

# *Interview Packet*



CAS Career  
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## Introduction

This packet is designed to help you stay organized and to give you some direction in your interview preparation. It includes recommendations for before, during, and after the interview. It is recommended that you visit with a Career Consultant in order to practice your interview skills and boost your confidence. We can provide feedback on the content of your answers and non-verbal communication, what to expect, and some do's and don'ts. If you'd like to make an appointment with us, visit [HireOSUgrads.com](http://HireOSUgrads.com) and click "Make an Appointment." We look forward to helping you!

## Before the Interview

- Researching the company/position
- Researching yourself
- Preparing questions to ask the interviewers
- Practice & last minute tips
- Appropriate dress

## During the Interview

- First impressions
- Answering questions
- Example interview questions & responses

## After the Interview

- Closing statement
- Follow-up
- Thank you cards

## Resources

Practice, practice, practice! *Also, take advantage of up to 10 free pages of resume per day, 3 free thank you cards per day, and a \$5 professional portfolio at 360 Student Union.*

- **HireOSUgrads.com:** This site includes a Resource Library where you can read through many helpful handouts before an interview. You can also watch videos offering tips for dress and other preparation videos through Candid Career.
- **Glassdoor.com:** This site has information about company salaries, reviews from employees and offers common interview questions for which you can become prepared.
- **Interview Stream:** Here, you can practice interviews from home by recording your answers via webcam or mobile device and then critiquing yourself or showing the video to a friend or career consultant so that you can see how you might appear to an employer. It also has a bank of industry specific interview questions. You can book a room to record your practice interview on Interview Stream at [HireOSUgrads.com](http://HireOSUgrads.com).

## Researching the Company

Be familiar with the company and position before you get to the interview. This should include the company's structure, products/services, job requirements, current events or things like the company's mission statement. See below for some specific tips and tricks.

- *Visit their website.* Most companies will have a website that contains a “careers” or “employment” section of some sort. Become familiar with it! Look for information about the company's philosophy, tag line, goals, mission statement, philanthropic activities, etc. Be prepared to incorporate some of this information with your answers to the below questions that may arise during an interview.
  - Why do you want to work for \_\_\_\_\_ company?
  - What attracted you to our company?
  - How do you believe you will fit into our organization?
- *Know the job description.* Be sure you know the specific job for which you're applying. This includes the title, qualifications, experience, and characteristics they are looking for in applicants.
- *Know the industry.* There are plenty of resources for getting to know various industries. This information might include public policy, labor statistics, salaries, required skills/education, etc. Use the below websites to learn more.
  - Glassdoor.com
  - Onetonline.com (Occupational Information Network – O\*Net)
  - CareerOneStop.org
  - BLS.gov (Bureau of Labor Statistics)
  - MyVisaJobs.com
  - Economy.okstate.edu (Center for Applied Economic Research)

## Researching Yourself

While you know yourself better than anyone, you have to be able to verbalize that information in a succinct and compelling way. We offer several assessments that may be helpful in identifying strengths, areas of growth, personality, skills/competencies, and more. Be prepared to incorporate this information with your answers to the below questions that may arise during an interview. Studying your resume or revisiting the details of your experiences, class projects, or campus involvement will also refresh your mind on some great examples to share.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What qualifications do you have?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- Do you work better in a team environment or independently?
- What motivates you?

## Preparing Questions for the Interviewers

You should have at least 4 to 5 prepared questions when you walk into your interview. However, you'll have to pay close attention when the employer is speaking because you should not ask questions that have already been answered in the interview process or could easily be found on the employer's website or at an information session. Write these questions down in your portfolio because you will inevitably forget them! You can also ask questions that arise during the interview about unclear points or specific information relevant to your discussions.

Typically, the employer will provide a space for you at the end of the interview by asking what questions you have for the company. This is your time to shine! The more *specific* your questions, the more memorable to the employer. While asking about the work atmosphere or trajectory of the position or company is good, asking more specific questions about the position or company based on the research you've done up front will set you apart. See below for some sample questions.

- What makes this firm different from your competitors?
- What qualities would the ideal candidate for this position possess?
- How does this position interact with the rest of the organization?
- What education and training programs does the company provide?
- What do you enjoy most about working for this firm?
- What challenges might I face in this position?
- How did you get started in the company? What made you successful?
- How does this job contribute to the mission or goals of the company?

### CAUTION

Avoid "what's in it for me" questions about salary, benefits, vacation, etc. These questions should be reserved for after an offer has been extended! See the "Salary Negotiation" or "How to Negotiate" handouts or meet with a career consultant to learn more.

## Practice & Last Minute Tips

Practice, practice, practice! The only way to become more comfortable interviewing is to practice doing it. Whether it's more formal practice with Career Services or informal practice with your roommate/mom/dog, be sure you're comfortable answering questions. See the bottom of the introduction page for resources available to you.

Here are some last minute tips and tricks to keep in mind before your interview:

- Review how to find the interview location and parking arrangements. Leave sufficient time to arrive on time to your interview. Arriving excessively early can put pressure on the employer to move the interview up while arriving late shows disorganization, poor time-management, etc. Find balance by arriving about 5-10 minutes before the scheduled interview time.
- Have a printed copy of your resume prepared in case you are asked to provide a copy.
- Be sure all correspondence is neat and error free.
- Take your jacket off while traveling to keep it wrinkle free.

# Dressing for an Interview



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## Professional Attire

- ⦿ Matching, two-piece dark colored suit (black, blue, grey)
- ⦿ Tailored shirt/skirt with conservative neckline/length
- ⦿ Polished dress shoes that match belt color
- ⦿ No sneakers or open-toed shoes
- ⦿ Dark or neutral socks or pantyhose

## Jewelry & Accessories

- ⦿ Conservative tie or bowtie (no “flashy” designs)
- ⦿ Small, non-distracting jewelry. For example, stud earrings, a simple necklace, and/or a plain watch

## Other Things to Consider

- ⦿ Dress one level above what you think the interviewer will wear. Think conservative before trendy!
- ⦿ Be clean and use deodorant liberally. However use cologne/perfume VERY modestly.
- ⦿ Makeup and hair should be simple, clean, and modest to your comfort level
- ⦿ Be sure your breath is fresh. Carry breath mints with you, but don't use them during the interview. DO NOT chew gum.

## First Impressions & Answering Questions

The most important advice we can give any student is to be *genuine* and *professional*! Don't try to be something or someone you are not. Some employers will make decisions about a candidate in the first 10 seconds of a meeting, so a good first impression is imperative.

- Greet people by name, give a firm handshake, and if you do not catch the name, ask for it again.
- Establish good eye contact and be polite with everyone you meet, including front desk staff.
- Be early and put your phone away while waiting. Show the employer you have patience and are not addicted to your phone!

Answering questions effectively is also important. Read through these pointers to become a more effective interviewer:

- Prepare; don't wing it! You should be comfortable answering questions about yourself and the company based on your research.
- Take your time. It's alright to pause to think about an answer. You can say something like "That's a good question, let me think about that a second..." in order to stall and give yourself a few seconds. You can also ask them to repeat the question, but do not do this more than once or twice in an interview.
- Answer directly and concisely. Find balance between abrupt, short answers and rambling. Likely, an answer somewhere around 30 seconds to 2 minutes will suffice for most questions.
- Use concrete examples and real-life, professional stories in order to illustrate your points. Add humor as appropriate!
- Remember non-verbal body language: maintain eye contact and keep hands visible, reduce excessive motions.
- Remember your language: monitor your volume and pace, speak clearly, and avoid fillers such as "um," "like," or "you know" by practicing!

## Example Interview Questions & Responses

These are general questions frequently asked during interviews. You can find industry specific questions on resources like Interview Stream mentioned in the resources section.

### 1. Tell me about yourself.

Assume that you will be asked this question, and prepare your response ahead of time. Research the employer and the position to identify how you can make a valuable contribution. Prepare up to a two-minute commercial-style response, talking about your experiences, qualifications, and accomplishments rather than specifics of your childhood, family, or hobbies. You may include reasons why you developed a passion for your field as well as your long-range professional goals. Frame your answer as to how you can contribute to meeting the needs of the employer: "My background has been devoted to preparing myself to become the best professional possible. For example..."

## **2. Why are you motivated to apply for this position? Why are you attracted to our company?**

Talk about the interesting details of the job and why they fascinate you. Discuss the skills you have that the job requires. Know what distinguishes this employer from competitors. Reflect on why this employer appeals to you versus other employers in the industry. Research the website and the company's mission statement and core values. Knowing this information will help you with intelligent and insightful comments: "Through my internship experience, I discovered just how much I love this profession. That's when I started researching employers that had worthy goals and results. There is no company that compares with yours. After reading your core values on the company website, I knew this company would be a great fit for me."

## **3. What qualifications do you have?**

Name a few skills that relate to the position and provide brief examples of how you have demonstrated them through class projects, part-time jobs, leadership roles, internships, etc. For example, "Through my experience as a camp counselor, I developed strong leadership and teaching skills by leading activities for middle-school aged students. This will help me in this new role by..."

## **4. How do you believe you best fit in this organization?**

This question is partially designed to see how much you know about the organization. Through prior research, you should know of services that are needed or areas where the employer is expanding. You can base your response on that information. Keep your response general by indicating several areas of interest: "If I understand correctly, you are expanding your marketing efforts to include the Texas area. I am particularly interested in that possibility. My previous internship within the industry made me familiar with the Texas market, and it would be exciting to help you in that effort."

## **5. Tell me about your education. How has your education prepared you for your career?**

Explain your education, training and skills. Mention a course in which you excelled or a project that was especially beneficial to your skill development. Explain how your education has contributed to successful life and leadership experiences.

## **6. How did you learn about our organization?**

Let the interviewer know that your decision to interview with this employer was not just a random choice. Demonstrate a genuine interest in the organization. Cite any contact you have had with employees, customers, or products that have given you a positive impression.

## **7. What are your strengths?**

Don't list more than three strengths, as some recruiters may ask you to list the same number of weaknesses. Cite from one to three areas where colleagues have praised you in the past. Provide specific examples of what they have said and how you utilize these strengths to benefit others: "My co-workers have always sought me out to ask advice in situations with difficult people. They say that I know how to work with all kinds of people, which means a lot to me. As a result, I would say that my biggest strengths are adaptability and strong interpersonal communication skills."

## **8. What are your weaknesses?**

There are a variety of ways to handle this question. You may use something that could be viewed as both a positive and a negative trait. For example, "I tend to be someone who jumps into projects quickly."

While I like to take on new challenges, I can have difficulty slowing down and planning projects through to completion.” Remember each weakness should be followed with actions you are taking to overcome the weakness. You might also name a personal challenge which you have overcome. Be mindful to not name a weakness that is essential to the position, i.e., not liking people if you’re applying for a sales position.

## **9. What kinds of people do you find difficult to get along with?**

Be careful how you respond to such a personal question. While you may want to share this information with the interviewer, you need to keep the conversation positive and include how you deal positively with these types of people.

## **10. Did you ever have a disagreement/conflict with a supervisor? Why? Why not?**

Be wise in answering a question of this nature. You do not want to give the impression of being either a troublemaker or someone who avoids conflict at all cost. Neither is valuable to an organization. Conflict is a fact of life. In fact, employers value people with the skills necessary to get through difficult situations: “Yes, my boss had asked me to do something that did not appear totally ethical. I asked to speak with him after work when we could have a private conversation. I was able to share my personal dilemma about the situation. Thankfully, he had not realized all the implications and quickly made appropriate adjustments. We were both very happy about the outcome. I was able to be true to my values, and we developed an even more productive working relationship.”

## **11. Which course did you find most difficult and why?**

The interviewer wants to know if you have perseverance when faced with a difficulty: “After earning a ‘D’ in my first semester, I was devastated. The benefit, however, was that it revealed my poor study skills. As a result, I joined a study group and hired a tutor. After taking the course again, I was able to bring the grade up to a ‘B.’ The valuable study skills I learned have dramatically improved my overall academic achievement.”

## **12. What is your greatest failure? What did you learn from it?**

Everyone, at some point or another, fails. Being able to admit failure shows maturity. However, avoid examples that might reflect on your ability to do the job. You might want to use an example like the one given in the previous question. For example, you can show how you dealt with the failure, learned from the experience, and how it helped you succeed in the future.

## **13. Do you work better in a team environment or independently?**

Think about your response to this question in light of the requirements of the position while being true to yourself: “Although I have thoroughly enjoyed group projects and teamwork, the hours required to work independently to solve complex problems is equally satisfying to me. Let me give you an example...”

## **14. Would you rather be in charge of a project or work as part of the team?**

Different situations will call for different types of involvement. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate to the interviewer that you know when it is appropriate to lead and when it is better to follow: “I am happy to follow the leadership of someone else. In fact, some of the best learning experiences have come in that manner.”

I must be honest, though, to say that it has been very encouraging in the past when the group decided that I would be the best person to lead the project. I'm honestly very happy in either role."

## **15. What are your long-term goals? Where do you want to be in 5, 10, or 15 years?**

Have several professional goals in mind. You may want to research a typical career path for a person that is successful with this employer. Tell the manager you plan to be working for him or her in that position: "Although it's difficult to predict things that far into the future, I know what direction I want my career path to follow. Within the next five years, I would like to become the best your company has. I will work toward becoming the expert that others rely on. And, in doing so, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long term."

## **16. Give me an example of a time when \_\_\_\_\_.**

Whenever you are given a question starting with, "Give me an example when" or, "Tell me about a time when", know that it is a behavioral question. The interviewer is trying to determine how you would behave in specific situations common in the workplace. Common behavioral questions fall in the areas of teamwork, conflict resolution, or leadership. You may find it helpful to tell your story using the "STAR" format. Tell about a "Situation" or "Task". Explain the "Action" you took. Many people neglect to finish the story with the "Result". Explain a quantifiable result that was achieved and emphasize the role you played in the successful outcome.

## **17. What motivates you?**

There are many potentially effective answers; however, money is not necessarily the best answer. Are you motivated by solving problems, helping people, a sense of accomplishment, or the respect of others? The possibilities are endless. Make your response honest and personal.

## **18. What kind of salary are you looking for today?**

You should know what a competitive salary is for the position, but do not offer a figure. Quoting a figure too low may get you an offer that is too low. A number that is higher than the employer has in mind may keep you from getting an offer. Respond by saying that you expect to be compensated fairly for the education, skills, and qualifications that you bring to the job: "While finding the right opportunity is more important than money, I have looked at salary comparisons and the cost of living in the area. I would expect to receive compensation at a fair value for my skills and qualifications." If the interviewer persists, respond that your market research shows that salaries falls in the range of \_\_\_ to \_\_\_, but avoid setting an exact figure for yourself. You may choose to politely transform your answer into a question for the employer. "What range do you have in mind for the position?"

## **19. Do you have any questions?**

This is an overlooked question by candidates. One or two strategic and purposeful questions can make a huge difference in the interview. By asking your own questions, you may reiterate areas of strength or discover points that need clarification. Asking good questions reflects your interest level and initiative. For example, "Could you tell me what characteristics the ideal candidate possesses?" After the interviewer responds, you then have the opportunity to add any information you may have inadvertently omitted. You may also highlight your own qualifications as they relate to the interviewer's answer.

## CAUTION

While the vast majority of employers innocently want to get to know a candidate, there are illegal questions employers should not ask according to Title VII and/or The American Disabilities Act. These questions include discriminatory topics like sex, age, race, national origin, religion, or disability when they do not pertain to job duties. Again, most employers genuinely want to get to know you and are not intentionally asking illegal questions. When responding, it's important to remain positive if you want to keep the door for the job open. After the interview, you can decide whether or not you want to accept any potential offers. You are under no obligation to answer illegal questions but can decide whether or not to answer if you do not believe the employer had discriminatory purposes in mind. To learn more about how to respond or take action if you feel you've been treated unethically, you can make an appointment with a career consultant or visit [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov).

## Closing Statements

When the interview starts to wrap up, be sure to leave your interviewer knowing where you stand. If you are very interested in this opportunity, be sure to express that in a clear, enthusiastic yet professional manner. This means saying something like, "I have very much enjoyed learning more about your company and I am excited about continuing the application process." You also need to be sure to get clear information on how to move forward. Ask questions about the next steps in the application process, the time line in which they are hoping to fill position, and any other questions you may have about the process. Make sure you get the interviewer's contact information!

## Follow-Up & Thank you Cards

Following up with the interviewer can make the difference in getting the job or position or not! A simple, hand written thank you card shows gratitude, professionalism, and enthusiasm. You can (and should) send thank you notes for a variety of professional contacts, from meeting someone at a career fair to an official interview. Anytime someone helps you in your career journey, whether it's a colleague who recommends a position to you or an official interview, a thank you note is warranted. Typically, sending a hand written card within about 24-48 hours is ideal. You may also consider sending a brief thank you email if you cannot get a hand written card sent in that timeframe. Here are some general tips for what to include:

- Mention some of the things you learned about the company, any clarifications or things you forgot to mention in the interview, and invite the employer to contact you at any time.
- Be sure it's error free and you sign it.
- Send an additional thank you note if and when you receive an official offer whether or not you accept or decline the position.

Remember, free thank you cards are available at the CAS Student Success Center (213 Life Sciences East) Once you receive an offer, we can also help you navigate how to negotiate for or understand things like salary and benefits, compare offers, and make final decisions. Good luck!