

INTERVIEW PREPARATION AT A GLANCE

INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER
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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 and organization, 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, objective and skill set. This is a great opportunity to get an inside view of the company and the employee's work environment.

Types of Interviews

Phone Interview

- Employers often use this opportunity to screen the applicant before bringing them into an office for a lengthier face-to-face interview. They ask general questions to determine if the candidate possesses the required skills to perform the job. This gives applicants the opportunity to expound upon their resumes and talk about their strengths. Phone interviews traditionally last about half an hour.

Screening 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. It is often 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 may also be used in the professional sector. The advantage of this type of interview is that applicants get to 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. It is important to remain true to your own qualifications and not try to compete with others' answers.

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 Interview Stream 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.** It can be a small world, especially within an industry.

Know the Employer

- How long has the employer been in operation?
- Where is the organization's main office?
- How many other locations do they have?
- 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 are the organization's short and long term goals?
- What else is the organization known for such as community involvement, special programs, or great working atmosphere?
- What challenges or difficulties does the organization face?
- How can I help solve these challenges in my future role?
- Mission and vision of the company?
- Social media presence of the company?

Questions for the Interviewer

- 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?
- How will I be trained if I am hired 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 and reputation of the office?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- What would a successful first year look like?
- What do you love about working here?
- How did this position become available? Is it a new position?

****** Make sure you 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.

Behavioral Based Interviewing

Behavioral based interviewing is a common style of interviewing that most companies use in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is that past situations predict future performance. These types of questions are more probing and boil down to three main areas:

Can you do the job? Will you love the job? Can we work with you?

C-A-R Strategy for Answering Questions

CIRCUMSTANCE

- 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.

ACTION

- What needed to be done? What did you do to 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 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?
- Tell me about a situation where you demonstrated good communication skills.
- 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?
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time?
- What new skills or ideas do you bring to this position (internship or graduate program) that another candidate may not be able to offer?

***Refer to Interview Stream for industry specific interview questions.

Two Methods of Interview Practice at Indiana State University

1. Web Based Interview Practice: Interview Stream

Interview Stream, which is available through Sycamore Career Link (<http://www.indstate.edu/carcen/CareerLink.aspx>), is a web based mock interview program to assist in preparation for upcoming internship, job, or graduate school interviews. It is a simple and effective way to refine and master your interview skills from the comfort of your own home. The system allows you to tailor your interview questions based on major and count the number of filler words used. You may use Interview Stream from any computer with a webcam and a microphone. After your interview, you have the option of sending it to a staff member at the Career Center for review.



2. Face-to-Face Mock Interview

Schedule a face-to-face practice interview with a staff member in the Career Center. You may have the interview recorded and put on your flash drive for future reference. Visit Sycamore Career Link to schedule a mock interview or contact the Career Center by phone or email.

Practice Interview Evaluation

- **Appearance:** Dress appropriately for the interview. Treat it as if it was the real thing and bring a copy of your resume and job description if possible.
- **Greeting/Introduction:** Stand to greet your interviewer with a handshake; use his/her name. Also, make eye contact with the interviewer, smile and be professional.
- **Body Language:** During the interview, be aware of your eye contact, subtle use of hands while speaking, good posture, not touching your face or hair repeatedly.
- **Attitude:** Your attitude toward work and working with others is crucial in the hiring process. Convey an attitude that is enthusiastic, sincere and genuine.
- **Responses to Interview Questions:** Do your research and practice, practice, practice! Have examples of demonstrated accomplishments and know your goals.
- **Oral Communication:** Speak clearly and concisely. Think out your response before answering a question.
- **Preparation:** Research the position and company for which you are interviewing and prepare questions for the interviewer. If applying to graduate school, it is important to have knowledge on the particular program, faculty, research and be able to articulate why that program is the best fit to further your education in that field.

Face-to-Face Mock Interview Format: Start to Finish

- Your interview experience begins the moment that you enter the Career Center. Just like any interview, you may leave an impression on the reception staff or anyone else in the interview waiting area.
- You and your interviewer will go to a room and begin the interview. The interview itself will consist of 10-15 questions and last from 20-30 minutes.
- Following the interview the staff member will review your overall interview and talk about areas of strength and areas that are in need of improvement. This will be the time when you can ask questions or share concerns you have about the interviewing process.

Additional Resources to Assist in Your Job Search:

CareerShift

CareerShift is a search engine that allows you to do geographic and industry specific job and internship searches. It also allows you to search for ISU alumni within an organization. Through the system, you can also store application documents, manage applications, and save job or internship opportunities to view at a later date. All postings on CareerShift are recent opportunities that have been posted within the last 30 days.

Sycamore Career Link

Sycamore Career Link (SCL) is the ISU gateway for connecting students, alumni, employers, and Career Center Staff. This online service allows students to set appointments with career advisors and sign up for workshops and events. Additionally, you are able to submit your resume in to the resume books for referral to employers and apply for internships and jobs posted specifically for ISU students. Students are able to log on to SCL from the Career Center's website or their portal using their ISU username and password.

Teamwork MVP Access/College

This is a place to find not just jobs, but careers in the sports, amusement, and recreation industry. The service's recruiting tools and industry networks enhance the candidate's ability to find the right job quickly through numerous applicant-specific techniques. Teamwork Online hosts the recruiting webpages for over 780 organizations for job opportunities in sports, recreation, medical, administration, management, operations, finance, marketing, and technology.

Job Search Assistance

The Career Center can assist students and alumni with their job search. Career Center staff members can show you how to access job listings and recommend other resources for finding employment. We also can help you learn how to effectively network with prospective employers.

Illegal 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 in asking these questions. 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 Illegal Questions

- What is your birthdate?
- Are you or other family member’s naturalized citizens?
- Where were you and your parents born?
- What is your religious affiliation or denomination?
- Who do you live with?
- What is your marital status?
- What is your race?

Final Advice

- **Practice multiple times before your interviews.**
- Answer questions honestly, thoroughly and sincerely. If you don’t know the 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.
- Dress neatly and in interview attire. Conservative is always better.
- Drive to the location before the interview to see how traffic is and where to park.
- Remember that your interview begins the moment you leave the house. You never know who you will meet on your way into the building.
- Have a padfolio to take notes, have extra copies of your resume 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 on the final page of this document.
- An email thank you letter is acceptable if the company has indicated they are going to make their decision quickly, but an employer will never complain about getting a written thank you.

Interview Attire



Men

- Wear a two-piece matched suit to an interview. Do not combine a suit jacket with pants that do not match. Wear a conservative tie. Avoid fashion extremes such as character ties.
- Safe color choices are navy, black and dark gray. Conservative is always better.
- Wear long sleeved shirts only. Choose white or another solid color. Avoid striped shirts.
- Leather, lace-up or slip-on business shoes are best. Make sure they are polished. Dark color socks only (black, navy blue, or dark brown).
- Belt color should always match your shoes. Black or dark brown leather is best.

Women

- Wear a two-piece matching suit. Think about the situation. Skirts are more formal, but pants might be more appropriate for certain organizations.
- Pants should be creased and tailored, not tight or flowing.
- Skirts should end at the knee when you are standing and look chic and professional. Longer skirts can be professional if they are narrow enough not to be billowing. High slits in skirts are not appropriate.
- Colors should be navy, dark gray or black. Conservative is always better.
- A tailored blouse in a color or small print that coordinates nicely with your suit is best. A quality knit shell is also appropriate underneath your suit jacket. Don't wear low cut blouses or show cleavage.
- When picking out footwear, choose closed-toe pumps and avoid extremes such as stilettos or chunky platforms. A low heel is appropriate.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum. Small, professional earrings are recommended.

Sample Thank You Letter

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Terre Haute, IN 47802
812-123-5432
janderson@sycamores.indstate.edu

April 22, 2012

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 4. 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 Communications, 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 pre-professional 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,

Jim Sycamore