



# Interviewing: Telling your Story

## Preparation Is Key

It's no secret. A good resume can open the door to an interview, but it's your personal presentation in the interview that determines if you'll secure the position for which you have applied. That can feel daunting; so how do you ensure you do well?

First, remember that an interview is not an interrogation; it's a conversation. Realize that you are not likely to be interviewing if the organization didn't think you could do the job. Granted they still want to hear you speak about your skills and job knowledge, but if they didn't think you had the basics, you wouldn't even be there.

Learn to tell many short stories about your accomplishments and contributions in the classroom, at your internship, on the soccer field or in your volunteer project. Show how you responded to a crisis, exhibited leadership, learned from a mistake, or functioned as part of a team. These examples help demonstrate to an employer how you will be performing in their organization and, when answered thoughtfully and completely, can help you to stand out from your competition.

### STANDING OUT:

It is highly unlikely that you are the only person interviewing for a position, making it imperative that you convey how you are the best fit. Telling your story well is key, but so is demonstrating your interest in the *specific* position and company. Have you ever been in a situation where you are not seen as an individual, but rather as just one of many? Although there may be definite similarities between you and your peer groups, it doesn't feel very good to be lumped in with everyone else and have to fight to show your individuality. Does it? It's the same with employers!



Employers don't want to feel like their company is just one of many you've applied to. Vaguely expressing your interest in working for a company "like theirs" is basically saying you'll take whatever you can get, regardless of who hires you. Similarly, although it's an excellent start, it's not enough to have a generic understanding of the skills many employers are looking for; what is the company you're interested in looking for?

**Do your research, be specific, and keep your responses relevant to convey the traits of value to your interviewer.**

Additional tips on interviewing can be found in the digital editions of **JOB CHOICES:**

<https://www.lvc.edu/career-development/students.aspx>

*Career Planning section*

## Articulate Your Strengths

**Who are you? What can you do?  
What do you know?**

Every interview question, no matter how creatively worded or complexly designed, is basically asking one of these three questions. If you can respond in a way that highlights your skills and explains how you fit within the organization, you are much more likely to move ahead in the hiring process.

To identify top skills many employers seek, take a look at: <http://www.lvc.edu/career-development/hot-skills.aspx>. Research the company with which you are interviewing to help strengthen your understanding of traits they value.

It sometimes can help to think of your strengths/skills as falling into one of three areas, as outlined in *SkillScan*, a skills-focused career development tool.

### Transferable / Functional / Liberal Arts Skills

Actions taken to perform a task, transferable to different work functions and industries.

- Based on ability and aptitude.
- Expressed in verbs (i.e. organize; promote; analyze; write)

### Personal Traits / Attitudes

Traits or personality characteristics that contribute to performing work.

- Developed in childhood and through life experience.
- Expressed in adjectives (i.e. patient; diplomatic; results-oriented; independent)

### Knowledge Based Skills

Knowledge of specific subjects, procedures and information necessary to perform particular tasks.

- Acquired through education, training or on-the-job experience.
- Expressed in nouns. (i.e. accounting, Spanish, Personnel administration, contract management, PowerPoint)

# Telling Your Story

Many employers use the **behavioral based interviewing method** of asking questions to encourage you to describe your experience. The assumption is your past performance in a job, activity, leadership role, service or class project will predict your future performance in the work place. So how do you describe your experiences? By telling your story!

When you tell a story you come alive. You smile, you relax; you use gestures to complement your words and your tone of voice becomes interesting to listen to. Overall, you are engaged with the interviewer and are providing them with illustrations of your communicative abilities, analytical skills, work ethic and teamwork skills. They want to hear about your interpersonal strengths and your success with taking initiative, solving problems, and keeping flexible. Well-told stories enable you to highlight your abilities in these areas.

A great technique to help you tell your story is the **S.T.A.R.** method:

## **Situation - Task - Action—Result**

### **Situation/Task**

State the problem, need, opportunity or goal.  
*This provides the context for the actions you took.*

### **Actions**

State the key actions performed using action verbs as much as possible.  
*This helps to target your strengths/skills to the requirements of the job you are seeking.*

### **Results**

State the result and quantify the significance of your actions or qualify the impact it had on the organization.

*This helps to demonstrate the significance of your actions.*

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**Practice articulating your skills and telling YOUR story in a mock interview**



## Building your Story Bank

As you think about telling your story, there are many things your college experience has given you, outside of a solid academic foundation. Getting involved on and off campus is valuable socially, developmentally, and personally. But doing so is also extremely valuable when thinking about the job and internship search.

CareerBuilder recently conducted a survey, finding that “one-in-four hiring managers say relevant experience is the top thing they look for in a new graduate” (2011). Why? Because being a well-rounded student demonstrates to employers that you are ready to handle the world of work. Depending on your involvement, it is also where you are developing many job related skills that can help you to stand out from your competition. All you need to do (aside from participating!) is make the connection between what you are accomplishing and how it relates to necessary job/internship skills.

Consider your involvement in the following activities as you begin building your personal story bank:

- Coursework / Group Projects
- Study Abroad
- Part time jobs
- Internships
- Campus Involvement / Leadership positions
- Volunteer Activities / Community Service
- Athletics
- Any other relevant involvement!

## Types of Interviews

Employers use a variety of interview techniques and settings to determine your hireability.

**Traditional interviews** typically begin with introductions and are followed by questions asked of you and then questions you ask the employer. Candidates will often be interviewed by one or two persons. The types of questions generally will be open-ended questions that require the candidate to determine how to best respond.

**Behavior Based interviews** focus on specific questions that force you to demonstrate your skills and abilities by giving detailed descriptions of how you handled yourself in certain situations. The approach is based on the premise that the best predictor of future job performance is past performance in similar circumstances.

**Screening interviews** identify if you meet the minimum qualifications for the job. They may be done in person, over the telephone, or through video.

**Panel interviews** are conducted by individuals in three or more departments within the organization. Questions are generally specific to the departments represented.

**Peer group interviews** are conducted by those with whom you may work; they are designed to determine how well you “fit in.”

**Luncheon interviews** demonstrate how well you handle yourself in social situations.

**Second interviews** are similar to your first interview and will typically follow the traditional or behavior-based approaches. They will be more intense, lasting for several hours; some may even last a full day. Expect to find a combination of interview types when involved in full day interviews.