



# Career Development

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## Interview Guide

**7900 W. Division Street, Crown Link 100  
River Forest, Illinois 60305**

**Phone: (708) 524-6786  
[careers@dom.edu](mailto:careers@dom.edu)**

## The Job Interview



The job interview is the most important part of the job search process. It is through the interview that you will have the opportunity to sell your skills and background to a potential employer and to get to know more about that employer. The most important part of an interview is your preparation. By preparing for the interview you can maximize your chances for success. There are four key areas of preparation:

- **Know Yourself**

To effectively articulate your qualifications to an employer; you must first know what they are. Review all aspects of your resume. Know why you chose your major and your university. Know what classes you liked and disliked. Know what skills and accomplishments you have developed through your coursework, your work experiences, your activities, and your life experiences. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be able to talk about yourself and your personal characteristics.

- **Know the Organization**

Start with the organization's website. Know the basics about the services/products they offer, who their competitors are, any recent business acquisitions or trends. You should also gather some "non-biased" information from websites such as Crain's Chicago Business ([www.chicagobusiness.com](http://www.chicagobusiness.com)), Career Shift (create an account from the link on [www.careers.dom.edu](http://www.careers.dom.edu)), or Chicago Tribune ([www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com)). If all else fails, stop by Career Development to see what we know about the company.

- **Know the Details**

Part of your interview preparation is to know the day, date, time, and location of your interview. Do not assume. **Check to be sure that you have the right information.** Be certain there have been no last-minute changes. Plan out what you are wearing, how you are getting there, etc. the night before.

- **Mock-Interviews**

You can use the Interview module in **Optimal Resume to participate in a "virtual" mock-interview.** You can choose the length of the practice session, the type of interview, and even the interviewer! Hundreds of interview questions are available. Job seekers can create their own set of interview questions or let the site pick questions at random for you. If you have a web-cam on your computer, you can save your practice session as a link and email your interview to others for feedback. It's easy to use and gets job seekers ready for face-to-face or online employment interviews. Create an account using your Dominican email from the link at [careers.dom.edu](http://careers.dom.edu)

## **Behavioral Interviewing**

Behavioral Interviewing is a style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is this: the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. Traditional interviewing questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently. Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are looking and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. For example, if successful leadership is necessary for a position, you may be asked to talk about an experience in which you were a leader as well as what you think makes a good leader. To assess which skills the employer seeks, review employer literature, speak with alumni, family and friends who work for the employers, and listen carefully during the organization's information session.

During a behavioral interview, always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely. Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations from your experiences on your resume where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks. During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them about the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. Your answer should contain these four steps (Situation, Task, Action, Result or "STAR") for optimum success.

### **STAR Method**

**Situation:** give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome

**Task:** describe the tasks involved in that situation

**Action:** talk about the various actions involved in the situation's task

**Results:** what results directly followed because of your actions

Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated STAR stories) during the interview.

It is helpful to frame your answer as a story that you can tell. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. They refer to this as "digging a well." The interviewer will sometimes ask you open ended questions to allow you to choose which examples you wish to use. When a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, he/she will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person." or "Lead me through your decision process."

Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."

Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then? What did you learn? Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service and work experience.

### **Example of a STAR Answer**

**Situation:** During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events.

**Task:** I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

**Action:** I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

**Result:** We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year.

### **Examples of a Behavioral Question**

Behavioral questions can be difficult if you are not prepared. Always try to be conscious about what the recruiter is trying to find out about you by asking you a particular question. Setting up a mock interview with a career advisor is an excellent way to practice. Here are some examples:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communications skills in order to get an important point across.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

## Common Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you choose to interview with our organization?
3. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?
4. Can you name some weaknesses?
5. Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
6. Of which three accomplishments are you most proud?
7. Who are your role models? Why?
8. What motivates you most in a job?
9. Have you ever spoken before a group of people? How large?
10. Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
11. Where do you want to be in five years? Ten years?
12. Do you plan to return to school for further education?
13. Why did you choose your major?
14. Why did you choose to attend your college or university?
15. In which campus activities did you participate?
16. Have you ever quit a job? Why?
17. Have you had difficulty getting along with a former professor/supervisor/co-worker and how did you handle it?
18. Which classes in your major did you like best? Least? Why?
19. How does your college education or work experience relate to this job?
20. Did you work while going to school? In what positions?
21. What did you enjoy most about your last employment? Least?
22. What do you know about our organization (products or services)?
23. Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution to an employer.
24. Give an example of a time in which you worked under deadline pressure.
25. Have you ever done any volunteer work? What kind?
26. How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?
27. Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
28. Would you be successful working with a team?
29. Are you able to work on several assignments at once?

## Questions to Ask Employers

1. What qualities are you looking for in the candidate who fills this position?
2. Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
3. How long has your internship program been in place?
4. What is your timeframe for filling this position?
5. What do you like best about your job/company?



## You are Ready to Interview!

Show up to your interview early so you can relax and collect your thoughts before the interview. There are four basic components to an initial employment interview. They are:

### 1. Introduction

The introduction will be very short, but a very important part of the interview. Good body posture, a firm handshake, and steady eye contact should all be displayed during the introduction. Answer the question, "Tell me about yourself" by stating your 30 second commercial.

### 2. Questions by the Interviewer

Your preparation and practice will pay off during this portion of the interview, which will be the longest part. Most interviewers will ask good, open-ended questions that will let you give information about your background. This is the time to present those specific answers that were talked about in the practice section. General answers, such as "I am hard working and motivated," don't mean anything to an interviewer until you tell them why you say that. What past experiences have you had that make you say that about yourself? If you do not understand a question, be sure to ask questions that will help you focus your answer. Don't forget to practice beforehand! Do a virtual interview through Optimal Resume.

### 3. Questions by the Interviewee

Again, this is where your preparation and **practice will pay off**. Prepare a **list of questions** for the interviewer ahead of time. Be certain you don't ask questions that were answered in the literature or on the company's website. However, it is fine to ask for additional information or interpretation of information. Clarify any aspects of the position through your questions. Just as you want the interviewer to ask you open-ended questions, your questions should be stated in such a way that you will receive helpful information from the interviewer. It's OK to have a list of questions prepared ahead of time, just bring them with you.

### 4. Closing

As with the introduction, the closing will be a small part of the interview, but also a **very important** part. Before you leave, **verify contact information for the interviewer**. If you have not received a **business card**, ask for one. Also, verify the next step in the hiring process. Will they follow up with you or should you **follow up** with them and how soon? Express your **appreciation** for the opportunity to interview and leave with **a smile and a handshake**.

### 5. After the Interview

Send a **brief thank you note** to the recruiter within a day or two of the interview, if you are interested in pursuing a job with that organization. In the note, thank them for their time, express excitement about the organization or position, and tell them you look forward to hearing from them. If you do not hear from them within a specified amount of time, follow up with them.

Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life. ~Confucius

# When Job-Hunting: Dress for Success

By: Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.

It's probably one of the most overused phrases in job-hunting, but also one of the most underutilized by job-seekers: dress for success. In job-hunting, first impressions are critical. Remember, you are marketing a product -- yourself -- to a potential employer, and the first thing the employer sees when greeting you is your attire; thus, you must make every effort to have the proper dress for the type of job you are seeking. Will dressing properly get you the job? Of course not, but it will give you a competitive edge and a positive first impression

Should you be judged by what you wear? Perhaps not, but the reality is, of course, that you are judged. Throughout the entire job-seeking process employers use short-cuts -- heuristics or rules of thumb -- to save time. With cover letters, it's the opening paragraph and a quick scan of your qualifications. With resumes, it is a quick scan of your accomplishments. With the job interview, it's how you're dressed that sets the tone of the interview.

How should you dress? Dressing conservatively is always the safest route, but you should also try and do a little investigating of your prospective employer so that what you wear to the interview makes you look as though you fit in with the organization. If you overdress (which is rare but can happen) or underdress (the more likely scenario), the potential employer may feel that you don't care enough about the job.

How do you find out what is the proper dress for a given job/company/industry? You can call the Human Resources office where you are interviewing and simply ask. Or, you could visit the company's office to retrieve an application or other company information and observe the attire current employees are wearing -- though make sure you are not there on a "casual day" and misinterpret the dress code.

Finally, do you need to run out and spend a lot of money on clothes for interviewing? No, but you should make sure you have at least two professional sets of attire. You'll need more than that, but depending on your current financial condition, two is enough to get started and you can buy more once you have the job or have more financial resources.

## Hints for Dress for Success

Attention to details is crucial, so here are some tips for both men and women. Make sure you have:

- clean and polished conservative dress shoes
- well-groomed hairstyle
- cleaned and trimmed fingernails
- minimal cologne or perfume
- no visible tattoos or body piercing beyond conservative ear piercings for women
- well-brushed teeth and fresh breath
- no gum, candy, or other objects in your mouth
- minimal jewelry
- no body odor

Finally, check your attire in the rest room just before your interview for a final check of your appearance -- to make sure your tie is straight, your hair is combed, etc.

*Dr. Randall Hansen is currently Webmaster of Quintessential Careers, as well as publisher of its electronic newsletter, [QuintZine](#). He writes a biweekly career advice column under the name, [The Career Doctor](#). He is also a tenured, associate professor of marketing in the School of Business Administration at Stetson University in DeLand, Florida. He is a published career expert -- and has been for the last ten years. He is co-author, with Katharine Hansen, of Dynamic Cover Letters. And he has been an employer and consultant dealing with hiring and firing decisions for the past fifteen years. He can be reached at [randall@quintcareers.com](mailto:randall@quintcareers.com)*

### **Informational Interview:**

An informational interview is a meeting between you and a professional. The purpose is to help define your career options. It is an opportunity to learn first-hand about your chosen profession by asking questions about tasks, business environment, and educational background. It is **NOT** to ask for a job.

### **Questions to ask:**

1. What is your typical workday like?
2. What do you like most (and least) about your job?
3. What skills/abilities are most important to succeed in this job?
4. What is your educational background?
5. How did you get started in this field?
6. What courses were most helpful to you and which would you recommend?
7. What is the best way to get started in this field?
8. What career paths are generally available?
9. What kinds of entry-level jobs or internships do you think are good training ground?
10. Do you spend most of your time at your desk? Moving around the company? Outside?
11. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
12. What kinds of decisions do you make?
13. What hours do you normally work? Is there much travel involved?
14. What is the job title of the person you report to? The titles of people who report to you?
15. What are the positive/negative aspects of working in this field?
16. What are the "hot issues" in this field?
17. What trends and developments do you see affecting career opportunities?
18. What is the corporate culture of your company? Is it informal or formal? Do people work autonomously or in teams?
19. Are you active in any professional organizations? Are students invited to attend? Are student memberships available?

### **Following Up:**

Review your notes. What was your impression? Did you leave the interview feeling as if you can envision a future in this occupation or were you discouraged-you don't feel you learned enough about the occupation or the job description doesn't sound appealing any longer?

Send a thank-you note to anyone you interview. Whether you decide to forge ahead on that career path or find another one, this professional may be a good person to network with when you begin your job search.