examples of common interview questions check out Minnesota State [CAREERwise](#) and [MN CareerForce](#) interview questions.

ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions represent only a sampling of illegal questions. Typically, illegal questions during an interview involve age, marital status, sexual orientation, country of origin, disabilities, or religion.

- How old are you?
- Are you married, single or engaged?
- Do you have any children?
- Are you disabled in any way?
- Where did you learn to speak Spanish?
- Do you need to take time off of work for any religious holidays?

These questions can be tricky to answer, but here are some tips on [how to respond](#).

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Before you leave, thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Once you get home, write a thank you letter or email. If your primary communication with the employer has been through email, sending a Thank You via email is recommended. Often employers decide on a candidate before a hand-written note arrives.

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Tips for the thank you letter:

- Write about something specific that was discussed in the interview which makes you unique and qualified for the position.
- Multiple interviewers means multiple letters. Each interviewer should receive a thank you letter following the interview.
- Personalize your greeting based on your interaction with the interviewer(s). For example, if the person you interviewed with said “call me Anne” then address your letter “Dear Anne,”
- Spell everything correctly. One incorrect spelling can ruin your chances. Have a family member or a friend proofread your thank you letter before you mail it.
- Be sure to get the proper spelling of the interviewers’ first and last names and job titles.
- Mail or email the thank you note within 24 hours after your interview.
- Always send a thank you note to your references and let them know when you secure a position.
- Find more tips and sample Thank You Letters on CAREERwise’s [Interview Follow-Up](#) page.

SAMPLE THANK YOU EMAIL

Subject: Thank you – Outside Sales Representative Interview

Dear Mr. Maxx:

As I was leaving your office today, I reflected on how much I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about Universal Tire Corporation. I appreciate the time you spent with me discussing your opening for an Outside Sales Representative.

I believe my internship with Shemax, Inc. and my educational background in Marketing and Business Administration make me an excellent candidate for the position. You mentioned the importance of having an outgoing person with a lot of initiative. I feel that my experience using my marketing, communication and customer service skills would exceed your expectations if given the chance.

I was also very impressed with Universal Tire's commitment to investing in your employee's future through the Tuition Reimbursement Program you mentioned. I look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, please contact me at 651-555-5555 or via this email if there is any additional information I can provide to help you in your decision.

Sincerely,
Mary Johnson

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

October 1, 2022

Mr. Robert V. Maxx
Vice President Human Resources Universal Tire Corporation
2000 Park Drive
Rosemount, MN 55068

Dear Robert:

As I was leaving your office today, I reflected on how much I enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about Universal Tire Corporation. I appreciate the time you spent with me discussing your opening for an Outside Sales Representative.

I believe my internship with Shemax, Inc. and my educational background in Marketing and Business Administration make me an excellent candidate for the position. You mentioned the importance of having an outgoing person with a lot of initiative. I feel that my experience using my marketing, communication and customer service skills would exceed your expectations if given the chance.

I was also very impressed with Universal Tire's commitment to investing in your employee's future through the Tuition Reimbursement Program you mentioned. I look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime, please contact me at 651-555-5555 or email me at #####@gmail.com if there is any additional information I can provide to help you in your decision.

Sincerely,
Mary Johnson

IN SUMMARY – INTERVIEWING TIPS

- Double-check the time of the appointment. For an in-person interview, arrange to be ten to fifteen minutes early. If time permits, do a dry run beforehand.
- For virtual interviews, login 5-10 minutes early to ensure your system is working. Practice with the technology ahead of time and take the interview in a quiet, well-lit, and professional-looking space.
- Have copies of your resume and cover letter with you. Make sure these are clean copies and are the same as the resume you submitted when you applied. Have your reference list available, including names, email addresses, and phone numbers.
- Be sure your references gave you permission to use them as a reference and expect phone calls or other inquiries about you. It is helpful to send them a copy of your resume and the job description so they can be better prepared to discuss your qualifications for the position.
- Dress appropriately for the job you are seeking. Being overdressed is better than being underdressed.
- Give the appearance of self-confidence and energy when you first enter the room: Smile. Be yourself. Give a firm handshake. Be relaxed. Maintain eye contact.
- Be positive but not overly friendly with the interviewer.
- Practice, practice, practice. Practice answering questions out loud in front of a mirror or using your computer webcam.
- Before answering a question, take time to pause, take a deep breath, and plan an appropriate response. Try not to fill “awkward” silences with nervous responses.
- It’s okay to ask for clarification or to have the question repeated if you need.
- Keep your responses positive and give examples when appropriate. Employers are looking for evidence you can do the job which is why examples are more effective than just listing skills.
- If you have an irregular work history, with employment gaps or several job changes, prepare a response to address what you were doing during the gaps or why you changed positions frequently, as interviews will likely ask about it.
- NEVER complain or say negative things about your current or past employer.
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer(s) for their consideration and time.
- Write a thank-you letter to the interviewer(s) immediately following the interview. Thank them for the interview, recap what you learned from the interview, and reaffirm your interest in the job (ask for the job!).

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW RESOURCES

- [Types of interviews](#) - Minnesota State CAREERwise
- [Interview and Negotiate](#) – Minnesota State CAREERwise
- [Interview Resources](#) – MN CareerForce
- [Connect](#) with a CareerForce specialist for personalized support