

## Interview Tips

### BEFORE YOU INTERVIEW

1. Research company/position for which you are applying.
  - Go to company web site
  - Call alumni
  - Attend information sessions if offered
  - Use Hoover, CareerShift, LinkedIn or similar resources
2. Know yourself.
  - Strengths
  - Your story
  - Career goals
  - Areas of needed development
  - Accomplishments
  - Why you should be hired
3. Based on your research and knowledge of yourself, prepare to communicate “your fit” with the company.
4. Prepare to ask/answer questions using specific examples.
5. Prepare appropriate outfit: a suit.
6. Practice initial greeting and handshake.
7. Bring extra copies of your resume.
8. Prepare to give references and to release transcript information if requested.
9. If off-campus, determine location and travel time.
10. Practice! Here are two great resources:
  - **ReadyPrepInterview:** Visit [www.readyprepinterview.com](http://www.readyprepinterview.com) and search for a job title to see most commonly asked interview questions. Then practice answering those questions.
  - **Mock Interview:** When you have an interview planned, and have practiced with ReadyPrepInterview, call 931-221-6544 to schedule a mock interview to serve as a dress rehearsal prior to the actual interview. Be prepared to share the company/organization name and the job title you are seeking. You will come to the interview dressed professionally with a resume. *Call in advance to schedule as available appointments fill quickly.*

### DURING/AFTER YOUR INTERVIEW

- Obtain a business card from each interviewer.
- State your interest in the position and ask for the job!
- Write thank you letters immediately after interviews.

### PROVE YOUR WAY TO A JOB OFFER

Listen carefully to all questions during the interview. Relax as much as possible and think in terms of “What is this recruiter really asking me?” Do not over-analyze the question, but listen carefully and think before responding.

**“Why did you sign up for this interview?”** The recruiter is asking you to prove that you are interested in the company so discuss your company research.

**“What is your greatest strength?”** Here is your opportunity to prove that you have the most important strength required for the position. Do not blow it by offering some off-the-wall strength that does not relate to the position for which you are applying.

**“What is your greatest weakness?”** 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 weakness that might be perceived as true negative such as “I’m always late.”

**“Why weren't your grades higher than a 2.3?”** This is your opportunity to prove ability in spite of average grades. Take responsibility for the GPA and be ready to explain.

**“Why did you attend this university?”** Companies like to hire winners who have been in control. Do not indicate that external forces directed you to college: “I couldn’t afford Emory, so I settled for Auburn.” Offer a response that is logical and shows that you made the decision.

## Interview Tips

### DRESSING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Interviews require Business Professional attire (suit, dress suit, in conservative colors). If you think the dress code would be more relaxed consult with the Office of Career Services to receive more information on the company and their interviewing standards.

### PHONE INTERVIEW TIPS

A phone interview may or may not be planned. If the first contact from a potential employer is a call, that is an interview whether you want it to be or not. These tips will prepare you for both planned and impromptu calls.

#### Preparation:

- If the time isn't convenient, ask if you could talk at another time and suggest some alternatives.
- Keep résumé in clear view so it's available when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of accomplishments available to review.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
- Grab a glass of water so it's accessible as needed.
- Turn call-waiting off so your call isn't interrupted.
- Clear the room; evict kids and pets.
- Turn off music and/or TV.
- Close the door.

#### During:

- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or drink.
- Smile. It projects a positive image to the listener and changes the tone of your voice.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name). Only use a first name if they ask you to.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer.
- Take your time. It's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- Give short answers.
- Remember your goal is to set-up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer ask if it would be possible to meet in person.

#### After:

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Write a thank you note to reiterate your interest in the job.

### QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS MAY ASK

Employers want to know if you have the skill set needed to perform successfully on the job and contribute positively to their company/organization. Understanding the job description gives you insight into what type of questions you might hear. If the description is lacking, here is a list of the top 10 skills sought by most employers according to NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) 2011 Job Outlook:

- Communication skills (verbal)
- Strong work ethic
- Teamwork skills (works well with others)
- Analytical skills
- Initiative
- Problem-solving skills
- Communication skills (written)
- Interpersonal skills (relates well to others)
- Computer skills
- Flexibility/adaptability
- Prepare to answer these questions:

#### 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.
- Share a failure? What did you learn from it?
- Of which accomplishments are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- How does your education/experience relate to this job?

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- What motivates you most in a job?
- How have you handled getting along with a difficult former professor/ supervisor/co-worker?
- Have you ever spoken before a group? How large?
- Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
- Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
- Do you plan to further your education?

### Education

- Why did you choose your major?
- Why did you choose to attend your university?
- Did you receive 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? Least? Why?
- If you were to start over, what would you change about your education?
- Which elective classes 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 college education?

### Experience

- What job-related skills have you developed?
- In what positions did you work while in school?
- What did you learn from these work experiences?
- What did you enjoy most about your last job? Least?
- Have you ever quit a job? Why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
- Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
- Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- How would a former supervisor 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?
- How do you feel about working in a structured environment?
- Are you able to work on several assignments at once?
- How do you feel about working overtime? Flextime?
- How do you feel about travel?
- How do you feel about the possibility of relocating?

### GENERAL QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

- Why are you interested in our company?
- What are your goals and where will you be in five years?
- What do you consider your strengths?
- What do you consider to be your weaknesses that you would like to improve?
- What experience in your past do you believe has prepared you for your future?

Before you begin interviewing, think about these questions and possible responses and discuss them with a career counselor. Conduct mock interviews and be sure you are able to communicate clear, unrehearsed answers to interviewers.

### BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Many employers ask behavioral-based questions to probe your past behavior in jobs, classrooms, group projects and activities. As you listen to the question, think about what quality or skill they are evaluating and utilize the **STAR Method** (a specific Situation, the Task at hand, the Action you took and the Result) to answer questions.

#### Here are some examples:

- Which classes gave you the most trouble?
- What are the biggest challenges encountered in college?
- Give an example of when you refused to give up.
- How was your transition from high school to college?
- When your priorities are changed by someone else, how do you adjust to such situations?



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- How do you manage priorities?
- Tell me about a time when you planned an event and what steps you took to make sure everything went well.
- Tell me about your method for personal organization and time management.
- Tell me about a time you were faced with conflicting priorities. How did you determine your course of action?
- Tell me about a time you helped someone else be successful.
- Describe a time a presentation went extremely well. How did you know?
- Tell me about a time you experienced initial failure in convincing someone else to do something. What ultimately happened? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time you were suddenly called on or forced to be a leader.
- Tell me about a time where you had to work with a difficult manager, classmate or peer.
- Tell me the most unpopular decision you had to make and why you chose to make it. What was the outcome?
- Share a time when you recruited someone to help you with a project.
- Tell me about a time you inspired someone toward some goal achievement. Tell me about a time when you were dissatisfied with the performance of someone who worked with you on a project. What did you do? How did they react?
- Give a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others. (Evaluating leadership abilities)
- Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful? (Evaluating leadership abilities)
- Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. (Evaluating stress management abilities)
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? (Evaluating decision-making abilities)
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation? (Evaluating interpersonal abilities)
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- Tell me about a time that you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do? (Evaluating time management abilities)

### POTENTIAL QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWER STRATEGIES

*Briefly tell me about the highlights of your educational and work experiences that are relevant to this job.*

- Share related educational, work or life experiences. (If you don't have related experiences at this time, get involved on- or off-campus to diversify your strengths.)
- Think of a time when you have been very busy (with school, job, home issues, etc.). What did you do to manage your time and complete the tasks you needed with "too much to do in too little time"?
- Take time to think of a specific example and share how you prioritized to be successful.

*Imagine that you are on a team with a person whose behavioral style is very different from yours. You find it difficult to work together because you disagree about how things should be done. How would you handle this situation?*

- "Avoid working with this person," is NOT a good answer if you want to illustrate strong interpersonal skills.
- Think of a time when you were in this situation, dealt with it directly, succinctly and successfully.

*Share a time when you sacrificed or put your personal goals aside to achieve an overall goal for the group.*

- Think through what it means to be part of a whole and how you do and do not contribute to that group.

*Tell me about a time when you took on a significant new challenge at school, home or a job in order to achieve personal or professional growth.*

- If you do not have an example for this situation, you need to get more involved or seek an opportunity that challenges you to move beyond your comfort zone.

## Interview Tips

### QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

Brainstorm questions to ask before you interview:

- I'm excited about the job, are there any additional expectations not outlined in the job description?
- What assignments might I expect the first six months?
- Does your company encourage further education?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- What products are in the developmental stage now?
- Do you have plans for expansion?
- What are your growth projections for next year?
- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- Is your company environmentally conscious? How?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?
- Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff?
- May I talk with the last person who held this position?
- What is the usual promotional time frame?
- Does your company offer either single or dual career-track programs?
- What do you like best about your job/company?
- Once the probation period is completed, how much authority will I have over decisions?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
- What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
- Has there been much turnover in this job area?
- What skills are really important for this position?
- Is there a lot of team/project work?
- Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?
- Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?
- How much travel is involved in this position?
- Always ask this question before you leave an interview:
  - What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?
  - Do not ask salary questions during initial interview and be cautious asking about flextime.

### EVALUATION

Based on recruiter evaluations used during Auburn University on-campus interviews, here is what recruiters seek in ideal candidates:

#### Presentation

- Professional and appropriate dress and appearance
- Eye contact
- Good handshake
- Body language
- Fit / Image

#### Preparation for the Interview

- Knowledge of the company
- Understanding of the job expectations
- Demonstrated preparedness for the job
- Able to ask pertinent questions
- Related work and academic experiences

#### Verbal Communication

- Persuasive/passionate in presenting ideas
- Quickly grasps concepts/questions
- Responds directly to questions
- Uses correct grammar and vocabulary—articulate
- Ideas presented logically and succinctly

#### Direction

- Well-defined goals
- Confidence in abilities
- Proactive and self-motivated
- Demonstrates diligence and the ability to produce quality results in timely fashion

#### Leadership

- Roles/responsibilities in competitive organizations
- Moves others to action
- Decisive and demonstrates sound judgment
- Self-reliant
- Passionate about his/her pursuits
- Sets goals and follows through
- Identifies opportunities and takes responsibility

#### Sincerity

- Genuine attitude
- Honesty and sincerity



## Interview Tips

### Interpersonal Skills

- Enthusiastic, energetic
- Motivated, mature and has initiative
- Comfortable/confident around many personality types
- Open, engaging and candid demeanor
- Listening skills
- Empathy

### Flexibility

- Achieves goals in face of adversity
- Not easily discouraged and strives under pressure
- Develops effective alternatives to achieve goals
- Initiates constructive change, challenges status quo and continuously looks for better ways to do things

### Problem Solving

- Resolves problems with logical approach
- Comes to reasonable conclusions
- Enjoys and demonstrates problem solving
- Effectively combines diverse information
- Shows common sense
- Inquisitive

### Productivity

- Thrives under high pressure
- Successfully manages multiple priorities
- History of high productivity
- Examples of positive recognition in the past

### Teamwork

- Works well on a team
- Ethical and responsible behavior
- Shares information
- Effectively informs, inspires and influences others

### Other

- Creativity
- Computer literacy
- Language skills
- Written and verbal communication skills

### HANDLING ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Various federal, state and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. An employer's questions, whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process, must be related to the job you are seeking. For the employer, the focus must be: "What do I need to know to decide whether this person can perform the functions of this job?"

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- Answer the question, if you wish. However, remember you are giving information that isn't related to the job, and you may be giving the "wrong" answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
- Refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational, hardly words an employer would use to describe the "ideal" candidate.
- Examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job.

**Examples are below:**

#### National Origin/Citizenship

##### **Illegal:**

Are you a U.S. citizen? Where were you/your parents born? What is your "native tongue"?

##### **Legal:**

Are you authorized to work in the United States? What languages do you read/speak/write fluently? (This is okay only if this ability is relevant to the performance of the job.)

#### Age

##### **Illegal:**

How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?

##### **Legal:**

Are you over the age of 18?



## Interview Tips

### Arrest Record

**Illegal:**

Have you ever been arrested?

**Legal:**

Have you ever been convicted of \_\_\_\_\_? (The crime named should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)

### Marital/Family Status

**Illegal:**

What's your marital status? With whom do you live? Do you plan to have a family? When? How many kids do you have? What are your childcare arrangements?

**Legal:**

Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (These are okay if asked of all applicants.)

### Affiliations

**Illegal:**

What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?

**Legal:**

List any professional, trade groups or organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.

### Military

**Illegal:**

If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?

**Legal:**

In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

### Personal

**Illegal:**

How tall are you? How much do you weigh? (These are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential for the safe performance of the job.)

**Legal:**

Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?

### Disabilities

**Illegal:**

Do you have any disabilities? Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list them and give dates when these occurred. What was the date of your last physical exam? How's your family's health? When did you lose your eyesight? How? Do you need an accommodation to perform the job? (This question can be asked only after a job offer has been made.)

**Legal:**

Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? (This is okay if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.) Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions? As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on exam results.)

Resource Credit: <http://www.auburn.edu/career/>

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