

Interviewing

Most people describe interviewing as the most intimidating part of the job or internship search. However, learning how to interview well is a skill that can be developed by anyone—even by those who feel especially anxious in interview situations. The key is thorough preparation and consistent practice.

Much of this preparation builds on the work you will already have put into your job or internship search:

- Drafting an accomplishment-based resume based on STAR statements will give you stories that confirm your competence;
- Doing company research and informational interviews will help you articulate why you are a good fit for both the position and the company; it will also teach you the language and culture of the target industry and company;
- Writing a cover letter that clearly matches your experience point-by-point to the essential requirements of the job will help you demonstrate the relevance of your skill set.

The next step is to turn this raw material into answers to potential interview questions. Although there are countless possible questions an interviewer might pose, you need only know the key messages you want to communicate about yourself. These messages will address any number of questions, and should be formulated as concrete stories about yourself and what you've accomplished. Just as every good story has a beginning, middle and end, you should structure your answers clearly, using the STAR format that helped you write your accomplishment-based resume. Describe the:

Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

Mock Interviews

Well before any anticipated interviews, you should begin practicing your interviewing skills through regular mock interviews with a career coach. After your first mock interview, use a webcam to record a simulated interview at home using InterviewStream [see sidebar]. After reviewing the recording and evaluating your own performance, schedule a follow-up mock interview to gauge your progress.

We recommend that you complete at least three mock interviews per quarter. In any case, before you are allowed to participate in on-campus recruiting, you must complete at least one mock interview.

Tips for using mock interviews effectively:

- Running through repeated mock interviews—no matter how many—isn't enough to make real progress; you need to identify problem areas and develop strategies to address them.
- Don't cram in mock interviews just before a real interview. That time is better spent researching the company/industry, eating well and getting rest.

Interview Preparation

While mock interviews are an effective way to develop your interviewing skills, they aren't sufficient as preparation for an actual interview. Beyond telling the interviewer about yourself, you need to show that you are both serious and knowledgeable about the company/industry/position. How well you do this will determine whether the interviewer perceives you in a lim-

ited functional role or as a potential leader.

You will demonstrate your knowledge implicitly and explicitly by:

- How you contextualize your answers. Do you have a broad perspective that connects the tactical level to general strategic issues?
- The depth and relevance of your questions. Always prepare at least several questions for your interviewer.

Use the time before an interview for in-depth research:

- Talk to classmates, alumni and others in your network with experience at the company or in the industry.
- Go beyond the company's own website to find out what others (competitors, the media, government offices, etc.) say about the company and the industry. LexisNexis, an online archive of news, legal and business content, is a great resource that is free to UW students: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/databases/LexisNexis/>
- Attend any information sessions the company might hold on campus to learn first-hand about the company's culture, potential career paths and hiring process.

Interview Etiquette

At every stage of the interview—from the parking lot and reception area to the interview room—consider that you are being evaluated. Behave courteously and professionally.

Always ask for the interviewer's business card. Send a thank you note (by email) within the next day. Should be straightforward, sincere thanks for the interview—at most reiterate interest in company and position, but don't sell yourself. This can often diminish the sincerity of your note. However, it can be acceptable to correct a mistake you made in the interview or otherwise supply information you didn't have during the interview.