

INTERVIEWING- Tip Sheet

Before the Interview

Two Types of Research

1. Research Yourself (Self-Assessment) – Create a list of personal strengths and past accomplishments. Identify and evaluate your education, experience, skills, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses.
2. Research the Employer – Gather as much information about the employer as possible.

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|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| - size and location(s) of organization | - product line, industry, service | - recent news/trends |
| - culture, mission and values | - clients, potential markets | - training provisions |
| - structure of organization | - stock history | - length of assignments |
| - past, current and potential growth | - the competition | - name/title of interviewer |

Other Preparation

- Prepare a list of well-researched questions for the interviewer.
- Practice interview techniques before the interview. You are encouraged to participate in the Career and Professional Development Center’s (CPDC) Practice Interview Program. The service may consist of a resume review and a brief videotaped practice interview with your career coach followed by personal feedback. You can also participate in a practice interview with an employer volunteer on selected schedules, which are posted in Handshake. Click on “Jobs” on the main menu bar and then “On-campus Interviews.”
- Prepare necessary logistics. Get detailed directions. If driving, practice driving the route at the same time of day as the interview, to observe traffic patterns. Investigate and identify parking options. Your goal is to arrive 10-15 minutes early – but no earlier than that.
- Organize materials you want to bring such as transcripts, work samples and updated resumes.

Preparation: Interview Attire

Research shows that hiring decisions are often impacted by the first impression. For interviews, conservative attire rather than a fashion statement is best. However, the style of dress should be reflective of the type of work or industry. Those entering a creative field or industry may have the opportunity to express more personality and style. If unsure, ask a professional and/or your career coach about dress for that field. Overall, keep it simple, polished and professional. Be memorable for your unique abilities and successes, not by being inappropriate or outlandish.

Clothing

Formal, two-piece matching suit
Shirt should be light, solid color (white or light blue)
Conservative tie (solid color or small-patterned)

Belts should match shoes
Skirt should come to the knee
All clothing should be pressed and clean

Footwear

Choose dress shoes that are polished and well-maintained
Solid color navy or black socks (gray or black if wearing a gray suit). No white socks!

Closed toe pumps with low to moderate heel
Skin tone hosiery or panty hose (no patterns)

Hair and Accessories

Hair should be brushed and neat
Long hair can be worn up or down
Facial hair should be minimal and well groomed
Neatly trimmed hair, mustache, and sideburns

Remove facial and body piercings and cover tattoos
Choose natural tones of eyeshadow and lipstick
Wear a minimum of jewelry
Use minimal or no fragrance

Quick Tip: The CPDC has a limited supply of interview-appropriate clothing available. If you need to borrow professional attire for a scheduled interview, stop by and visit our ‘Career Closet’ in advance.

During the Interview

Your Entrance:

Have a positive and cheerful attitude. Be sure to smile and show your enthusiasm toward the job and organization. Also be courteous to those you meet and interview with. Give the interviewer a warm greeting with a firm handshake.

Your Presentation:

Relax, be yourself, and think of the interview as a conversation and exchange of information between two people. Remember to use the interviewer's name in the conversation. However, be professional and courteous – don't address your host by their first name unless they ask you to do so.

Components of a Strong Answer:

- Use active verbs and concrete examples. Be concise and complete. Summarize key points and make transitions.
- Back up a statement with a specific example.
- Share the outcome or solution to a specific problem.
- Summarize to emphasize your strengths.

Your Questions:

- Be sure to ask the interviewer questions. Good questions reflect your interest in the position and the research you have done about the organization. (Review sample questions at the end of this tip sheet.)

Non-verbal Behaviors:

Studies show that nonverbal communication accounts for more than 50% of the interview. Be aware of posture, eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions, and active listening. Here are examples:

Positive:

- Appropriate dress, matching the interviewer's organization
- Firm handshake
- Good eye contact
- Occasional affirmative nodding of the head
- Leaning forward (but do not lean on the interviewer's desk)
- Sitting with hands, feet, and arms unfolded
- Smiling appropriately
- Sitting up straight in the chair
- Maintaining a pleasant facial expression

Negative:

- A weak and ineffectual handshake
- Lack of eye contact
- Inappropriate facial expression or lack of expression
- Poor body posture, either sitting or walking
- Squirming in the seat or sitting on the edge of the chair
- Nervous habits or gestures
- Frowning

Your Exit:

- Thank the interviewer. Ask about the next steps in the interview process and about the employer's timeline for making a decision. Ask them what type of follow-up they prefer (phone, email, mail).
- Reaffirm interest and enthusiasm for the position. Give the employer a firm handshake and walk confidently from the interview.

After the Interview

Assess Yourself:

Evaluate what you did well and what may need improvement. Seek assistance from the CPDC, if needed.

Write a Thank You Letter or Email:

Personalize the letter/email and try to set yourself apart from other applicants. You may also strengthen or add a point about your qualifications in relation to the position. Don't just say "thank you;" reiterate your interest in the job or organization and mention some specifics from the interview.

Types of Interviews

Screening Interview

The goal of this type of interview is to get the facts from the candidate by identifying relevant skills and abilities, verifying the resume, and looking for a solid fit with the position. It is usually less than one hour, and depending on the employer and location, can take the form of a campus, site visit, videoconference, or telephone conversation.

Virtual Interview

Interviews conducted by video, telephone or digital communications platforms are on the rise and may be used for a screening interview only or for the full interview process. A virtual interview allows the employer to conduct an interview regardless of the candidate's physical location, and is used to assess whether or not the candidate should be considered for an on-site interview. Occasionally, candidates seeking internships and summer jobs have been interviewed and hired using this method without an on-site interview. Keep in mind these tips when participating in a virtual interview:

- Get your technology in order. Be sure the technology being used for the virtual interview is installed and working before your meeting.
- Prepare your environment: silence your cell phone, turn off your TV or radio, and check for any other distractions.
- Position your camera to have a blank background if possible.
- Have relevant materials handy: your resume, paper and pen to take notes, research on the organization, a list of points to cover, and questions you want to ask.
- Dress as if it were an in-person interview. Also, be aware of your appearance, body language, and tone of voice.
- Send a thank you letter by mail or email to anyone who participated in the interview.

NOTE: You may schedule an interview room in the RMU CPDC for your phone or video interview. Rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis and should be scheduled in advance. Contact the CPDC at 412-397-6333 or careers@rmu.edu.

Interview Techniques

Behavioral Interview

This very popular interview style is based on the idea that a candidate's past behavior is useful in predicting future performance. Typical questions center on how a candidate has handled past situations where skills and teamwork have been demonstrated. Topic areas could include project work, relevant work experiences, difficult situations, accomplishments and leadership roles. Example questions are provided in this tip sheet.

** When responding to a behavioral question, use the **STAR** approach. It is important to discuss a specific example and include information about the **situation**, the **task**/problem to which you had to respond, the **action** you took, and the **result**. Provide examples with positive outcomes.

Case Interview

This style of interview presents the candidate with a simulated business problem. It is used to assess presentation skills, logic skills, analytical skills/reasoning, critical path thinking, problem solving ability, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, and communication skills. Case questions typically come in three different forms: business problems, guesstimates and brainteasers. Business problems assess broad functional skills, big-picture perspective, and comfort with details and analysis. Guesstimates measure comfort with ambiguity and creativity. Brainteasers are riddles that attempt to assess problem solving and creativity. Business problems are the most commonly used type of case questions. Case questions can be very difficult. It is important to remember that there may not be a “right” answer. The interviewer will be evaluating your problem solving skills as well as how you think on the spot and react under pressure.

Group Interview

A group interview can involve several people who are taking turns asking questions or presenting scenarios for the candidate to respond to or solve. It can also involve a group discussion that gauges how a candidate interacts with other members of the group who may be potential colleagues. When interviewing with a group, it is important to engage in conversation with all of the interviewers, not just the one who asks the question.

Technical Interview/Presentation

Candidates applying for positions in technical fields may be asked a series of specific technical questions or asked to complete technical assignments such as a programming task. Some employers may also ask candidates to make a brief technical presentation.

Improper or Illegal Interview Questions

Generally, employers should ask questions related to the job for which you are interviewing and your abilities to perform the duties. For example, an employer cannot ask what country you were born in, but he/she can ask if you are authorized to work in the United States. If you believe you have been asked an improper or illegal question at any time in the interview process, it is recommended that you do not discuss it or accuse the interviewer to his/her face, but do bring your concern to the CPDC. In this way, the issue can be reviewed and addressed with appropriate university personnel. In the interview, you may choose to offer the information requested if you do not mind sharing it. If uncomfortable answering the question, you may also choose to ask the interviewer how the question relates to the duties of the position.

Commonly Asked Questions

Goals/Interests

1. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
2. Do you have plans for continued study?
3. Why did you decide to seek a position with our organization?
4. What do you know about our company?
5. What are your short and long term goals? -OR- Where do you see yourself in five years?
6. What do you do in your spare time?
7. What salary are you expecting?
8. What interests you most about this position? What concerns do you have about this position?
9. Are you willing to relocate?
10. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
11. What criteria are you using to evaluate companies/organizations?
12. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you set for yourself for the next ten years?
13. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
15. How do you determine or evaluate success?
16. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
17. How would you describe your ideal job following graduation?
18. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

Experiences/Skills/Accomplishments

1. What do you consider to be your greatest strength? Weakness?
2. How do you think a friend, classmate, or professor who knows you well would describe you?
3. Why should I hire you?
4. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this job?
5. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
6. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
7. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
8. Tell me about yourself.
9. What unique qualities or abilities would you bring to this job?
10. Tell me about your internship (job, extracurricular activity). How do you work under pressure?
11. What supervisory or leadership roles have you held?
12. What would your supervisors tell me about you?
13. What have you learned from your mistakes?

College Experience

1. What subjects did you like best and least? Why?
2. How has your college experience prepared you for this job?
3. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
4. Are your grades an accurate reflection of your abilities? Why or why not?
5. Tell me about your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences at college.
6. Why did you select Robert Morris University?

Behavioral Interview Questions

1. Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.
2. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to use your verbal communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
4. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
5. Give me an example of an important goal you had set and tell me about your progress in reaching it.
6. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you have completed.
7. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
8. What did you do in a project or class to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.
9. Give me an example of a time you were asked to do something you were not trained to do or was not part of your original job description.
10. Tell me about a time when you worked in a group and encountered a problem with a group member. How did you deal with the problem?
11. Describe a time that you failed at something. What did you do afterwards?
12. Tell me about a project that you had either at work or school. Describe in detail how you managed it. What was the outcome?
13. Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure.
14. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
15. Describe a situation in which you've recommended a solution to a tough problem. Tell us the reason for that solution.

Case Interview Questions

Business Problems:

1. Impact on company of a consolidating industry?
2. Should Company X add capacity?
3. How should Company X react to a new competitor?
4. Should Company X enter/exit a new/old market?

Guesstimates:

1. Estimate the weight of a 747.
2. How many pennies are in the Robinson Mall?
3. How many disposable diapers were sold in the U.S. last year?
4. Approximately how much money does a large ski resort make in a weekend?

Brainteasers:

1. Why are manhole covers round?
2. You are in a room with three light switches, each of which controls one of three light bulbs in the next room. Your task is to determine which switch controls which light bulb. Your constraints are that you may flick only two light switches and you may enter the room only once. How would you set about determining which switch controls which bulb?

Education Questions:

The American Association for Employment in Education's (AAEE) *Job Search Handbook for Educators* is great for additional information about interview questions and the job search process and can be found at www.aaee.org/job-search-handbooks. Copies are available in the CPDC on a limited basis.

1. Why do you want to teach?
2. What is your philosophy of education?
3. What was your biggest problem in student teaching? How did you resolve it?
4. What are the rules of your classroom? How are they established?
5. Are parent/teacher conferences important? Why or why not?
6. Describe your ideal classroom.
7. A student is consistently late to your class. How would you handle this situation?
8. How would you handle a student who continually "acts up" in your class?
9. How do you engage a parent in the education of his/her child?
10. What do you expect from your supervisor?

Additional interview questions for educators:

Education World: 30 Favorite Questions for Future Teachers

www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin352.shtml

Teacher Catapult: 88 Teacher Interview Questions

<http://teachercatapult.com/teaching-articles/teacher-interview-questions>

Technical Questions:

1. Please describe any technical hobbies or interests you have.
2. How do you approach a technical problem? Give an example.
3. What exposure have you had to (software, hardware, product marketing, budgeting, etc.)?
4. Briefly describe a technical project that you found challenging or rewarding.
5. What have you done above and beyond course work especially in an area related to your major?
6. Have you published any papers or projects?
7. Have you ever been in a situation where you found yourself without the specific technical knowledge to perform a task essential to your project? What did you do?
8. Tell us about your experience dealing with end-users.

Additional technical interview questions:

IndiaBix: Technical Interview Questions and Answers

<http://www.indiabix.com/technical/interview-questions-and-answers>

The Balance Careers: Top Technical Interview Question

<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/top-50-it-interview-questions.htm>

Interview Questions for You to Ask

Prepare a list of well-researched questions to ask the interviewer. Keep in mind that your questions should reflect the amount of research you have done rather than your lack of knowledge about the organization. Avoid asking questions regarding salary or benefits. The questions below are guidelines; create and adapt questions to meet your individual needs and interview situation. Be prepared to ask three to six questions for each interview. Time availability may determine how many questions you will be able to ask.

1. Which parts of the job are most challenging?
2. How are the goals for this job set?
3. What activities are routinely performed in this job? What is a typical day like?
4. What other departments/divisions do you interact with the most?
5. How much travel is involved and to where?
6. Where will the position be located?
7. Will relocation be required in the future?
8. What is the length of the training program/period?
9. What is the typical career path for someone in the position?
10. What is the average time to move within this career path?
11. What is the potential growth of your organization?
12. What is the organizational structure and how does this position fit into the organization?
13. How often are performance reviews given?
14. Is this a newly created position?
15. Who would evaluate my work?
16. Does the organization endorse promotion from within?
17. What skills have you found to be valuable in this job?
18. Does the organization encourage professional development?
19. What is the work environment like?
20. What do you view as the most positive and least positive aspects of the organization?
21. How much visibility does this position have?
22. What is the turnover rate in the organization?
23. Please describe your organization's management philosophy.
24. What are your expectations for new hires within their first three to six months on the job?
25. How long has this position existed?

Additional Resources

CollegeGrad: The Path to Interviewing Success - <https://collegegrad.com/interview>

LiveCareer: Guide to Job Interviewing Resources and Tools - www.livecareer.com/career/advice/jobs/intvres

Monster: Interviews - <http://www.monster.com/career-advice/job-interview>

The Balance Careers: Learn How to Ace a Job Interview - <http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/aceinterview.htm>

Vault: Interviewing Advice (sample questions, informational videos, interviewing blog) - www.rmu.edu/cpdc