Interviewing

Interviewing is a two way process that allows the employer to assess your fit for the position and organization by asking questions about your experiences, qualifications, and career interests, while also allowing you to learn about the organization and specific position to which you are applying. The employer is assessing your fit for the organization, but also Union College’s fit as a target recruiting school. As such, it is important for you to remember that you represent yourself and Union.

Pre-Interview

Employers want smart individuals who are able to do the job, who are genuinely interested in the opportunity, and who complement the team. To interview well, you must demonstrate these attributes while also relating your knowledge, skills, and abilities to the position.

Research

- Research the organization’s website and conduct online searches for recent news on their company.
- Acquire information about the position by reading the position description, knowing the duties/responsibilities, and talking to people doing this or similar work.
- Be sure you know what time you should arrive, where you should be, whom you should ask for upon arrival, and the expected duration of the interview.

Reflect

- Use the research you have collected to make a case for why you want to work for the organization and why you are the best candidate for the position.
- Review the job/internship posting and highlight similarities between the job/internship responsibilities and your qualifications.
- Prepare to speak about everything on your resume.
- Create insightful questions to ask the employer based on your research that cannot be answered by reviewing information on their website. Reference page 6 for further tips.

Practice

- Schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor. Becker Career Center offers interview preparation and mock interview appointments designed for the career field and type of position for which you’re applying.
- To practice virtual interviewing utilize Big Interview, a software program available on Becker’s webpage that provides access to free, virtual interview practice, and guidance.
- Generate a list of questions utilizing resources like Glassdoor and practice your responses to commonly asked questions with someone who can provide constructive feedback.

What to Bring to the Interview

- A portfolio, padfolio, and/or a professional bag
- A pen and notepaper
- 5-10 copies of your resume
- Your list of prepared questions for the interviewers
Professional Dress
- Solid, dark, or neutral colored pant or knee length skirt suits
- Long-sleeved dress shirts or high neckline blouses
- Clean-dress shoes and socks that you can comfortably walk in, with no marks or scuffs
- Conservative ties coordinated with suit
- Belts that match the color of your shoes and attire
- Moderate jewelry
- Neat and professional hairstyle
- Clean-shaven or neatly trimmed facial hair
- Light fragrance
- Natural style for makeup and nails
- Try on your interview attire and make sure it fits properly prior to your interview

Arrival & Introduction
- Turn off your cell phone and discard gum or mints before entering the interview site.
- Arrive 15 minutes early to get settled and be ready when the interviewer greets you.
- Greet your interviewer, make eye contact, smile, and offer a firm handshake.
- Be prepared to engage in small talk.
- Remember that you are being evaluated from the moment you arrive. Be courteous and respectful to every individual with whom you interact.

During The Interview
- Listen carefully to the question asked and be sure to answer the question clearly and succinctly. Once you answer the question, stop. Do not ramble or go on tangents.
- Sit up, lean forward, speak confidently, be positive, and avoid fidgeting.
- Support your statements with specific examples. This will help make your experiences more tangible.
- Focus on the qualifications you have, not on those you don’t. The fact that you’re interviewing for the position means that you have the necessary prerequisites.
- If presented the opportunity to ask questions, ask insightful questions to demonstrate your genuine interest in the position. Reference page 6 for further tips.
- Near the end, ask what the search process timeline is so you know when you can expect to hear from them.
- At the end of the interview day, thank the interviewer(s) for their time, shake their hand, and tell them that you look forward to hearing from them.
- Avoid talking about salary or benefits during the interview. If asked for salary requirements, say that you are interested in the opportunity and that you trust the organization will offer a competitive salary commensurate with your qualifications and target position. Do not provide a salary number.

Post-Interview
- Write down the names of everyone that you interviewed with and what you discussed as soon as you can.
- Always send a thank you e-mail or hand written note to each individual with whom you met within 24 hours of your interview.
- Call or e-mail your contact if you have not heard from them within the discussed time frame. If no time frame was discussed, follow up one week later.
- Meet with a Career Advisor for advice on accepting/rejecting an offer and salary negotiation.
- If you are not selected, remember, rejection will happen often. Persevere and move on.
Phone Interviews

A phone interview is a cost effective and efficient way for employers to initially assess potential hires. Many of the same guidelines that apply to in-person interviews also apply to phone interviews. However, there are several things to keep in mind about phone interviews.

- Ensure that you are in a quiet, private place, where you can eliminate background noise and distractions.
- Do not do anything that you wouldn’t do during an in-person interview. This includes, eating, drinking, chewing gum, and checking your email.
- The Career Center has interview rooms available; call (518) 388-6176 to reserve a room.
- Use a land line, if possible, and do not use the speaker phone feature. If you are using a cell phone, turn notification sounds off, and be sure service is consistent.
- You are not able to convey meaning and emotion via non-verbal communication. As a result, you must use tone and voice modulation to convey your meaning, interest, and enthusiasm.
- If you are supposed to call the employer, do so on time – not five minutes early or late. Be sure to clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place.
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes.
- Address the interviewer(s) by name.
- Smile throughout the phone interview. Interviewers can hear it in your voice when you do so.
- Speak slowly and clearly and be sure to sound confident, capable and interested in the position.
- If you do not understand a question, it is okay to ask the interviewer to repeat it.
- When the interviewer is speaking, listen carefully and let them talk without interruption. You may take notes if you would like to respond to something they say later.
- At the end reaffirm your interest in the position, ask about next steps, and thank the interviewer(s).
- Ask for contact information (email and phone number), if you do not already have it, so you can follow up.
- Send a thank you email to the interviewer(s).

It’s a good idea to dress in a professional manner, and to sit up straight at a desk. Doing so gets you into the interview mindset, and helps keep you focused on the conversation as a professional interaction. Although they pose some challenges, there are also some benefits to phone interviews. For example, you can have your application materials and a list of questions in front of you to reference throughout the interview.
Virtual Interviews

Companies are increasingly using virtual interviews as a way to save money while also trying to get an understanding of your behavior, speech, professional dress and fit for the company. The traditional Skype interview involves interviewer(s) and candidates asking and answering questions.

In addition to this format, more companies are using computer generated interviews to weed out candidates. To complete this interview, a person logs into a system and records themselves answering questions that are given to them on the screen through the web page. Typically, people are given a time limit to answer all of the questions and cannot log out and back in again.

To practice virtual interviewing, utilize Big Interview, a software program available on Becker’s website. You can practice for specific industries, graduate school programs, and behavioral interviews.

Virtual Interview Tips

- Make sure you ask beforehand who will be ‘calling’ who for Skype interviews, and clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place.
- If the interview is computer generated, make sure you are fully aware of all the guidelines, including the time limit and whether it is possible to re-do answers.
- Dress professionally (from head to toe in case you have to stand up and move around).
- Utilize a quiet space like the Career Center or eliminate all background noise and interruptions in your own home or shared living space. Call (518) 388-6176 to reserve an interview room in the Career Center.
- Remove objects in the background that are distracting and inappropriate (posters, beer cans).
- Login at least 10 minutes before in case you need to install software, download a plugin, or adjust anything.
- Take into consideration the distance you sit from the camera, typically trying to get waist up, as if you were sitting across from one another at a table.
- Make sure your cell phone is muted or turned off so that it does not disrupt the interview.
- Close all other apps and tabs so you are not distracted, especially by incoming e-mails.
- Don’t allow yourself to fidget, be sure to maintain good posture, and smile.
- Always look into the camera lens, even if that means you cannot look into your monitor to look at the interviewer’s face. If you look into the lens, their perception will be that you’re looking directly at them.
- Speak slowly and clearly and be sure to sound confident, capable and interested in the position.
- If you cannot hear the person on the other side asking questions, tell them. You can ask for a back-up phone number to call them and continue the interview, or you could reschedule the interview. It is better to reschedule or reconfigure the interview than pretend like you can hear them.
- At the end reaffirm your interest in the position, ask about next steps, and thank the interviewer(s).
- Ask for contact information (email and phone number), if you do not already have it, so you can follow up.
- Send a thank you email/handwritten note to the interviewer(s).
Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral Interviewing is a technique in which the interviewer probes for details about your past experiences to assess your qualifications for a particular position. These questions typically address themes focusing on communication, teamwork, leadership, persuasion, problem solving, initiative, handling conflict, decision making, and overcoming failure.

An effective strategy for answering behavioral interviewing questions is the STAR Method which stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. To respond, detail the specific situation or task you faced, the action you took, and explain the positive result of your actions.

If an employer were to say: “Tell me about a time when you had to utilize creative problem solving skills.” You would use the STAR method to respond. For instance, “As Treasurer of the Biology Club, we saw a 15 member increase from 10 to 25 from my junior to senior year, though our club received no additional funding. This meant that our field trip to the Museum of Natural History would either be cancelled or that we’d have to be selective in choosing who went. Instead, I reached out to campus departments and was able to secure a co-sponsorship for the event. As a result of their co-sponsorship, all 25 of our members were able to go to the museum.”

Behavioral Interviewing Tips

- Identify specific scenarios from past experiences that effectively demonstrate skill sets consistent with the themes mentioned above. Include examples from past internships, work experiences, extracurricular activities, leadership roles, athletic experiences, coursework, etc.
- Reflect on your experiences prior to your interview, so you have multiple examples and do not need to repeat the same situations for answers.
- Use these scenarios to prepare answers using the STAR method.

Sample Behavioral Questions

- Tell me about the best presentation you’ve ever done.
- Give me an example of a time when you worked with a group/team to determine project responsibilities. What difficulties did the group/team have? What was your role?
- Give me an example of a time when you played a leadership role in a work situation, course project, student club, or team setting.
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make recommendations to solve a problem.
- Describe a time where you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with someone with whom you did not get along.
- Have you ever taken an unpopular stand on an issue? What was the situation and how did you handle it?
- Describe a situation when you tried your hardest but didn’t achieve the desired result. What did you learn and how did you handle it?
Questions to Ask Employers

Following the conclusion of the interviewer’s questions, they will ask if you have any questions for them. Saying no will indicate to the employer that you are not interested. Asking insightful questions about the position and employer demonstrates to the interviewer that you have done your research and are genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity. When interviewing, you might not have time to ask all of your questions, so you want to ask your questions in order of importance. Use the below categories, listed in order of importance, in combination with your research to create your own list of relevant questions.

**Position Related:** Your first set of questions that you want to ensure you have time for, should directly relate to the position that you are interviewing for to show the employer that you have given this serious thought, and are genuinely interested in this opportunity.

- What are the characteristics of the people who succeed in this position?
- What are the key challenges you expect the person in this position to face?
- Have you had individuals in this position who have done it very well? If so, what did they do to give you that impression?
- Have you had individuals in this position who have not done it very well? If so, what did they do to give you that impression?
- How will the individual performance be measured in this position?
- How would you be interacting with/working with someone in this position?

**Department Related:** Ask questions about the department/functional area this position is in to learn more about the work environment, the culture, and the team dynamics.

- What are the key metrics that you use to evaluate this department?
- What are the key objectives for this department in the next 6-12 months? How does this role support these objectives?
- How do you describe your management style? (For the supervisor/manager)

**Company Related:** Learn more about the company and gain a holistic picture of the organization.

- How would you describe the culture of the department/organization?
- What are the key objectives for this company in the next 6-12 months?
- What are some of the key challenges for the organization?

**Industry Related:** Converse with interviewers during small talk about industry specific current events that you have researched to show your knowledge about your career field, and to learn how they are impacting their company.

- In my ____ class, we just learned about ____. Is that impacting your company? If so, in what ways?

**Additional/Broad Questions:** These questions can typically be asked to each interviewer and allow you to assess the consistency of responses, and get a holistic picture of your search process.

- What is the timeline for this search process?
- What initially attracted you to this company and how have your expectations been met since working here or what has made you stay at this company?

**Tips for Asking Insightful Questions**

- Write down your questions and, if necessary, refer to them at the appropriate time.
- Do not ask questions that can be easily answered by viewing the employer’s website.
- Do not ask questions about salary or benefits. Wait until the employer makes an offer to discuss them.
Commonly Asked Questions

These four questions are common interview questions and we have strategies for answering each. The goal of this exercise is to familiarize yourself with common interview questions and strategies to effectively respond.

1. **Tell me about yourself.**

   **Purpose of Question**
   This type of question is very popular in the beginning of an interview and is used to transition from small talk to formal interview questions. It is used to assess your communication skills, as well as your interest and enthusiasm for the organization and career field.

   **Strategy for Responding**
   To answer, give the interviewer a little background on yourself, how and when you became interested in this field, and explain why the opportunity and organization made you want to apply.

   **Sample Response**
   “I am a senior Environmental Science major at Union College and am very interested in sustainability initiatives. As Vice President of the Environmental Club, I research and plan relevant activities and projects for the club to participate in. Last fall, I organized a community service project at the Boston branch of Sustainable Farming International, an organization dedicated to educating third world communities on the benefits of sustainable agriculture. After volunteering for this organization and seeing how many communities could be improved from proper education in sustainability practices, I became inspired to intern for them that summer. Upon seeing your position posting and doing more research, I was excited to learn that your organization also has a focus on sustainable agriculture education and outreach, and decided to apply.”

   **Your Response**

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________

   ____________________________________________________________
2. Why should we hire you?

Variations
- How has your liberal arts degree prepared you for this position?
- How does your liberal arts degree make you a better fit for this position over anyone else?
- We typically hire from professional (business, marketing, etc.) school, so why should we hire you?

Purpose of Question
Employers want to hear you articulate how your education has prepared you to do their job. They want you to make a connection between your education and ability to do the job.

Strategy for Responding
To assist you, we’ve developed an acronym – EDUCATES – to help you articulate the skills and characteristics that you’ve developed or enhanced at Union.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Disciplined approach to inquiry</th>
<th>Unity</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Analytical</th>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Ethical</th>
<th>Self-Reflection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consider multiple alternative perspectives</td>
<td>Work effectively in teams, collaborate</td>
<td>Communicate effectively in writing and orally</td>
<td>Identify relationships among seemingly disparate parts</td>
<td>T-Shape (deep and broad), creatively, integrating knowledge</td>
<td>Engage in and do the right thing</td>
<td>Develop humility, courage, tolerance and learn how to learn</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The core four – Unity, Communication, Analytical Skills and Thinking skills are the skills most often identified by employers and professors as valuable to both education and employment.

Sample Response
Throughout undergrad, I have strengthened my critical thinking skills that have allowed me to think deep and broad. Through my coursework and research I developed effective communication skills both orally and in writing, and strong analytical skills that have allowed me to identify relationships among seemingly disparate parts. I learned how to work effectively in teams, and how to look at the world through other’s eyes and this empathy will certainly help me when I deal with current and prospective clients. Finally, Union College has taught me the importance of ethics, engaging in and doing the right thing. Together, these skills will help me to effectively solve any problem I encounter now and in the future.

Your Response
3. What is one challenge you have encountered in the workplace and what have you been doing to improve?

Variations
- What parts of this position do you think will be the most challenging?
- What is an area with which you struggle?

Purpose of Question
Employers ask this question to evaluate a candidate’s self-awareness and confidence to admit a shortcoming, the ability to find solutions and ways to improve, and catch potential barriers to their success in the position. Do not give a dishonest answer that the interviewer can see through like “I am a perfectionist.” You also do not want to give an answer that might disqualify you for the position like “I put off responsibilities until the last minute and do not get them done until I have to.”

Strategy for Responding
To identify potentially appropriate weaknesses, consider one thing you’re not naturally good at but have worked to further develop. Address the steps you’ve taken to get better at it, and end by showing how you’ve improved. Some examples may include: public speaking, leading a group, handling multiple priorities, delegating responsibility, and understanding the value of differing perspectives.

Sample Response
“Public speaking is an area I’ve been working to improve. To improve, I forced myself into situations that required me to speak to large groups including becoming a campus tour guide and enrolling in two courses that required three presentations each. These experiences gave me many opportunities to practice speaking and receive feedback and helped me improve.”

Your Response
4. **Where do you see yourself in 3 - 5 years?**

**Variations**
- How does this position fit into your long term goals?
- What are your career goals?

**Purpose of Question**
This question is used to evaluate your commitment to the occupation and career field, and assess your long term plans. Employers want to hire dedicated, enthusiastic individuals that are going to put their energy and passion into the position and organization, thus making it successful.

**Strategy for Responding**
To answer, let the interviewer know that you have thought long term, that their organization is a part of your plan, and that you’re genuinely interested in the opportunity. Mention a long term career goal, break down the major steps you need to reach it, and provide tentative timelines.

**Sample Response**
I hope to learn the key responsibilities of this position quickly and begin to add value to the department. Once I have a solid understanding of my role, I hope to take on additional responsibilities and eventually hold a leadership position.

**Your Response**

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
Illegal Questions

Federal and state laws prohibit employers from asking questions to uncover personal information unrelated to the position for which you’re interviewing. Specifically, employers are not allowed to ask questions about your race, gender, religion, marital status, family status, disabilities, ethnic background, origin or birthplace, sexual orientation, or age. If you’re asked an illegal question on an interview and want to process it, you can contact Becker Career Center. During the interview, you have a few options of how to handle this situation.

1. Answer the question directly only if you’re comfortable and don’t believe it will affect your candidacy.
2. Do not answer the question, tell them you don’t see how it pertains to the position, and ask politely if they would explain the relevance, re-phrase the question, or move on to the next question.
3. Redirect the question and then provide an answer. For instance, if an employer asks if you have any disabilities, you could reply, “If you’re asking whether or not I can perform these tasks, I can.”

Follow Up Correspondence

To follow up with an employer regarding your application or following your interview, e-mail is the best way to communicate with them. Re-affirm your interest in the position and ask for an update on the timeline or status of your application. This is one example of a follow up e-mail:

Subject: Program Coordinator Position

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I’m writing to express my continued interest in the Program Coordinator position and wanted to know an update on the status of my application. Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Anita Job

Thank You Notes

After an interview, you should always send a thank you e-mail or hand written note to each individual with whom you met within 24 hours of your interview. While email is acceptable, a handwritten thank you note may have greater impact. Thank the interviewer(s) for their time, reaffirm your interest in the position, and reference something you learned about the opportunity. This is an example of a thank you e-mail:

Subject: Thank You

Dear Mr. Johnson,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the Program Coordinator position at the Ferguson Community Center. I enjoyed discussing your vision for the organization including the focus on engaging with more community partners and local businesses. The interview confirmed my interest in the position.

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to speak with me and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Anita Job
Negotiating Employment Offers

An employment offer consists of benefits package and a salary figure. You must analyze both aspects and see if they are the right fit for you at this time. The following components might be part of your job/internship offer for you to review: base salary; start date; bonus structures; sign-on bonus; relocation expenses; benefits; insurance; retirement plans; life insurance; disability insurance; paid vacation; unpaid leave time; holidays; sick days; tuition remuneration; and any other perks. If you feel your offer is low, you can meet with a Career Advisor who can help you do some research to present to the employer in hopes of influencing the employer to change the offer.

Accepting Employment Offers

Once you have decided to accept a job/internship offer, contact the employer right away so you can move forward with completing all required hiring paperwork. You should contact them through the form of communication they used to offer you the position. If they gave you a deadline to accept, contact them earlier than the last day to show your genuine interest and start with a positive impression.

Declining Employment Offers

If declining a job/internship offer, you should do so through the form of communication most utilized throughout your interview process with that employer. Write a draft before e-mailing or calling. Contact the employer as soon as possible so you do not delay their process. When declining, make sure you thank the employer for their time and wish them success. If you are accepting another offer, you do not need to let the employer know this. You can simply let them know this opportunity was not the best fit for you at this time. Below is an example email:

Dear Mr. Schulman,

Thank you for offering me the Program Coordinator position. Regretfully, I must decline your offer because it is not the best fit for me at this time. Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me and for the generous employment offer. I was impressed by your company’s mission and commitment to quality service, and wish you and your colleagues continued success.

Best regards,
James Bond

Reneging Employment Offers

Reneging on a job/internship offer means to go back on one’s word or promise. Once you accept an employment offer, you should not be actively applying to other opportunities or interviewing with other organizations. You need to honor the time commitment and stay for the duration of the internship, or one year for a job. If you renege on an employment offer, you can damage the relationship with that employer and tarnish your reputation. Additionally, if networking was involved and your contacts were references for you, they might be hesitant to serve as a reference for you again in the future. If you are thinking about reneging on an offer, meet with a Career Advisor.

Any Union College student who reneges on the acceptance of an offer obtained through the campus recruiting program, which includes alumni and employer contacts, will be immediately suspended from all recruitment activities provided by the Becker Career Center for the remainder of the recruiting term. Students must meet with a member of the Becker Career Center Employer Relations team to be considered for reinstatement and access to the recruiting program. Students are strongly encouraged to explore all employment options in order to secure a position that is the right fit for them.