

INTERVIEW PREPARATION GUIDE

FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE EVERYTHING

It is critical to remember that first impressions matter in the interview process. The interview is not just a chance for an employer to learn more about the applicant's personal and professional attributes and whether they will be a fit for the position, but it is also the applicant's chance to better understand the position and if the goals of the company match his or her career goals, objectives, and skill set. This is a great opportunity to get an inside view of the company and the employee's work environment. Interviews try to get at 3 main questions: Can you do the job? Are you excited about the job and company? Can we work with you (are you someone we want on our team)?

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Phone/Virtual Interview

Employers often use this opportunity to screen the applicant before bringing them into an office for a lengthier face-to-face interview. General questions are asked to see if the candidate possesses the skills and allows applicants to expound upon their résumés and talk about their strengths. Traditionally lasts about half an hour.

Face-to-Face Interview

The focus of this face-to-face meeting is to determine whether the applicant's qualifications match the employer's needs and vice versa. Sometimes it is an initial interview to determine whether an applicant will be invited for a second, more in-depth interview. This interview may last 30 minutes to an hour, but may also be longer.

Panel Interview

Common for graduate/professional school interviews, the panel interview is also often used in the professional sector. Applicants meet more than one person at a time. Though it may be tempting to focus on just one person, candidates should be sure to make eye contact with everyone in the room.

Group Interview

A group interview allows the employer to meet with multiple interviewees at one time. The employer typically instructs the applicants to interact with each other or go around the room and answer questions. Employers are typically looking for how you interact with the other applicants. This is not a common type of interview.

HOW TO PREPARE BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

Prepare Yourself

- Interviews can be an intimidating task if you are unprepared. Preparation and practice are key ingredients to a successful interview.
- Identify potential questions and practice responding to those questions multiple times. Use Hiration to practice as recommended later in this guide.
- You must be able to talk about yourself and your previous work experience with confidence and enthusiasm.
Never speak negatively about yourself or a past employer.

Know the Employer

- How long has the employer been in operation?
- Where are the organization's headquarters and other locations?
- Is it a public or private organization?
- Has the organization been in the news lately? For what reason(s)?
- What are the services/products/programs this organization provides?
- Who are its competitors? How is it doing relative to its competitors?
- What else is the organization known for, such as community involvement or special programs?

- Mission and vision of the company?
- Social media presence of the company? LinkedIn?

Questions for the Interviewer*

Interviewers will almost always ask if you have questions for them at the end of the interview. Have a list of 4-5 good questions prepared that you couldn't necessarily find on their website.

- What are some of the qualifications you expect the ideal candidate for this position to have?
- What characteristics do individuals who are successful in this position possess?
- Could you describe the normal daily routine for this position?
- What opportunities will there be for professional development?
- How will my performance be evaluated? How often? By whom?
- What is the culture of the office?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- What do you love about working here? Why do you continue to stay with this organization?

***Do not ask the employer any questions about salary or benefits.** If they bring it up, you can answer their questions using the research you conducted on salary.

Aptitude and Skills Testing

Occasionally a company will have you take an aptitude, skills, or even a personality test. It's common for students going into a technical or financial field to be given math or analytical skills tests at the interview. You can ask prior to the interview if you will be taking any tests during the interview process.

BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEWING

The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that past situations predict future performance.

S-T-A-R Strategy for Answering Questions

SITUATION

- Describe a specific situation you were directly involved in and recount it as it occurred. What and who was involved? Tell the interviewer about a particular situation that relates to the question. Use examples from past internships, work experience, classes, team involvement, and community service.

TASK

- What needed to be accomplished in that situation? What was the goal, expectation, or responsibility you were facing? Clarify what you were required to do before you took action.

ACTION

- What did you do to address the task or solve the situation? Always emphasize your strengths and your specific actions. Have success stories prepared ahead of time that represent your skills, qualities, and characteristics.

RESULT

- What happened as a result of your behavior? What did you learn from the situation?

Common Interview Questions**

- Tell me about yourself and why you're interested in this job/company (education, experience, background, etc.).
- How has your college and work experience prepared you for this position/internship?
- What do you consider to be your greatest challenge or weakness? How are you going about improving upon it?
- Describe for me a situation where you made a mistake. How did you handle that mistake and what was the resolution?
- Give an example of a group/team project you were involved in where the members had differing approaches. How did you handle the situation?
- How would you describe your leadership style? Tell me about a time when you effectively exhibited this style of leadership?
- Tell me about a situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer, co-worker, or team member. How did you resolve the issue?

**Refer to Hiration through the Career Center website for industry-specific interview questions. Or paste the job description into an AI platform and ask for 10 potential interview questions.

Interview Questions- Career Readiness Competencies

Example behavioral interview questions to practice the STAR method.

Competency	Definition	Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions
Critical Thinking	Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.	☐ Give an example of a time you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem. ☐ Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with an upset customer, co- worker or group member. ☐ Tell me about a difficult decision you have had to make and the reasoning you used to make the decision. ☐ Tell me about a situation where rules or guidelines were not explicit. How did you accomplish the task and what guided your decision-making process?
Communication	Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.	☐ Describe a time in which you were able to influence someone's opinion. ☐ Tell me about a time when you successfully delivered a presentation. What made it successful? ☐ Discuss an effective written document or report you completed. What made it effective and why are you particularly proud of it? ☐ Tell me about a time when you did not communicate well. What did you learn from it?
Teamwork	Build collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.	☐ Tell me about a time when you successfully built and maintained a relationship with a coworker or client. What were your strategies? ☐ Describe how you have contributed to an organization's or employer's mission. ☐ Tell me about a time when you worked on a team. What was your role and impact on the team?
Technology	Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.	☐ Describe a challenge you had in solving a technical or software-related problem. What were your steps and what was the outcome? ☐ Tell me about a time when you adapted to develop technical skills with a software or tool. What was your learning process? ☐ Have you ever had to introduce a new process or technology to a group of people? If so, please explain your method.
Leadership	Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.	☐ Give an example of a time you showed initiative and took the lead on a project. ☐ Give an example of a time when you motivated others. Tell me about a time when you delegated tasks to others. ☐ How did you decide what to delegate to different individuals?
Professionalism	Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.	☐ Give an example of a time you set a goal and the steps you took to achieve it. ☐ Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond to get the job done. ☐ Tell me about a time when you had several obligations and had to prioritize your time. How did you decide what to prioritize? Were you successful? ☐ Give an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed. How did you handle the situation?
Career & Self-Development	Proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning and networking to build relationships within and without one's organization.	☐ Tell me about a time when you received feedback from others. What did you learn and how have you utilized it? ☐ Give an example of a time when you have acted with integrity in a job or organization. ☐ What have you done during your time in college to become better prepared for your career? ☐ Tell me about a professional accomplishment you are proud of.
Equity & Inclusion	Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices.	☐ Tell me about a time when you recognized and overcame your own biases. ☐ Give me an example of a time when you have worked with people who have different beliefs and values than you. ☐ Give an example of a time when you showed inclusivity of others.

TWO METHODS OF INTERVIEW PRACTICE AT INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

1. **Web Based Interview Practice** **HIRATION**

Hiration is an AI-powered platform designed to support job seekers with their career development. It offers tools for résumé and cover letter building, LinkedIn profile optimization, and **interview practice** leveraging AI to provide feedback. Visit <https://indstate.hiration.com/>, and login with your ISU email and password to get started!

2. **Face-to-Face Mock Interview**

Schedule a face-to-face practice interview with a career coach in the Career Center. This can be done in person or virtually. Visit Handshake to schedule a mock interview or contact the Career Center at (812) 237-5000.

ILLEGAL/INAPPROPRIATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What to do?

It can be uncomfortable when asked an inappropriate question during an interview. It is important to assess what kind of information an employer is seeking when they asked the question. For example, if an employer asks if you are planning on having children, they may be interested in whether or not you will be able to travel or have flexibility in the job. You can address this issue without having to answer the question. For instance, a possible reply could be "If you are worried about whether or not I will be available for business trips, the answer is yes, I will be able to travel." It gives the employer the necessary information and also directs the line of questioning away from the initial question.

Additional Examples of Inappropriate Questions

- What is your birthdate?
- Are you or other family members naturalized citizens?
- Where were you and your parents born?
- What is your religious affiliation or denomination?
- Who do you live with? Do you have your own home or rent?
- What is your marital status?
- Do you have any children?
- What is your race?
- Any questions regarding gender or gender identity and disability.

FINAL ADVICE

- Practice multiple times before your interviews.
- Answer questions honestly, thoroughly and sincerely. If you can't think of an answer, ask if you may return to it at the conclusion of the interview.
- Be polite, tactful and sincere. Eye contact is also very important.
- Drive to the location before the interview to see how traffic is and where to park.
- Remember that your interview begins as soon as you park near the interview site. You never know who you will meet on your way into the building.
- Have a padfolio to take notes, have extra copies of your résumé on hand, and a reference sheet. A padfolio is also a great place to have prepared questions for the interviewer stored.
- Send written thank you letters out immediately following your interview and make sure they are addressed properly. A sample thank you letter is towards the end of this document.
- An email thank you is acceptable if the company has indicated they are going to make their decision quickly.

INTERVIEW ATTIRE

The guidelines for dress below are traditional. Interview and workplace attire are very specific to the employment industry. It is safer to dress more conservatively than you might normally dress in the work environment. Being “over-dressed” is always better than being too casual, but you need to do research ahead of time to find out the most appropriate interview attire for each specific company. For example, if you are interviewing with a law firm, accounting firm, or bank, suits are still expected. If you are interviewing with a construction company, it might be appropriate to wear khaki pants and a polo shirt. Ask current employees or the HR representative who set up your interview what would be most appropriate.

Suggested Dress Tips:

- Wear a two-piece matching suit; black, navy blue, and dark grey suits are preferred. Professional dress suits can include pants and a jacket or a skirt and a jacket.
- Do not wear tight-fitting tops, see-through shirts, or show cleavage.
- Skirts should end at the knee when you are standing and look professional. Longer skirts can be professional if they are narrow enough and not billowing. High slits, tight and short skirts are not appropriate.
- Pants should be creased and tailored, not tight or flowing. The hem length should be altered if the pants are touching the floor. Fitted legging-like pants, cropped pants, and jean styled pants are not appropriate.

Suggested Shoe and Accessory Tips:

- If you choose to wear a tie, it should be silk and without characters or flashy patterns/colors.
- Your belt color should match your shoes.
- Socks should be a dark color, such as black, navy blue, or dark brown.
- Leather or faux leather shoes are best.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum.
- When picking your footwear, choose closed-toe pumps and avoid extremes such as stilettos or platforms. Keep your heel height below 2 ½ inches. Stockings or trouser socks should be worn to cover bare skin below the waist.

Clothing Closet:

- The Clothing Closet in the Career Center contains gently used professional clothing.
- Students can visit once a month when the Career Center is open for business – Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Up to four items may be selected per visit.
- The clothing items are yours to keep!



SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Hiroshi Tanaka
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November 22, 2025

Mr. Glenn Wright
Human Resources Manager
United Way of Metropolitan Chicago
5555 Main Line Road
Chicago, IL 60661

Dear Mr. Wright:

I enjoyed interviewing with you during your recruiting visit to Indiana State University on April 20th. The management trainee program you outlined sounds both challenging and rewarding, and I look forward to your decision concerning an on-site interview.

As I mentioned during the interview, I will be graduating in May with a Bachelor's degree in Communication, with a Concentration in Public Relations. I have gained many skills, as well as an understanding of planning, marketing, and delivering innovative community programming. My experiences have prepared me well to enter your program and add a great deal of value to United Way.

I have enclosed a copy of my college transcript and a list of references that you requested. Thank you again for the opportunity to interview with United Way. I am very enthusiastic about becoming part of a great team that makes a difference in so many lives. I can be reached at (812) 123-5432 should you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Hiroshi Tanaka

Hiroshi Tanaka

Salary and Job Offer Negotiations

Speaking with an employer about salary and benefits can feel uncomfortable for any professional. Review these basic tips to help prepare you. Schedule an appointment in Handshake with your Career Coach if you have further questions.

Basic Rules for Salary Negotiation

- **Never** ask an employer about salary or benefits during an interview. Talking salary or benefits too early can leave a bad impression that you are more focused on money than the job.
- If the employer asks for your salary expectations in an interview or application, you should answer their question using the prior research you have conducted on average salaries for this industry and position.
- Express expectation to be paid in line with industry standard and your education and experience level
- Set a salary range from your research (Ex: \$43,000-50,000) and remain positive
- Be honest, flexible, and reasonable (avoid emotion)
- Receive written confirmation of agreed upon salary and benefits

Factors to Consider with Salary Negotiation

- Your education level and years of experience
- Industry, size, and reputation of the company
- Cost of living in that geographic location
- Economic climate of the country at this specific time
- What similar positions and companies are paying
- Research your profession's salary range and benefits package through your professional associations

Additional Benefits to Consider in the Negotiation

Remember that your job offer is not just salary. It's a variety of benefits that have different monetary values that can add up to a solid financial package. If salary isn't negotiable, are some of these benefits negotiable?

- Tuition reimbursement/loan repayment options
- Health insurance plan
- Vacation, sick, personal time off
- Pension or 401K; employer matching options
- Stock options or performance bonuses (ask about company policy on raises)
- Training, professional development/memberships + certifications
- Childcare and wellness benefits + fitness membership
- Flexibility in work schedule/unpaid leave for already scheduled trips
- Relocation expenses

The Counter Proposal

If you decide to negotiate your salary or job offer, the responsibility is on you to demonstrate why you are worth the added investment. Try using language similar to these examples:

"In reviewing salary and cost of living data for similar positions in the Indianapolis area, I found the salary of \$42,000 is a bit below average. Is it negotiable?"

"With my education and multiple related internships, I think I bring a lot of value to the organization. I was hoping to get closer to \$45,000. Is there room for negotiation?"

If you do offer a counter-proposal, offer it once, at most twice, and then either accept or decline. Do not go back and forth multiple times as that leaves a negative impression.

Salary and Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Research

Familiarize yourself with how much money you will need to support yourself in the geographic area you choose. Basic COLA expenses include: housing, food, taxes, and healthcare. Use online resources for both salary and COLA research.

- [Glassdoor](#)
- [Salary Expert](#): FREE salary reports including COL
- [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [Payscale](#)