

KEYS TO SUCCESS

# INTERVIEWING



## Lebanon Valley College

CENTER FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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# Preparing for an Interview

An interview is an opportunity to showcase your relevant strengths, experience, and interest in the position for which you are applying. An interview is also a chance for you to ask questions of the employer to find out if the position is a good fit for you.

## A few things to know:

- Interviewing requires advanced planning, preparation, and practice.
- Interviewing is an interactive process. An interview is a conversation with a purpose.
- Interviewers are human too!
- You, too, have decisions in the interview process.

*Whether you've had one interview or 15 interviews, you will find that all interviews are different.*

Some interviewers are skilled at interviewing; others are not.

Some interviewers are talkative; others let YOU do most of the talking.

Some interviews are highly structured; other are more conversational and casual.

Your challenge is to be ready for any style! To prepare for any type of interview, think about it in three stages:

1. **Before the interview (Preparation)**
2. **During the interview (Communication)**
3. **After the interview (Follow-Up)**

## Types of Interviews

### Screening Interview

- You will exchange information, focused on questions about your skills and experiences.
- Usually an even flow of information between the interviewer and interviewee.
- Some interviewers will incorporate behavioral interviewing strategies in a screening interview.
- On-campus interviews are typically this type.

### Telephone Interview

- Common when an employer wishes to screen candidates before bringing a few in for an interview.

- This interview often indicates that you have exhibited some of the experiences and skills sought
- Typically scheduled in advance during a time that is convenient for both parties.
- Some of the items you should have in front of you during the phone interview are your resume, company information, job description, and key points you want to share.

### Group Interviews

- Occur occasionally when employers want to talk with many candidates at one time.
- You may, as a group, be given a problem to solve and explain. Your best strategy is to be involved, rather than be aggressive or passive in the interaction. You want to balance your ability to lead, listen, and follow directions.

### Panel Interviews

- Several interviewers gather to ask questions often as a time-saving device for employers
- You want to respond first to the person asking the question, and then make eye contact with the remainder of the group throughout the answer.

### Case Interviews

- Used primarily by consulting firms and for higher level positions.
- The interview simulates a work issue of the job and involves a presentation on the hypothetical or real business case or quantitative problem.
- An employer is evaluating your problem-solving skills when dealing with difficult situations. A case interview requires intensive preparation with practice cases.

### Behavioral Interviews

- Asks job candidates to provide concrete evidence of their qualifications in behavioral terms. Based on the premise that the best predictor of future potential is past performance.
- The interview focuses on identifying specific examples in an applicant's background that document skill in the areas relevant to the job description.
- Be prepared to discuss specific, concrete, and relevant behaviors in an employment interview. You will be demonstrating the attributes of initiative, problem-solving, planning, communication, motivation, and maturity that most interviewers are seeking in potential employees.

# 1. Before the Interview (Preparation)

## Before The Interview Checklist

- **Know what you have to offer.** Employers desire employees who are self-aware and able to communicate clearly about what they have to offer. After reflecting on your diverse experiences, what have you learned and how does this relate to the position for which you're applying? Write down specific examples that would illustrate your match for the job description. Study your resume and be prepared to articulate the transferability of all experiences listed. Remember, many experiences could serve as a good example for multiple questions, so be prepared to think about your experiences from different vantage points.
- **Understand the position.** If you have not been given a position description, request one from the organization. What specific qualifications are they seeking? What particular strengths are they looking for in a candidate? If possible, conduct an informational interview with a professional who currently holds this type of position to get an inside perspective. Utilize resources such as the Occupational Outlook Handbook and O\*NET to gather information on typical duties and skills required.
- **Research the organization.** Spend time exploring the organization's website and/or informational literature. What is the organization proud of? What is their mission/vision statement? What is the primary population they serve? What is their reputation in the industry? Try to access their most recent annual report. Follow them on Twitter and LinkedIn. Employers will expect you to know background information on their organization, so be ready. If you know the name of your interviewer, check to see if he/she has a LinkedIn profile so you can view their professional background.
- **Be aware of your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.** Take advantage of the Mock Interview service through the Center for Career Development both in person and through online software, like **InterviewStream**. A career counselor will ask you a list of interview questions and provide you with feedback on your strengths and suggested areas for improvement. Don't let your first interview experience be with the actual interviewing committee-practice on us!

## First Impressions Matter!

- **Arrival Time.** Arrive at your interviewing destination approximately 10-15 minutes early. This should give you some time to organize your thoughts and observe the working environment.
- **Cell Phones.** Remember to turn off all electronic devices!
- **Professional Dress and Behavior.** For most organizations, typical interview attire includes a well-tailored professional suit; however, it can be helpful to find out what's most appropriate from someone working in the field. Avoid overdoing accessories, makeup, cologne or perfume. Dress in neutral tones. Professionalism is more than dress; it's how you present yourself. Stand when the interviewer approaches you.
- **Firm Handshake.** Extend a firm handshake to your interviewers.
- **Eye Contact.** This shows confidence and engages the interviewer.
- **Smile.** Be polite to anyone you meet. You want to come across as enthusiastic, friendly, and approachable. Avoid negativity, both verbal and nonverbal.

## 2. During the Interview (Communication)

### What to Bring with You

- A folder/portfolio with a notepad and a pen
- Extra copies of your resume
- Typed list of your references
- List of questions you would like to ask

### Interviewing Tips

- Build rapport by greeting the interviewer by name, with a smile, firm handshake, and good eye contact
- Make sure your answers are articulate, concise, and relate to the question
- Be prepared for questions like: *Tell me about yourself. Why are you interested in our position/company?*
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues and body language. What message are you conveying?
- Be sure to use **specific examples** from past experiences when answering questions
- To reduce anxiety, try to think of the interview as a conversation-the interviewer is getting to know you and you are getting to know him/her
- Respond to questions by highlighting your strengths and accomplishments
- Avoid talking too much or getting off track on tangents. In general, keep your answers to less than 2 minutes
- When addressing weaknesses, be sure to communicate how you are working to overcome them.
- Be sure to ask intelligent questions that will underscore your interest and initiative (*see below for sample questions to ask an employer*)
- It is okay to take a moment to think rather than answering a questions prematurely. Be sure to ask for a minute to formulate your thoughts related to the question
- Be prepared to talk about the experiences listed on your resume. Many interviewers ask questions specifically related to this information
- Remember to write down the names, positions, and contact information of your interviewers or request their business cards so that you can follow up appropriately with a thank you note
- Practice active listening skills

### Sample Questions to Ask an Employer

- What would it take to exceed your expectations for this position?
- Can you tell me how the different departments within the company work together?
- What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
- What is the profile of a successful employee of your organization?
- How are performance reviews conducted?
- What would you expect me to accomplish in the first 60-90 days?
- What kind of opportunities exist for me to improve my professional skills within the organization?
- What are some recent challenges and opportunities faced by your organization?
- Can you tell me the next steps in the selection process?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- *Do not ask about salary, benefits, vacation time, etc. during the first interview*

## **Behavioral-Based Interviewing**

Behavioral-based interviewing is the style most commonly used by interviewers. According to Katherine Hansen of Quintessential Careers, “The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations...Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate’s experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant’s potential for success.”

It is important to prepare in advance for behavioral-based questions. Try using the following strategies to help you organize your past experiences, or “stories” as potential examples.

- Make a list of skills or experiences which are relevant or transferable to the position. Review any materials from the employer to help you identify these desired skills and experiences (job description, website, company reports, research, etc.)
- Think about situations in which you have utilized the desired skills. Come up with 10-15 stories from college, class projects, jobs, internships, volunteer activities, club involvement/leadership and hobbies. Think also of situations that did not go as planned or were difficult but turned out to be a learning experience
- Practice telling your examples to others, such as friends and family, or a career counselor
- Make sure your examples are concise, well-told, and interesting. They should create word pictures of what you have done, learned or accomplished that relate to the job for which you are interviewing
- Tip: while it is important to have examples for certain types of questions you may anticipate being asked, remember that examples are not “one size fits all”. During the interview itself, an answer/example you had in mind for one possible question may be a better fit for another
- Don’t hesitate to market your accomplishments; this is not the time to be too modest!
- Be aware of **nonsense questions** (also commonly called **off-the-wall questions**), such as “if you could be anyone in the world who would you be?” etc. Though these questions may seem odd, they do have purpose. Interviewers may want to see if you have a sense of humor, or determine how well you can think on your feet, respond to pressure, or handle an unusual situation. While there is no true way to prepare for these types of questions, you can excel at answering them by not appearing rattled, and providing an honest response that is not too “abnormal” in nature

## **Example Behavioral-Based Interview Questions**

- Give me an example of the most complex assignment or project you have worked on. What was your role? What was the result of the project?
- Give an example of a problem you faced and the steps you took to resolve it? Did they work? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time you had to conform to a policy with which you didn’t agree.
- Describe a time on the job when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about a time you were criticized. What was the issue involved, who made the criticism, and how did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to approach several different people for support or cooperation. How did you approach them?
- What is the most difficult situation you have faced? How did you handle it? What was the result?

## **To Prepare, Think S.T.A.R**

The S.T.A.R. Technique helps you to organize your stories and examples into responses to behavioral based interview questions.

### **Situation**

What was the situation?  
What problems or challenges did I face?  
What was the context in which this situation occurred?

### **Task**

What was my role?

### **Action**

What did I do specifically?  
What skills did I utilize?

### **Results**

What were the outcomes/accomplishments?  
What did I learn?  
What would I do differently next time?

## **Think Strategically, Respond Convincingly**

Listen carefully to all questions during the interview. Relax as much as possible and think in term of *“What is this recruiter really asking me?”* Do not overanalyze the questions, but listen carefully and take a moment to think before providing a response.

**“Why did you sign up for this interview?”** The recruiter is asking you to prove that you are interested in the company. Why would you be an asset? Discuss what you know about the company-prove that you did your research and that you are interested!

**“What is your greatest strength?”** Here is your opportunity to prove that you have the most important strength required for the position. Be sure to provide a strength that relates to the position for which you are interviewing.

**“What is your greatest weakness?”** Take a positive approach to this question. Select an area of personal or professional development such as “presentation skills” or “working toward understanding the big picture” to indicate your willingness to grow and improve. Do not name serious weaknesses that might be perceived as true negatives to the interviewer.

**“Why weren’t your grades higher than a 2.3?”** the recruiter is giving you an opportunity to prove ability in spite of your average grades. Be ready to explain.

**“Why did you attend this university/college?”** Companies like to hire winners who have been in control of their decisions. Do not indicate that external forces directed you to college: “I didn’t have the money for Stanford, so I settled for XYZ University.” Offer a response that is logical and shows that you made the decision.

## **Closing the Interview**

- State your interest in the position
- Briefly summarize why you are well qualified for the job
- Find out what the next steps will be and thank the interviewer(s) for their time
- Be sure to smile, shake hands, and collect business cards before you leave

### 3. After the Interview (Follow-Up)

Write and send a thank you note (and/or email) to the interviewer within 24 hours, reiterating your interest and strongest qualifications (*see sample thank you letter below*). Be sure to complete any follow-up requests from the employer. Contact your references to let them know how it went and to potentially expect to hear from the company. If the employer indicated that they would contact you by a specific date and they have not, contact them. It is reasonable to follow up after a week or two following your interview. This demonstrates your interest.

#### **Assess**

- Reflect on the experience, your interest in the organization and position, and use the interview as a learning experience. Be sure to note areas of improvement.
- Recall details from the interview-questions asked and your responses, information you gathered, additional questions you have.
- Evaluate whether this job is for you-a bad job can be worse than no job!

#### **While you Wait**

- Research salary in comparable positions in your geographical area
- Prepare your salary negotiation points
- Is there a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> interview-if so, start preparing
- Maintain an active job search. Don't wait to hear from each employer. Continue to network, conduct informational interviews, and volunteer!
- **DO NOT** update your social media status with "opinions" about the company or your feedback from the interview

#### **Sample Thank You Letter (hand-written note or email message)**

*For a hand-written thank you, use simple professional stationery and a card, neat handwriting, and address the interviewer professionally on the front of the envelope.*

Email Subject (if emailing): Thank you

Dear Dr. Jones:

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in the on-site interview for the ABC Position. I thoroughly enjoyed spending the afternoon learning more about XYZ Company, the position, and the department. I very much enjoyed the conversations that I had throughout the day; I especially appreciate the details and perspectives that were shared with me from the members of the staff and administration. I am very excited about this opportunity, and I would enjoy being a staff member at the XYZ Company.

I look forward to hearing from you soon regarding your decision.

Sincerely,  
LVC Student

# Questions Employers May Ask

## Personal

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What can you offer us?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- How do you think your friends would describe you?
- Define success. Failure.
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
- Of which accomplishments are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
- What motivates you most in a job?
- How have you handled getting along with a difficult professor/colleague/supervisor?
- Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What do you know about our company?
- Where do you want to be in 5 years? 10 years?
- Do you plan to further your education?

## Education

- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend LVC?
- Do you think you received a good education? In what ways?
- In which campus activities did you participate? Tell me about your leadership skills.

- Which classes in your major did you like best?
- If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
- Which general education electives did you like best? Least? Why?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
- Were you financially responsible for any portion of your education?

## Experience

- What job-related skills have you developed?
- In what positions did you work while in college?
- What did you learn from these work experiences?
- What did you enjoy most from your last employment? Least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
- Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

## Career Goals

- What kind of boss do you prefer?
- Would you be successful working with a team?
- Do you prefer large or small organizations? Why?
- What other types of positions are you considering?
- What do you think about working in a structured environment?
- Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
- How do you feel about working overtime? Flextime?
- Do you like to travel?

## Common Interview Mistakes

- Being unprepared for the interview. Lack of knowledge of the organization or position
- Overbearing or overaggressive, overconfident or conceited
- Inability to express oneself clearly and explain strengths—poor communication skills
- Lack of career planning and goal planning
- Didn't ask questions about the job or company
- Lacks involvement in on-campus or community activities
- Lacks involvement in ways to connect to profession (joining professional organization, no research or internships, etc.)
- Using slang or improper grammar
- Lack of enthusiasm, doesn't smile, appears disinterested or bored
- Dressed inappropriately for an interview
- Improper attire, offensive or excessive body art/piercings
- Excessive perfume/cologne
- Excessive makeup
- Lack of confidence, ill at ease, too nervous
- Overemphasis on money
- Poor academic record
- Expecting too much too soon; unwilling to start at the bottom and work up
- Being evasive and making excuses
- Lack of tact, courtesy, and maturity
- Condemnation of past employers
- Poor eye contact
- Limp handshake or a handshake that is too strong
- Candidates who appear to be “shopping around” or “job hopping”
- Lack of or little sense of humor
- No interest in organization or industry
- Too much emphasis on whom one knows
- Unwillingness to relocate
- Expressing strong prejudices
- Narrow scope of interests
- Little or no interest in community activities
- Inability to accept constructive criticism
- Late for interview without good reason
- Indecisiveness
- Asking about salary, vacation, benefits, or retirement package

**Don't want to make the above mistakes? Practice without pressure with...**



Visit [vc.interviewstream.com](http://vc.interviewstream.com) to create an account. Practice as often as you wish, using pre-determined question sets or sets of your own creation from the over 6,000 question bank, and watch the recording to self-assess or invite Career Development to provide feedback.

# What are Employers Looking For?

Throughout your work and life experiences, coursework, and activities, you have developed many skills. Knowing your transferable skills and being able to market them gives you an edge in your job search. There are many transferrable job skills. Below are some categories with skill samples to help you identify your skills.

## Communication

- Listening
- Speaking
- Persuasive/passionate in presenting ideas
- Quickly grasps concepts/idea
- Responds directly to questions
- Uses correct grammar
- Presents ideas logically and concisely
- Knowledge of other languages

## Leadership

- Motivation
- Decision-making
- Demonstrates sound judgement
- Self-reliant
- Passionate about his/her pursuits
- Sets goals and follows through
- Respectfully delegates
- Mediation
- Flexibility
- Identifies opportunities and takes risks

## Self-Management

- Follows instructions
- Responsible
- Successfully manages multiple priorities
- Sense of humor
- Dependable
- Detail oriented
- Highly productive

## Interpersonal

- Works well on a team
- Enthusiastic and energetic
- Supportive
- Practices active listening
- Empathic
- Shares information
- Effectively informs, inspires, and influences others
- Open, engaging, and candid demeanor
- Comfortable around many personality types

## Computer & Data

- Software
- Hardware
- Internet/web management
- Project management
- Social media platforms
- Troubleshooting
- Research
- Analysis/assessment of data
- Problem solving
- Organization of information