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When interviewing for a job or internship, your first interaction with an employer often begins with an email or a phone conversation. From that very first point of contact, the interviewer is evaluating your professionalism. Below are tips on how to put your best professional foot forward.

Professional Etiquette

Email

- Use a professional email address
- Use a descriptive subject line such as “Marketing Assistant Interview”
- Keep your message professional, short, and concise
- Do not use casual language, abbreviations, all CAPS or emojis. Write in complete sentences
- Use an easy-to-read font
- Be sure to spell-check and proofread your message before sending
- Thank the professional at the end of the email

Phone

- Record a professional voicemail message. For example, “Hello, you have reached _____. I am unavailable at the moment. If you could please leave your name, number, and a brief message, I will get back to you as soon as possible. Thank you.”
- Choose a quiet environment for phone conversations
- Do not answer your phone in a loud setting or while driving. Have the phone call go to voicemail and return the phone call

In-Person

- Dress professionally
- Greet the professional with a firm handshake, introduce yourself with your first and last name, and express your interest in meeting them
- Show that you are listening. Nod your head, smile, and maintain good eye contact
- Avoid excessive hand gestures. Keep your hands in your lap, if possible
- Turn off your cell phone. Do not answer your phone or text during any interactions with professionals

Virtual

- Choose a quiet location where you will not be interrupted
- Select a location that has a clean and professional background
- Be sure to download the virtual platform that is going to be used for the interview
- Test the virtual platform prior to the start of your interview
- Test your Wi-Fi to ensure a good connection

Digital Presence

- Share content that is professional in nature or appropriate for a wide audience
- Maintain strict privacy settings on social media and monitor them on a regular basis
- Be sure that all profile photos are appropriate. Check other photos as well. If you are unsure if a photo is appropriate, it is best to just delete or untag it
- Google yourself. Delete and/or update inappropriate information (at least during your job search)

Interview Preparation

Advanced preparation is key to interview success. The following preparation strategies are recommended if you want to be considered as a serious and strong candidate for a job or internship.

Know Yourself

- Know the types of positions you are seeking and why you are interested
- Review the cover letter and resume that you submitted. You should know your resume inside and out
- Identify your top skills and abilities
- Consider work and lifestyle values that are important to you

Review the Job Description

Prior to any interview, you should review the job description carefully. Consider the following questions:

- Do you meet the qualifications?
- Can you anticipate questions the interviewer might ask?
- How do your skills and experiences relate to the position?

Research the Organization

Make it a priority to visit the organization's website. You should be able to answer: "What do you know about our organization? Why do you want to work for our organization?"

Below is a list of things to keep in mind when you are researching an organization.

- History of the Organization
- Mission Statement
- Organizational structure, branches, locations, and size
- Clients, Products and Services
- Major Competitors
- News/Recent Events/Newsletter/Blog

In addition to checking out the organization's website, be sure to review their social media pages for anything newsworthy and read company reviews on Glassdoor.com. Go one step further and google the organization to see if they have been in the news recently. If you know whom you will be interviewing with, research the interviewer(s) on LinkedIn. Lastly, research the industry to be up to date on the current trends.

Practice Commonly Asked Questions

Practice makes perfect. Prior to an interview, it is recommended that you review sample interview questions and practice your responses. Story telling is very important during an interview. Be sure to include examples in your answers from internships, jobs, course projects, leadership roles, and other experiences. Like studying for an exam, the more time you spend preparing, the less nervous you will likely be and the chances of you doing well increases.

Below are sample questions that are most often asked during an interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you the best person for this position?
3. How has your experience prepared you for this role?
4. What is your greatest strength?
5. What is your greatest weakness?
6. How do you handle pressure or stressful situations?

7. Why are you interested in our organization/role?
8. Where do you see yourself professionally in 5 years?
9. How would your supervisor and colleagues describe you?
10. What are your expectations for a future employer? In a supervisor?
11. Give an example of a problem you solved and the process you used to solve it.
12. Why are you passionate about or interested in this field?
13. Give me an example of a time when you failed and how you handled that situation.
14. Tell me about a team project you were a part of and your contribution to it.
15. Describe your experiences working with diverse groups of people.
16. Tell me about a recent project of yours and how you went about organizing your time.
17. What type of technology skills will you bring to this position?
18. How have your academic courses prepared you for this position?
19. What type of involvement have you had on campus or in your community and what have you learned from it?
20. Do you have any questions for me?

A more comprehensive list of commonly asked interview questions, including commonly asked questions for teacher candidates, can be found on the Career Services website.

Prepare for Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interview questions ask candidates how they have responded to a particular situation in the past to determine how they would potentially approach a similar situation in the future. The interviewer wants to get a sense of how a candidate might react in their workplace. Key phrases to listen for include:

"Give me an example of ..."
"Tell me about a time when..."
"Describe an occasion when..."
"Share an example of a situation where ..."

Candidates who tend to do the best with behavioral interview questions are those who have predicted the questions and have planned and practiced the answers prior to the interview. Here are some important tips on how to plan for a behavioral interview:

1. Research the organization and industry thoroughly
2. Review the job description, research the department that you will be working for, and review the supervisor's LinkedIn profile to get a sense of what their job responsibilities are
3. Review your resume. What skills and experiences are going to be important to highlight?
4. Develop a list of strong examples that will highlight the skills and experiences that relate to the job

When answering behavioral questions, the recommended strategy to ace the interview is to use the **STAR** method.

Situation – State the situation. What was the project/situation?

Tasks – Explain the tasks involved in the situation. What were the tasks that had to be completed?

Actions – Tell the story of how you completed the tasks. What actions had to be taken?

Results – Discuss the results. What were the results and what did you learn that relates to the job for which you are applying?

Below are samples of behavioral interview questions you may encounter during an interview:

1. Tell me about a time when you overcame a challenge
2. Give me an example of a problem you solved and the process that you used
3. Describe a situation where you had conflict with another individual and how you resolved it
4. Take me through a project where you demonstrated leadership
5. Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team

Prepare Questions that You can Ask the Interviewer

An interview is a two-way street. This is the time where you can learn more about the position and organization to see if it will be a good fit for you. Prepare 10 potential questions prior to the interview with the intentions of asking 2-3 of them. Below are samples of questions that you may be interested in asking:

1. What is your method for training new employees?
2. What would my first week on the job look like?
3. What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
4. How would you describe your supervisory style?
5. How will my performance be evaluated in this position?
6. What does a typical work week look like for this position?
7. How would you describe the company culture?
8. What are some of the challenges you have seen with people in this role?
9. What do you like best about working here?
10. Could you describe advancement opportunities through the organization?

Please note: Avoid questions about salary and benefits until you receive a job offer or the employer brings up the topic.

Select Professional Attire to Wear on the Day of the Interview

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. While each job and industry may warrant its own style and expectations for attire, you still need to take the interview seriously and dress professionally. Below are descriptions of the two main types of attire when it comes to the professional workplace and interviewing:

Business Professional Attire

This is considered the highest level of attire and typically includes:

- Matching 2-piece traditional pant or skirt suit in black, gray, or navy blue
- White, solid, or striped dress shirt and tie or blouse with long sleeves
- Dress shoes

Business Casual Attire

This is often considered acceptable for everyday wear on the job and typically includes:

- Dress pants or skirt
- Dress shirt, blouse, polo, or sweater
- Dress shoes

General Tips

- If you wear a tie, the proper length is for it to hit the top of your belt
- Make sure your shoes are clean, polished, and not scuffed. Wear comfortable yet professional shoes
- Match your belt color to your shoe color
- Wear dress socks that match the suit or pantyhose in a neutral tone
- Keep your accessories minimal: simple, tasteful jewelry, watches, ties, etc.
- Maintain neat hair and/or make-up
- Use scents, perfume, and aftershave sparingly, if at all
- Trim your beard/mustache or be clean-shaven
- Ensure hands are clean and nails are well manicured
- Watch what you eat before/during an interview (no onions, garlic, spinach, etc.)
- Consider your visible piercings or tattoos and how they may be received in the industry

Types of Interviews

Interviews can take place in many forms. Below is a list of some types of interviews you may encounter during your internship or job search.

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are often used to screen candidates and narrow down the pool of applicants. Success during a phone interview usually leads to an in-person or virtual interview. Most recruiters will contact you to schedule a phone interview, but there are some cases when you may be contacted by a recruiter who is interested in holding an impromptu phone interview. Be prepared for either situation.

Prior to the phone interview, a candidate can prepare by doing the following:

- Confirm the day, date, and time of the interview
- Confirm who will be calling whom
- Inquire about who will be conducting the interview
- Review the organization's website and revisit the job description
- Practice answers to commonly asked questions and prepare questions that you would like to ask
- Check your cell phone reception in the room you anticipate using for the phone interview
- Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed and will be able to concentrate
- Gather your cover letter, resume, job description, pad of paper and a pen
- Turn on your laptop/computer and have the organization's website in front of you
- Keep a glass of water nearby for use during the interview

Virtual Interviews

Virtual interviews have become increasingly popular. Some tips on how to master a virtual interview are as follows:

- Find a quiet location with good Wi-Fi connection
- Ensure a clean and professional background with good lighting
- Dress professionally

- Test your computer's microphone and camera
- Download and test the system (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
- Gather your cover letter, resume, job description, a pad of paper with the questions you would like to ask the interviewer(s), and a pen for any notes you would like to jot down
- Keep a glass of water nearby during the interview
- Join the meeting about 5 minutes before the interview is scheduled to start
- Look at the webcam and not the interviewer's face on your screen
- Mute desktop notifications on your computer to prevent alert distractions during the interview

On-Site Interviews

An on-site or in-person interview can vary from one organization to the next. You could be interviewing with someone from human resources, a hiring manager, or with a group of interviewers. It is strongly recommended to ask ahead of time who you will be interviewing with, so that you can prepare accordingly. Be sure to collect business cards if available.

Case Interviews

During a case interview, the candidate is given a hypothetical situation in which they are given a problem to solve. The candidate is expected to ask a series of detailed questions about the situation to help formulate a response. Typically, these types of interviews are for mid to senior level candidates in the field of management consulting.

Group Interviews

A group interview consists of one or more interviewers asking several internship/job candidates questions at the same time. This type of interview typically takes place if the organization needs to fill multiple positions quickly. It is also more likely to occur in the food service, hospitality, and retail industries.

Interview Follow-Up: The Thank You

An interview is not officially over until you send a formal thank you to each one of the interviewers. The practice of following up after an interview cannot be stressed enough. It can set you apart from other candidates. **Within one to two days** of each interview, you should prepare and send a formal email thanking the person(s) who interviewed you. The following items highlight the key aspects of a thank you:

1. Thank the person for the opportunity to interview for the position
2. Reference your conversation and reiterate your skills and abilities
3. State that you look forward to continuing the interview process, if you are still interested in the position

Sample Thank You Email:

TO: recruiter@citrincooperman.com

SUBJECT: Thank you for your time

Dear Susan:

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Staff Accountant position at Citrin Cooperman. I sincerely enjoyed meeting you yesterday. Our conversation gave me a better understanding of the company and the requirements for the job. Citrin Cooperman is the type of company I would be proud to call my employer.

I feel confident that my academic program at Bridgewater State University as an accounting major and the skills I gained through my internship at H&R Block would make me a good fit for this position. During the interview, you mentioned that you wanted a candidate that was a quick learner and a team player. Having started my internship at H&R Block in the middle of the busy tax season, I had to learn on the job quickly, hone my time management skills, and work with my team to get the job done. I can offer you these skills and attributes as well as my strong attention to detail, flexibility, and excellent customer service.

My interest in the position was further solidified because of the interview. I look forward to further discussing the ways in which I could contribute to Citrin Cooperman. Please feel free to contact me at 555-555-5555 or via student@student.bridgew.edu if you have additional questions about my candidacy. Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sarah Jones

Interview Preparation Checklist

- ☐ Research the organization. Check out the website of the organization with which you are interviewing. Be able to answer questions like: “*What do you know about our organization?*” and “*Why do you want to work for our organization?*”
- ☐ Google the organization you are interviewing with to see if they have been in the news.
- ☐ Practice commonly asked questions. Google industry-specific interview questions and practice how you would answer them during the interview. Be ready to answer, “Tell me about yourself.” and “Why should we hire you?”
- ☐ Prepare a list of 5-10 thoughtful questions that you would like to ask the interviewer(s). You should ask the interviewer(s) 2-3 of the questions when given the opportunity to do so, typically towards the end of the interview. Do not ask about salary and/or benefits until you receive the job offer.
- ☐ Review your resume and job description the night before your scheduled interview.
- ☐ Plan what you are going to wear. Professional attire, meaning a business suit, is strongly recommended when attending an interview. Your suit should be a conservative color, such as navy, black or gray with a white or simple color collared shirt/blouse. Match your belt color with your shoe color.
- ☐ Get a haircut, if needed. Hair and makeup should be neat. Limit the amount of cologne/perfume that you apply.
- ☐ Gather the materials that you would like to take to the interview, including a padfolio or folder with copies of your resume, reference page, a pad of paper with your questions and a pen to take notes.
- ☐ Confirm the date, time, location and where to park. If you have not yet done so, ask who will be conducting the interview.
- ☐ Confirm if the interviewer will be calling you or you will be calling them, if you have a phone interview scheduled. Be sure to find a spot with good reception.
- ☐ Map out the location of your interview in advance and allow extra time in case of traffic or lack of parking.
- ☐ Beware of what you eat prior to the interview (no onions, garlic, spinach, etc.). Do not smoke prior to your interview.
- ☐ Arrive 10-15 minutes early prior to your scheduled interview time in person; 5-10 minutes for virtual.
- ☐ Turn off or mute notifications on your phone and other devices to avoid interruptions.
- ☐ Prior to check-in, seek out a restroom with a mirror to make sure you look professional.
- ☐ Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and maintain good eye contact. Smile!
- ☐ Be aware of your posture and hand movements. Sit up straight and minimize your hand gestures.
- ☐ Speak clearly and loud enough, so that you will be heard. Avoid speaking too fast and using verbal fillers like “umm.”
- ☐ Listen to the questions carefully and ask for clarification if the question is unclear. It is perfectly acceptable to take a moment before responding to a question.
- ☐ Provide examples to back up your answers to each question that you are asked, if possible.
- ☐ Refrain from speaking negatively about a supervisor, coworkers, or an employer.
- ☐ Follow the STAR method when you are asked to provide specific examples from your work or academic experience.
 - **S**ituation – What was the project/situation that you are using as an example?
 - **T**asks – What were the tasks that you needed to accomplish?
 - **A**ctions – How did you complete the task(s)?
 - **R**esults – What was the result of the project/situation?
- ☐ Send an individualized thank you email to each person that took part in your interview, within one to two days of your interview. Reference your conversation and reiterate your skills and qualifications.