

# INTERVIEWING SUCCESS



**This packet is specifically designed to help guide you through the interviewing process from preparing yourself beforehand, to conducting appropriate follow-up. The Gerri Ripp Center for Career Development is dedicated to helping you break into your ideal career field by making the interview as efficient and marketable as possible.**

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# 10 Tips for Your Next Interview

## 1) Do Your Research

Prior to going to the interview, it is best to know as much as you can about the company. Research the mission, culture, future trends, clients, products, services, current company news using the following sections on the company's website: About Us, Company History, Careers page, Media/Press Release section. Glassdoor.com and LinkedIn's Company Pages are excellent resources.

## 2) Mock Interview/Practice Questions (see page 3)

It is strongly suggested to participate in a mock interview with a Career Advisor to practice discussing your strengths, weaknesses, goals, accomplishments, relevant experiences, and questions plus verbal and non-verbal language. However, if time is limited, practice the interview questions. For those who want to stay ahead of the game, rehearse your answers while looking in the mirror. Refer to the CareerSpots videos on the Career Development website (Resources tab) for more in-depth guidance.

## 3) Be on Time

Consider a trial run to the company if you are unfamiliar with the location. Plan to arrive 15 minutes prior to the interview. It is recommended to use Google maps and MapQuest to assist you with your travel arrangements. Be sure to consider peak time traveling.

## 4) Dress Professionally (see photos on page 2)

Wear a business suit to ensure a professional appearance. Plan your attire in advance.

## 5) Connect to the Employers

Listen carefully to the questions. Discuss relevant skills/strengths that match employer's needs. Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer; try to be relaxed and confident.

## 6) Organize Your Thoughts

Practice ahead of time, your answers should be concise and complete. Prepare to answer questions based on past and current experience. What did you learn and how will you apply it?

## 7) Be Specific

Tell the interviewer how you can contribute to the company and give detailed examples. Consider your leadership experience (Club Organizer, E-Board member, SGA), and applied knowledge gained through academic projects.

## 8) Ask Questions (see page 4)

Prove that you have done your research and reflect your knowledge of the industry and interest in the position/company. Additionally, avoid asking about salary and other benefits.

## 9) Closing Up/Follow-Up

Send a Thank You Note (see page 7)

A typed or e-mailed thank you note to all individuals you interviewed with will make you stand out. Obtain business cards for correct name spellings and position titles. Provide any requested information (transcripts, references) immediately.

## 10) Evaluate your Experience

Think about what happened during the interview and ask yourself: Is this a place you think you would enjoy working? Are the job responsibilities a good match with your strengths? Is there opportunity to learn and grow? See the *"Questions to Ask Yourself After the Interview"* on page 5.

# DRESS TO ACHIEVE

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The way you dress can make the difference in getting the job, being offered additional opportunities, and getting ahead once you land your first job.

Remember, an interview is a formal situation, so it's important to be aware of the details of your appearance. Keep the color of your clothing muted and understated. The focus should be on YOU—not your clothes.

The idea here is to avoid anything that could distract the interviewer. A clean and neat, professional appearance is an important step in making a good first impression.

*Adapted from SYMS 'Dress to Achieve'*

## APPROPRIATE MEN'S ATTIRE

- Neat Solid Suit** (*Navy, Black, Dark Grey, Dark Brown*)
- Tie & Belt**
- Conservative Shoes**
- Little or No Jewelry**
- Limit the Aftershave/Cologne**
- Portfolio or Briefcase**

## APPROPRIATE WOMEN'S ATTIRE

- Neat Solid Suit** (*Skirt or Pant*)
- Appropriate Skirt Level**
- Limited Jewelry** (*nothing distracting*)
- Neat Professional Hairstyle**
- Neutral Pantyhose**
- Light Makeup and Perfume**
- Conservative Nail Color and Length**
- Portfolio or Briefcase**



## WHAT TO AVOID

- Bright, distracting colors or patterns**
- Excessive fragrance**
- Backpacks, sunglasses**
- Chewing gum, smoking cigarettes**
- Noisy, or overpowering jewelry**
- Dirty, scuffed shoes**

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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## QUESTIONS INTERVIEWERS ASK

A typical interview will entail different types of questions designed to have candidates market themselves. Below are samples to get started:

### Self Awareness:

- Can you tell me about yourself?  
Focus on key skills, qualities, and related academic, work, and extracurricular experiences when answering this question. Ask yourself “Why do I want employers to hire me?”
- What are some of your strengths?
- Can you tell me about an area you may need to improve on?  
Mention something that you struggle with, and discuss steps taken to correct it.
- What energizes you?
- Tell me about something that gives you a sense of accomplishment.
- What do you consider your greatest achievement thus far (academic or personal)?
- Where do you hope to see yourself in 5 years?
- What are your long-term goals and how would working for our organization help you to achieve them?

### Academics

- What made you choose \_\_\_\_\_ as a major?
- Why did you choose Iona College?
- Do your grades reflect your abilities?

### Position/Company Related

- What do you know about our company?
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- In what ways do you expect to make a contribution?
- What are you looking for in an internship/job?
- What makes you an ideal candidate for this position?

### Expectations of self and others

- What do you want to learn in this position?
- What do you expect from a supervisor?

### Description questions

- What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- How would a former supervisor describe your work ethic?

### Skills/Experiences Obtained

- How do you take initiative? Set priorities and goals? Manage your time?
- What experience have you had with public speaking? Statistics? Writing professional reports?

### Self-Motivation to Understand Your Chosen Industry

- What steps do you take to stay knowledgeable in your field?

### Extracurricular Activities

- What have you learned from your involvement in the \_\_\_\_\_ Club? How has this impacted your work style?

### Leadership Skills

Briefly discuss 2 challenges you faced in a leadership role and discuss how you solved them. What did you learn from that experience?

### **COMMON BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS**

*Past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior, which is why employers ask these questions. The acronym SAR is the best way to answer. Give details of specific Situation, the Actions you took to address it, and the*

*Result:*

*Can you tell me about a time when you...*

- Demonstrated strong teamwork?
- Utilized leadership skills?
- Made an important decision?
- Worked under pressure and completed the assignments?
- Had to juggle several things at once? How did you manage the multiple demands and what was the result?
- Overcame a major obstacle?
- Managed a project, from beginning to end?
- Took initiative to improve a challenging situation?
- Went above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done?

### Unexpected Situations

- Were in a situation in which you thought you could handle alone, and soon realized you took on more than you could handle. What did you do?
- Had to handle a problem that arose and your manager was unavailable. What was the nature of the problem? (What was the outcome?)

### Problem Solving Skills

- Describe a conflict situation you helped resolve.
- Made a mistake and corrected it. What was the result? What did you learn?

### Sales Experience

- Sell me this pen (or other item within view).

### Customer Service

- Handled a difficult customer or client?
- Went outside of your normal responsibilities to satisfy a customer?
- A customer rented a black sedan, and a green mini cooper pulls up instead. How do you defuse the situation, keep them as a customer and maybe sell them something in the process?

### **CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS**

*Employers ask questions designed to gain an understanding of your thought process, and how you come to educated conclusions:*

- How many tennis balls would it take to fill up this room?
- Estimate how many windows are in New York City.
- Two U.S. coins add up to thirty cents and one is not a nickel. What are the two coins?
- How many times a day does a clock's hands overlap?

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER**

*One way of showing your interest in the position and company is to ask questions. Here are samples:*

- What are your expectations for this position?
- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- What type of training would I receive if hired?
- What do you like best about the company?
- What has been your most rewarding experience while working for the company?
- What is the next step in the interview process?
- What do you consider the major challenges facing the industry today?
- What are the prospects for growth and advancement?

### **EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS THAT REFLECT RESEARCH**

*Demonstrate a strong sense of interest by asking about what you learned on your own:*

- I read on your website that Smithfield High School has included class assignments and events on their website. How have students and parents reacted to this change?
- I read on your website that you will be acquiring businesses to increase your customer presence. How will this impact your organization?
- A Wall Street Journal article of two weeks ago stressed your company's commitment to innovative marketing strategies. Can you elaborate on those strategies?

### **HANDLING ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Employers are **not** allowed to ask questions that relate to the following:

Age, Religious/Spiritual Identity, Marital/Family Status, Ethnicity

*Do not volunteer any personal information.* If you are asked any of these questions, feel free to say:

- Can you tell me how knowing this information relates to the position?, **or**
- I do not feel comfortable sharing this information, however, I would be happy to answer other questions related to my qualifications for the position.

In addition, you may want to discuss strategies for handling illegal questions with a Career Advisor.

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

*Evaluate your encounter with the interviewer(s), and use your answers to assess your experience:*

- Describe the employees you met. Did they seem energetic, efficient, and organized? Or did they appear unenthusiastic?
- Did your interviewer(s) answer your questions in a direct and positive manner?
- Do you see yourself working for the company five years from now?
- Is the salary scale competitive?
- Do the job and company fit in with your lifestyle?

For more helpful tips, CareerSpots videos are available on the Career Development website located under the Resources tab.



# SKYPE & PHONE INTERVIEWS:

Sometimes, traditional face-to-face interviews are not possible. However, they still need to occur in a timely manner, even in slightly unconventional ways. Ace your next Skype or phone interview using the following tips:

## Dress the Part:

It is advised to wear standard interview attire to get you in a professional state of mind. Wear a full suit. In the event that you may have to stand up, the last thing you want is for the interviewer to see overly casual pants. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

## Prepare Your Surroundings:

Whether your call is video or telephone, do it in a quiet, businesslike setting. Look behind you, because this area will be seen. A blank or neutral background is best, with a **well-organized desktop**. A cluttered background may distract the interviewer, not to mention send the wrong idea of your organizational skills. Also, remove personal items to help you stay focused. If your interview will take place at home, be sure to inform anyone living there about the meeting to minimize interruptions.

## Practice In Advance:

Initially, video calls may be awkward while trying to figure out the mechanics (i.e. training yourself to look at the camera instead of the screen, or adjusting hand movements or voice pitch). Become comfortable by practicing with someone ahead of time. Schedule a Skype mock interview appointment with a Career Advisor to assist you. Record your answers prior to your interview.

## Don't Forget to Smile:

Smiling connotes feelings of warmth and engagement. It also builds a positive rapport with the employer. This makes you look and sound approachable in both mediums.

## Stay Present:

It's important to give the other caller signs that you are paying attention. Periodically interject "listening sounds" (such as "yes" or "hm"). It also reassures that technology is working properly and you are still listening. Refrain from fiddling with your computer during a call. Sounds like the tapping of a keyboard in the background can give the impression that you are not engaged.

## Use Your Resources/Go Ahead and Cheat:

One advantage to a video or phone interview is that you can use your resume and other notes to remember everything you want to mention. Have your questions to ask the interviewer accessible also.

## Address Tech Issues Immediately:

When using video or phone equipment, there's a chance you'll experience a technical glitch (a weak connection, interference, or garbled signals). You may hesitate to draw attention to the problem, but you don't want to give an inaccurate answer because you didn't understand the question. A simple "Excuse me" works well. But if the problem persists, acknowledge it. If there are too many blips, it's good to stop the call (and redial). The interviewer may conclude that you're a problem-solver, and you would provide top-quality service if they hire you. It is also recommended to use a landline for phone interviews to help avoid dropped calls.

## Online Sources:

The Muse: Article adapted from <https://www.themuse.com/advice/7-ways-to-nail-your-phone-or-skype-interview>; and [www.learnvest.com](http://www.learnvest.com)

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# THANK YOU LETTERS

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- By sending a thank you letter, you show your interviewer common courtesy and respect.
  - Gives you a chance to stand out to employers.
  - A thank you letter:
    - Gives you an opportunity to reiterate your strengths for the position.
    - Lets you make points you might have missed in your interview.
    - Demonstrates your written communication skills.
  - At the very least, it puts your name in front of an interviewer one more time.
  - Send note within 24-48 hours of the interview.
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*-Sample Thank You Letter-*

555 Mamaroneck Avenue  
Mamaroneck, NY 10543  
aanderson@gmail.com

October 15, 20xx

Ms. Erin Smith  
Director, Helping Hands Community Center  
700 Moore Avenue  
New Rochelle, NY 10801

Dear Ms. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me this afternoon. It was great to learn more about Helping Hands Community Center's commitment to personal development and diversity initiatives. The many services provided by the center are so critical to personal growth. I am very excited about the possibility of obtaining the Community Relations Associate position. I am confident that my leadership and volunteer experience would be an asset to the center.

After meeting with you, I walked away enthusiastic about the possibility of working with Helping Hands. I hope you will not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information. I may be reached at 914-555-5555. I look forward to speaking with you again soon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Aaron Anderson

## CLOSING & FOLLOW-UP

The closing of the interview is just as important as the initial greeting. You want to express your interest in the company, and find out what the next steps of the hiring process may be. Following up by way of a *'Thank you note'* is necessary. Before contacting the organization, consider these points:



- ALERT YOUR REFERENCES**  
If you have not done so already, let your references know that they may be contacted soon by a potential employer.
- DON'T STOP YOUR SEARCH**  
Although you feel confident you may receive an offer for the position, do continue to apply and interview to find additional opportunities.
- FOLLOW-UP PHONE CALL**  
Inquire with a phone call if you have not heard back from employer(s) within a reasonable time (seven to ten days). Make sure to continue to reiterate your enthusiasm and market your strengths for the position during the call.
- BE PATIENT**  
Relax, the hiring process often times takes longer than the employer anticipates.
- NEVER BURN BRIDGES**  
Even if you find out you did not get the position, try and turn the situation into a positive one. Consider bringing the interviewer into your network, and ask for feedback, as well as possibly asking for referrals for other contacts.
- COMMITTING TO A JOB OFFER**  
Carefully consider an offer before you accept. Once an offer has been accepted, you are expected to fulfill the commitment and properly decline other offers.  
For more information about accepting, denying, delaying, or negotiating an offer, please contact the Gerri Ripp Center for Career Development.