

The Interview

Before Your Interview

- **Research the organization** so you can demonstrate knowledge about their work and about the specific position you are applying for.
- Contact individuals from your personal network in the organization to speak to them about the agency. **Don't forget about Maxwell alumni!**
- Understand what makes you a good candidate. **Prepare specific examples** that demonstrate how your skill set is right for the position.
- **Anticipate questions** you might be asked based on the job description and what you know about the organization.
- Develop a set of examples that you can use to describe your **skills and experiences**, such as examples of teamwork, professional difficulties you have overcome, and successful accomplishments.
- **Create a list of questions** to ask the employer at the end of your interview. More is better in case they answer some throughout the interview.
- Double-check the details before you go, including the **time and place** of your interview.
- **Bring a pen and professional notebook** or portfolio, and copies of your resume with you to the interview.
- **Dress to impress.** Wear a suit or similarly professional business outfit. Simple and conservative is better; for example, a suit jacket with pants or a skirt. Avoid flashy accessories.

During Your Interview

- **Arrive 15 minutes early** to make sure you are on time and have enough time to prepare yourself before the interview.
- Be friendly and open. Do not forget that you are making a first impression. **Smile**—even laugh— when appropriate.
- Provide **concrete examples** about past experiences whenever possible and relate examples back to the position you are applying for.
- When the interviewer has finished asking you all their questions, **ask the questions you brought with you.**
- At the end of the interview, shake the interviewer's hand and **thank them** for providing you with the opportunity.

After Your Interview

A **thank-you** is essential after interviewing or speaking with an employer. Send a thank-you immediately after meeting with a person. In the message, be sure to:

- Thank the employer for their time.
- Mention the position you interviewed for and reference what you discussed during the interview.
- Briefly reiterate your qualifications and any of your specific traits or experiences that apply to the position.
- Reaffirm your interest and enthusiasm to be part of the organization.
- Express your willingness to provide additional information.
- Conclude by mentioning your interest in hearing from the employer soon.

Sample Interview Questions

Commonly Asked Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- What previous experience prepared you for this position?
- What is your experience with _____? *(Fill in the blank with relevant tasks described in the job description. Ex: supervision, research, policy analysis).*
- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated _____. *(Fill in the blank with relevant skills described in job description. Ex: problem-solving, leadership, resilience).*
- What is a challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?
- Tell me about a project you saw through from start to finish and what you learned.
- Tell me about your greatest success at work.
- What role do you typically play on a team?
- What are your greatest strengths?
- What are your greatest areas of improvement?
- What are your long- and short-term career goals?
- Why should we hire you?
- Are there any last things I should know about you?

Questions to Ask Employers

- What qualities are you looking for in the successful candidate?
- Who would I be reporting to and working with most frequently?
- What current challenges are facing the department/organization?
- What new projects or goals does the department/organization currently have?
- What professional development opportunities are available within the organization?
- How would you describe the most successful employees in this organization?
- What is the selection timeline for this position?

Questions Not to Ask Employers

While it is generally good practice to show interest during an interview by asking the employer a few questions, there are some questions you should avoid. For example, do not ask what the position's pay or benefits are; whether you can change any of the position responsibilities, schedule, or salary; how quickly you can be promoted or change positions within the organization; or whether the employer requires background checks. Finally, do not ask about any gossip you may have heard about the organization. Some of these questions are appropriate for the negotiation stage but can be seen as presumptuous early on.

Illegal Interview Questions

Certain federal, state, and local laws are in place to protect you from employers asking discriminatory interview questions. The questions asked of you in an interview must be related to the job you are applying for. Examples of illegal interview topics include nationality, age, marital status, and disabilities, among others. If faced with an illegal interview question, you may choose to 1) answer the question, despite its illegal nature; 2) refuse to answer the question; 3) provide a related response, that avoids the illegal aspect of the question. For example, if asked about childcare, respond with your ability to adapt to work hours and travel requirements. If you wish to report your experience, you may contact the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.