

Interview Preparation

Congratulations! You got an interview. This is wonderful news because it means the company you're interested in already knows you're qualified, based on your application materials. The interview is your chance to show them who you are as an employee and as a person. And this goes both ways: it is also your opportunity to see how you feel about working with them.

Interviews are discursive, a conversation with one or more people. Preparing can feel daunting because it's impossible to predict every question that might be asked—that's ok! It's more important (and more feasible) to work on feeling comfortable with the unknown and confident talking about yourself and your work.

This handout will help you prepare without feeling like you have to memorize an answer to every imaginable question. Outlined below are four ways of engaging with sample interview questions (also provided below). Each one requires working with a tutor or friend. Choose the activity that seems most helpful for you right now—and maybe try another later.

No Pressure

1. Take turns asking each other questions from the list on the back of this handout. Try to answer casually, the way you would to a friend. This is just practice.
2. Notice your own responses, including the language you use and the themes you bring up. Notice each others' answers, looking for new ways to talk about these topics.

Crafting a Narrative

1. Read over your résumé and pick 2 experiences (jobs, classes, internships, volunteer roles, etc.) that you want to highlight—ones that were the most formative, relevant, or fun. Focusing on one at a time, discuss the following:
 - What made you choose this experience?
 - What did you like about it? What didn't you like?
 - Describe one thing you learned from this experience.
 - What might you change about this experience?
2. Now pick any two sample questions from the list below. In responding aloud, try to bring in one of these two favorite experiences as an example.

What's the Point?

1. Pick out one or two or a bunch of questions from the list. For each, discuss the following:
 - Why might an employer ask this question in an interview?
 - What do they want to learn, both directly and indirectly, by asking it?
2. Considering this purpose, what is it important to include or focus on in your response?
3. Now, try talking through your own answer/s.

Go with Your Gut

1. Mark or highlight any questions that pop out as “fun” to answer. Now mark (with another symbol or color) questions that seem challenging.
2. Discuss the differences between fun and challenging questions. What makes some seem easier? Do any themes emerge—topics you’re more or less comfortable discussing?
3. Talk through your reasons for not wanting to answer certain questions. Can you find a perspective or some content that makes answering easier? Or can you speak directly about this resistance in a way that relates to your own perspective and skills?

Sample Questions

Opening

Tell me a little about yourself/walk me through your résumé.
What led you to choose your major/field of study?
Why do you want this job/Why are you interested in this position?
What’s your dream job?

Personal

What are your greatest professional strengths?
What is your greatest achievement?
What do you consider to be your weaknesses?
What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

Job-Specific — *Replace the [bracketed] words with skills/tasks from the relevant job description.*

Tell me about a time you exercised [*leadership*].
How do you feel about working in a [*team setting*]?
How do you feel about your work [*being changed/modified*]?

Professional Growth

How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations at work?
How would your boss and co-workers describe you?
What do you think we could do better or differently?

Personality & Critical Thinking

If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?
Are you a hunter or a gatherer?
If you were deserted on an island with all basic needs met, what two items would you bring?
How many tennis balls can you fit into a limousine?
Why are manholes round?

Wrapping Up

I see many applicants with similar credentials; why should we hire you?
What else should I know about you?
What questions do you have for us?