

INTERVIEW BASICS

Interviews are an integral part of the job application process. Use this resource to learn about the types of interviews, as well as how to prepare for your next interview. Then use the [INTERVIEW CHECKLIST](#), the [HOW TO RESPOND TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS](#) resource and the [SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS](#) resource to get organized before the big day.

What is an interview?

An interview is a meeting between you and an organization, when you're considered as a candidate for a job or position. The organization may interview several candidates before making a final selection. An interview is also your opportunity to learn more about a position/organization to determine if it's a fit.

A traditional interview consists of a series of questions asked by the interviewers. You may also be asked to demonstrate your skills by completing short work-related tasks such as formal presentations, role-plays or written assignments. These tasks may be assigned ahead of the interview, or you may be asked to perform them on the spot.

What do interviewers want to know?

- + Can you do the work?
- + Will you be a "fit" with the work culture?
- + Are you motivated to do the work?

Types of interviews

One-on-one: These interviews are typically between you and one organization representative. The representative will likely be a manager or supervisor, or from human resources. This could be the only interview you have with the organization, or it might be part of a series of interviews to assess your match for the position. Usually, one-on-one interviews consist of questions or activities related to experience, skills, technical knowledge, personal attributes, conflict resolution and other competencies the organization is looking for in a candidate.

Panel: Although the questions may be similar to the one-on-one interview, panel interviews include several different interviewers. This means that several representatives from the organization will ask you questions. Your panel could include the job supervisor, someone from human resources, or someone with an interest in the projects you would work on. Organizations use panel interviews to give all relevant stakeholders the ability to participate. Panel interviews also promote balanced and objective assessments by using feedback from a number of panel members, rather than relying on the decision of one interviewer. Interviewers may take turns asking questions, or one person may do most of the talking while the others listen and take notes.

Group: Group interviews include multiple job candidates at the same interview and are generally used in sectors where an organization wants to hire many employees at once. These interviews are common for positions that demand exceptional interpersonal and negotiation skills (e.g. the aviation industry, the public service and executive track recruitment). Group interviews will often include a competitive or a collaborative team exercise. Your ability to interact with others will be evaluated while you are assessed on the skills or attributes the organization is seeking. In these situations, it's important to adopt a balanced approach. Speak up but don't dominate the conversation. The organization is assessing your ability to work on a team, so you'll need to demonstrate that you can draw people together in a constructive way. This doesn't always mean taking on the role of organizer; it can involve contributing ideas, facilitating discussions and building positive relationships with group members and the interviewers.

Phone: Sometimes the interviewers are too far away to host an in-person interview or they want to screen applicants before inviting them to a face-to-face meeting. Phone interviews let you have your résumé, cover letter and extra notes right in front of you. On the other hand, the interviewer can't see you, so you lose the ability to make a good visual impression. Remember that your voice is an important tool to convince the interviewer that you're a top candidate. Convey your energy and interest by sounding confident and enthusiastic.

When you arrange the interview, schedule it at a time and place where you'll be uninterrupted and where there'll be no background noise. Organize your notes and research about the organization, your résumé and any other documents you have prepared. Make sure your phone is fully charged, the call waiting function is deactivated and your voicemail sounds professional. If you are using a cell phone, choose a location with reliable reception. Be ready early, as organizations sometimes call before the designated time.

Skype and other webcam interviews: Skype, iChat, Facetime and other video conferencing tools are becoming more popular for out-of-town interviews. Treat webcam interviews as a combination of a telephone and in-person interview. As in a phone interview, you can have some notes in front of you, but should avoid referring to them too often.

Ask permission

When looking to call someone using a webcam tool like Skype, iChat or Facetime, it's polite to ask for permission before calling. Your contact might be on the telephone, in a public place or otherwise not in a position to take your webcam call. Try instant messaging before making the call - a short text like "Is this still a good time for our call?" will only take a few seconds and will avoid catching your contact off guard. It's also a good idea to know whether your contact expects to see you on webcam, or whether he or she expects a voice-only call.

Prepare your space

To prepare your space, find a quiet spot with bare walls behind you, set up the webcam/monitor so it is eye-level, and make sure you're captured well on the screen. Test your computer set up to make sure your settings are correct and your voice levels are good. Avoid being surrounded by clutter and don't plan to multitask during the call - your full attention should be on the interview. Log on about 15 minutes early.

Create a professional profile

When you connect via web conferencing program, they will be able to see certain profile information about you by default. Be aware what your status, location, and other profile details are saying and ensure they are appropriate and accurate when using this type of tool for business.

Test the technology

You may also wish to practice an interview to get the hang of looking and speaking to the lens and microphone instead of to the screen image of the interviewer(s). Test out the quality of your microphone and make sure that your voice is clear for the person on the other end. If possible, invest in an external microphone and headphones. Ensure there won't be other demands on your internet connection at the same time —like your roommate playing online games. If you have access to an Ethernet connection, it is usually better than wireless.

Remember, this is an interview

Dress professionally. Even if the employer can only see the top half of your body, you'll feel more confident if you are dressed in full interview attire.

Multiple Mini Interviews (MMI): MMIs or Multiple Mini Interviews are used primarily for assessing students for admittance to health related professional schools. This interview format consists of a series of short interviews (usually 6-10 minutes each) that take place at separate stations on a circuit. Although Multiple Mini Interviews were initially developed for medical school candidates, they are now common for admittance to nursing, pharmacy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and veterinary schools. See the MMI section in the tool kit for details about MMIs or visit www.uvic.ca/coopandcareer/studentsalumni/career/workshops for information about upcoming practice sessions.

Do your research

Explore the organization's website to review their services or products, structure, culture, mission statement, annual reports and recent news. Research the organization online and review information about this organization from external sources. Look for profiles of the directors and those involved in hiring by searching social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook. Get in touch with your personal, professional and academic contacts to see if they know someone who might have information about the salary range, working hours, work culture, projects and challenges at this organization.

Anticipate interview questions

Carefully review the job posting and job description (if you have access to one) and any information you have gathered during your research to identify the requirements and qualifications that are important for this particular position. Practice speaking about: the attributes, interpersonal, communication and technical skills required by this employer. Make notes about times you exhibited these skills and had positive results. If you're moving into a new career area, try to think of situations from similar work environments. For example, if you're applying for work as a policy analyst, use a story from a volunteer office job you've had instead of from a serving position at a restaurant.

You'll likely be asked to begin the interview by telling them about yourself, so be prepared to do this by focusing on your relevant professional experience, educational background, attributes and interests. It's also common for interviewers to ask an applicant about a time something went wrong. Try to consider an experience when a problem was not extremely dramatic and you were able to develop a solution.

Dress to impress

Organizations have different expectations regarding what you should wear to your interview. Some, like banks, are fairly formal and you should choose formal business attire for your interview. Other organizations are more informal and it's best to wear "business casual" clothing like a dress shirt with dress pants.

If possible, visit the organization ahead of time to see what the usual dress standards are, and then dress one step above that. Another strategy is to dress like the person who will be hiring you. For most positions avoid:

- + Old jeans
- + Runners
- + Low-cut shirts
- + Short skirts
- + Distracting jewelry
- + Scented products and any odors from food or cigarettes

Choose your clothing a number of days before your interview and try everything on, including your footwear, to make sure it's clean, fits and is appropriate. Have your hair trimmed to polish your appearance, and ask someone whose opinion you trust, to offer feedback.

Choose what to bring

Select a slim, professional looking folder and neatly organize your:

- + Résumé and cover letter
- + Reference list and reference letters
- + Pen and paper
- + Samples of your work (if appropriate; see the [PORTFOLIO BASICS](#) resource)

You may also want to bring the following items to review before the interview:

- + Instructions on how to get to the interview and contact information in case you are delayed
- + Correspondence you've had regarding the position (e.g. the time, date and location of interview)
- + The job description and your research on the organization
- + Notes you've made to prepare yourself for the interview
- + Two or three questions to ask the interviewer