Below are some basic tips to help you prepare for your upcoming interviews. Individual coaching appointments and practice interviews are also available at Career and Internship Services. To schedule an appointment with a career professional, call 612-624-2710.

**When Contacted for an Interview**

- Be enthusiastic and be flexible about the interview time and date.
- Confirm who you will be meeting with and the length of the interview.
- Ensure you know the exact location of the interview and where to check in once you arrive.
- Get a phone number in case you have follow up questions or need other assistance.
- If you need any accommodations for your interview, request it at this time.

**Research the Employer**

Researching the employer is a critical first step to preparing for an interview. Plan to gather comprehensive information such as products, clients, customers, financial situation, current news, and/or organizational structure. Places to go to gather this information include:

- Organization website and online news sources such as The Business Journal.
- U of M Business Reference Library – http://busref.lib.umn.edu/ (Click on the Companies tab).
- Current employees, former employees, or clients via informational interviews.

**Research the Position/Anticipate Questions**

Employers often create interview questions directly around the skills listed in the job posting. It is, therefore, very important to do the following:

- Request a comprehensive description of the job prior to an interview.
- Ask someone in a similar career about the skills required for their job.
- Review the job description and make a list of skills and qualities required for the position.
- Use the skills list to create, and practice from, possible interview questions that might be asked.

**Identify Your Qualifications**

- What are your top 3-5 qualifications for the position? Think through common interview questions and how you can communicate these skills in your answers.
- Determine your weaknesses as they relate to the position. Create a plan for how you will address and minimize these weaknesses in the interview.
- What is your unique selling point that makes you different from other candidates who may have similar skills and qualifications?
- Prepare a professional portfolio that shows samples of your work – this is relevant to all industries!
- Identify why you want this job with this organization. How does this fit with your career goals?
Prepare for Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interview questions ask you to share examples of times when you have exhibited specific skills. These questions are typically phrased “Tell me about a time when…”

To prepare for behavioral interview questions it is important think of your best moments in jobs, class projects and involvement activities that you want to share with employers. Once you have some ideas in mind, plot out what you will say about each example using the S.T.A.R. technique below:

- **Situation:** What was the setting or situation of this example?
- **Task:** What specific task or problem had to be addressed? (Related to the question)
- **Actions:** What 3-4 steps did you take in this situation and what specific skills/tools did you use? (This is the most important part of your answer; the most time should be spent here.)
- **Result:** What was the positive result of your actions?

For more information on behavioral interviewing, including sample questions and an example response, check out our Behavioral Interviews Handout.

Complete Final Preparations

There are a lot of small things that you should do to prepare for the interview:

- Prepare answers to likely interview questions; rehearse them **out loud**!
- Schedule a mock interview at the Career and Internship Services by calling 612-624-2710.
- Decide how you will dress for the interview (see our Interview Dress Handout for more information).
- Organize what you will bring: resume copies, references, transcript, pen, portfolio, note paper and questions you want to ask the employer.

The Interview – Arriving

The first moments of the interview are often most important because it is the first impression the employer will have of you. Consider the following to ensure the best possible impression:

- Arrive for your interview 10 minutes early
- Treat front desk staff with respect and kindness.
- Greet the receptionist and give them your name, appointment time and interviewer name.

When the interviewer comes to greet you, be sure to:

- Stand up and smile to show respect, enthusiasm and to demonstrate self-assurance.
- Make eye contact to show confidence (if it is culturally appropriate for you to do so).
- Shake the person’s hand in a firm and poised manner if able to do so.*
- Introduce yourself giving both your first and last name (especially if it is hard to pronounce), repeat their name as well to help you remember “Nice to meet you Ms. Gupta, I’m Mai Vang.”

* **Note:** If you cannot shake hands with an employer, simply plan ahead for this situation. A response might be: “I am sorry, I am not able to shake your hand, but thank you for offering, it’s a pleasure to meet you.”
The Interview – Body Language & Voice Quality

Studies have shown that in the first moments of an interview 55% of the impression you make is on appearance, 38% on your voice quality, and only 7% on the content of what you say. Be sure to follow the below tips:

- Sit up straight – no slouching!
- Smile and look happy, your face may look too serious when you are nervous.
- Avoid fidgeting with hair, jewelry or pens.
- Make eye contact with the interviewer(s) if culturally appropriate for you to do so.
- Speak loud enough to be heard and enunciate your words.
- Avoid verbal fillers such as “um” or “like”.
- Don’t raise your voice at the end of a sentence, this tone can give the impression you are unsure.

Questions to Ask Employers

The most common last question is “What questions do you have for us?” It is critical that you have a prepared list of questions for this moment in the interview. Ask for information about the position, organization, and what they are looking for in an ideal candidate to ensure a good fit between you and the organization.

A few sample questions are below. For more tips check out our Asking Questions in Your Interview Handout.

- What type of projects should I expect in my first year on the job?
- Who would be my supervisor for this position? How would you describe their supervisory style?
- What skills and characteristics are most needed in this position?
- What is the most difficult part of this job?
- What would a typical day be like?
- What are the biggest challenges facing your department in the next year?
- What do you most like about working here? Why do you work here?

Respond to their answers if appropriate - share more about your qualifications or reiterate your interest in what they’ve said.

**DO NOT** ask questions about salary, benefits, or vacation time at this stage in the interview process. Doing so leads employers to believe you are only interested in the money, not the job and organization.

Closing an Interview

Once your questions have been answered, it is also ideal to have a closing statement that thanks them for their time, re-highlights your key qualifications, and states your interest in the position.

“Thank you so much for interviewing me today, I have enjoyed learning more about your company. I know that my writing experience and my computer graphics skills make me a great fit for the position. I am very excited about your company and want to reiterate my strong interest in this position.”

Before you leave, it is appropriate to ask for the next steps and time line for the hiring process. It would also be wise to ask for the business card of anyone who has interviewed you.
After the Interview

- Send a thank you letter within 24-48 hours of the job interview. For suggestions on writing a thank you note, see the Thank You Letter Handout available at Career and Internship Services.
- Write down questions you were asked in the interview as a tool for future interview preparation.
- Once the appropriate amount of time has passed call to check in about the status of their decision.

Final Interview Tips

Do

- Do listen carefully to the question asked and be sure to answer the question directly.
- Do pause to organize your thoughts before you begin to answer a question.
- Do project confidence, but try not to come across as arrogant or over-confident.
- Do be yourself! Try to show your genuine personality.
- Do turn off your cell phone during an interview.

Don’t

- Don’t be late – ever!
- Don’t speak badly about previous employer or co-workers.
- Don’t bring up controversial topics such as religion, politics or personal issues.
- Don’t use absolute phrases or minimizing phrases “I only…” “I just…” “I always…” “I never…”
- Don’t use the words “like,” “um” or “kind of” as they sound less professional.
- Don’t smoke before an interview and don’t chew gum during a job interview.
- Don’t answer questions with only a “yes” or “no.” Instead explain yourself and give some details.

Related Resources

Career and Internship Services in 198 McNeal Hall/411 Bruininks Hall has additional materials to assist you with your interview skills. Stop by our office to check out the following materials or find them online at www.careerhelp.umn.edu/interviews.html

Handouts:
- Sample Interview Questions
- Behavioral Interviews
- Phone/Skype Interviews
- Interview Dress
- Asking Questions in Your Interview
- Design Interview Questions
- Professional Dress
- Thank You Letters

Interview Videos:
- Sample Interview 1 - See an example of an “average” job interview: z.umn.edu/sampleinterview1
- Sample Interview 2 - View questions answered again in the correct, more detailed fashion: z.umn.edu/sampleinterview2

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