

Interview Preparation Guide

INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER

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, 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/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 gives applicants the opportunity to expound upon their résumés and talk about their strengths. These 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 is also often 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 Big Interview 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 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 and reputation of the office?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- What do you love about working here? How did this position become available?

***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. 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?
- 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?
- 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 Big Interview through the Career Center website for industry specific interview questions.

Interview Questions- Career Readiness Competencies

Example behavioral interview questions to practice the CAR method.

Competency	Definition	Examples of Behavioral Interview Questions
Critical Thinking	Practice sound reasoning and analytical skills to make decisions and overcome problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a situation where you had to deal with an upset customer, co- worker or group member. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a difficult decision you have had to make and the reasoning you used to make the decision. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you worked in a situation where rules or guidelines were not explicit. How did you accomplish the task and what guided your decision making process?
Communication	Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly to a variety of audiences and employ effective public speaking skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Describe a time in which you were able to influence someone's opinion. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you successfully delivered a presentation. What made it successful? <input type="checkbox"/> Discuss an effective written document or report you completed. What made it effective and why are you particularly proud of it? <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you did not communicate well. What did you learn from it?
Teamwork	Build collaborative relationships with coworkers and be able to work well in a team environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you successfully built and maintained a relationship with a coworker or client. What were your strategies? <input type="checkbox"/> Describe how you have contributed to an organization's or employer's mission. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you worked on a team. What was your role and impact on the team?
Technology	Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to complete tasks; demonstrate effective adaptability to new technologies	<input type="checkbox"/> Describe a challenge you had in solving a technical or software related problem. What were your steps and what was the outcome? <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you sought to develop technical skills with a software or tool. What was your learning process? <input type="checkbox"/> Provide an example of a time when you had to change how you work and adapt to a new technology. <input type="checkbox"/> Have you ever had to introduce a new process or technology to a group of people? If so, please explain your method
Leadership	Utilize the strengths of others to achieve common goals; use interpersonal skills to develop and motivate others	<input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time you showed initiative and took the lead on a project. <input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time when you motivated others. Tell me about a time when you delegated tasks to others. <input type="checkbox"/> How did you decide what to delegate to different individuals?
Professionalism	Exhibit effective work habits such as punctuality, working productively, personal accountability, integrity, and ethical behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time you set a goal and the steps you took to achieve it. <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond to get the job done. <input type="checkbox"/> 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? <input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed. How did you handle the situation?
Career & Self-Development	Identify skills, strengths, knowledge, experiences, and areas of growth related to career goals; navigate job options and pursue opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you <i>have</i> received feedback from others. What did you learn and how have you utilized it? <input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of a time when you have acted with integrity in a job or organization. <input type="checkbox"/> What have you done during your time in college to become better prepared for your career? <input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a professional accomplishment you are proud of.
Equity & Inclusion	Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in antiracist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.	<input type="checkbox"/> Tell me about a time when you recognized and overcame your own biases. <input type="checkbox"/> Give me an example of a time when you have worked with people who have different beliefs and values than you. <input type="checkbox"/> 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

Big Interview helps students learn how to answer common interview questions and practice for a professional interview. It is an online virtual interview tool that allows you to practice a variety of interview questions by recording yourself and watching it back. It also provides many instructional videos to watch. Go to <http://indstate.biginterview.com>, create your free account with your ISU email, and get started with the tutorials or jump right into practicing some questions.

2. Face-to-Face Mock Interview

Schedule a face-to-face practice interview with a staff member in the Career Center. This can be done in person or via Zoom. You may have the interview recorded and put on your flash drive for future reference. Visit Handshake to schedule a mock interview or contact the Career Center at (812) 237-5000, or isu-career-center@indstate.edu.

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 by 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? Do you have your own home or rent?
- What is your marital status?
- Do you have any children?
- 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.
- 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 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 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 hand-written thank you note.

INTERVIEW ATTIRE

Men

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

Women

- Wear a two-piece matching suit. Research the organization; skirts are more formal, but pants may be more appropriate for certain organizations.
- Colors should be navy, dark gray and black. Conservative is always better.
- A tailored blouse in a color or small print that coordinates nicely with your suit is best. A fine gauge, quality knit shell is also appropriate underneath your suit jacket. Do not show cleavage, wear lace or a camisole that can be seen, or shirts that are tight or see through.
- 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.
- When picking your footwear, choose closed-toe pumps and avoid extremes such as stilettos or platforms. Keep your heel height below 2 ½ inches.
- Keep jewelry to a minimum. Small, professional earrings are recommended.

Career Center Clothing Closet

Visit the Clothing Closet for gently used professional clothing. Students can visit once a month during walk-in hours Monday-Friday, 10am-12pm and 1-3pm, and up to 4 items may be selected per visit. The clothing is yours to keep!



SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Jim Sycamore
3212 Wabash Ave.
Terre Haute, IN 47802
(812) 123-5432
jsycamore@sycamores.indstate.edu

April 22, 2021

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 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 paraprofessional 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

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 price 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 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
- 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 \$37,000 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 \$42,000. 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. Remember that salary levels may be higher in bigger cities so citizens can afford to live comfortably. Use online resources for both salary and COLA research.

- [Salary List](#): provides salary data records by job title, company, and state
- [Salary Expert](#): lists FREE salary reports including cost of living analysis and potential salary.
- [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [Nerd Wallet](#)