

Interviewing 101



NEED A LITTLE HELP?

Call 315-228-7380 to schedule an appointment with an advisor.



PURPOSE

Interviewing can be intimidating if you don't know what to expect. From phone screenings to final rounds, it's common to feel overwhelmed and nervous. But remember, the purpose of an interview is two-fold. The employer needs to find out if you are the best candidate for the position, and you need to determine if this is the right opportunity for you.

Essentially, the employer needs to answer three questions:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you do the job?
3. Will you fit in?

Three important factors you should consider when interviewing:

1. Is the work going to be interesting? Will it challenge me? What opportunities will I have to contribute?
2. Are the work environment and people a fit for me?
3. What are my career goals for the next five years, and will this position help me reach them?

Even though interviews can range from 15 minutes to several hours, and consist of different questions, all interviews will share three stages: *pre-*, *during*, and *post-interview*. This guide will prepare you for each stage and help you ace your next interview!

STAGE 1: PRE-INTERVIEW

PREPARATION REALLY MATTERS

If you don't prepare for an exam, it's likely that you will not earn a strong grade. The same applies to interviews. Colgate recruiters report that students' level of preparedness is the distinguishing factor in whether a candidate is chosen for a second round interview.

THE BASICS

Know Yourself

The employer has screened your résumé and invited you to interview based on your potential to do the job. Now, you must explain how you are a strong candidate. Take time to think about the actual examples you will highlight during the interview.

- What are the specific skills, experiences, and personal attributes you want to convey to the employer?
- Review the job description and come up with real examples of how you meet the qualifications.
- Be aware of your weaknesses and create responses that show the strategies you used to overcome them.
- Consider why you have applied for this position and be ready to discuss your motivations.
- Your major, liberal arts education, or experience may not directly correlate to the job description. You may need to articulate why you are a great candidate.

Research

Interviewers expect you to do your research. An interview is not the time to ask, "What does this employer do?" or "What does this job actually entail?"

- Familiarize yourself with the content highlighted on the employer's website.
- Know the employer's mission, community impact (non-profit/government), or scope of business (for-profit).
- Read press releases and annual reports for current news and information.
- Know the employer's online brand and how it positions itself on social media.
- Be aware if there is a Colgate connection at this company/organization. Do a quick LinkedIn™ search and stay updated with Career Services' Recruiting Roundup e-mails.
- Speak with individuals in the field to understand the industry and this particular employer and position.
- Utilize Career Services' online resources for industry research, including CareerBeam™ (industry reports) and Vault's Career Insider™.

Practice

Interviews can be stressful. For most people, it's not natural to speak persuasively about your strengths. Before interviewing, practice aloud, and be sure to get feedback.

PRACTICE TIPS

1. Practice speaking confidently about your strengths and supporting examples, as if you would in an interview setting.
2. Remember to include important details of your experience to an interviewer who is unfamiliar with the content and context of your experience.
3. Have a friend or former colleague ask you sample questions and provide honest feedback.
4. Do a mock or practice interview with a career advisor or networking contact. Schedule well in advance so that you have time to apply the feedback.
5. Recognize your deficiencies, and correct them with practice. For example, if you tend to speak very quickly when nervous, work on slowing down and breathing.

What to Wear

Your appearance plays a significant role in making a first impression. Dress code can vary by industry, but for most, interviewing attire is business formal. A good rule of thumb is to dress one step up from daily attire for the position. Please refer to Career Services' "Dress for Success" handout for details.

- Invest in a suit. For student budgets, check out online sales and stores like TJ Maxx, Marshall's, or local department stores.
- Plan your outfit, and try it on well before your interview to give you time for alterations. It should fit well and comfortably.
- Break in your dress shoes prior to your interview day to ensure that they will not hurt your feet.
- Wrinkles can kill even the best looking ensemble. Invest some extra minutes in ironing your shirt, suit, and/or dress.
- You don't want to draw any negative attention, so use common sense. Be well groomed, remove visible piercings (if they don't fit in with office culture) and, ladies, be mindful of skirt length, heel height, and revealing blouses!
- When in doubt about what to wear, ask a career advisor or networking contact.

DAY-BEFORE TIPS

1. Assemble your interview outfit the night before. Prepare other items, including a padfolio with printed copies of your résumé, and supporting materials (i.e.: reference sheet, portfolio, or work samples) if needed. All materials should be printed on résumé paper, which is a higher weight than copy paper.
2. Be sure to have the address, name, and phone number of your interview contact, just in case.
3. Map out and time your travel route. Be sure to add extra time to account for unexpected delays or traffic. Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes prior to your scheduled time – not too early, but never late!
4. Bring some cash with you for parking costs or in case of emergency.
5. Pack a quick snack, such as a granola bar, and a bottle of water. You may also want to bring band-aids (for shoes), and aspirin.
6. Bring your cell phone, but turn it off – not to vibrate – once you are at the interview.

STAGE 2: DURING THE INTERVIEW

You may encounter different kinds of interviews, even within one hiring process. Here are common formats and questions:

FORMATS

Phone Interview

Usually used as a screening process and can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. Have notes in front of you for key talking points and the employer's website open. Smile and sound pleasant; first impressions (even over the phone) are very important.

Skype Interview

Conduct the video interview in a clean, well-lit, uninterrupted space with a strong internet connection. Be aware of your backdrop. Also, coordinate with the employer beforehand to confirm who will be calling whom and to give the employer your username.

Lunch or Dinner Interview

Although this interview can appear more relaxed than the others, remember that you are always "on" and being evaluated. Be sure to brush up on your dining etiquette and your interview responses.

Case Interview

Typically found in analytical fields such as consulting or finance and is a test of your problem solving and creative thinking. You are not expected to provide the "right" answer but rather clearly convey your logic and thought process. Be sure to verbalize the specific steps you are using to solve the question asked. You may also receive singular case questions within other interview formats.

One-on-One Interview

You may have a single meeting or a string of 1:1 evaluative conversations. These usually include the key contacts for an employer – your supervisor, human resources contact, peer, department head, etc. Your goal is to make a personal connection and frame your answers to the content most relevant to that particular interviewer.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

General

The interviewer wants to get a general sense of who you are as an employee and as a person. You will be asked about your past experiences, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses, and personality traits.

Examples:

- What's your greatest strength?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Situational

The interviewer will ask you about a hypothetical scenario, and ask you to explain how you would react. If possible, try to answer the question while referencing a similar situation you have been through **and** what you learned.

Examples:

- What would you do if a client started to disagree with your recommendations and was getting irate?
- You witness a colleague stealing from the company. What do you do and why?

Behavioral

The interviewer will ask you about a specific instance in the past to gauge how you may act in the future. These questions may begin with, "Tell me about a time when..." or may embed a skill they are evaluating with the question. It is important that you answer these questions with examples from your experience, but then tie your response back to the employer's needs. See the STARR tactic below.

Examples:

- Tell me about a time when you solved a problem while thinking outside of the box.
- Have you ever had to work within teams to achieve a goal? (looking for collaboration, leadership, followership)

Stress

Although rare, some interviewers will put you through a stress interview to ensure you can perform under pressure, a requirement within these jobs. Tactics such as weird silences, constant interruptions, and challenging lines of questions are designed to push your boundaries and test your poise.

Examples:

- Why is there such a difference between your GPA and SAT score?
- How would you evaluate me as an interviewer?
- What is the worst thing you've heard about our company?

STARR Technique

We recommend using the STARR technique to answer behavioral questions.



Sample Questions Employers May Ask You

Tell me about yourself.

What are your short-term/long-term goals?

What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Why do you want to work for (insert name of employer)?

Tell me why you think you will excel in this position.

Why should we hire you?

How do you see yourself contributing to our organization?

Tell me about your biggest failure.

How do you work with others from backgrounds different than yours?

Tell me about a time when you balanced competing priorities.

How would a former boss/supervisor describe you?

What do you like to do outside of work?

Why did you choose Colgate?

Sample Questions To Ask An Employer

What opportunities exist for continued training?

Do your entry-level employees participate in any professional associations or conferences?

What career paths do people typically follow after this position?

What are the biggest challenges that someone in this position would face?

What are the most important things you'd like to see someone accomplish in the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job?

To whom will I report?

What's different about working here than anywhere else you've worked?

Why is this position available?

What is the typical work day like?

Can you please tell me the time-frame in which you are hoping to make hiring decisions? What are the next steps in this process?

MANAGING ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throughout the hiring process, all questions asked of you must relate to measuring your ability to perform the position's job responsibilities. Various federal, state, and local laws, as well as an individual employer's internal policies, regulate what criteria a potential employer can utilize to evaluate your candidacy, and what areas of your identity are protected from illegal discrimination. For example:

ILLEGAL

Are you a U.S. citizen?

Do you have a disability that will limit your performance in this job?

Are you a Republican?

Do you have kids?

LEGAL

Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?

Can you help me understand how you would perform the responsibilities of this position, as outlined in the job description?

Please list any professional trade groups, affiliations, or organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to this position.

Are you willing and able to travel as needed for the job?

If an interviewer poses a question directly inquiring about a protected area, write it down verbatim and consult with a career advisor and/or your potential employer's HR contact before moving forward in that process. In the moment, however, here are some tips to answer such questions:

TIPS

1. **Reframe it:** examine the question for its intent and frame your answer to not jeopardize your lawful protection. If asked, "Are you a U.S. citizen", respond by asking, "Are you asking if I am authorized to work in the U.S.?" If so, "Yes, I am."
2. **Seek clarification from the employer about their question's intent before you answer.** "I want to make sure I am answering your question in relation to the position. Can you please help me understand how your question relates to the job responsibilities?"
3. **You can choose to answer an illegal question as it was asked, knowing that information that you provide may be used to evaluate your candidacy.**

TOP INTERVIEWING MISTAKES

1. Wearing Inappropriate Clothing to the Interview

2. Not Adequately Researching the Employer Beforehand

An interview is a test. You have to prepare, practice, and do your research. Conducting research on the position and employer shows the interviewer how serious you are about this opportunity, and allows you to have talking points throughout the interview process.

3. Not Asking Questions During the Interview

Don't forget that this is a two-way conversation. You should always come prepared to ask questions *that cannot be uncovered in your research*. This is your opportunity to gain information to determine whether this opportunity is a fit for you. Your inquisitiveness also demonstrates your level of interest in the position. So, next time the interviewer says, "Do you have any questions for me?" smile and say, "As a matter of fact, I do!"

4. Being Overly Confident During the Interview

While it is important to highlight your accomplishments and strengths throughout the interview process, don't come on too strong. Focus on your qualifications and explain how well they will fit with this new position.

5. Posting Questionable Content on Social Media Sites

70% of hiring managers said that Millennials make the mistake of posting potentially compromising content on social media channels (ie.: blogs, Facebook, and Twitter). Be aware that employers will research you.

6. Using Bad Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues

Yawning, poor posture, a weak handshake, nervous behavior, and saying "um" or "like" frequently are examples of poor verbal/non-verbal cues. Think about behaving in the interview as if you were representing your new employer in front of a top client...because that is what your interviewer is thinking. Bring your 'A' game.

7. Making Negative References to Past People/Exaggerating/Lying or Inflating Abilities

Speaking negatively about past employers, colleagues, or situations is a bad reflection of you. Likewise, exaggerating your abilities, or flat-out lying about what you have accomplished will never serve you well.

8. Not Bringing Copies of Your Résumé

Always bring extra copies of your résumé for interviewers who might have misplaced it or never received it. Instead of missing your content, they will leave with a positive impression of your forethought.



STAGE 3: POST-INTERVIEW

Make Yourself Memorable (for the right reasons)

Before you leave the employer's office:

1. Restate your interest in the position and summarize how you will be a good match
2. Ask what the next steps are in the interview process
3. Use a firm handshake, smile, and maintain eye contact as you thank the employer for the opportunity to interview
4. Collect business cards so that you can send a follow-up thank you e-mail or letter to each individual. This helps you ensure titles and the spelling of names are correct

Thank You Letters

It's important to send a thank you note within 48 hours of your interview. Your message should be appropriately formal (including salutation and closing), and error-free. Both e-mail and handwritten notes are acceptable formats. It may be tempting to send a single e-mail to everyone that you met, but it is preferable to write individualized messages to each. If the hiring decision is less pressing and the interviewer seems more traditional, you might distinguish yourself from other candidates with a hand-written note.

What Do I Include?

- Reiterate your interest in the position and employer clearly and concisely
- Review your qualifications for the position. If there is something you forgot to mention in the interview, mention it in your thank you letter
- Highlight something about the interview that you particularly enjoyed or found interesting
- Offer to provide any additional materials or information to aid the search committee in their decision-making

Additional Materials

Following an interview, an employer may request: transcript(s), writing samples, references, or an updated résumé

Self-Reflection

After the interview, evaluate your overall experience. This will help you to assess your fit for the position and employer, and highlight any adjustments or corrections that you should make for future interviews

Ask yourself:

- What went well and what could have gone better?
- What red flags (if any) do you have about the position or employer?
- What do I like and/or dislike about the position or company?

TIP

A reference list should be sent as a separate document complete with three to four contacts. Include your contact's title, relationship to you, contact information (phone/e-mail), and current employer. You can use your header from your résumé to create a letterhead for your materials.