Interview Tips and Practice Questions

Before the Interview

Sign up for a mock interview!
Doing well in an interview is a skill in itself. The more you do them, the better you'll get. Learn the kinds of questions you may be asked and develop the best answers. If your qualifications are weak in some areas, determine how to express them as positively as possible. Sign up for a mock interview at the Career Exploration Center at least three days before your real interview.

Research the organization
Look at magazine articles, newspapers and trade journals, in-house brochures, and web-pages. Talk with customers/clients to familiarize yourself with the organization. Visit the Alumni Affairs and Development Office in S3110 Schuman Hall to see if we have any Human Ecology alumni working there. With this information, work facts based upon your research into your interview conversation.

Make sure to have an answer for these five questions:
1. Which sets of skills, abilities, and knowledge do you possess that can fill this position?
2. What would motivate you to excel in this position?
3. How would you get the job done? Would you know when you need help and how to ask for it?
4. How would you fit within the organization? What would you contribute to their team?
5. What are you hoping to gain from this position? How will this job help you work towards your long term career goals?

Prepare answers to the Expected Questions and Behavioral Questions listed in this packet. If you are applying to medical school or a business consulting firm, also prepare answers for the med school or case interview questions.

Dress:
The way you dress for your interview depends largely on the type of job you are applying for, the season, your age, and of course your own personality. You should always be yourself at an interview, business meeting, or any other event in your professional career. Before the interview, get a sense of the company's culture by looking at their website and talking to any employee contacts. When in doubt, classic choices like a suit, simple dress, or a sports jacket/blazer with trousers will generally be appropriate.

General tips:
• Be careful with bright colors and patterns. Dark and neutral colors are standard for many industries.
• Try on your clothes in advance to ensure that they fit comfortably.
• Avoid bulges or loose change in pockets.
• Keep your phone away and on silent.
• Bring a briefcase or portfolio if necessary. It can be helpful to have a resume on hand for your own or the employer's reference.
• Make sure your clothing and shoes are clean and free of holes or excessive lint.
• Do not wear excessive amounts of cologne or perfume.
• Fingernails should be trimmed and cleaned.
• Be cognizant of company culture related to any tattoos or piercings you may have on any visible body parts.
• Bring a bottle of water with you to stay hydrated and have a clear voice when speaking to your interviewer.

After your interview, clothing will continue to play a role in your career. Continue to be aware of company and workplace culture to determine what is appropriate, professional, and most comfortable to you.
During the interview

Listen to the interviewer
Adjust to the interviewer’s style and try to ascertain why particular questions are being asked. If you’re uncertain what they’re trying to obtain, ask for clarification. If necessary, take a moment to formulate your response. It is always better to take a pause than to stutter or appear flustered with a question. You can ask to return to a question at a later point in the interview, but it is then your responsibility to return to the question later on. Be sure to respond completely to all aspects of the question. You can ask the interviewer to repeat a question, as well.

Don’t monopolize the conversation
While interviewers usually want more than a simple “yes” or “no” answer, you should also avoid long discourses. Make your answers accurate, descriptive, to the point, and as interesting as you can. Sharing examples can demonstrate your point in a concise way.

Be positive
This is not the place to knock your school, past employers, professors, etc. An optimist is more useful in an organization than a pessimist. If you can be enthusiastic about past experiences, you are likely to be positive about future employers. View your problems or issues as obstacles and challenges instead. Take responsibility and show the impact you are able to make. No one likes a complainer!

Remember that people hire, not organizations
Your goal is to establish rapport with the interviewer, and encourage him/her to like and respect you and what you have to offer. Brand yourself and share who you are. Aside from having the skills, people will remember your impression and how you communicate your thoughts. The textbook answer to a question won’t show your individuality. Frame your responses with a theme running throughout your interview. Provide examples that connect and fill your story.

Be prepared to talk about your resume
Be ready to talk about everything and anything on your resume, whether it’s telling a story about an experience or achievement or remembering your favorite part about a class. Remember to really explain why/what/how you learned, the challenges, etc., and how you would potentially apply what you have learned to the position for which you are interviewing.

Ask questions
You also have an opportunity, throughout the interview, to obtain more information about the organization, available positions, work locations, and related information to assist you in your choice of employer. You will also be given the opportunity to ask additional questions of the interviewer. This can serve as an opportunity to display your knowledge of the organization. Some questions to ask might include:

- What are the people who held this position previously doing now?
- How much responsibility is given a new employee in this department?
- Upon what criteria are employees in this department evaluated?
- With whom would I work closely in this job?
- What are the opportunities for advancement in this organization?
- What is the company philosophy?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- What are the company/department goals for the next five years?
- What types of people succeed in this environment?
- What qualities have successful hires displayed?
- Could you describe your training program?
- What have you enjoyed the most about working at this company? What is something that you think could be improved upon at this company?
- You should usually not ask about salary during the first interview.
Point out why you like the organization
Why do you think the organization is a particularly good one? Are there factors which led you to single it out among many others of its type?

Express interest
Assuming the job/organization interests you, take time near the end of the interview to express that interest. Unless you say you like the job/organization, the employer has no way of knowing this.

Learn what happens next
Is your file complete? Is additional information needed? Are your references complete? What are the next stages of the process and the projected timeline?

Express thanks
Thank the interviewer for his/her time and interest, as well as the opportunity to learn more about the company. Remember to give a firm handshake and maintain good eye contact. If you feel good about the company and job, share this with the interviewer. And finally, make sure you have the contact information of the interviewer so that you can send a thank-you email or letter. (See information on follow-up letters in this packet.)

Don’t mention salaries
Don’t be the first person to talk about money. Salary negotiations may come up during your interview. If it does, be sure to express your interest in the company and your worth over what the exact salary is, or turn the tables and ask your interviewer for an expected range.

Different Types of Questions and Interviews

Tell me about yourself.
This question often proves to be challenging for interviewees and puts them in an awkward or defensive position at the start of an interview. Do not be caught unaware by such a question. If you’ve done your preparation, you know something about the organization, the job, and perhaps even the interviewer. Therefore, you know what you need to communicate in order to make an effective self-presentation. Use this open-ended question as an opportunity to take charge of the interview at the outset, and talk about your strengths, successes, and qualifications for employment.

What are your goals?
This is an ambiguous question since people generally have several types of goals-- personal, social, and professional. For the purposes of the interview, it is safe to assume that they’re talking about your career goals. Use your answer to highlight important personal or work characteristics as they relate to the position for which you’re interviewing.

Why do you want to be a___________?
You should have an answer to this question before arranging an interview. You should focus on the duties of the position, the work environment, and/or your interest in the field. Be ready to demonstrate a match between what this position holds and what you have to offer.

What can you add to our organization as an employee?
Interviewers must determine not only your interest in obtaining a job, but also in working for their organization. If you’ve taken the initiative to find out about the organization, its products or services, market share, growth potential, etc., you’re in an excellent position to answer this question. Sources of information on organizations include annual reports, recruiting literature, business indices, trade journals, newspaper articles, and webpages. Given knowledge of the organization, you can more effectively relate your skills to the requirements of the employer.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?
This question can be difficult for interviewees and requires deeper self-reflection prior to the interview. It can best be answered by reference to skills and abilities developed in a variety of employment and other settings. Cite references or comments from previous employers as evidence of strengths. Refrain from mentioning weaknesses that may be detrimental to the job. Similarly to this, refrain from mentioning strengths in disguise, such as that you work too hard or are a perfectionist. To some employers, these may be seen as strengths and not actual weaknesses. Simply, be yourself and be honest. Show that you are cognizant of your own weaknesses and share your efforts towards
Behavioral Questions

Behavior-based questions are the most common among employers. The approach is built on the premise that recent past behavior will likely predict future behavior. Each question probes a bit deeper to reveal more detail on your approach to past situations and the results of your efforts. Respond using a “story” technique to demonstrate your behavior.

1. Describe a problem you faced.
2. Explain the actions you took.
3. Detail the beneficial outcomes of your efforts.

Sample Questions:
• Describe a time when you were faced with problems that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
• 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.
• Describe a situation when you had to make an important decision about something quickly.
• Tell me about a time when you were able to motivate others.
• Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy, even though you did not agree with it.
• Give me an example of when you used fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem. How did you analyze the problem? How did you come to a decision?
• Describe a goal that you have. What progress have you made toward reaching this goal?
• What is your most significant accomplishment and why are you most proud of it?
• Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done?
• Explain something you were able to communicate successfully to an individual who may have different views than yourself.
• Describe the most innovative job-related project you have completed.
• Tell me about a time when you thought it was necessary to modify or change your actions in order to respond to someone else’s needs.
• How did you contribute to a team environment in your most recent group project/job?
• Tell me about a time when others had to depend on you.
• Tell me about the worst customer, coworker or team member you have ever had. How did you deal with him or her?
• Tell me about a time when you had to analyze a situation carefully in order to be effective in guiding your actions.
• Tell me about a situation in which your work was criticized and how you handled it.
• Tell me about a time when you put a lot of effort into a project/work and it was suddenly changed.

The Telephone/Videconference Interview

Now more than ever, recruiters and hiring managers are using phone and videoconference interviews as a mode of initial contact with job applicants. It is therefore critical to be prepared to effectively showcase one’s skills and experiences through these mediums.

Turn off phone notifications and do not leave other phone applications running
Disruptive noises, distractions, or interruptions can cause a shift in focus and ultimately impede your chances of moving forward in the interview process.

Have Internet access
Because the interviewer cannot see you, you can have the company’s website open so that you can ask appropriate questions or address relevant topics. Only use this as support; you should always have questions for the interviewer prepared beforehand.

Try standing up or try the “power pose” if you are not on-camera
Standing brings up your energy level. When it comes to the “power pose,” think Wonder Woman or Superman. You can place your hands on your hips with your chest out in an open, expansive manner, or you can have your hands above your head. Research has shown that striking this pose for simply one minute can make a big difference in boosting your confidence and energy levels.
Answer each question thoroughly, yet briefly
Allow the interviewer time to respond or ask questions. Avoid interrupting the interviewer if they are in mid-sentence. If you have more to say, ask the interviewer if there is time to provide additional details.

Find a quiet space
Ensure that there are no external sources of noise or distraction, such as construction, roommates, etc. You can reserve the interview room in Mann Library for up to two hours.

Headphones
There are both advantages and disadvantages to utilizing headphones. They can help in freeing your hands to take notes or to make hand gestures as you are speaking. They may potentially avoid playback from regular computer speakers and allow the interviewer to better hear you. However, you have to be sure that the mouthpiece is close to you so that the interviewer can best hear you. Some may find that headphones make them look silly, especially for a videoconference interview. Though, quality of communication is what is most important. You can address the use issue head-on and let the interviewer know that you will be using headphones to communicate with them.

Test your set up in advance
Ensure that your computer, audio, video screen, and all other electronics of your set up are functioning properly prior to the start of your interview. Give yourself ample time to make any adjustments to your set up or have back-up options available in case the technology is malfunctioning.

Clarify
You should ask the interviewer if they can repeat anything that was unclear or inaudible to you. You should also periodically check with the interviewer to make sure that they heard your responses by asking clarifying questions, such as “Was that clear?” or “Were you able to hear me clearly?”

Smile!
Just as an in-person interview, smiling affects your tone of voice. This is a great way to show your enthusiasm and positive attitude to make a more favorable impression.

Follow up
Take notes during the interview and send a thank you email immediately afterward. In the thank you note, refer to a positive point in the conversation, e.g. “I was really pleased to learn about the opportunities for growth at Deloitte, and this has heightened my interest in the position.”

Have the following on hand at the time of your scheduled telephone interview:
1. Your resume for reference
2. Name(s) of the person/people you will be talking to
3. Your notes and questions
4. Pen and paper or another note-taking system to record notes, new information, phone numbers, and names

Tips specific to video calls:
• Use an appropriate username for Skype etc.
• Look into the camera.
• Be mindful of body language.
• Dress as if for an in-person interview.

The Pre-Recorded Interview
The pre-recorded interview has grown in popularity. This is when you are given a set of interview questions and asked to record yourself answering them. The recorded answers will be uploaded and saved for the company’s or organization’s reference.

Deadlines
You will likely be given only a certain amount of time to complete the interview questions. Therefore, it is important that you are mindful of deadlines. You do not want to miss the due date for your responses and harm your chances of obtaining the position.
Avoid rushing or being hasty
Despite the deadlines, you should also not rush or be hasty with your responses. As with a traditional, in-person interview, you want to portray yourself in the most calm and natural way. Your responses should avoid sounding robotic or over-rehearsed.

Test your setup
As with telephone and videoconference interviews, be sure that your setup is working. You may want to do a trial run and record yourself before you begin answering the actual interview questions.

Dress
While you will be able to record your responses at a location of your choosing, be aware that you may be asked to submit your responses via video, not just voice recording. This means that you will still be visible to the employer who evaluates your responses. You should be dressed appropriately as for an in-person or videoconference interview.

Medical School Interviews
Medical schools will ask questions to determine:

Motivation
Why do you want to become a doctor? What and who influenced this decision? What activities or accomplishments indicate your interest in medicine? How have you demonstrated self-motivation in other aspects of your life?

Logic thought
Do you tackle a novel problem in a logical, step-by-step fashion? Do you recognize the consequences of each step and understand more than one side of the problem? The interviewer will probably present a hypothetical problem having no one right answer, but which tests your ability to think on your feet, like “Can you devise a strategy to deal with the problem of child abuse?”

Extracurricular activities
What have you done besides study a lot? What did you learn? How did the activity change you? What did you add to the organization?

Academic breadth
What subjects did you enjoy studying? Medical schools like to see a student’s broad exposure to the humanities and social sciences.

Leadership
What experience have you had leading large or small groups of people? Did you enjoy the responsibility or at least handle it well? What did you learn about people, situations, and yourself? What did you contribute as an organization’s leader?

Maturity
What major decisions have you made on your own? What responsibilities have you had? How did you solve a difficult problem in your life? What have you learned by dealing with problems or disappointments in the past?

Preparedness
Do you know what you are getting into? Are you familiar with medical students’ and doctors’ lifestyles? Where did you get your information? Are you ready to commit yourself to a career in medicine at this time?

Open-mindedness
Do you see both sides of a problem regardless of your personal opinion? Are you willing to change your mind if you learn more about a situation?

Sensitivity and compassion
How have you shown your sensitivity to others’ problems?

Goals
What are your ultimate goals or dreams? What have you done to reach them?
Questions from Different Medical Schools:

**Harvard Medical School**
- What about Harvard medical school scares you most?
- Why didn’t you go into social work?
- Do you think that there should be mandatory HIV testing for couples wanting to get married?
- Would you prefer to provide less effective medicine to more people or more effective medicine to fewer people?
- Who is your hero and why?
- How can you tell if someone is truly compassionate?

**Weill Medical College of Cornell University**
- Why study medicine when you have so many talents?
- If someone 15 years from now were to write a book about you, what would you want to have included in that book?
- If you had a magic pen, what would you do to remedy health care in America?
- How can we minimize health care costs when people are willing to pay more to be healthier?
- Regardless of your grade, which course would you recommend that all students take?
- What are you passionate about?
- What would you do if you were accepted to every program you applied to and what would you do if you didn’t get in to an program you applied to?
- What is the one thing about you which distinguishes you from the rest of the applicants?

**Duke University School of Medicine**
- What did you think about the disadvantages or advantages of managed care? Who did you think is responsible for rationing health care?
- If I'm to talk to the Admissions Committee tomorrow, why should I tell admit you to our program?
- Which of the accomplishments or activities listed on your AMCAS do you consider your biggest failure or disappointment?
- Pretend that you're your best friend — how would that person describe you?

**Stanford University School of Medicine**
- What are some things that you will have to give up as a doctor?
- If you are walking down the street and a homeless person asks you for money, do you give it to them?
- Would you share your religious beliefs with your patients?
- How do you help people who don’t want to be helped?
- In what field do you think the next major advancement in medicine will come?

**SUNY Upstate Health Science Center at Syracuse**
- What do you think of the priority system for organ recipients, as well as the priority system for allocating funds for medicine?
- What negative experiences from your different jobs made it clear to you that you wanted to pursue medicine?

**Albert Einstein College of Medicine at Yeshiva University**
- Do you think that technology had helped or hurt the medical profession? Have diagnostic apparatuses helped to make better physicians?
- Suppose you realize after surgery that you have left an instrument in your patient, how would you handle it?
- Why do you feel so many students are interested in medical school?
- How did you deal with going to an Ivy League school -- in terms of being a little fish in a big pond instead of being a big fish in a little pond?
Case Interviews
In a case interview, an employer poses a problem relevant to the business and asks the candidate to propose logical steps to resolve the issue. Management consulting firms might use this approach to introduce you to the kinds of questions consultants encounter on a daily basis, while at the same time assessing your organizational, analytical and problem-solving approaches to unfamiliar situations.

Basic format:
1. Introduction and Question
The introduction sets the stage by describing a client situation. You receive a brief description of the client, the industry, and the help the client is seeking. You are then asked how you would think about helping the client with the problem.

First, you'll need to frame the issues. For example, you'll want to outline the issues you plan to focus on, your rationale for doing so, your hypothesis, the types of analysis you might want to do, and how you would rank the significance of your results.

2. Analysis
In this stage, you dive into the analysis you've proposed. Describe the methodology you are using and ask a series of questions to obtain the data you need. Many of these questions will be directed to senior management.

3. Summary Diagnostics/Reflection
After analyzing a number of issues, assemble the data to sketch a cohesive picture of the situation. Highlight the main findings and show how they relate to one another.

4. Recommendations/Potential Client Actions
In the last stage, the client needs an answer to the initial case question. What should the client do to put your solution into action?

Sample questions:
- A North American manufacturer/retailer of high-end glassware experienced a dramatic decline in same-store sales at its retail outlets last year. How would you begin to assess the reasons for the decline? Using your analysis as a basis, what strategy would you recommend for the manufacturer?
- A large public utility formerly had a monopoly in the British electricity market. Now that the market has been de-regulated, small power-generation companies have already captured a five percent share from the utility by offering to provide large businesses in the U.K. with their own in-house power generation capabilities. The CEO of the utility wants to understand whether this trend will continue and how she can prevent further loss of share. How would you answer her question?
- A US-based pharmaceutical company that focuses on discovering, developing, and selling drugs for the treatment of cancer has been experiencing flat growth and is interested in expanding into new businesses. In view of the growth and profitability of stand-alone cancer treatment centers in the U.S., the company is considering establishing and operating similar centers in China. This would be the company’s first foray into the cancer treatment center business. How would you evaluate the attractiveness of the opportunity?

Additional Resources for Questions
Career Exploration Center guides
The Career Exploration Center offers a number of guides containing sample questions and tips that are specific to different types of interviews. We have a Case Interview Preparation Guide developed in partnership with a consulting group on Cornell’s campus and an MMI: Multiple Mini Interview Guide developed in partnership with the College of Human Ecology’s pre-health advisor. You can pick up copies of the guides at the CEC in 119 Academic Surge A.

Glassdoor
Glassdoor is an expansive resource that can provide insight into different aspects of a company or organization. Previous employees contribute to the website by sharing their experiences. Through the Cornell Career Services website, you have unlimited access to Glassdoor features. You can search companies/organizations and browse through questions that applicants have previously been asked during interviews.
After the Interview
The interview does not end at the interview itself. Be mindful of your interactions before and after the interview, especially if you are on-site at a company, university, or medical school. You should not be on any mobile devices as you are waiting for your interview. Everything that you do from the moment that you are on site is an indication of your level of commitment, professionalism, and performance. From the receptionist to the employees walking out the door, you never know who you might be talking to or who may be observing your behavior, and who has influence over the hiring and recruitment.

Follow-Up letters & emails
This is another opportunity to say thank you to your interviewer. It also is a way to keep your name and credentials in the interviewer’s mind, as well as to drive home a point that you may not have been able to make during the actual interview.

On your way home from the interview, take note of this information before you forget:
- Name(s) and title(s) of person/people you met
- Job description
- Why you believe you can do the job
- Aspects of the interview that went wrong and why (a great learning resource)
- What was said at the end of the interview
- The agreed upon next step

In your letter, be sure to convey:
- Appreciation
- Confidence
- Interest in the job
- Dedication
- Awareness

Keep it short (don’t exceed one page) and send the letter within 24 hours. Be proactive. If you haven’t heard from them after a week or two, call and follow up with the interviewer.