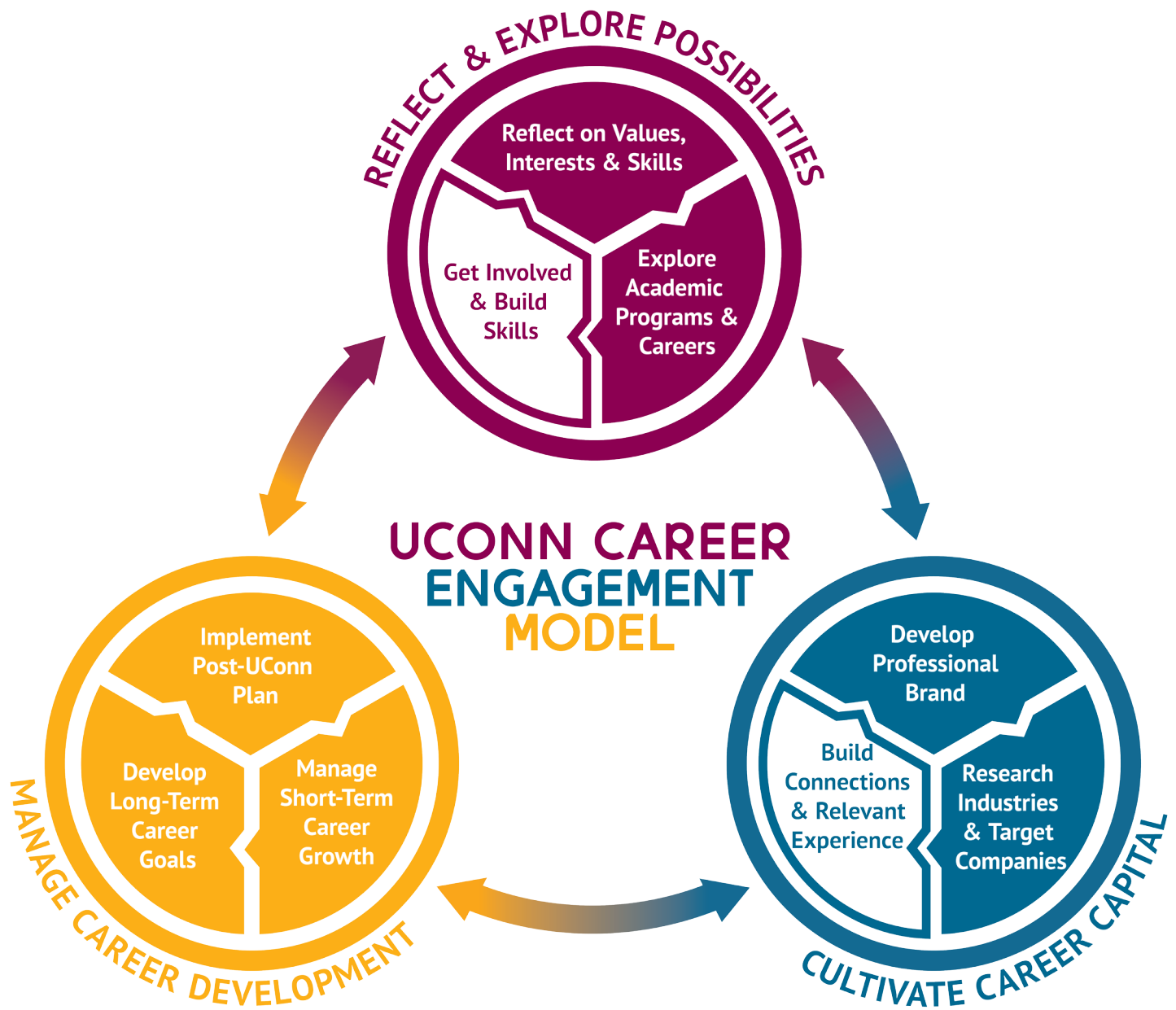


# PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWING GUIDE

**UConn**

CENTER FOR  
CAREER DEVELOPMENT



Illustrated above is the **UConn Career Engagement Model**. This process highlights important elements in your personal career development journey. It showcases which career elements the Center for Career Development (CCD) recommends incorporating into your personal career development plan. It is important to note that career development is rarely a linear process, and as you gain new experiences, your goals may shift. We encourage you to revisit this process early and often throughout your time at UConn to continually adapt and adjust your personal career plan.

The elements of **“Build Connections & Relevant Experience”** and **“Implement Post-UConn Plan”** are highlighted because they both directly connect to the purpose of this guide: preparing for interviews. This guide will give you clear action steps for focusing on these career elements. This guide is intended to be used independently and/or to provide guidance and support as you meet with a CCD staff member.

# PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWING

# GUIDE

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# THE BASICS OF INTERVIEWING

While your résumé may get you an interview, it is the interview that gets you the job! Whether you are interviewing for a job, internship, graduate school, or other opportunity, the key to successful preparation is a thorough understanding of the position or program and how your personal interests, skills, and values align with it.

The Center for Career Development (CCD) offers numerous resources to help you prepare for a successful interview. You can schedule a practice interview, which includes practice interview questions followed by personalized feedback. The CCD offers both in-person and virtual 60-minute tailored practice interviews as well as in-person 30 minute general practice in reviews. Participating in a practice interview can be beneficial for interviews related to internships, graduate school, part-time and full-time jobs. You can also meet with a career consultant to talk about your overall position search and interview process.

Visit the CCD's website ([career.uconn.edu/interviewing](http://career.uconn.edu/interviewing)) for online interviewing resources; you can gain interviewing experience through Big Interview\*, a virtual interview website that allows you to record yourself answering various questions with your own webcam. This Professional Interviewing Guide will help you through the entire interview process by providing you with tips about how to prepare for your interview, how to succeed during the interview, and what to do after your interview ends.

## HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT A SPECIFIC TYPE OF INTERVIEW?

The CCD has additional information available about the following types of interviews that can be reviewed with you during either a practice interview, same-day career coaching session, or appointment:

- All-Day Interviews
- Case Interviews
- Group Interviews
- Panel Interviews
- Virtual Interviews

This information is also available on the CCD website at [www.career.uconn.edu/student-resources](http://www.career.uconn.edu/student-resources).

## \*ACCESSING BIG INTERVIEW

1. Navigate to [uconn.biginterview.com](http://uconn.biginterview.com)
2. Click on "Register" in the upper right-hand corner
3. Create an account using your UConn email address



**PREPARING FOR**

AN INTERVIEW

# STEPS TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW

## **PERFORM A SELF-ASSESSMENT**

- Have a clear picture of your interests, skills, and values as they relate to the position or program you are interviewing for. Self-awareness will allow you to better articulate who you are and what you can offer prospective employers and admissions representatives.
- Look closely at the experiences that have shaped you as a person and as a candidate for the position or program and be ready to talk about them. In order to make a positive impression on an interviewer, you must first know yourself well and be ready to articulate your strengths.
- For additional guidance on your self-assessment, contact the CCD to speak to a career consultant.

## **RESEARCH THE COMPANY OR PROGRAM**

- Conduct a web search; visit the company or program's website and follow their social media platforms for more information on their goals, history, competitors, culture, and current initiatives. Also, utilize HuskyCareerLink to gather additional information.
- Connect with faculty, staff, other students, and alumni who are currently or were previously involved with the company or program for input.
- Review the position or program description to make sure you have a full understanding of your potential responsibilities and what the requirements/qualifications of an ideal candidate are.

## **PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE INTERVIEW**

- Based on your self-assessment and research, brainstorm a list of 3-5 questions to ask during the interview. The questions you prepare are intended to allow you to get a better feel for whether or not the company or program is the right fit for you. They also show you did your research and have genuine interest in the opportunity. Refer to page 15 of this guide for suggested question topics.

## **PRACTICE FOR YOUR INTERVIEW**

- Review the position or program description and website to anticipate what types of questions you may be asked. Write down the ideas you have and practice answering those questions.
- Practice using Big Interview.
- Ask a friend or family member to help you practice answering potential questions that may come up in the interview. You can also practice in front of a mirror.
- Sign up for a practice interview by visiting [career.uconn.edu/interviewing](http://career.uconn.edu/interviewing).

# HOW TO DRESS FOR AN INTERVIEW

Within the first 10 seconds of meeting you, an interviewer has developed a strong first impression. Research shows that those who come across as polished and professional are more likely to have a favorable outcome than those who are seen as putting in less effort. Dress for success!

## APPROPRIATE INTERVIEW ATTIRE – BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL

*It is best to wear business professional attire to most interviews, unless it is specifically noted otherwise. Some color may be appropriate; know the culture of your industry.*

- Full pant suit or skirt suit in a neutral color such as navy, black, or dark gray
- An appropriate suit skirt – long enough so you can sit down comfortably and is never more than two inches above your knee when standing
- Clean, appropriately-cut, button-up shirt or coordinated blouse
- Conservative tie in a solid, neutral color
- Dark socks that match and are long enough to cover your ankles
- Conservative shoes – heels not above two inches, no open-toed shoes, stilettos, or athletic sneakers

## REMEMBER

- Neat, groomed hair and facial hair
- Hair tied back so it is kept off your face
- Minimal accessories and jewelry
- Conservative makeup
- Neatly trimmed nails
- Neutral nail polish colors
- Minimal cologne or perfume

## CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES TO AVOID

- Sunglasses, backpack, or headphones
- Outrageously patterned or overly bright clothing – with the possible exception of creative fields like those that involve media and design; it is often best to stick with neutral shades such as navy, black, or gray
- More than one set of earrings
- Statement jewelry or accessories that make noise are distracting
- Facial piercings, tongue jewelry, or visible tattoos
- Ill-fitting clothes – having your garments tailored is a worthwhile investment
- Rumpled or stained clothing – if interviewing late in the day, try to change into a fresh outfit immediately beforehand
- Clothing where undergarments are visible
- Perfume, cologne, tobacco smoke, or other odorous products

BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE	BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE	UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS
Choose a basic neutral pant suit or skirt suit and a standard button-up dress shirt. If you are wearing a skirt, make sure it is an appropriate length. Accessories should be minimal and polished, close-toed shoes with a matching belt will coordinate the ensemble.	Select a pair of pressed slacks, such as khakis or dark dress pants, and a dress shirt. Conservative skirts and dresses are also acceptable. Adding a blazer allows for adaptability to your environment, and removing the jacket is acceptable to exude a more casual appearance.	Research the organization and the culture in advance. If you are interviewing for a job that requires a uniform, it is still important to dress professionally for the interview. If your interview is outdoors, practicality is crucial.

# THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION

- Review directions in advance. Know exactly where to go for your interview and how long it will take to get there. If possible, complete a dry-run to the interview location a few days prior. Make sure to locate parking and public transit locations if necessary. Plan for traffic or unexpected delays in your commute.
- Lay out clothes and materials the night before. Make sure everything is ready to go so you are not scrambling in the morning to iron your shirt or print your résumé. Refer to the checklist below for information about what to bring/not to bring to an interview.
- Get a good night's sleep. It is important that you are well-rested for your interview and that you don't make any drastic changes to your morning routine, so you can perform to the best of your ability.
- Arrive 5-10 minutes early. It is not recommended to arrive any earlier because it could put extra stress on the employer to begin the interview earlier than they intended. Any later appears unprofessional.
- Be "on" from the beginning. Your interview truly begins from the moment you step foot outside your car, so your behavior must reflect that. Leave your cell phone in your car or powered off. Assume the hiring manager or the interviewer will ask everyone from the security guard to the receptionist their opinion of you and your behavior.
- Make a great first impression. Your first impression is based solely on your attire, enthusiastic body language and, most importantly, your handshake. Greet everyone you meet with a firm, confident handshake. Also, be sure you are not carrying any odors that will enter the room before you do (ex. excessive perfume/ cologne, tobacco smoke, etc.)

## A CHECKLIST


### WHAT TO BRING TO AN INTERVIEW:

- ✓ Additional copies of your résumé (one per interviewer, plus a few extra just in case)
- ✓ A padfolio with paper and a pen to take notes
- ✓ Additional application materials such as transcripts, cover letters, references, etc.
- ✓ Optional: A small briefcase or bag

### WHAT TO NOT BRING TO AN INTERVIEW:

- ✗ Cell phone: shut it off or leave it in your car
- ✗ Trendy purses, backpacks, or large bags
- ✗ Beverages, including coffee or a water bottle
- ✗ Gum, candy, or food of any kind
- ✗ Parents, family, or friends

### WHAT IS A PADFOLIO?



A padfolio is a leather-bound folder with space inside to keep a notepad and pen. It usually also has pockets for copies of your résumé, a place to hold business cards, and a pen holder. The notepad inside your padfolio can be used to write down questions you have prepared for the end of the interview so you don't have to worry about forgetting them. The padfolio should remain closed and on the table or your lap in front of you until it is your turn to ask your questions. Padfolios are available at the UConn Bookstore and most office supply stores.



COMMON

**INTERVIEW  
QUESTIONS**

# TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions listed here are some of the most common questions asked in interviews across all industries. Most of them relate to your personality, background, and values, which allow the interviewer to get to know you better as a person and a candidate.

1. *Tell me about yourself.*
2. *What are your two greatest strengths?*
3. *What is your greatest weakness?*
4. *Why are you interested in this company/program?*
5. *What sets you apart from other applicants?*
6. *Tell me about an accomplishment on your résumé that you're proud of.*
7. *What does diversity mean to you? What is your experience with diversity?*
8. *Where do you see yourself in one, three, or five years?*
9. *What motivates you and why?*
10. *Is there anything I should know about you that I haven't asked yet?*
11. *Do you have any questions for me?*

# BEHAVIORAL

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In contrast to traditional interview questions, behavioral interview questions are used for the specific purpose of finding out what type of behavior you have used to handle specific situations in your past experiences. Using examples to answer these situation-based questions allows the interviewer to predict how you may react to similar situations in the future.

1. *Give me a specific example when you demonstrated your leadership abilities.*
2. *Tell me about a time you faced a challenge while working in a group.*
3. *Give an example when you went above and beyond what was expected of you.*
4. *Tell me about a time you collaborated with a team.*
5. *Describe a moment when you had to adapt to your environment.*
6. *Give me an example of when you demonstrated your ability to work under pressure.*
7. *Tell me about a time when you motivated others.*
8. *Describe a moment when you had to deal with an upset customer or co-worker.*
9. *Tell me about a time you failed at something.*

# HOW TO ANSWER

## “TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”

This question or some variation of it will almost always be asked in an interview. This open-ended question is used by the employer to observe how well you articulate your skills, abilities, and ambitions. While this question seems simple, it has layers and depth, so preparing a brief answer ahead of time will help you make a strong first impression on the interviewer. Your prepared answer can be about two minutes in length. Use this time wisely; make sure you do not ramble for too long about one particular activity or experience.

During this introductory question, the interviewer is considering whether or not you are a good fit for the company or program as well as whether or not you are qualified. How you answer this question sets the tone for the remainder of the interview, so remember to smile and show enthusiasm!

### WHAT TO INCLUDE

- ✓ **Explain your background and your story.** Explain a little about who you are and why you are interested in the opportunity. How did you first know the field was a good fit for you? Choose an aspect of your professional identity that makes you stand out and talk about it.
- ✓ **Describe your experience and relevant skills.** Talk about your relevant experiences including internships, on-campus involvement, academic projects, volunteer experiences, and jobs where you gained these relevant skills. Try to match these skills with the opportunity you're interviewing for.
- ✓ **Discuss your future plans.** Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years, and how does this opportunity help you get there? Explain how this position or program is the next logical step in your career path.

### WHAT TO AVOID

- ✗ **Personal life:** Avoid talking about hobbies or interests unless relevant to the position.
- ✗ **True confessions:** “I’m looking for a new job because I hate my boss!”
- ✗ **The commercial:** Make your answer genuine and natural, not rehearsed or robotic.
- ✗ **Lying:** Always be honest and focus on the positives; don’t just tell them what they want to hear.
- ✗ **The résumé:** Do not simply repeat or read off your résumé. Instead, summarize key points of it.

### HOW TO START YOUR ANSWER

Don't start out your answer to this question by saying, “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm currently a \_\_\_\_\_ at the University of Connecticut studying \_\_\_\_\_.”

Almost all students start out their answer this way! In order to stand out, start with something else instead, like the reason you're interested in your field, a unique story about your related experience, or a pertinent current event that is of particular interest to you.

# HOW TO ANSWER STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

## STRENGTHS

Choose a skill or a quality you possess that is **relevant** to the position, and be ready to provide a few examples of how you have used that skill in the past. Be sure to avoid general phrases or traits like “hard working” or “dedicated.” Rather, focus on **transferable skills** that you can articulate to the interviewer. Back up your answer with an example from your résumé. When did you gain or exemplify this strength? Elaborate with an example or story rather than just telling them.

### EXAMPLE ANSWER FOR A TEACHING POSITION:

“What is your greatest strength?”

“I would have to say I have strong communication skills, both verbal and written. When I was a camp counselor at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp last summer, I had to communicate clearly and effectively to campers to ensure they were having a fun, yet safe summer experience. I did so by facilitating a daily meeting every morning to make my campers aware of each day’s planned activities, ask which they were interested in participating in, and get feedback about the activities that took place the day before. I also communicated with their family members through phone calls, emails, and in-person interactions on visiting days to keep them updated on camp events and their camper’s wellbeing. Both my campers and their parents appreciated my effort to keep everybody informed and to cater the camp experience as much as possible to each camper’s interests. I know I could bring a strong communication skillset to a classroom by effectively communicating in similar ways with students as well as parents or guardians on a regular basis.”

**TRANSFERABLE SKILLS** are abilities, attributes, and personal qualities obtained during your studies and experiences that you can use across industry lines. Examples include:

*Administrative, analytical, creative, critical thinking, customer service, interpersonal, leadership, multitasking, organizational, persuasion, problem-solving, quantitative, teaching, teamwork, technological, time management, and verbal/written communication skills.*

## WEAKNESSES

Being able to identify and articulate honest and genuine weaknesses is essential to a successful interview. The key to answering this question is to pick a skill or quality that is **not necessary for the job or program but is not so unrelated it is superfluous**. After you briefly describe your lacking skill or trait, be sure to describe ways in which you are improving or planning to improve that skill. Be as specific as possible when describing what you are currently doing to improve this area.

### EXAMPLE ANSWER FOR A TEACHING POSITION:

“What is your greatest weakness?”

“Since I am most interested in focusing on English and language education, I sometimes face difficulty with tasks that involve analyzing numbers or other types of data. I often excel when class assignments involve reading and/or writing because that is how I learn best, but I am hesitant and much less confident when working on assignments that involve data analysis or interpretation. When I first came to UConn, I was excited to find out that there was not a math requirement for my major. I soon realized, however, that I would have to be doing at least some numerical analysis in my work as a teacher, so I decided to take a statistics course to develop my skills in this area a little bit more. The course was not easy for me; I spent many hours in my professor’s office and studying with classmates, but I was able to finish the course with a B+ and now feel much more comfortable with numbers.”

# USING THE STAR METHOD

## HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS WITH THE STAR METHOD

**Behavioral questions** are interview questions in which employers want to know how you behaved or used a particular skill in past situations. Interviewers use these types of questions to gauge how you would react or behave in a similar situation in the future.

The best answers to these types of questions usually contain four important parts. To remember them, use the STAR acronym, which stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

### EXAMPLE ANSWER FOR A GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMISSION INTERVIEW:

*“Tell me about a time when you took initiative.”*

*Behavioral questions usually start with:*

- *Tell me about a time when...*
- *Give me an example when...*
- *Describe a moment when...*

### Some helpful tips for using the STAR Method:

- Plan ahead and think of several situations that you could use to answer multiple questions.
- Focus on the most meaningful and relevant experiences.
- Do not talk about personal situations or conflicts.
- Use a variety of experiences; try to include jobs, internships, leadership, volunteer, or academic projects.

**SITUATION** Give the interviewer a brief overview of the situation. This will provide context so the interviewer understands what setting you are talking about. What position were you in? When did this occur?  
*“I am a Resident Assistant at the University of Connecticut. This position requires organized leadership and initiative because I am responsible for hosting educational and social programs that are of interest to 30 undergraduate students in a residence hall on campus.”*

**TASK** Describe the task or project for which you had responsibility for. Use brief details.  
*“When thinking about planning my first educational program of the semester for the students that live on my floor, I wasn’t exactly sure what topics my residents would want to learn about.”*

**ACTION** Explain the action steps you took to approach the situation. This will be the bulk of your response. Be sure to include specific actions you took to solve the problem using “I” statements, not “we” statements.  
*“Instead of just picking topics on my own, I conducted a survey and needs assessment for the students to fill out. I handed out the survey to my residents, letting them know I would put together programs for the year based on their recommendations. I gave them two days to turn in their surveys by placing them in an envelope outside my door, which was accessible 24/7. I analyzed the results and found that internships, helpful study skills, and a few other topics were the most chosen. I did some research to determine whether or not there were any resources on campus that had information on these topics. After identifying the departments, I contacted each one of them to find out if they would be interested in presenting to my residents.”*

**RESULT** Remember to include the outcome. This ties the answer together and provides the interviewer with a thorough explanation of your skills and abilities with a positive resolution to the problem or task at hand. If applicable, you could take it one step further and relate this experience to the position.  
*“Fortunately, I was able to bring in three different offices to give presentations to my students regarding the topics they expressed the most interest in. My residents really enjoyed the educational programs, and each had approximately 40-60% attendance, which was drastically up from last year. My supervisor praised my initiative in conducting the survey and needs assessment in order to develop programming that my students were truly interested and asked me to share it with my fellow RAs so they could use it with their students as well.”*

# TIPS TO SUCCEED

# TIPS & TRICKS: COMMUNICATION

Your verbal and non-verbal communication have a big impact on the interviewer's perception of your competence and professionalism. Below are some tips and tricks specific to verbal and non-verbal communication that you can use to impress the interviewer and leave a positive lasting impression.

## VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Use formal grammar and avoid fillers such as “um,” “like,” and “you know.”
- Stick to professional language and industry-specific terms when appropriate. Avoid colloquial phrases like “you guys.”
- Listen carefully to questions in their entirety, and respond in a clear, concise, and logical order.
- Aim to complete each answer within 1-1.5 minutes.
- Try to avoid skipping questions or asking the interviewer to repeat any, which may make it seem like you are not listening. Ask them to rephrase instead.

## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Maintain steady eye contact throughout the entire interview. Aim to be making eye contact approximately 70% of the time.
- Avoid fidgeting or spinning in your seat.
- Maintain good posture – sit forward and alert, not slouched in your chair.
- Use hand gestures strategically to add emphasis to answers/concepts when needed. Using your hands too often or too drastically can be distracting.
- Maintain professionalism even if the interviewer assumes a more casual demeanor.
- Most importantly, remember to SMILE!

# GENERAL INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

- Make it clear that you have spent time researching the company or program.
- Be prepared to discuss your fit with specific elements of the company or program's culture and values.
- Be familiar with all the information listed on your résumé, and be prepared to talk about your experiences within the context of the position or program requirements.
- Articulate your strengths by utilizing a variety of specific professional, appropriate examples from past work, school, internship, leadership, and involvement experiences.
- Stick with examples from experiences you've had within the past four years.
- Be able to explain how the position or program you are applying for fits into your career goals.
- Remember to smile and show enthusiasm about the role, company, or program in order to leave a lasting friendly impression.
- Convey genuine confidence and a professional enthusiasm for the position or program you are applying for. Being overly confident may come across as egotistic or rude.
- Ask for contact information if you do not have it already; you can ask for business cards if the interviewers have them. Put the information safely in your padfolio.
- Shake your interviewer's hand at the end of the interview and thank them for their time.
- Restate your interest in the opportunity, highlighting why you are a good fit.



# ENDING THE INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview, you should ask 3-5 well thought out questions. Prepare these ahead of time, and write them down in your padfolio if you think you might forget. It is appropriate to jot down notes in your padfolio as the interviewer answers, to show you are engaged and listening. Asking unique, thoughtful questions will make a lasting impression on the employer and can also provide you with relevant information.

DO ASK	DO NOT ASK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Next steps in the selection process</li><li>✓ Projects you will work on from the beginning</li><li>✓ Training/orientation opportunities</li><li>✓ Current events impacting the company or program</li><li>✓ Company or program's plans for future growth</li><li>✓ Tailored questions based on your research</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Salary or hours</li><li>✗ Housing accommodations</li><li>✗ Vacation time and holidays</li><li>✗ Controversial topics</li><li>✗ Company criticisms</li><li>✗ Personal topics</li></ul>

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Always send a thank you note! Send a short note via email within 24 hours of the interview to each person who interviewed you. An additional mailed hand-written letter or card is encouraged but not required. If you met with multiple people, it is recommended you send a personalized letter to each individual. An example is included below.

*Be sure to thank them for their time and reiterate your interest in the position.*

*Mention something you recall from the interview such as a unique insight or a story. This will make you stand out as well as show you were really invested in the conversation you had.*

*Lastly, thank them again for their time and inquire about additional steps.*

*Dear Dr. Smith:*

*It was a pleasure to meet you this morning. Thank you for your willingness to interview me for the Communications Associate position at ABC Laboratory. Your team really seems to enjoy working there, and I would be fortunate to count myself among them.*

*I was particularly interested in the upcoming advertising campaign you mentioned this morning to promote the use of more sustainable packaging that is set to be released this summer. I believe my prior internship at XYZ Public Relations Firm has provided me with a solid foundation to help spread the word about this campaign and other projects ABC Laboratory is currently developing.*

*Please let me know if you require any additional information from me. I look forward to hearing back from you about the next steps.*

*Sincerely,  
Jonathan Husky*

## NEGOTIATING AN OFFER

If you receive an offer, in person or over the phone, respond by saying: "Thank you so much, I am very excited for the opportunity to work with \_\_\_\_\_. When do you need my decision by? Would you be able to send me the official offer in writing? Thank you." It is important to express your enthusiasm for the position; however, do not say "yes" or accept on the spot, as this will cause you to lose your chance to negotiate. After having the above conversation, you can then call the CCD to speak to a career consultant about how to accept or decline the offer, how to balance multiple offers or ask for more time, and how to negotiate the offer. Do not accept an offer that you do not intend to keep; going back on an offer, also known as renegeing, reflects poorly on you as a professional and can have negative future implications on your career.

