



# Interviewing Guide for Industry

## PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW PROCESS:

An interview is a conversation with a company to help both you and the organization determine if you are a good fit. It is important to prepare for an interview because it will help you feel more confident and comfortable. Interviewing is a learned skill, and the more practice and preparation you do the easier it becomes and the more competitive of a candidate you will be. Below are some ways for you to gain knowledge and practice:

- **Online Videos:** Watch short online workshops about interviewing at [career.umn.edu](http://career.umn.edu) or [www.careerspot.com](http://www.careerspot.com)
- **Resource Center:** Find more detailed interview preparation information in the books and binders in our Resource Center in 105 Lind Hall.
- **Interview Stream:** This online resource allows you (with the use of a webcam) to record yourself answering interview questions. Go to the following link to create your free account: [www.umn.interviewstream.com](http://www.umn.interviewstream.com).
- **Participate in Practice Interview Days:** This event gives you the opportunity to practice interviewing and get feedback from an employer (every fall and spring semester, click “Interview On Campus” on [goldpass.umn.edu](http://goldpass.umn.edu)).
- **Schedule a Practice Interview with a Career Counselor:** Gain practice answering interview questions and get feedback from a career counselor. Call 612-624-4090 to schedule an appointment.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS:

- Every interview is different. Before your interview, ask the company representative about the structure—how many interviewers and their job titles, location, time, length of interview, and format of interview.
- Some employers as part of their hiring process will give candidates knowledge tests and/or personality assessments. These assessments are conducted to gain a better sense of your abilities and your work style.
- Keep in mind that many employers will have more than one interview as part of their hiring process.

**Phone Interviews:** These are typically “screening” interviews with the purpose of determining whether the company wants to bring you in for an in-person interview. Make sure that you have a good phone connection and a quiet place for your interview. Since the interviewer can’t see you, it is even more important to speak clearly and to verbally communicate that you are interested in the position and company. Watch our online workshop about Phone Interviewing on our website: [cse.umn.edu/career/](http://cse.umn.edu/career/).

**On-Campus Interviews:** These are interviews where the employer comes to campus to interview candidates for his or her organization. To view which employers are coming to campus and to apply for these opportunities, log into [goldpass.umn.edu](http://goldpass.umn.edu) and click on “Interview On Campus.”

**Group/Board Interviews:** When more than one person is interviewing you, be sure to introduce yourself to everyone. Regardless of who asks you the question, make eye contact with and engage each interviewer. Bring enough copies of your resume for each person.

**On-Site Interviews:** Interviews occurring at the company, especially if they are second-round interviews, are often a few hours long. Your visit may include a tour, lunch, the opportunity to meet potential co-workers, and interviews with multiple staff members and supervisors.

## INTERVIEW ATTIRE:

- Dress professionally—a suit is appropriate if you have one, otherwise wear a button-up dress shirt and dress pants. Make sure your clothes are clean and wrinkle free. A tie is often appropriate for an interview, and if you wear a skirt make sure it is at least knee length.
- Wear comfortable dress shoes with matching color dress socks.
- Keep your hairstyle simple and facial hair groomed. Avoid perfumes and colognes.

## RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION:

Before your interview research the organization so that you are able to articulate why you are a good fit for the company and can prepare questions to ask your interviewers. Find out what their mission/purpose is, the size and structure of the company, what services/products they provide, any awards/recognition they have received, and if they have recently been in the news. See the [Researching Employers and Industries](#) handout for research strategies.

## PREPARE QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER:

At the end of your interview, it is likely that the employer will ask if you have any questions. This is your opportunity to ask anything that would be helpful as you assess your fit with the company and the position. It is important to ask thoughtful questions that cannot be answered through basic research. Use the information you gain from researching the company to develop more in-depth questions. An interview is not an appropriate time to ask questions regarding salary or benefits. The questions below are examples of general questions that may be helpful to ask:

- What do you enjoy most about working here?
- Could you describe the culture of the organization?
- What are the characteristics of someone that is successful in this role?
- What training and development exists for this position?
- What is your hiring timeline for this position?

## PREPARE TO ANSWER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Understand and be able to articulate your values, interests, skills, strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, transferable skills, related experience, and career goals.
- Reflect on and be able to explain why they should hire you (How are you a fit for the position and company?).
- Know who your interviewers are (engineer, manager, scientist, human resources representative, etc.); this will help you determine how technical your answers should be.
- It is impossible to prepare for every question they will ask, however most of the time employers ask questions directly related to the job description. Before your interview, write down several stories that demonstrate the skills found in the job description and then practice telling these stories out loud without your notes. This will help you prepare well thought-out examples for whatever questions they may ask.
- Review the “How to Approach Commonly Asked Interviewing Questions” on Pg. 3&4.
- Review the list of “Practice Interview Questions” on Pg. 4 and write down and practice out loud your responses.

## HOW TO APPROACH TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

**Behavioral Based Questions (“Tell me about a time,” “Give me an example”):** These are the most common type of questions asked in an interview. Employers believe that past behavior predicts future performance, therefore they will ask you questions about the skills they are seeking and want to hear specific examples from your past that demonstrate these skills. Examples may come from work experience, internships, academic experiences, extracurricular activities, or volunteer work. The STAR (describe the Situation/Task...Action...Result) technique described below is useful for structuring your answers to ensure you are telling a detailed story. Before your interview, write down several stories that demonstrate the skills the employer is seeking using the STAR technique, then practice telling these stories.

**Situation/Task:** Description of specific situation, project, or task related to the skill sought

**Action:** Description of specific steps you took in the situation

**Result:** Outcome resulting from the action taken. Be specific. How did you know you were successful?

**Technical Questions:** For science and engineering positions it is common to be asked technical questions to gauge your abilities and problem solving skills. To best prepare for these questions review the job description. If you are asked technical questions, they most likely will be related to the skills listed (for example, if they are seeking C++ experience they may ask you to solve a programming problem). When asked a technical question the most important thing is to demonstrate your analytical and communication skills. If you don’t know the answer (sometimes there is not a right answer), be honest and describe how you would approach the problem.

**Case Interview Questions:** These questions are most commonly asked by consulting companies to gauge your problem solving skills. An example is, “How many jellybeans can fit in a jumbo jet?” To answer these types of questions, talk through what information you would need to know to solve the problem, ask questions, and communicate the steps you would take to find the solution. More important than solving the problem is demonstrating your logical approach.

## HOW TO APPROACH COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS:

**Tell me about yourself:** Employers ask this question to learn more about you, specifically what your academic background is and what your experience is related to their position and organization. In your response you can include:

- Your student status— major, year in school, courses in progress, interests related to academics, research, industry.
- Your related experience—internships, student organizations, research, work experience, course projects, leadership positions (assume they have not read your resume).
- What qualities and skills you have that make you a good fit for the position and the organization (use the job description and the company research you conduct to inform your response).

**What are your strengths?** Use the job description and the company research you conduct to inform you of the skills and qualities the employer is seeking, then identify which of these are your personal strengths. When asked “what are your strengths,” name a few related to the position and give detailed examples of how you have demonstrated these strengths in the past—remember, employers are looking for proof in your answer.

**What are your weaknesses?** Employers want you to be honest about your weaknesses. Select a weakness that is not going to impact your ability to do the job and shows self-awareness. Tell them one of your weaknesses and then give an example of how you are working on that weakness; be specific about the steps you have taken to manage this weakness.

**Why do you want to work for this organization?** State why you want to work for the company, demonstrating your knowledge about the organization (for example, the mission of the company, the new product they are creating, etc.—be specific!). Emphasize how your past experiences and skills have prepared you to contribute successfully to the organization.

**Why did you choose your major?** Answering this question gives you the opportunity to demonstrate why you are passionate about your field. Be specific about why you chose your major, what motivates you to be successful in your program of study, and what you have enjoyed most about your academic program (such as courses, projects, research, a certain specialization in your field). Explain to the interviewer how your major has helped prepare you for the position with their company.

**What are your short term and long term career goals?** Relate your immediate career goal to the company you are interviewing with. It is okay to be somewhat vague about your long term career goals, however, indicate some possibilities for your future based on the company and industry research you conduct. Be sure to demonstrate that you have a commitment to your field and that you want to develop and grow as a professional.

**Is there anything else you would like to share with us?** Often this question is asked at the end of an interview, your response should include any information you have not yet been able to share with the interviewer that would be important for them to know regarding your key qualifications and a statement about your interest in the position and the company.

### **Why should we hire you?**

This gives you the opportunity to summarize why you are the best candidate for the position and what makes you stand out from other applicants. Most likely the interviewer is not going to remember everything you said from your interview, so when this question is asked, reiterate your qualifications: Your unique strengths, skills, and experiences relevant to the position and organization. Leave the interviewer with a positive lasting impression. The purpose of the interview is to answer this questions, so try to prove your response throughout the interview, as well.

**PRACTICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- What prompted you to enter this field? Why?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Why do you want to work for our organization?
- What strengths would you bring to this organization? What would you consider a weakness?
- What exposure have you had to this field?
- Discuss your experiences as they relate to this field.
- What are current issues/trends/challenges in this field?
- What are your short term and long term career goals?
- Describe your greatest accomplishment. What are you most proud of?
- Why should we hire you over other applicants?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful professional relationships?
- What motivates you?
- How do you like to be supervised?
- How would a friend or professor describe you?
- In what ways do you think you could contribute to our organization?

**PRACTICE BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:**

- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation which you had to complete.
- Describe the project or situation which best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?
- Give a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Tell us about a time when you were particularly effective on prioritizing tasks to complete a project on schedule.
- Tell me about a time when you played a leadership role on a team project.
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a difficult person/patient/customer, etc.
- Tell me about a time when you took initiative beyond what was expected.
- Tell me about a time when you were faced with multiple conflicting priorities. How do you organize your work?
- Tell me about a time when you worked effectively as part of a team.
- Give me an example of something you have done that demonstrates your creativity.
- Tell me about a time when you know you had communicated effectively.
- Tell me about a job or setting where great precision to detail was required to complete a task. How did you handle that situation?

**AT THE INTERVIEW:**

- Map out the location of your interview and arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Bring extra copies of your resume and questions to ask the interviewer in a portfolio or folder.
- Give a firm handshake, introduce yourself, make eye contact, and smile.
- Be polite, honest, professional, and enthusiastic—show that you are passionate about the field and are interested in the position and the company.
- Every interviewer has a different style; follow their lead.
- Speak slowly, clearly, and concretely.
- Relax and breathe; it is important to be yourself.
- At the end of the interview, after you have asked your questions, re-state your interest and qualifications and thank them for their time. Ask them about next steps in the interview process and to review the hiring timeline. Ask for their business cards so that you can send a thank you note and follow up afterwards.

**AFTER THE INTERVIEW:**

- Reflect on what you have done well and what you want to improve on, as well as your overall impression of the company and the position.
- Within 48 hours of a job interview, it is crucial to send the interviewer(s) a letter or email expressing your sincere appreciation as well as your interest in the position. You may state why you think you are a good match for the position and outline your excellent candidacy by briefly discussing your qualities and skills. Include something specific that was discussed during the interview. Thank you letters can be handwritten on stationery, typed in a professional format, or sent via email. Keep in mind that if they indicate at your interview that they are making a decision in the next few days, an email may be the best method for sending your letter to ensure they receive it before they make their decision.

**Thank You Letter Example**

Dear Ms. Swanson,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Lab Assistant position. I enjoyed our discussion and was excited to have a tour of the facility.

Your lab equipment was impressive and I was interested to learn about your upcoming projects. In addition to my strong interest in researching the effects of salmonella in diverse species, I think that my skills we discussed would allow me to contribute greatly to the assignment. Your overview of the project was fascinating, and it was exciting to hear about the collaborative role that the Lab Assistant will have with Dr. Smith.

The interview reinforced my enthusiasm for the opportunity, and I would be grateful to be a part of your team. Please let me know if you need any additional information from me. Thank you again, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Matt Matthews

- Follow up with the interviewer if you have not heard back within the timeframe they indicated. Reiterate your interest in the position and inquire about where they are in the hiring process.

**Interview Follow-up Example**

Dear Ms. Swanson,

I wanted to follow up with you regarding the Lab Assistant position. At my interview last Monday you indicated that you were hoping to have a decision by the end of this week. I wanted to check-in to see where you are in your hiring process and to see if there is any additional materials or information I can provide. I am still very interested in the position and excited about the possibility of collaborating with you and Dr. Smith on projects in your laboratory. I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Matt Matthews