



# INTERVIEW SKILLS



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Career Services

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**<http://www.volstate.edu/careerplacement/>**

# Interview Time Is Show Time

Want to tell a potential employer that you're creative? A problem solver? Flexible?

Instead of describing yourself as a "self-starter," tell a story about how you took action when you saw an issue that needed to be fixed.

Don't say you are "flexible"—tell the hiring manager about a change in your job (or schoolwork demands) and what you did to deal with the change.

Well-worn phrases won't help you get the job, but concrete examples will!

<b>Don't say</b>	<b>The story you need to tell</b>
Highly qualified	Highlight your accomplishments in previous jobs. Emphasize your specific skills and note any certifications you have earned.
Hard worker	Explain exactly how you've gone the extra mile for your job. For instance, did you regularly meet tough deadlines, handle a high volume of projects, or tackle tasks outside your job description?
Team player	Provide examples of how you worked with colleagues or individuals in other departments to meet an objective or complete a project.
Problem solver	Highlight a difficult situation you encountered and how you handled it.
Flexible	Describe how you responded to a major change at work (or in your schoolwork) or dealt with the unpredictable aspects of your job.
People person	Can you offer examples of your strong communication skills? Can you describe how you've worked with co-workers and customers?
Self-starter	What can you contribute immediately to the company or to the department you work in? Describe how you took action when you saw an issue that needed to be fixed.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

# Interview Etiquette

First impressions do count. Your resume earned you a job interview. Now, business etiquette will add some polish to your presentation.

Etiquette—good manners—is based on the idea that certain social behaviors put people at ease and make interaction pleasant. Here are seven rules for interview etiquette:

## 1. **Be on time.**

Or arrive 5 minutes early. Being late says you're disorganized and not very good at time management. Drive the route to the organization the day before your interview so that you know exactly how long the commute will take.

## 2. **Turn off your cell phone.**

And leave it in your car. You don't want to be distracted as you offer your expertise to an employer, and an employer doesn't need to know your ringtone sounds like Beethoven's Symphony #5.

## 3. **Respect those already employed.**

It doesn't matter whether you're interviewing to be an entry-level employee or the next CEO of an organization. Be polite to everyone you meet, including the receptionist. You never know who may be asked, "So, what did you think of this candidate?"

## 4. **Dress like you mean it.**

Dress in business attire, even if you're interviewing in a business-casual office. Suits for men; suits or dresses for women. Go easy on the aftershave or perfume—better yet, don't wear fragrance at all just in case someone you are about to meet has allergies. Go light on the jewelry—earrings, a watch, and nothing else. No T-shirts, tank tops, or flip flops.

## 5. **Be handy with your handshake.**

Hand out. Clasp the extended hand firmly, but gently. Pump once. Release.

A flimsy handshake feels like dead fish and is unimpressive. A bone-crunching grasp may crush your potential boss' tennis swing and your chance of getting a job.

Practice ahead of time with a friend.

## 6. **Have a presence.**

Speak well, make eye contact, sit up straight.

Use your interviewer's name (in moderation), enough to show you're awake and attentive, but not so much as to annoy the hiring manager. Looking the hiring manager in the eye as you talk shows you're confident and engaged in the conversation. Don't stare—that's rude and creepy. Sit up straight. Slouching or sliding down in the chair makes you look tired, and no one wants to hire someone who is tired before they've started the job.

## 7. **Say thank you. Twice.**

The first thank you—at the end of the interview, the last few seconds before you leave the office (and while you're shaking hands for the second time)—may come naturally. "Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you," shows you appreciate that someone has taken the time to talk to you and consider you for the job.

Say thank you by e-mail to each person who interviewed you immediately after you get back to your home. Spell everyone's name correctly and use their correct titles (find the information on the organization's website).

A thank-you note does several things:

- a. It says you appreciated the time your potential boss spent with you.
- b. It suggests you'll follow up on important things (like the boss' business).
- c. It's a great time to reiterate (very briefly) how your qualifications are a good match and how interested you are in getting the job.

*Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).*

## Using Information Interviews and Shadowing to Find Your Career

The best way to explore a potential career choice is by speaking with and/or following someone who works in that career.

- Do an information interview. Learn first-hand about your chosen profession by asking questions about tasks, business environment, and educational background.
- Shadow a professional. Follow someone in your career choice as they go through a typical day or week on the job. Ask questions and observe the work.

### Finding a Profession(al)

Finding someone to interview or shadow is not difficult. Ask your parents and your friends' parents if they know someone you can interview. Ask your professors for recommendations of professionals in the field. Go to your career center: Many maintain lists of alumni and employers who are willing to help in your career exploration.

Next, call or write a letter requesting an information interview or job shadowing. People who like their jobs tend to enjoy talking about them. You compliment the professional by expressing an interest in the career. In your phone call or letter, explain how you found the person you want to interview and request time for an appointment. Emphasize that you want to find out more about the career—you're not looking for a job. If you're lucky, the professional you contact may have other colleagues you can interview also.

### Asking Questions

Takes notes during your time with the professional. Here are some questions you might 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. Do you have any additional advice to help me prepare?

## Following Up Your Interview

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?

Take your thoughts and concerns to the career center staff and get feedback on the next step to take in your career exploration. You may want to do additional information interviews in this career path or you may want to reexamine your goals and find a different path for your interests.

No matter what you decide, send a thank-you note to anyone you interview or shadow. 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.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

## Top Tips for Answering Interview Questions

Employers believe the best predictor of future behavior is recent past behavior. For example, do you know someone who is always late to class? What's the likelihood that she'll be late to class tomorrow?

That's the principle of "behavioral-based interviewing," a common interviewing technique. Interviewers want to get a picture of how you have behaved *recently* in a situation because it will help them determine how you'll behave in a similar situation on the job.

Answering these questions takes insight into what employers are looking for.

### Prepare for the interview

Before going to an interview, look at the job description (if one is not available, use the job posting as a basis) and think about some of your most important milestones: projects, grades, presentations, and work experiences that make you proud. You'll use these milestones as examples when answering questions. Use your best examples to concisely tell the story to the interviewer.

In addition, there are some standard attributes that many companies look for, including:

- Strong communicator
- Adaptable/flexible
- Able to work in teams
- Self-directed/motivated
- Demonstrates honesty and integrity
- Goal-oriented
- Strong follow-through

Think through your activities and experiences, and identify those that you can use to show you have these attributes.

#### **During the interview**

The interviewer says: "Tell me about a time when you were a part of a difficult team and what you did to get the team back on track." Include the following in your answer:

- **Situation:** Explain the situation in detail. Was it a class team? What was the project? What was difficult about the project?
- **Action:** What did YOU do to pull the team together? What specific action did you take? Don't talk about what "we" did or "they" did. Talk about *your role* in the situation.
- **Outcome:** Discuss the outcome of the project or team. Did the team succeed? How did you know the team was successful?
- **Learning:** Sometimes you'll be asked about a situation in which you weren't successful. Talk specifically about what you learned, how you modified your behavior, and how you've incorporated this lesson into your routine.

Keep your answer focused on recent job-related experiences. Whenever possible, use examples from your internship, class work, professional association, or other degree-related experiences. Do not use personal or family examples, or examples from religious organizations.

#### **Additional interview advice**

- Make sure your response is clear and concise. Watch the interviewer's body language. If he/she seem uninterested, wrap up your answer.
- If you can't think of an answer, say so. Don't try to bluff your way through because the interviewer will know it.
- The best candidates are able to speak to everything on their resume.

Use your career services center to practice sample questions and participate in mock interview sessions.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

## Conducting the Successful Phone Interview

A potential employer may want to do a preliminary interview by phone. If you're prepared for the call, you can impress the interviewer.

Here are some tips:

1. Turn off distractions. Take your phone into in a quiet room.
2. Have all your tools in one place:

- a. Resume
  - b. Pen and paper to jot the interviewer(s) name(s) down immediately and to take notes during the interview
  - c. Company research (with relevant information highlighted)
  - d. Questions to ask about the company and position
  - e. A loosely written outline of points to make or items to cover as you talk about the position
  - f. A glass of water
3. Dress the part for the interview. Experts say if you're dressed in a professional manner, you'll speak that way.
  4. If an employer calls and wants to do the interview right away (instead of setting up an appointment), excuse yourself politely and offer to call back in five minutes. This will give you time to make the psychological switch from whatever you are doing to your professional demeanor.
  5. Stand up to talk. Your position affects the quality of your voice. If you are sitting down or relaxing, you don't project the same readiness and intensity as when you stand up.
  6. Talk only when necessary. Since you lack the visual cues of body language to assess whether you've said enough, mark the end of your response with a question, such as "Would you like more details of my experience as an intern with XYZ Company?"
  7. Let the employer end the interview. Then you should say "Thank you for your time," and reiterate your interest in the position.
  8. Write a thank-you note to anyone who participated in the phone interview.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

## Tips to Preparing for Video Interviews

Video interviewing is a convenient and cost-effective alternative to the traditional in-person interview for potential employers. However, there are format-specific elements that students and new graduates need to understand and consider when preparing for a video interview.

Your career center may offer a workshop on preparing for a video interview or mock video interview sessions so that you can practice before you participate.

Here are some recommendations for preparing for video interviews:

- **Understand the technology and be comfortable with it**—Don't sign up for a video interview until you're comfortable with the process. Learn what you can and can't do with the audio and video controls. Find out what your image looks like—and how to look your best—and where to look once the interview begins. Being adept with the technology gives you credibility as an "online professional."
- **Consider image and the interview environment**—Dress professionally as a video interview is an interview. Ensure the background of the interview area is consistent with the image you want to portray to recruiters. Remove or silence all distractions, such as cell phone ringers, e-mail alerts on the computer, music, pets, roommates, and more.

- **Test all settings and connections beforehand**—Make sure the settings are optimized and all connections are working prior to the interview to avoid any issues during the interview.
- **Be prepared for a system hiccup**—And even though you're thoroughly prepared, have a Plan B ready in case the technology fails during a video interview. For example, have your cell phone ready to use in case the connection is unacceptable or drops. Being prepared in such a manner and making a smooth transition to another method in light of unexpected problems can impress an employer.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).

## Interview Rubric

	<b>Excellent interview: You should get a job offer!</b>	<b>Average interview: You could get called back, but it is not certain.</b>	<b>Interviewing skills need significant improvement: You would not get this job.</b>
<b>First Impressions</b>	Your appearance is professional; you are wearing a business suit. You greet and shake hands with your interviewer correctly. Your conversation is enthusiastic and engaging.	You look nice, but you do not wear a suit. Your greeting is appropriate, but you forget to shake hands with your interviewer. Your conversation is enthusiastic and engaging.	Your attire is unprofessional: You wear jeans or shorts to the interview. You do not greet or shake hands with your interviewer. Your conversation is not energetic.
<b>Interview Content</b>	You are knowledgeable about the organization and position. You display poise and confidence. You relate your skills to the job very well.	You are knowledgeable about the position, but not about the organization. You display adequate confidence in your answers. You state your skills, but do not adequately relate them to the job.	You are not knowledgeable about the position or organization. You are not confident in answering questions about yourself. You do not state the skills you have to do the job.
<b>Interview Skills / Techniques</b>	You have excellent eye contact with your interviewer (without staring). Your language and grammar are appropriate. (No use of "um".) You speak at the correct speed.	You have adequate eye contact with your interviewer. Your language and grammar are adequate. You use "um" and other inappropriate terms, but not enough to disrupt the interview. You speak a little too quickly or too slowly.	You look at the floor or ceiling when speaking. Your grammar and language are inappropriate. You speak too quickly or too slowly.
<b>Closing</b>	You successfully convey your interest in the position. You ask appropriate questions. You thank the interviewer.	You convey some interest in the position. You are not prepared to ask questions. You thank the interviewer.	You do not show any interest in the position. You do not ask any questions. You do not thank the interviewer.

by Amy Diepenbrock. Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).