

GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING

Becker Career Center

UNION

COLLEGE

Contact us: 518-388-6176
www.union.edu/career

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 and assess the organization and specific position to which you are applying.

During the interview process, not only is the employer assessing your fit for the organization, but also Union College's fit as a target recruiting school. As such, it's important for you to remember that you represent yourself and Union. Treat every interaction with employers as critically important for both yourself and the College.

Pre-Interview

Employers want smart students who communicate well, work effectively in teams, and are genuinely enthusiastic about the position and organization. To interview well, you must demonstrate these attributes while also relating your knowledge, skills, and abilities to the position of interest. Below are some tips for effective preparation.

Research

- Research the organization via their website, industry/trade journals, and online searches. Among the details you should know: industry, mission, competitors, annual sales, income, number of employees, recent news, and if a publicly traded company, stock symbol and price.
- Acquire as much information as possible about the position for which you've applied. Read the position description, know the job responsibilities, and talk 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.
- Speak to a Career Advisor about interview tips specific to your target career field. Different career fields require familiarity with different types of interview questions and strategies.

Reflect

- Use the research you've collected to make a case for WHY you want to work for the organization in the specific position for which you've applied, and why they should choose you.
- Review the position description and highlight similarities between job responsibilities/qualifications and specific experiences that demonstrate your competencies in these areas.
- Prepare to speak about everything on your resume. In addition, identify three items on your resume that you hope the employer won't ask about and be ready to talk about each one in a positive manner.
- Create insightful questions to ask the employer based on your research.

Practice

- Schedule mock interviews with a Career Advisor. The Career Center offers taped and un-taped mock interviews targeted for the career field and type of position for which you're applying.
- Generate a list of questions and practice your responses to commonly asked questions with a friend, professor, and/or parent.

Professional Dress & Presentation

- For Men – Standard interviewing attire is a conservative navy or charcoal two-piece business suit, white long sleeved button-down dress shirt, silk tie (that coordinates with the color of your suit), belt, dark socks, and polished dress shoes.
- For Women – Standard interviewing attire is a conservative dark colored pant or skirt suit and white (or light colored) blouse. Pantyhose should be neutral in color and flawless (no runs). Shoes should be moderate heeled, closed toe, and color coordinated with your suit.
- See "Dressing for Success" document (available in the Career Center and on the Career Center website) for important details on professional dress.
- Try on your interview attire and make sure it fits properly prior to your interview.
- Obtain a professional portfolio and stock it with 5 - 10 extra copies of your resume on resume paper, the position description, company information, your list of questions to ask the employer, and reference list in case you are asked for it.

General Interviewing Tips

Arrival & Introduction

- Turn off your cell phone and discard gum before getting to the interview site.
- Arrive 15 minutes early to get settled and be ready when the interviewer greets you.
- Greet your interviewer by name, make eye contact, smile, and offer a firm handshake.
- Be prepared to engage in small talk. This will usually be prompted by the interviewer.
- Remember that you are being evaluated from the moment you come into contact with a representative from the organization, whether in the waiting area, elevator, or parking lot. 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. Don't ramble.
- Sit up, lean forward, speak confidently, be positive, and avoid fidgeting. Research suggests *55% of communication is non-verbal, 38% is HOW you deliver your message, and only 7% is what you actually say.*
- Support your statements with specific examples. This will help make your experiences more tangible, thus making you a stronger candidate.
- 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.
- Ask for business cards from each person with whom you interview. This will help ensure proper follow up.
- Ask your contact when you can expect to hear from them regarding the position if he or she does not tell you.
- At the end of the interview day, thank your contact for their time, shake their hand, and tell him/her 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're more interested in the opportunity and that you trust the organization will offer a competitive salary commensurate with your qualifications and target position. Don't provide a number.

Post-Interview

- Write down the names of everyone that interviewed you and specifically what you discussed with them 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. While email is perfectly acceptable, a handwritten thank you note may have greater impact. Thank the interviewer for their time, reaffirm your interest in the position for which you interviewed, and reference something you learned about the opportunity.
- Call or e-mail to follow up with your contact if you have not heard from him/her within the discussed time frame. If no time frame was discussed, follow up one week later. Following up is important because it reiterates your interest in the position and keeps your name in the interviewer's mind.
- Schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor if you have questions or want assistance evaluating your interview performance.
- 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. Don't take it personally; 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:

- 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.
- If you are supposed to call the employer, do so on time – not five minutes early or late.
- Make the call from a quiet, private place, where you can eliminate background noise and distractions. 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 land line, turn off your cell phone.
- Do not do anything that you wouldn't do during an in-person interview. This includes, eating, drinking, chewing gum, and checking your email.
- Have a pen and paper available to take notes.
- Smile throughout the phone interview. Interviewers can hear it in your voice when you do so.
- Do not answer any other calls that come through via call-waiting. If possible, deactivate call-waiting during phone interviews so you're not distracted by it.
- Be sure to clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place.
- Address the interviewer(s) by name.
- Speak slowly and clearly and be sure to sound confident, capable and interested in the position.
- If you do not understand a question, it's okay to ask the interviewer to repeat it.
- When the interviewer is speaking, listen carefully and let him/her talk without interruption. You may take notes if you would like to respond to something he/she says later.
- At the end, reaffirm your interest in the position and the organization, ask about next steps, and thank the interviewer.
- Ask for contact information (email and phone number) for your interviewer(s) so that you can follow up and send a thank you note/email.
- Send a thank you note/email to the interviewer(s).

It's a good idea to dress in a professional manner, and to stand or 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're able to have your resume, cover letter, the job description, 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. In addition to traditional Skype interviewing, 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 one hour to answer all of the questions, cannot log out and back in again, and have the chance to re-do each question one time providing they remain within the one hour time limit.

Common industries using digital interviewing: entertainment, education, finance, insurance and start-ups. These companies are using digital interviewing to save time and money. A select group of graduate schools are also beginning to use this method of interviewing.

Virtual Interview Tips:

- Make sure you ask beforehand who will be 'calling' who and clarify in advance the time zone in which the call will take place.
- If the interview is computer generated, make sure you're fully aware of all the guidelines, including the time limit and whether it's possible to re-do answers.
- Practice common interview questions beforehand.
- 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 a room in the Career Center.
- Remove objects in the background that are distracting and inappropriate (posters, beer cans).
- 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.
- Don't allow yourself to fidget, be sure to maintain good posture, and smile.
- Have your resume and the job description as a reference and feel free to prepare a few notes, but avoid bringing too much information or referencing it as that becomes a distraction.
- Always look into the camera lens, even if that means you can't 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.
- Address the interviewer(s) by name.
- Speak slowly and clearly and be sure to sound confident, capable and interested in the position.
- When the interviewer is speaking, listen carefully and let him/her talk without interruption.
- If you cannot hear the person on the other side asking questions, always make sure that they're aware. It's better to reschedule the interview than pretend like you can hear them.
- At the end, reaffirm your interest in the position and the organization, ask about next steps, and thank the interviewer.
- Ask for contact information, usually an email and office address, for your interviewer(s) so that you can follow up and send a thank you note/email.
- Send a thank you note/email to the interviewer(s).

Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral Interviewing is an interviewing technique in which the interviewer probes for details about your past experiences to assess your qualifications for a particular position. It is based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Behavioral interview questions typically address some of the following themes: communication, teamwork, leadership, persuasion, problem solving, initiative, handling conflict, decision making, and overcoming failure.

STAR Method

An effective strategy for answering behavioral interviewing questions is the **STAR** Method. **STAR** stands for **Situation, Task, Action, Result**. To respond, detail the specific **situation** or **task** you faced (the problem or challenge presented), 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. Rather than cancelling the event, I reached out to another campus programming source, the Minerva system, and was able to secure a co-sponsor 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, coursework, class projects, etc.
- Use these scenarios to prepare answers to sample behavioral questions 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.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to persuade someone of your point of view.
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation to solve a problem or issue.
- 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 didn't get along.
- Have you ever taken an unpopular stand on an issue? What was the situation and what did you do?
- Describe a situation when you tried your hardest but didn't achieve the desired result. What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine what was a top priority in scheduling your time?

Questions to Ask Employers

Following the conclusion of the interviewer's questions, he or she will generally ask if you have any questions for them. Saying no will indicate to the employer that you're not interested. Asking insightful questions about the position and employer demonstrates to the interviewer that you've done your research and are genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity. Below are sample questions to ask the employer. Use these examples in combination with your research to create your own list of questions.

- What are the key challenges for the department/organization?
- What are the characteristics of the people who succeed in this position?
- In six months time, how will you know if you've hired the right person?
- Relative to your competitors, what is your competitive advantage?
- What are the key metrics that you use to evaluate your department/business?
- What are the trends that will/are influencing the business/industry?
- How would you describe the culture of the department/organization?
- What are the key objectives for the next 6-12 months? And, how does this role impact these objectives?
- (For the manager) How do you describe your management style?
- How did you advance to your current position in (company name)?
- Is this a new position? If not, where did the person go who occupied the position?
- Where are you in the search process? When do you expect to make a hiring decision?

Note: Many of these questions can be asked to each interviewer. Asking the same questions allows you to assess the consistency of responses. The more consistent, the more likely the information is an accurate depiction of the organization.

Tips for Asking Insightful Questions

- Review recent headlines about the organization. You should be able to generate a few insightful questions from these headlines.
- Write down your questions and, if necessary, refer to them at the appropriate time. Employers would rather you refer to your list of questions to ask an insightful question than not refer to your questions and ask a silly question.
- 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 before either topic is discussed.**

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, disabilities, ethnic background, country of origin, sexual preferences or age.** If you're asked an illegal question, you have a few options.

1. Simply answer the question directly if you're comfortable doing so and don't believe it will effect your candidacy. If you're not comfortable answering, tell them you don't feel comfortable as you don't see how it pertains to the position, and ask politely if they would explain the relevance.
2. Redirect the question and then provide an answer. For instance, if an employer asks your country of origin, you could reply, "If you're asking whether or not I can work in the US, I can."

If you think you've been asked an illegal question, contact the Becker Career Center.

Sample 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 and am excited about the possibility of working at Ferguson.

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

Sincerely,

- Roger Daultry

Sample 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 ask if you know the status of my application. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

- Roger Daultry

Commonly Asked Questions

Although we can't predict every question you might encounter, we can provide you with guidelines for answering commonly asked questions. Following are four common interview questions (including popular variations) and strategies for answering each. Prepare answers for each of the following question types, as you're likely to encounter most (if not all) during your interview. The goal of this exercise is not to memorize your responses, but to familiarize yourself with common interview questions and strategies to effectively respond. Once you master the strategies behind these questions, you will have the ability to answer many different interview questions.

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 (year, major, career interests), how and when you became interested in this field, and explain why the opportunity and organization peaked your interest and made you want to apply.

Sample Response

"I'm 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.) schools, 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.

E mpathy	Consider multiple alternative perspectives
D isciplined approach to inquiry	Provide evidence based conclusions / solutions
U nity	Work effectively in teams, collaborate
C ommunication	Communicate effectively in writing and orally
A nalytical	Identify relationships among seemingly disparate parts
T hinking	T-Shape (deep and broad), creatively, integrating knowledge
E thical	Engage in and do the right thing
S elf-Reflection	Develop humility, courage, tolerance and learn how to learn

The core four - Unity, Communication, Analytical Skills and Thinking Skills are the skills most often identified by employers and professor's as valuable to both education and employment. If you can add in your ability to self-reflect, make ethical decisions, be empathetic or have a disciplined approach to inquiry you will further impress the employer.

Sample Response

You should hire me because at Union College I developed critical **thinking** skills that allow me to think deep (through studies in my major) and broad (through studies outside of my major), T-shaped thinking if you will; Through my coursework and research I have developed effective **communication** skills both orally and in writing, and strong **analytical** skills that have allowed me to identify relationships among seemingly disparate parts; Through my coursework and extracurricular activities I've 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 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. That's why I believe you should hire me.

Your Response

3. What is your weakness?

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, and catch potential barriers to their success in the position. Job seekers generally make one of two mistakes. They either give a dishonest answer that the interviewer can see through (e.g., “I’m a perfectionist”). Or they give an answer that can take them out of contention for the position (e.g., “I put off responsibilities until the last minute and don’t get them done until I have to”).

Strategy for Responding

To answer, mention a true weakness and show how you’ve taken steps to improve it. To identify potentially appropriate weaknesses, consider something 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 include: public speaking, leading a group, handling multiple priorities, delegating responsibility, meeting new people, and understanding the value of differing perspectives.

Sample Response

“Public speaking is an area I’ve been working to improve. I used to get nervous about speaking in front of large groups of people. To improve, I forced myself into situations that required me to speak to large groups. This year, I became a campus tour guide and planned my class schedule around two courses that required three presentations each. The two courses and tour guide position gave me many opportunities to practice speaking and receive feedback. This has helped me improve dramatically. I also recently read the book “The Exceptional Presenter” by Timothy Koegel, and have incorporated many of his tips into my presentation style.”

Your Response
