

Successful Interviewing

The interview is the single most important part of an employer's selection process.

But there's no need to get butterflies or sweaty palms if you're prepared to effectively package and present your passion and fit for the position. The pointers in this chapter will help you plan, prepare, and practice for a great interview.

INTERVIEW FORMATS

On-Campus Recruitment (OCR)

Nearly 200 top employers conduct interviews at the UCLA Career Center through the OCR program each year. To learn more about the protocols and best practices, first complete the OCR Orientation in My UCLA > Finances & Jobs tab.

Screening: Before inviting you to interview, an employer may screen you via phone or video (Skype, etc.). The interviewer asks pre-qualifying questions to determine if you should advance to an interview.

Phone Interview Tips:

1. **Be ready** at least five minutes prior to the time the employer is scheduled to call you.
2. **Prevent interruptions.** Turn off notifications and find a quiet place to conduct the interview. If you share a living space, post a "Do Not Disturb" sign.
3. **Use a landline**, if possible, for better call quality and reduced risk of dropped calls. If using a mobile phone, make sure your ringer is audible and that you have adequate signal strength and battery life.
4. **Use your notes.** This is one main benefit to phone interviews. Be prepared to take notes as well.
5. **Smile.** Even though they can't see you, smiling during the interview will convey enthusiasm.

Video Interview Tips:

In addition to the Phone Interview Tips:

1. Test your equipment (webcam, speakers, and microphone) ahead of time to prevent technical glitches from occurring during the interview.
2. Position your camera so that your background is clean, professional and free of distractions. A neutral wall is recommended with the light source in front of (not behind) you.

3. If available, the Career Center will allow you to utilize a small room for your virtual interview. Please visit the Career Center 2 days before your interview to check for availability.

One-on-One: One interviewer.

Panel: Two or more interviewers. Be sure to make eye contact with each panelist as you answer each question.

Group: You are interviewed with a group of other candidates. Often used to evaluate your teamwork skills and how you operate in a group setting.

Case: Commonly used for consulting positions to evaluate your thought process. You are given a complex problem and are asked to formulate a solution under tight time constraints. See Career Library for preparation resources.

Presentation: Evaluates your public speaking and communication skills. Practice to ensure you stay within the time frame allocated.

Day-Long (or more): Over the course of one or more days, candidates participate in multiple interview segments with different interviewers and varying formats. May include interviews over a meal. Be sure to remain professional and utilize proper dining etiquette. Make sure you are rested and energized to last all day. Especially if you are introverted, use the breaks to sit quietly by yourself and recharge.

9 STEPS TO ACING THE INTERVIEW

Before the Interview

Step 1: Do Your Research

Candidates who know the employer's business and the requirements of the position are most likely to make it to the next round of interviews. Research will help you prepare appropriate points to emphasize and questions to ask. It will also give you a head start in responding to such interview questions as "What do you know about our company?" and "Why are you interested in working for this company?"

- Study the job posting carefully. Come up with examples of how you have demonstrated the skills and qualifications they are seeking through your past experiences.
- Visit the company website and familiarize yourself with their:
 - › Mission Statement

- › Products & Services
- › Locations / Size
- › Current News / Announcements
- Think of ways to connect your own values, experiences, and skills to demonstrate a fit with their company.
- Use InterviewStream, an extremely effective online tool found on Handshake.
- Visit **GlassDoor.com** and **Indeed.com** to read employee reviews, interview tips, and salary information related to the company.
- Follow the company on various social media outlets so you understand their brand, culture, and current announcements.

Step 2: Showcase Yourself

- Be prepared to introduce yourself and give an overview of your relevant past experiences in about three minutes.
- Review the resume and cover letter you submitted and prepare yourself to elaborate on all experiences and skills you indicated.
- Brainstorm your past accomplishments and challenging situations.
- Come up with CARR stories that demonstrate that you possess the skills that the position requires. (see *the CARR Method at the end of this chapter*).
- Know your strengths and how you can relate them to the position.
- Know one of your primary weaknesses and how you are managing it.

Step 3: Practice

After you have brainstormed talking points in Step 1 & 2, practice your answers to common questions aloud. Sometimes our thoughts don't come across as we intended when we speak out loud.

- Practice answering the most common interview questions aloud. See Common Interview Questions section on page 45.
- Use InterviewStream to video record yourself and watch it back so you can see how you come across, if you exhibit any distracting verbal fillers or non-verbal cues, and if your responses are too short, too long, or disjointed. Aim for focused, two to three minute responses to each question.
- While we encourage you to schedule a mock interview with a career engagement educator in order to receive feedback from an experienced professional, it is also valuable to practice with friends and family.

Step 4: Prepare Questions for Them

A typical interview concludes with an opportunity for you to ask questions of the interviewer(s). Be prepared with thoughtful questions in order to demonstrate your preparedness, interest in the position/company; and to help you determine whether the position is right for you. An interview is a two-way street to determine mutual fit.

The questions you ask should:

- Build upon the research you conducted in Step 1.
- Do not ask questions you could have found the answer to online.
- Demonstrate that you are trying to determine whether you could see yourself working there.
- Allow the interviewers to offer their own personal perspectives. This will engage them and open up a two-way conversation.

Sample Questions to Ask:

- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- What percentage of time would be devoted to each of the responsibilities of the position?
- What are the main opportunities or challenges or associated with this position?
- What is the nature of the training program and supervision provided to new employees?
- What are the backgrounds of other employees I would be working with in this position?
- What is the management style and corporate culture?
- What are the characteristics of your most outstanding employees in a similar position?

Step 5: Dress for Success

Business professional attire is generally expected at all interviews unless the employer indicates that business casual attire is acceptable (please see next page for photos demonstrating each). Make sure they are clean, and press your outfit ahead of time.

Guidelines:

- Clean, free of wrinkles and tears, comfortable fit.
- Suits: Pant suits and skirt suits are acceptable. Skirts should be no shorter than knee-length.
 - › Dark colors are more professional (black, navy), though a lighter colored suit (gray, beige) may be appropriate, depending upon company culture.
- Shirts: Solid color. Covers the chest.
- Tie: A conservative pattern or solid color. Not necessary for those who identify as female.
- Shoes: Close-toed dress shoes in a solid dark or neutral color. Heels or flats are acceptable. If heels, no more than two inches high.
- Socks (if wearing pant suit): Solid dark color that matches or complements suit.
- Accessories: Minimal and subtle. Avoid bringing a purse or bag, if possible. A leather portfolio for your resumes, notepad, and pen is recommended.

Business Professional Attire

When in doubt, dress professionally for all interviews.



Business Casual Attire

This is only acceptable if it's indicated by the employer.



INTERVIEW DAY

Step 6: Manage Your Time

- Prepare in advance so you can relax the night prior to the interview and get plenty of sleep.
- If you have a morning interview, set out your clothes and materials the night before.
- Give yourself more time than you think you need to get to your interview. Traffic and parking difficulties are not acceptable excuses for being late. You should check-in at the reception desk 10-15 minutes early.

Step 7: Communicate Effectively

These communication tips will help ensure that you are demonstrating politeness, confidence in yourself, and enthusiasm for the position:

- Follow the interviewer's lead.
- Have positive energy—smile.
- Have a firm handshake.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Answer questions fully and concisely (two to three minutes).
- Speak in a relaxed, conversational style while maintaining professionalism.
- Check your tone and rate of speech.
- Pay attention to the interviewers' nonverbal cues and adapt accordingly.
- Avoid verbal fillers such as "like, um, and you know".
- Exhibit appropriate body language:
 - › Open posture
 - › Minimal hand gestures
 - › Avoid fidgeting (tapping feet, swiveling chair, touching face/hair, etc.)

At the end of the interview you will have an opportunity to ask questions of the interviewers:

- After asking your questions, ask about the next steps in the process (Is there another round of interviews? What format will they be? When will you be notified?).
- Collect business cards from all interviewers.
- Take initiative to shake hands with all interviewers and thank them for their time.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Step 8: Evaluate the Interview

Take time to reflect on the interview. Write down any interview questions you can remember, notes of what you learned, key facts, and the interviewers' names. You will be able to use these items to help prepare you if you get a second interview and for writing the thank you notes.

Step 9: Send Thank You Letter

Always send a thank you letter or email to each person on the interview committee within 24 hours of an interview. It is a professional courtesy that demonstrates your enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to interview. A thoughtful letter may be the difference between getting the job or not.

The letter may be sent via email or a handwritten thank you note.

- Thank the interviewer for his or her time and interest in meeting with you and explaining the position.
- Reiterate the skills, strengths, and abilities you can bring to the job.

- Refer to something specific you discussed in the interview to remind them of your conversation.
- Perhaps describe how your interest was intensified after learning something specific from one of the questions you asked at the end.
- Express your interest in the position.
- See “Example of Thank You Letter” on page 46.

Common Interview Questions

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. What is your understanding of the position and why are you interested in it?
3. How have your past experiences prepared you for this position?
4. How does this position align with your long-term and short-term career goals?
5. What do you know about our company, our products, and our mission statement?
6. In what significant ways can you contribute to our organization?
7. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
8. Tell us about a time when...
9. Describe an example of when you showed...
10. Tell us about one of your greatest accomplishments.
11. Describe what you would consider to be the ideal job.
12. What would you do if your colleagues were not doing their share of the work?
13. Describe your decision making process.
14. What kind of boss do you prefer?
15. How do you feel about working in an unstructured environment?
16. Why should we hire you instead of another candidate?
17. Who is your role model and why?
18. If one of your professors or former supervisors were to evaluate you, what would he or she say?
19. Do you have anything else you would like us to know about you?
20. Do you have any questions for us?

Be sure to practice your responses to these and other questions on InterviewStream. Visit Handshake to access this helpful tool.

How to Answer Behavioral Questions:

The CARR Method

Behavioral questions aim to assess a particular skill or quality through an example of how you handled a situation in the past. The idea is that past behavior indicates future performance. Behavioral questions typically start with “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give an example of when you...”

Desirable Skills	Behavioral Interview Questions
Leadership	Give an example that demonstrates what type of leader you are.
Decision Making	Tell me about a time when you had to make a split-second decision.
Teamwork	Describe a time when a team member disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
Initiative	Give an example of a time you were given no direction, but took the initiative to get something done.
Organization	Tell me about a time when you were overwhelmed by too many competing responsibilities. How did you prioritize your tasks?
Problem Solving	Give me an example of when something you tried to accomplish failed.
Communication	Describe a time when you were able to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

The CARR method will allow you to formulate a thorough and concise response that will fully address the question and demonstrate how the example is relevant to the position you are interviewing for.

Context	Describe a specific event or situation. Give enough detail and context for the interviewer to understand. Draw from campus, work, or community experiences.
Action	Describe the action that you took to address the situation. If you are describing a group project, focus on your role.
Result	What did you accomplish? If not a success, what did you learn?
Relate	How does this relate to the position you’re applying for?

Thank You Letter Example

Kahrear Scantor

321 Belmont Ave., #106, Los Angeles, CA 99999, (555) 555-5555 Kahrear@ucla.net

May 27, 20XX

Ms. Joanna Lastname
Human Resources
Wealth Management Fictitious Name
12345 Wilshire Blvd., Sixteenth Floor
Century City, CA 99999

Dear Ms. Lastname:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the Financial Analyst position. I enjoyed speaking with you and learning more about Wealth Management Fictitious Name and your department. [Insert something specific you learned during the interview that particularly interested or excited you.]

My enthusiasm for the position and interest for working for Wealth Management Fictitious Name were greatly strengthened as a result of our interview. I am confident that my academic background and work experience provide a good fit with your requirements of the job. I can tell that those are qualities you value in an employee and I believe I have demonstrated those through [insert a brief recap of an accomplishment or experience you discussed during the interview].

Please feel free to contact me at (555) 555-5555 or by email to Kahrear@ucla.net if you would like me to provide you with any additional information. Thank you again for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kahrear Scantor

Kahrear Scantor