

# Interviewing



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Congratulations! If you have been offered an **interview** for a job or internship, it means an employer is already interested in what you have to offer. Now your challenge is to prove that you are the best person for the position. People rarely get jobs on the strength of their resume alone. An employer wants to know that you are capable of doing an exemplary job, that you are trustworthy, and that you will be a good fit for their organization. Successful interviewing is a combination of content and presentation.

Each interview will be different, but they often have a lot in common. Preparing for the interview by anticipating the questions will allow you to give thoughtful and intelligent responses. Please use this guide to get started with your preparations, and do consider making an appointment with a SPARC Career Counselor to practice your skills!

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## ORGANIZATION PREP

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Know the organization:

- Research the organization online and through any brochures you might have.
- Know and understand the job description. If it's very brief, check online at the employer's website or with their Human Resources Office for a more detailed description.
- Talk to people who have worked at the organization, or anyone who might have experience with/information about the organization. Remember to keep an open mind when listening to other people's opinions.
- Be prepared to answer the question, "What do you know about our organization?" Or, "What inspired you to apply for this position?"

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## APPEARANCE

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- No strong perfume, cologne, etc.
- Clean and respectable shoes. Polished, if applicable. Avoid jeans, shorts, and sneakers. Keep your jewelry and other accessories simple.
- Some common advice: Ask about dress norms!
- Corporate or Bank Jobs: Business suit, tie, dress shirt, dress shoes.
- Non-profit or teaching jobs: 'Business casual'—tailored or ironed pants/skirt, dress shirt, jacket, dress shoes.
- Landscaping, Summer Camp, Athletic Jobs: Dress casual and clean. Make sure you still are put-together and have no holes, etc., in your clothing.

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## MATERIALS TO BRING TO THE INTERVIEW

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- Two copies of your resume and cover letter
- Two copies of your reference list (or written reference letters, if requested by the employer)
- Samples of your work or a portfolio (if requested/applicable)

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## MENTAL PREP

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- Think ahead about how you might answer common interview questions (see page 4). Sometimes it helps to practice saying your answers out loud to yourself or rehearse with a friend or career counselor.
- Identify 3-4 of your main strengths related to the job, as well as 1-2 of your weaknesses.
- Think of times in which you used your strengths which resulted in a positive outcome. Practice telling those **short** stories and exemplify your ability to problem solve.
- Make an appointment with a SPARC Career Counselor to do a practice interview and receive feedback.

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## ARRIVE ON TIME (OR EARLY)

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- Get clear GPS directions and allow yourself time for traffic delays and other common life inconveniences. If the site is close enough, you may want to visit ahead of time to assess the location and parking situation.
- Have funds ready for the bus/subway fare, and any parking costs, etc.

- Charge your phone and have the company's phone number so that you can contact them if anything goes astray.
- Get a good night's sleep and set your alarm clock with plenty of extra time.
- Eat a good meal before your interview; being hungry may result in nausea or anxiety.

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## THE INTERVIEW

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### APPROPRIATE INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

- Arrive at least five minutes early. Turn off your cell phone.
- Follow the interviewer's lead about when the interview begins and ends and who sits where. If the interview starts late, take it in stride and try to avoid commenting on it.
- Be kind and polite to everyone you meet, even if they are not the people interviewing you for the position.

### MAKE A STRONG IMPRESSION – NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Begin with a handshake or elbow bump. Keep your handshake firm: not limp, but also not bone-crushing.
- Maintain consistent eye contact throughout. In a group, try to make eye contact with everyone. Of course, it is okay to look away; don't stare at them, but also don't keep your eyes on the desk during the entire interview.
- Have good posture, nod in agreement, listen carefully, face each interviewer when answering a question.
- Avoid nervous movements such as bouncing your legs, flipping your hair, playing with your pen, etc.
- Notice cues in your interviewers' body language. For example, are they leaning forward and seeming interested? Are they fidgeting, checking their watch? Do they seem distracted? Are they nodding in agreement?
- Bring a mask, especially if people are masking (especially true of some populations).

### MAKE A STRONG IMPRESSION – VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Modulate your voice—try not to speak too soft or too loud. Use your inflection to show your interest and enthusiasm.
- Be concise. Your responses should be long enough to adequately answer the question, but not unnecessarily lengthy.
- If you are unsure of whether you understand the question, it is fine to restate the question or to ask for clarification.
- Take a moment to collect your thoughts and think about your answer—you don't have to answer immediately.
- Stay positive! Avoid speaking negatively about past positions, supervisors, or co-workers.
- While answering interview questions, incorporate anecdotes for specific examples.

- **If you don't have the experience that they are looking for, but feel as though you could learn it, say so!** Give them an example of another time when you learned something similar, or were able to quickly learn something challenging.

### **ASK APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS:**

#### **Questions about the job**

- Can you describe a typical work day for this position?
- Do you have an estimated start-date?
- What is the most challenging aspect of this position?
- What opportunities are there for training?
- What qualities or qualifications are you looking for in an employee and potential team-member?
- What is the supervisory style like for this workplace?

#### **Questions about the interview process**

- When will the interviewing team be contacting applicants for this position?
- Would you like to see any samples of my past work?

#### **Inappropriate questions**

- For this first stage of an interview, it is often recommended to avoid questions about salary, benefits, or vacation time.

#### **If you want the job, say so!**

- At the end of the interview, if you feel good about the position and employer, **TELL THEM.** Employers like to hire people who want to work with them.
- Before you leave, shake everyone's hand and thank them for the interview.

### **Interview possibilities and situations to be aware of:**

- **Prerecorded Interview - AI**
- **Phone/Video Interview** – During your phone or video interview, you will have to rely on the interviewer's voice tones rather than their body language. Don't be daunted by silence, it does not necessarily indicate disapproval, often they may be taking notes. Speak in a way that conveys energy and confidence, and especially, enthusiasm for the job.

- **Behavioral Interview** – They may ask questions about past experiences and how you have handled them. The premise of this is that past behavior indicates future behavior. Make sure to include in your anecdotes how you have problem-solved and overcome challenges.
- **Peer interview** – This interview might be conducted by the people you will directly work with. This can include students, clients, or other employees, etc.
- **Panel Interview** – This interview may include supervisors, peers, and/or people from other departments, etc.
- **Group Interview** – This type of interview may involve activities that ask you to interact with other interviewees.
- **Case Interview** – You will be told about a problem related to the field and asked how you might solve it.
- **Stress Interview** – Interviewer will ask irritating questions to see how you perform under pressure. An example may be that they say, “We have tried to hire people from your school before, but they never work out. What makes you different?”
- **Second Interview** – You may be called back after the initial interview, which is usually a good sign and means you are one of the few people being considered. Second interviews tend to be more in-depth than the first one. Be sure to fully research the organization and speak with someone in the field/company if you can.

## FOLLOW UP

### Write a thank-you email within 1-3 days.

- Make sure that you get the names and correct spelling of your interviewers. Ask for their business cards at the beginning or the end of the interview.
- In the thank-you note, state your appreciation for the interviewer’s time, voice your enthusiasm for the position, and invite them to contact you if they need any additional information.
- This is also an opportunity to clarify any issues from the interview. Example: “Earlier, you asked about my computer skills. I want to assure you that I have experience with Excel, Microsoft Word, Adobe Photoshop, and Publisher—I am a quick learner if there are other programs you would need me to use.”

**Keep a Record**

If you are interviewing at multiple places, keep a record of when you interviewed, who interviewed you, when you sent the thank-you note, and when you are expecting to hear from them. Staying organized will help your confidence!

**Follow-Up Call**

Follow-up calls are appropriate unless you have been specifically asked not to call. Explain that you are inquiring about the decision-making process and wanted to ask when you might expect to hear from them. Restate your strong interest in the job.

**CLOSURE****If you are offered the position:**

- Thank them for the offer. You can accept the position immediately; however, it is also OK to ask for time to think about it. Usually, within 24–72 hours is an appropriate amount of time to give an answer.
- You may want to ask questions that will help you make an informed decision about whether or not to accept. Ask about salary, benefits, hours, etc.
- If you are not interested in the position anymore, decline graciously. Do NOT fail to respond to the offer.

**If you are not offered the position:**

- Sometimes, it is appropriate to call or email and ask politely for any insight as to why you did not get the position. It is possible that they will not give you any information, but sometimes you may get valuable information that will help you for your next interview.
- Thank them and move on.

**SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

You won't be asked all of these, but it helps to be prepared for any possibility or situation in an interview. Being prepared will help you feel more confident and informed.

**Personal Qualities**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want this job?
- What makes you want to be a \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are your goals for the next 4-5 years?
- What is your greatest accomplishment to date?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

- What is your customer service philosophy?
- Describe a situation in which someone was unhappy with your performance and how you responded.
- What languages can you read, speak, or write in?
- How do you like to spend your free time?
- How do you work under pressure? Are you good with deadlines?
- Describe an experience from when you worked with a team, and what your role was.
- What assets do you bring in comparison to other possible candidates applying for this position?
- Why should we hire *you*?

**Interpersonal Skills**

- Describe a time when you had to effectively communicate with a coworker about an issue.
- Tell me about a time where you needed to defend your ideas or projects in the face of opposition.
- How would you describe your style of work?
- How well do you work independently? How well do you work with others?

**Drive, Ambition, Motivation**

- Give an example of a time when you were exceptionally motivated. Describe the experience.
- Talk about a time when you were told that a goal you set was unattainable. What was your reaction?
- We often work very long hours and we expect a great deal from our employees. Describe a time when you went above and beyond the 'call of duty.'

**Independence, Maturity, Stress**

- Describe a time when others looked to you for leadership and guidance. What was this situation like and how did you conduct yourself?
- Tell me about a situation in which you needed to juggle several high-priority tasks. How did you manage it and what was the outcome?

**Educational Background**

- Why did you choose Hampshire College?
- What were some of your favorite undergraduate classes? Why?
- What did you study and why did you decide to study the subject you did?
- What elements of your program appealed to you the most? Least?
- Tell me about your senior thesis project.
- How effectively do you balance course load with jobs or extracurricular activities?
- How has your field of study prepared you for this position?
- Do you have plans for additional schooling or furthering your education?

- Describe a time when you were faced with a challenge and you developed an innovative way to meet or exceed despite the challenge.
- How do you analyze information and arrive at a decision? Tell me about your process.