

The Career Centre

How to Prepare for an Interview

RESEARCH

YOURSELF AND COMPANY

KNOW YOURSELF

You will need to know and communicate to an employer your skills and the reason you are interested in a job or career field. Ask Yourself:

- What are my personal work-related values and priorities?
- What type of challenges do I like?
- What level of responsibility do I want to have or am I ready to manage?
- For what type of supervisor do I work best and why?
- What role in a team or with my co-workers do I like best and least?
- What have I gained from past work experience, volunteer positions, academic programs and other activities?
- What are my most relevant skills?

KNOW YOUR OCCUPATION

Be informed about your chosen occupation. This information will help you present your **relevant** skills and information to a potential employer. The following suggestions will help you develop a well rounded understanding of an occupation.

- Understand the general tasks and responsibilities of the job.
- Be aware of other aspects of the job which may affect your decision (travel, overtime, evening work, shift work).
- Be aware of future job trends in the field.
- Determine salary range and non-monetary benefits (e.g. flextime) which are generally related to your chosen field.

KNOW THE COMPANY

- Know the company's products and/or services.
- Look through their entire website (and those of their parent organizations).
- Look into what associations they belong to or if they have been in the news.
- Learn about the person (people) interviewing you, including their title(s) and how to pronounce their name(s).
- Read everything you can find about the position and the field. Talk to people who do similar jobs at other companies.
- Understand the general tasks and responsibilities associated with the job.
- Be aware of future trends in the field.

Adapted From Wilfrid Laurier University-Interview Guide

DRESS THE PART

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

- The standard approach is to dress one level more formal than you will when you get the job (for example, if a company is business casual, you should dress business formal).
- When applying for a corporate job, think conservative and dress in traditional colours.
- If applying for a non-corporate position, you may express your personality more through your clothing. Check out what the employees wear, and base your decisions on your observations. For example, an interview at a TV station that gears itself to young people will want to see more forward thinking style on its employees.
- Ensure your clothes are neat, clean and pressed. Polish your shoes. (First impressions from your appearance are important.)
- Do not overuse make-up, perfume or jewelry, as they can be distracting.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.

WHAT TO TAKE TO AN INTERVIEW

Carry a nice portfolio or brief case to keep items in. Bring:

- A pad of paper and pen
- A piece of paper with your key points/skills (memory jogger)
- A list of questions you have for the interviewer
- A list of three professional references (unless otherwise indicated)
- Copies of reference letters
- A portfolio (examples of your work, i.e., writing samples, a relevant paper, outline of course or projects you have completed/organized)
- Extra copies of your résumé

Give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview. Know the route and where you will park, so there are no last minute panics. You should always be at least 15 minutes early.



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THE STAR APPROACH

“SHOW” DON’T TELL!

The STAR approach helps you:

- A. Prove you can do what you claim you have done**
- B. Support with evidence the training, skills, and work experiences you have listed on your résumé**

For each of the key qualifications outlined in the job posting and on your résumé, you should be able to provide an example of a time you demonstrated the key skill. You may not need to use STAR examples for every question asked, but, by having identified and practiced STAR examples, you will be more comfortable talking about your skills and qualifications.

SITUATION

Describe the **situation** in a concise and informative manner. The problem or situation could be from an education, employment, sport or volunteer situation.

***Example:** “ I have very-well developed customer service skills. One time, while working as an assistant manager at a donut shop, a customer was unhappy and complaining loudly that he had received an incorrect order at the drive through. He had already eaten over half of the food and wanted a full refund.”*

TASK

Explain your **role/ task** being completed. Were you working on your own? Were you a supervisor? Working as a member of a team? What did you need to do in order to resolve the problem?

***Example:** “ As assistant manager, I was responsible for ensuring customer satisfaction, dealing with customer complaints, but also following store policy. In this type of situation, store policy was to exchange incorrect items that had not been consumed. In this specific situation, I knew it was important to learn the facts to make a decision about what steps were necessary to resolve the issue.”*

STAR APPROACH CONTINUED

ACTION

What was the **action** you undertook? What **skills** did you use to resolve the situation? Did you use any skills you had learned during your training? Things you learned from school?

***Example:** I noticed the customer was very upset and causing a disturbance. I knew that I needed to calm him down to resolve the situation quickly. I asked him to explain what happened and listened to what he was saying. I felt that by asking to hear his side he might calm down. After listening to him, I explained our policy but indicated to the customer that I had decided to provide him with the item he originally ordered. Although I was not convinced that we had made a mistake, I felt that in this instance, this was the best solution.”*

RESULT

What was the **result**? Was everyone happy? Did it result in any changes? Were there any further conflicts? What was the feedback from supervisors and colleagues on how you handled the situation? What did you learn from the situation? Would you do anything differently if faced with a similar situation again? How is it relevant to what you would do in the position you are interviewing for?

***Example:** “The customer agreed to my offer and I was able to resolve the situation quickly. In this position, I know it will be important to find a way to make the customer feel valued and listened to in order to build a long-term customer base. With my ability to listen and reason with customers I know I can do this.”*

Simply telling a story about a situation is only a small part of presenting a STAR answer. Think about examples and be certain that you understood what happened and why you made the specific decisions, took certain actions and how these were related to the final results. The point of a STAR example is not the details of the past situation, but how well you describe your actions and the skills you used and how successful you are at demonstrating how you will use your skills and experience on the new job.

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HOW TO ANSWER “TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”

- Give a brief synopsis of your education, work, volunteer activities and interests
- Your answer should take 45 seconds to one minute, maximum
- Tell a story, in reverse chronological order highlighting relevant skills/experiences
- End by indicating why you are interested in the position

Example:

“Prior to beginning the Social Service Worker program at Loyalist College, I lived in Peterborough Ontario where I worked summers as a student employment advisor for Service Canada. I decided to study social services because I enjoy helping people succeed. My position at Service Canada enhanced my customer service, and research skills. In addition, I gained a lot of knowledge about the numerous community resources available in the City of Peterborough. I am very interested in this position with Career Edge as I love assisting people to meet their career goals and am confident my prior experience and education has prepared me with the skills required for the job. “

HOW TO ANSWER “WHAT ARE YOUR KEY STRENGTHS”

When discussing a key skill or strength, you do not want to focus on generic skills. The key to providing a good answer is your ability to divide the skill into its essential components. By doing this you demonstrate to the interviewer you can identify the key components of a skill and that you understand what is involved in using these skills.

Example:

“ As a result of working extensively with customers I have developed very strong customer service skills. In particular, I have demonstrated an excellent ability to build rapport with customers in a short period of time. As a result of my ability to communicate technical information effectively, I have found that I can put customers at ease and establish long-term customer relationships”

As part of your preparation you should have identified the key skills for the position and taken time to identify what it is you do which specifically demonstrates that you have this skill. Always select components that are most relevant to the position you are applying to.

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SKILLS EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING IN NEW GRADUATES

- Effectively communicates (clearly explains skills both orally and in writing)
- Demonstrates an ability to think critically (points out potential problems, expands issues by asking questions)
- Demonstrates problem solving skills (realizes consequences, finds alternative solutions and makes decisions)
- Demonstrates an ability to make decisions or take initiative (does things without constantly being told)
- Demonstrates leadership skills (can influence others, develops ideas, and delegate responsibilities)
- Takes advantage of opportunities to contribute ideas and information (offers ideas, opinions, solutions when asked)
- Gets along well with others (demonstrates a positive working relationship with fellow workers)
- Shows an ability to gain the confidence of others (others seek opinion from individual)
- Knowledge of procedures, legislation, guidelines, regulations
- The ability to use industry related equipment
- Cultural Awareness and knowledge of second language

When preparing for an interview, you should think of examples of past activities and accomplishments that illustrate each of these skills. Be prepared to demonstrate both **what** you have done and **how** you have done it.

FOLLOW UP

- Immediately following the interview, you should contact your references. Inform them of the points that seemed to be of particular interest to the interview and the details of the positions. This allows your references to provide potential employers with the most relevant information.
- Send a thank you letter that day (to everyone on the interview panel).
- Make a follow up phone call approximately one week after your interview, or around the time they said they would be making their decision. Do not be pushy, but remind them of your genuine interest in the position.
- If you do not get the position, ask for feedback as to why and how you could improve for next time.

*On a separate sheet of paper, write down details about the interview itself.
This information can be used to help you write your follow up letter.*

TOP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. How has your college experience prepared you for a career in _____?
3. What will it take to attain your goals, and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?
4. How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?
5. Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or instructor? How did you resolve the conflict?
6. Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?
7. Would you say that you can easily deal with high-pressure situations?
8. What personal weakness has caused you the greatest difficulty in school or on the job?
9. Tell me what you know about our company. Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
10. Tell me about the salary range you are seeking.
11. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way?
12. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
13. By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
14. Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
15. Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree.
16. Give an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
17. Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
18. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
19. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
20. Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help on a project.
21. Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague?
22. Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?
23. Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? Were you happy with the outcome? What would you do differently?
24. Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

1. Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
2. What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
3. What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
4. In your opinion, what is the best part of working at this company?
5. How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
6. Can you describe the company's management style?
7. What are the company's values?
8. What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
9. What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
10. Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
11. Are there opportunities to take seminars, classes, etc to learn more and grow within the role and the company?