

**CAREER  
SERVICES**  

---

**GROVE CITY COLLEGE**

---

# Job Interviewing Preparation

---

Career Services Office  
Phone: 724-458-3371 • Email: [career@gcc.edu](mailto:career@gcc.edu)  
[www.gcc.edu/cso](http://www.gcc.edu/cso)

## THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of an interview from an employer's perspective is to assess your interpersonal skills, attitudes, values, intelligence and experience. It is a chance for them to see how you would fit with their organization, and clarify any information on your resume.

The interview is your opportunity to match your talents and interests to the needs of the employers. Your goal in the interview is not to merely convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the job, but also to evaluate whether this is the right position for you.

### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: SIX STEPS IN PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

#### STEP #1: Engage in self-assessment exercises

To discuss your qualifications for a position effectively, you must have a clear understanding of what you have to offer an employer, and what you are seeking in a position. To begin, assess your skills, interests, values and experiences and apply this information to what you know about the organization and position you are seeking.

- Identify who you are in relation to the position; this serves as an opportunity to sell yourself
- Identify what unique qualities you possess in relation to the position
- Ask family and friends to help you assess your personal qualities, attributes and skills
- Complete the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (accessible through JobGrove) to assess your personality, how you look at things, and the way in which your decision process works
- Complete the Strong Interest Inventory (accessible through JobGrove), which will assist you in identifying work interests
- Know the transferable skills of the model person for the position, and assess which of those transferable skills you possess

#### STEP #2: Conduct substantial company research

The quickest way to turn off a recruiter, and end your chances of an offer of employment is to not research the organization prior to your interview. It is extremely important to sufficiently research the organization before your interview. This will help you understand the organization and the position for which you are applying.

- Locate the organization's website and research the following areas:
  - What is the company's history?
  - What does the organization do? What are its products and/or services?
  - What industries/populations does the organization serve?

- How large is the organization? Is it part of a larger organization?
- Where are its corporate headquarters? Where are other divisions located?
- What is the structure of the organization?
- What is the company's growth potential?
- What is the career growth potential in this organization? Are there training programs?
- Who are their competitors?
- Research the company's industry. Find answers to the following key questions:
  - What are the industry trends and areas of growth?
  - Who are the leading companies in the industry?
  - What products and services are in the greatest demand?
- Find secondary sources with information about the company.
  - Search databases such as [http://www.quintcareers.com/researching\\_companies.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html) which provide links to helpful websites
  - Review newspaper articles, press releases, and periodical articles
  - View the company's LinkedIn profile

### **STEP #3: Be prepared for questions about your accomplishments from the resume**

There are a number of questions commonly asked by employers during an interview. If you are prepared to articulate your experiences and accomplishments listed on your resume, you will be prepared to offer well, thought-out and concise replies.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Tell me about yourself?</li> <li>● How did you search for and select Grove City College?</li> <li>● What led you to choose your major?</li> <li>● What college subjects did you like best?</li> <li>● What college subjects did you like least?</li> <li>● If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently?</li> <li>● What are your career goals?</li> <li>● How do you plan to achieve your career goals?</li> <li>● Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?</li> <li>● What are your educational goals?</li> <li>● How would others describe you?</li> <li>● What do you know about our company?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What do you know about the position you are interviewing for?</li> <li>● What do you feel you can contribute to our organization?</li> <li>● What positions have you had that qualify you for this position?</li> <li>● What did you learn in your last position?</li> <li>● What major strength do you feel you have that will make you a great employee?</li> <li>● What is your greatest weakness?</li> <li>● How do you work under pressure?</li> <li>● What motivates you?</li> <li>● How do you best motivate others?</li> <li>● What professional associations do you belong to?</li> <li>● What clubs do you belong to?</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- What volunteer work have you done in the past?
- What awards or honors have you received?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- What are your feelings about success?
- What are your three greatest accomplishments during college?
- Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Is there anything else that is not on your resume that you would like to tell me?

### **Examples of Responses:**

- If the interviewer says, "Tell me about yourself," confine your answer to career-related information and how your skills relate to the position you are seeking. Too much detail about your personal history is inappropriate.
- If you are asked to describe why you selected your major/university, remember that the employer is interested in your decision-making skills. Discuss how you researched the information as well as the end result.
- If you are asked to describe your greatest weakness, include in your response the steps you are taking to overcome it. For example, "I tend to procrastinate in preparing term papers. This year, however, I devised a schedule with deadlines for completing research, for writing a first draft, and for editing. This has helped me to stay on track."

### **STEP #4: Be prepared to answer behavioral-based interview questions**

The purpose of the behavioral interview is to find out how someone *will* perform in a job, so the interviewer asks questions about how you *have* performed in similar situations in the past. This interview style is based on the theory that past performance predicts future performance. Your past behavior in a situation will provide a fairly accurate estimate of future on-the-job performance. The behavioral interview is a more structured process, looking for specific desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. The interviewer will ask you strategic questions to find specific past examples where you proved your skills and abilities. Using the behavioral interview process prevents an interviewer from making an evaluation of you based on their

personal feelings, attitudes or hunches. Using job-related past behaviors for evaluating candidates ensures that you will be evaluated on your own merits.

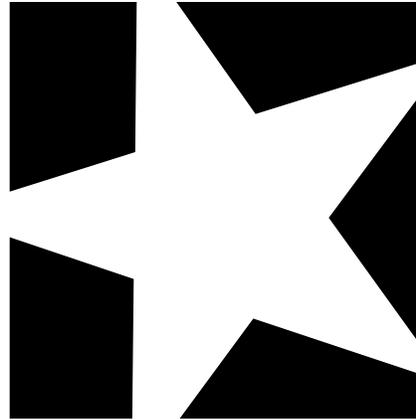
Before you review the following list of behavioral interview questions, it is imperative to understand how to answer them. When asked a behaviorally based question, interviewers are looking for a four-component answer. This four-part answer can be conveniently remembered as STAR. If you organize your responses using the STAR formula, you will avoid long, rambling responses and make a positive impression with your interviewer.

**Situation** – Give the background or context of the situation.

**Task** – Describe the job at hand.

**Action** – What did you do or say in response to the situation or task and how did you do it or say it? Action is the prime component of STAR because it shows the interviewer your specific past behavior.

**Result** - Describe the effect of your actions. Tell what change or difference was made because of your actions.



**Example:** Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member was not pulling his or her weight?

**Answer:**

**Situation** I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions or doing his assignments.

**Task** I needed the team member to join the team in coming to lab and completing the assignment.

**Action** I met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course.

**Result** He was not only able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' in it.

**Follow Up:** The interviewer might then ask follow-up questions such as the following to test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior.

How did you feel when you confronted this person?

Exactly what was the nature of the project?

What was his responsibility on the team? What was your role on the team?

### **Behavioral Interview Questions:**

(listed in alphabetical order based on transferable skill)

#### **Analytical/Problem Solving Skills:**

- Tell me about a time when you were faced with a difficult situation/problem that required careful analysis on your part. How did you proceed? What steps did you take? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a situation when the first solution you suggested to solve a problem didn't work and what you did next.
- Think of a time when you had a large amount of data related to a particular problem. How did you organize and use the data?

#### **Attitude:**

- Tell me about a time when there was much pressure at work or school, and how you kept a positive attitude.

#### **Client Services Orientation:**

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a customer who was angry or upset about a product or service? How did you deal with him or her?
- Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to satisfy a customer?

#### **Communication:**

- Give me an example of how you explained a product or information to an individual so you could be sure that he/she understood it.
- Describe a time when you had to make a presentation to an individual or group, and how you prepared for it.
- Tell me about a time when you tried to persuade a person or group to do something they didn't want to do.
- Tell me about a time when you had trouble conveying your thoughts.
- Give me an example of a time you had a problem communicating with a supervisor. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information. How did you ensure that the other person understood?
- What is the most difficult paper you have written?
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.

**Creativity:**

- Tell me about the most creative thing you have done.
- Give me an example of a time when you provided a solution that was outside of the box.
- Tell me about a time you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your class or group was facing. What was the challenge? What roles did others play?

**Decision Making:**

- Think of a particularly difficult decision you have had to make in school or work. What was the decision? What processes did you use to make the decision?
- Give me an example of a time in which you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

**Enthusiasm/High Energy level:**

- Tell me about a project that really got you excited.
- Describe a project that required a high amount of energy over an extended period of time. What did you do to keep your enthusiasm up?

**Flexibility:**

- Tell me about a time you had trouble seeing eye to eye with a colleague or group member. How were you flexible, and how did it turn out?
- Tell me about a time when an unexpected event demanded that you reschedule your time.

**Initiative:**

- How did you search for and select Grove City College?
- How did you choose your major?
- How did you get your summer job at \_\_\_\_?
- Give me an example of a time when you overcame an obstacle to achieve a goal.
- Describe one of your important goals from a previous job and how you went about achieving it.
- What has your job search been like?
- Give me an example of a time where you pushed yourself to do more than the minimum.

**Interpersonal Skills:**

- Tell me about a time when you were with new people in an unfamiliar setting. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to separate liking a person/group from working with them. What did you do to learn to adapt to that?

**Leadership:**

- Briefly review the leadership experiences you have had. How did you come to be a leader?

- Describe a time when you were in charge of a project and what you felt you accomplished.
- Tell me about a time when your leadership was challenged. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when your initiative made the difference in completing a project or task.

**Motivation:**

- Describe the last time you did something which went well beyond what was expected of you in school or work.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to motivate someone. What steps did you take?
- Tell me about the last time you had to motivate yourself. How did you do it?
- Describe a time you were most frustrated or discouraged in reaching your goals.
- What do you feel has been your most significant school, work, or internship-related accomplishment?

**Organizational Skills/ Attention to Detail:**

- Give me an example of a task you have performed which shows your organizational skills.
- Tell me about a situation in which you were responsible for planning and organizing a meeting or event.
- Recall for me a major project you worked on. How did you organize it?

**Rapid Learner:**

- Describe a time in which you were assigned to a completely new project. How did you go about learning more about the subject? How did this knowledge help you as you began additional projects?
- In your past internship, how did you learn about the products/services you worked with or sold?

**Results-Oriented**

- What had been one of your biggest achievements at work? What steps did you take to achieve it?
- Give me an example of a project or assignment that was particularly difficult to manage. What did you do to ensure success?

**Teamwork:**

- Share an example of a time when you were a member of a team. How did the team operate, and what did you contribute to the team? What was the result?
- Describe a time when you were in a team that experienced difficulties. What did you do to help reverse the troubles? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and a member was not pulling his or her weight.
- Tell me about a time of working on a team project at school or work when there was a strong disagreement among team members. What did you do?

**Technical Skills:**

- Describe your experience in working with computer systems/software.
- Tell me about a time you went about handling a problem with a computer.

**Time Management/Multi-tasking:**

- Describe a situation in which you worked on simultaneous projects, or in which you felt stretched too thin. How did you handle it? What did you do to get through it?
- Describe your current projects and how you keep them scheduled to be delivered/completed on time.
- How do you prioritize your work?
- Tell me how you keep your personal work schedule on track.
- What do you do to make the most efficient use of your time during the day?
- Tell me about a time you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

**Work independently:**

- Tell me about a time you had to complete a project independently with little direction.

**Trustworthy/person of Integrity:**

- Tell me about a time when you were trusted by your superior with confidential information, or to complete an important task.

**STEP #5: Prepare questions to ask regarding the company**

An essential part of your preparation is to research employers and develop pertinent questions based upon your investigation.

The questions you may want to ask employers falls into categories such as: prospective position, the organization, career paths, or individuals with whom you may be working.

One of the purposes of the questions is to gain information from the interviewer. Good questions make a very positive impression by showing that you are thorough, interested, intelligent and knowledgeable. An absence of questions shows no research effort on your part and leaves a negative impression.

Below is a compiled a list of pertinent questions to serve as examples. They are designed to help you develop your own questions during your research and interview preparation. The idea is not that you simply use these questions, but that you adapt them to your interests and concerns regarding the company.

Not all questions are applicable for all positions, employers or candidates. Ask questions that are of genuine interest to you and will help you identify whether that company is a good match for your interests, abilities and passions.

## **Questions Commonly Asked of Interviewers:**

### **Position Description**

- Would you please describe the duties of the position?
- Can you tell me about the primary people with whom I will be working?
- Is this a new position? If not, how long did the previous person hold it? Was he or she promoted?
- What support services are available to carry out the responsibilities of this position?
- To whom would I be reporting?
- How and when would my performance be evaluated?
- Is regular traveling a part of this position?
- Can you tell me about the people who would be reporting to me?
- Could you please describe a typical workday?

### **Career Paths**

- What career path does this position offer?
- What percentages of those in this position are promoted? After how long?
- How does this position fit into the organization?
- Could you tell me about the people who have preceded me in this position? Where are they now and what are they doing?
- Does advancement to upper management require an advanced degree?

### **Education and Training**

- What additional training might be necessary for this position?
- Is training done in a classroom/group session or on an individual basis?
- Are there training programs available to me so that I can learn and grow professionally?
- What type of on-the-job training programs do you offer?
- Does the firm support further college education of its employees?

### **Judgment Questions for the Interviewer**

- What kind of personal attributes and qualifications does your company value in a potential candidate?
- What characteristics are important for this position?
- What is the most significant challenge facing your staff now?
- Is there anything unusually challenging about this position?
- What are some of the best results people in this position have produced?
- What are your projections for this department/position for the next year? (Specify type of projection: sales, production, profits, etc.)
- What are some ways that previous people have made an impact?
- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?

- What are your plans for expanding the (specific) department?
- How do you rate your competition?

### **General Questions for the Interviewer**

- Are there any questions about my qualifications/resume which I can answer?
- What are the backgrounds of the leading individuals in my area of interest?
- Are there any other assignments not specifically mentioned in the position description?
- Can you tell me a little about your own experience with the company?
- Is the company planning any new market lines?
- When do you expect to make a hiring decision for this position?
- Could you describe the hiring process?

### **STEP #6: Rehearse**

It takes practice to feel comfortable and confident with interviewing. We recommend that you physically rehearse responses to practice interview questions either on your own or with another individual. The Career Services Office provides various opportunities for you to practice this skill. First of all, you can take part in mock interview days with a guest alumnus/a or employer. These opportunities are posted through JobGrove. Secondly, you can schedule a mock interview with a Career Services staff member. You may choose to have your interview video recorded. Immediately following the mock interview, you will review the video with the career counselor and receive helpful feedback. To schedule a mock interview appointment, please contact the CSO at [career@gcc.edu](mailto:career@gcc.edu) or 724-458-3371. Finally, feel free to visit our web resource, CareerBeam ([www.gcc.edu/careerbeam](http://www.gcc.edu/careerbeam); register using your gcc email address) and utilize its Video Interview Practice portion.

### **DRESS APPROPRIATELY: INTERVIEWING ATTIRE**

Your appearance at an interview is important because it portrays a significant first impression. You want to select clothes that are professional looking and tailored. People equate how neatly you dress with how neatly you will work. Following the below guidelines may assist you in your selection of an interview wardrobe.

#### **Men and Women**

- Conservative two-piece business suit (solid dark blue or dark grey is best)
- Conservative long-sleeved shirt/blouse (white is best, pastel is next best)
- Clean, polished conservative shoes
- Well-groomed hairstyle
- Clean, trimmed fingernails
- Minimal cologne or perfume
- Empty pockets--no bulges or tinkling coins
- No gum, candy or cigarettes

- Light briefcase or portfolio case to carry extra copies of resume and other materials
- No visible body piercings (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.)

## **Men**

- Necktie should be silk with a conservative pattern
- Dark shoes
- Dark socks (Avoid white athletic socks with your dress shoes!)
- Get a haircut; short hair always fares best in interviews
- No beards
- Mustaches are a possible negative, but if you must, make sure it is neat and trimmed
- No rings other than wedding ring or college ring
- No earrings (if you normally wear one, take it out)

## **Women**

- Always wear a suit with a jacket; no dresses
- No open toe shoes
- Conservative hosiery (and no runs!)
- If you wear nail polish (not required), use clear or a conservative color
- Minimal use of makeup (it should not be too noticeable)
- No more than one ring on each hand
- One set of earrings only

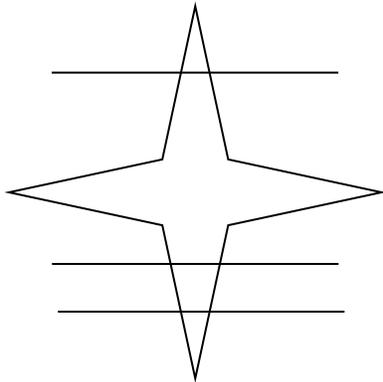
## **Final touches**

When in doubt, it's better to err on the formal rather than on the casual side of dress. Even though many companies have relaxed the internal company dress code, interviews still follow the same conservative standard. In general, you want to wear the best that you can afford and be impeccably turned-out, showcasing your natural attention to detail.

## **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

If you are interviewing on-campus for a full-time or internship position, you will likely be scheduled for a 30-minute interview. The first five minutes will be spent establishing rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer should make the candidate feel comfortable by introducing him/herself, and provide an orientation of the interview process. The next ten to fifteen minutes will be spent by the candidate answering interview questions about themselves, their experiences and their skills. The next five to ten minutes is spent by the candidate asking the recruiter specific questions about the company and the position. The last five minutes occurs after the interview is completed. The recruiter will evaluate the interview, and take notes on the specific comments and statements made in order to make an informed hiring decision. Below is a breakdown of a typical 30-minute interview.

## Interview Timeline



5 min – building rapport

10-15 min – answering interview questions about yourself

5-10 min – ask questions/hear company sales pitch

5 min – recruiter evaluation

## ADDITIONAL AREAS OF PREPARATION

- **Know where your appointment is to be held.** If you are scheduled for an on-site interview, it would be to your advantage to travel to the location in advance of the appointment to be sure you know how to get there.
- **Be on time.** Be sure to arrive ten to fifteen minutes before your scheduled interview. This creates a positive first impression, and it allows you to collect your thoughts before the meeting.
- **Firm handshake.** A firm handshake can reflect professionalism and confidence. A handshake should never be too firm, nor should it be limp.
- **Non-verbal communication.** Nonverbal communication can portray just as much if not more than our verbal words.
  - **Eye contact.** Maintain good eye contact with the person whom you are interviewing. It is OK to look away for a few seconds when contemplating a response to an interview question, but look away for only a few seconds, and then re-focus back on the interviewer.
  - **Posture.** Maintain proper posture during the interview. Be comfortable, lean slightly forward in your chair, and keep your shoulders up and back. Slouching down in your chair reflects laziness, lack of interest and a lack of confidence, while being too rigid and tense conveys inflexibility and nervousness.
  - **Gestures.** Gestures such as use of hands, eyebrows, etc., can enhance your message if they are not overdone. Using your hands to express a point in your story, and raising your eyebrows at something interesting all confirm your excitement and energy during the interview. If these things are overdone, they will distract the interviewer, and take away from your message.
  - **Relax.** If you are well prepared, you will feel more calm than if you neglect to prepare. Know yourself, your experiences, and the company. Listen well to the interviewer so you can calmly and succinctly respond to his/her question. While a little bit of nervousness is natural and shows our interest and care in what we are doing, being too tense can mean not getting the position. When we are well prepared, our ability to relax becomes easier.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

After the interview, one vital piece of correspondence lies between you and your potential job: *The Thank You Letter/Email*. By sending a thank you note to potential employers, you are showing professionalism and appreciation for the opportunity they have extended to you.

### **What should the thank you letter/email say?**

- Thank the interviewer for his or her time
- Reaffirm interest in the position and enthusiasm for the company
- Mention details discussed with the interviewer
- Add a relevant point you may have left out during the interview

### **When is a thank you letter/email appropriate?**

- After every job interview
- After every informational interview
- After a job fair
- After someone has helped you (i.e. referred your resume to someone, helped you network)

### **When should the letter/email be sent?**

- Try to get your letter in the mail or get an email out within 24 hours of the interview or meeting.

### **What are some ways to make my letter/email stand out from the other candidates?**

- Address a topic of particular interest that arose during the interview, especially where the topic reflects favorably on your job-related skills and strengths.
- Re-emphasize a skill or strength in which the interviewer expressed interest.
- If the interviewer had concerns regarding your skills or education, address them in greater detail than was possible during the interview.
- Feel free to be yourself and let your personality come across in the note.

### **Additional Tips:**

- Ask for a business card or write down the interviewer's title and proper spelling of his or her name before leaving the interview site.
- Keep the note brief and to-the-point.
- Carefully proofread your note and perhaps have another person review it, as well.
- If sending a note in the mail, use matching stationery of your cover letter and resume, or hand write one for a personal touch.