

# PREPARING FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

---

Congratulations! An employer has looked over your resume, read through your impeccably tailored cover letter, and now wants to interview YOU for the position. Interviewing is a two-way process: you are evaluating an organization and position while the employer is evaluating you. Your main goals should be to:

- Communicate – both verbally and nonverbally – your professional skills and abilities.
- Exchange information that will enable you and the interviewer to gain a better understanding of the potential “fit” between you and the position.
- Promote yourself into the next phase of the interview process.

## Know Your Audience

Research the organization’s mission, leadership, number of employees, products, services, programs, and customers or clients. Read the “About Us” section, past press releases, and annual reports. Explore the organization’s structure, profitability, and competitors. Follow organizations if they are active on social media.

In addition to researching the company, it is vital that you “research” yourself. Why did you apply for this job? Think back to your previous experiences (e.g., work, academics, professional associations, and volunteer roles) to determine the skills and abilities you have developed. Think of ways you can describe your accomplishments and skills in relation to the job for which you have applied.

## What should I plan to talk about?

Think ahead about what stories you want to tell. Use the **S.T.A.R.** approach to answering questions: State the Situation and your Task, describe the Action you took, and then sum up the Result. Develop various anecdotes that could give the interviewer a picture of who you are. Does the job require good organizational and managerial skills? Discuss the planning, coordinating, and delegating you did for a committee. Does the employer need someone who's a team player? You could talk about any group project or collaborative effort in which you played an influential and supportive role. By using experiential anecdotes you will create an accurate and believable picture of yourself.

## Is there anything I shouldn't discuss?

Usually, the employer brings up salary and benefits at the on-site interview or when a job offer is presented. If you feel you must know the salary at an earlier point, you might ask for a salary range rather than a specific figure. Formally presenting yourself to an employer can be a challenge, especially if you are harboring doubts in your own mind about where your career niche might be. Maybe you are interested in paralegal work because it could help you make a decision about law school. Or the nine-month schedule of a teaching job is appealing because it would give you time to travel in the summer. These are legitimate reasons for choosing one type of work over another, but they both focus on what a job or employer can offer you. In an interview, you should stress what you can do for the employer. It is fine to mention the non job-related factors that led to your interest in a position but keep the emphasis on your potential benefit to the employer: the abilities, experiences, and attributes that could enhance your performance on the job.

In the U.S. it is illegal for interviewers to ask about age, ethnicity, religion, race, citizenship, military record, sexual orientation, marital status, arrest record, and/or disabilities. If you are asked about one of these topics, you can politely refuse to answer, or ask why the question is relevant so that you could address what you think is the underlying issue. For example, the question “Is that an engagement ring on your finger?” may be the interviewer’s clumsy way of asking if

you can handle the nights, weekends, and travel the job requires. You could reply: "I'm aware of the time commitment needed for the position, and I assure you I'm quite willing to put in the hours needed to do an excellent job."

### **"Do you have any questions for me?"**

It is common for the interviewer to leave time for you to ask him or her questions. So how do you know what to ask? That's where all your pre-interview research comes in! The best questions you can ask are:

- Open ended—avoid questions that could be answered with a simple "yes" or "no"
- Focused—you just spent all that time building rapport with your interviews; now is not the time to stump him/her!
- Thoughtful—your questions should not be something that could be answered by reading the organization's website or promotional materials

You might ask:

- *What do you think are the most important qualities for someone to excel in this role?* This question can often lead to valuable information that's not in the job description. It can help you learn about the company culture and expectations so you can show that you are a good fit.
- *Where do you think the organization is headed in the next 5 years?* If you plan to be in this role for several years, make sure the organization is growing so you can grow with it.
- *What are the biggest opportunities facing the organization/department right now?* This question shows your drive to seize opportunity and may help you learn more about where the organization will be focusing over the next several months.

### **Concluding the Interview**

Most interviewers will conclude the interview by indicating when you can expect to receive further word on your status as an applicant. However, if the interviewer does not volunteer this information, be certain to ask. This will help you to follow up your interviews within a reasonable time frame. When employers are interviewing numerous candidates, your follow-up efforts will help distinguish you from less conscientious applicants. As a means of facilitating this follow-up process, ask the interviewer for one of his or her business cards and keep it handy for future reference. If the employer does not have a business card, write down his or her full name, title, phone number, and e-mail address for your records immediately after the interview.

### **Thank You Letter**

You should send a thank you letter (either hard copy or email) immediately after the interview. A thank you note leaves a positive impression about you as a candidate. It is another opportunity to show your enthusiasm for the position and differentiate yourself from other candidates. Some employers think handwritten notes are thoughtful and personable; email is fast and professional, so if you choose a handwritten note be sure you have a longer decision timeframe and that you have nice handwriting!

### **Phone Interviews**

Often you will be faced with a phone interview as a screener to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. While you're actively job searching, it's important to be prepared for a phone interview on a moment's notice. You never know when a recruiter or a networking contact might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk. This also means that the greeting on your voicemail should be professional.

Generally, the goal of a phone interview is to secure an in-person meeting. On occasion, you may end up interviewing solely via phone if you are being considered for an out-of-state or country position. Whenever possible, recruiters want to lay their eyes on you before rendering a final decision.

CAREER & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER | BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Campus Center, Room 202 | Phone: (610) 526-5230 | raross@brynmawr.edu | www.brynmawr.edu/career-civic/career-planning

Follow us on Instagram: @career\_engagement\_bmc

Handshake: <https://brynmawr.joinhandshake.com/>

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Do not make the mistake of thinking that an interview is somehow less formal if you are on the phone. While you can wear your PJ's on the call, some candidates prefer to dress in professional attire so that they can "feel the part" and make sure that they project a professional image.

Make sure to speak slowly and enunciate. Watch your intonation and project enthusiasm. Smiling while on the phone can go a long way in demonstrating your eagerness for a position! Note that verbal tendencies such as saying "um" or "ah" are more noticeable on the phone, so try to keep them to a minimum. Don't feel you have to fill in the silences. If you've completed a response, but the interviewer hasn't asked his or her next question, don't start babbling just to fill in airtime. Also feel free to pause after a question is asked if you need time to think, just ask for a moment or rephrase the question asked.

One advantage of a phone interview is that you can have notes spread out in front of you to jog your memory and can take copious notes as the interviewer talks – just be sure not to shuffle papers around audibly. It is preferable to take a phone interview on a land line if possible, to allow for better reception and a decreased chance of dropped calls. Make sure you are in a quiet room, removed from any possible interference, and do not eat or chew gum, although you may want a glass of water nearby.

When finishing up, be sure to get contact information for all interviewers so that you can follow up with a thank-you note. Re-affirm your qualifications and express your interest in the job and the organization. Ask about next steps and say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk about the position further in person, if appropriate.

### **Skype / Video Interviews**

Video interviews have become more and more popular among employers. Video interviews enable a more diverse pool of applicants and are very inexpensive to implement. It decreases the cost of traveling for interviewers and interviewees. While the interview can be conducted in the comforts of your own home, there are a few things to keep in mind to ensure a successful interview.

A video interview is no different from a phone interview and an in-person interview. Before scheduling video interviews, review your online presence. Make sure your profile picture and user name are professional. This will be the interviewer's first and sometimes last impression of you. Familiarize yourself with the video program prior to the interview. Always practice ahead of time with someone to work on speaking and looking right into the camera. This will also give you an opportunity to test your interview outfit and background, as they may read differently on screen.

Choosing an adequate location and adjusting environment settings are a must prior to your video interview. Search for a quiet room with little to no distraction at all and make sure to adjust the thermostat to a comfortable temperature. Also, make sure to test your equipment and connection ahead of time. Confirm that your environment and connections are appropriate and stable. Be sure to also test the microphone and webcam, so you may make volume and camera positioning adjustments ahead of time. If your built-in microphone creates echo, try an external microphone for better sound. Arrange your chair to create the optimal "screen-shot" of yourself, preferably with your head and shoulders in the screen. Be conscious of what's behind you on the walls and on screen; make sure it's reflective of your job position and professionalism. Lastly, position lighting in the most flattering form; you don't want to appear as a dark shadow during the interview. Lighting should be positioned in front of the screen, shining at you, not behind you. Furthermore, it is important to eliminate all distractions to minimize interruptions in the interview such as closing additional browsers, reminders, and windows with running programs on your computer.

CAREER & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER | BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Campus Center, Room 202 | Phone: (610) 526-5230 | [raross@brynmawr.edu](mailto:raross@brynmawr.edu) | [www.brynmawr.edu/career-civic/career-planning](http://www.brynmawr.edu/career-civic/career-planning)

Follow us on Instagram: [@career\\_engagement\\_bmc](https://www.instagram.com/career_engagement_bmc)

Handshake: <https://brynmawr.joinhandshake.com/>

During your interview, dress professionally, from head to toe. This will put you in the mindset of a formal and professional setting. You may need to stand up or reposition your webcam or adjust the lighting, so you don't want to be caught off guard with pajama bottoms and a dress shirt. Furthermore, give the interviewer or staff your phone number ahead of time in case of a connection failure to proceed with a standard phone interview. Prevent over-use of hand gestures and maintain proper posture and body language. Although, it may be acceptable for hand gestures and movements in an in-person interview, over-usage of hand gestures and body movements creates crowding on screen and make you look extremely busy. Despite our natural tendency to look at the interviewer on the screen to make eye contact, make sure you look at the camera instead of the screen. If you find the image of yourself distracting, cover it. Lastly, be engaging and remember to smile during the interview. Be sure to thank the interviewer for their time and ask interviewer for their contact information for follow-ups or any additional questions that you may have.

\*Adapted from Emory University Career Guide

### **Sample Common Interview Questions**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why do you want this job?
- How did you hear about the position?
- What are your greatest professional strengths?
- What do you consider to be your weaknesses?
- What is your greatest professional achievement?
- What is your management style?
- How do you deal with pressure and stressful situations?
- How would your manager and co-workers describe you?
- What are you looking for in a new position?
- What will your first 100 days on the job look like?
- Why was there a gap in your employment?
- Can you explain why you changed career paths?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- What other companies are you interviewing with?
- Why were you fired/let go?
- Why should we hire you?
- What questions do you have for us?

### **Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

- Tell me about a challenge or conflict you've faced at work, and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about a time when you have had multiple projects or tasks. How did you prioritize?
- Tell me about a time when you went the "extra mile" to do something because it needed to be done, even though it was not your responsibility.
- Tell me about a mistake you made. How did you solve the problem and bounce back?
- Tell me about a time you disagreed with a decision that was made at work.
- Tell me about a difficult person with whom you've worked. What approach did you use with this person? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you have taken a leadership role in a team situation. What was your leadership strategy?

CAREER & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER | BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Campus Center, Room 202 | Phone: (610) 526-5230 | raross@brynmawr.edu | [www.brynmawr.edu/career-civic/career-planning](http://www.brynmawr.edu/career-civic/career-planning)

Follow us on Instagram: @career\_engagement\_bmc

Handshake: <https://brynmawr.joinhandshake.com/>