



Interview Preparation and Tips

Job Interview Tips



Before:

- Research the organization and position
- Consider common interview questions and prepare potential answers; think about your strengths and what you could bring to the position
- Make a list of any questions you have about the job
- Print copies of your resume, cover letter, etc.
- Plan your route for getting to the interview so that you'll be able to walk in 15 minutes early
- Prepare your attire – business professional is best
- Turn your cell phone off or on do not disturb

During:

- Be yourself
- Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake
- Smile, make eye contact, and try to appear calm, confident, and assertive
- Be enthusiastic and positive, and show that you are interested in the organization
- Use proper grammar and diction, and select your words carefully (avoid “um” and “like”)
- Highlight your strengths and qualifications; put a positive spin on anything that could potentially sound negative
- Ask questions about the position and organization (avoid questions that you could have already researched)



After:

- Thank your interviewer for taking the time to meet with you before leaving the interview
- Follow up with a thank you note – a note sent via mail is best, but email may also be acceptable in some cases
- Use this as an additional opportunity to express your enthusiasm for the position and organization

20 COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The more prepared you are going into an interview; the more likely you will be able to put your best foot forward. The key to good interviewing is to demonstrate your personal competence by answering questions with confidence.

As you prepare for your next interview, please keep in mind these common interview questions. Obviously, an individual cannot plan for every single question that may be asked, but reviewing potential questions and thinking of your own responses will certainly help to prepare for common questions. The more prepared that you are will help to ensure a successful interview. You leave a positive impression and increase the chance of getting a job offer.

Here are some common questions and tips on how to respond:

1. ***Tell me about yourself.*** Talk about your background. Focus on your education and skills for the position, but you can also include some personal information like where you were raised. Think in terms of the “30 second commercial” to grab the interviewer’s attention.
2. ***What did you enjoy about your most recent position?*** Working with people, administrative duties, supervisory or training responsibilities, travel, etc. are all examples; try to focus on things that you would most likely be doing in the new position in which you are interviewing.
3. ***Why do you want to work here?*** Talk about information from the research you have conducted about the company and position. Talk about the reputation of the company or something that you liked about their website. You could even reiterate something that they shared earlier in the interview that excites you.
4. ***Describe an ideal work environment.*** Look at your ideal job preferences list, be realistic but try to align your answer to the job profile of the new position to which you have applied.
5. ***Tell me about some things you have done that show initiative.*** Think about a time when you offered to work on a project outside your normal responsibilities. Explain the idea, the support you received, how you initiated the project and the positive outcome.
6. ***What are some of your greatest accomplishments?*** Talk about situations where you were faced with a problem or difficult assignment, the steps you took to be successful, and the final result. Use action words to describe your accomplishments.
7. ***What is a weakness you are aware of and would like to improve upon?*** Be as positive as possible and talk about how the weakness is actually a good thing like “I will work on a project until it is totally finished. That might mean that I stay after work to get my other work done. But that is how I manage tasks and it seems to work so far.”
8. ***Describe how you work under pressure.*** It is not just enough to say “good”. Provide a concrete example where you can demonstrate how you have handled working under pressure.
9. ***Tell me about a time when you were criticized at work.*** Talk about how you take constructive criticism and how you implemented the changes that were suggested to you. If you were ever corrected, talk about what you learned from the experience and insist on not repeating behavior.
10. ***How do you handle change?*** Change is inevitable, so answer this question in a positive manner with an example of a past experience.

11. **What are your goals (short-term and long-term)?** Consider telling them that a short-term goal is to secure this position and that a long-term goal would be to move up within the organization. Not everyone wants to move up in an organization; you could state a long-term goal is to establish yourself well in the position.

12. **What did you enjoy least in your past position?** Choose something that is not too negative and certainly not required for the position for which you are interviewing.

13. **Why do you want to leave your current position?** Being laid off or caught in a company downsizing unfortunately does happen. This is not a negative reflection on you as an employee so it is appropriate to share. Overall, try to never share a negative circumstance. If you were fired from a position, you'll need to think about the big picture of how you've learned from that experience and one that will not be repeated. Other reasons for seeking a new job could be seeking a full-time position, one within your career field, or one that meets your personal interests and goals. In the end, be honest and positive.

14. **What are your salary requirements?** Tell them that this is negotiable and to answer this you would need to know more about the job requirements, benefit package, etc. If they insist you offer a specific figure, offer them a range based on what you already know and your experience. Make certain you research the salary range at www.acinet.org to give an educated figure. You do not want to provide a range too low or too high. Do your homework!

15. **With 10 being the highest, rate yourself between 1 to 10.** Don't tell them 10 or anything lower than 7.5. Describe why you provided the score that you did.

16. **What type of people do you not enjoy working with?** A possible answer is "clock watchers and people who find the negative in everything". To conclude, tell them the environment and culture in which you do enjoy working.

17. **Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?** Talk about your willingness to work in a team environment as well as your skills to work alone to complete a project.

18. **What qualities should a successful manager possess?** Talk positively about some of the managers you have worked with in the past and what qualities they offered and why you enjoyed working for them. Use key terms like open-minded, patient, and available.

19. **What would your references say about you?** Hopefully, they will say positive things about you – you should have an idea of how your references are representing you. This is your opportunity to, once again, share positive traits about yourself. Remember to notify your references of your job search plans and seek their approval before listing their contact information.

20. **Why should we hire you?** You obviously do not know the other candidates, but this is your opportunity to leave a good impression. This is your chance to summarize some of the skills you shared during the interview process highlighting how well suited you are for the position. Remember to end with emphasizing your interest and enthusiasm for the position.

At the end of the interview, remember to ask meaningful questions about the company in order for you to determine if this is the right employer and the right position for you. After all, interviewing is a two-way street. Finally, be certain to inquire about next steps of the hiring process and learn the timeline, if possible. Interviewing can be a successful experience. Good Luck!



Questions to ask during/end of an interview

- What do you look for in an employee?
- Can you describe the ideal person for this job?
- What is the best part about working for ABC Company?
- What attracted you to this company?
- How long did the last person in this position work here?
- What can I expect as a typical day's duties?
- Would you describe a typical workday and the things I would do?
- Which duties or responsibilities are most important for this job?
- What are the major challenges the new hire will face in this job?
- How will I be trained or introduced to the job?
- What are your expectations and how will I get evaluated?
- How would I get feedback on my performance?
- How long should it take for me to get my feet on the ground and become productive?
- What are the department's goals for the year?
- Who are the key people I'd be working with and what do they do?
- If hired, would I report directly to you, or to someone else?
- How soon do you plan to fill this job?
- What is the timeline for the position to be filled?
- Are there any final questions that you have for me to further explain my skillset for this job?

Dressing Professionally



Men:

Do's:

- Suits in neutral colors
- Long-sleeved collared shirts in light colors
- Conservative tie
- Polished shoes
- Dress socks that match shoe color
- Conservative watch or other simple accessories
- Well-groomed hair
- Well-groomed facial hair or clean-shaven face
- Clean and groomed fingernails

Don'ts:

- Wrinkled clothing
- Shorts, jeans, t-shirts, sneakers, or other casual clothing
- Strong cologne
- Visible tattoos or piercings

Women:

Do's:

- Suits in neutral colors (either pantsuits or skirt suits are acceptable, skirts should be around knee length)
- Professional tops in light colors
- Professional shoes (closed-toe, low heel or flat)
- Hosiery with skirts (neutral colored is best)
- Minimal accessories and make-up
- Well-groomed hair
- Clean and groomed fingernails with light-colored or no polish

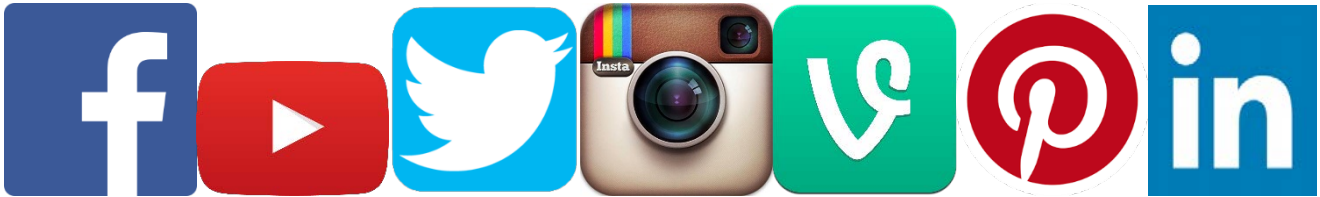
Don'ts:

- Short skirts
- Low-cut tops, midriff-baring tops, or tight clothing
- Too large or too many accessories
- Extremely high heels
- Wrinkled clothing
- Shorts, jeans, t-shirts, sneakers, or other casual clothing
- Strong perfume
- Visible tattoos or piercings (other than ears)



Professional Social Media Use

Social media is a huge part of our lives. Regardless of which networks you use, it's important to think about how to use social media professionally. Social media can enhance your contacts with employers to increase your chances of securing your perfect job, but poor social media use can also prevent you from obtaining a job. Use these tips to improve your professionalism on social media.



Connect with companies that interest you on social media: You can learn more about these companies and keep an eye on any potential job postings.

Watch what you post online: Offensive or overly opinionated content that is easy to find could reflect poorly on you as a job candidate.

Post about positive things you're doing on social media: If a potential employer sees your community involvement, volunteer work, etc., that could reflect well on you.

Check your privacy settings: If you don't want your social media use to be easily found by a stranger online, be sure that your privacy settings are very strict.

Use social media as a professional networking opportunity: Connect with groups related to your field of interest to learn more about your industry.

Don't badmouth an employer, a coworker, or a boss on social media: Venting could come back to haunt you later.

Display your expertise: Consider starting a professional blog where you can share your insights about your field. You never know where this could lead.

Don't completely avoid social media: Having no online presence might look suspicious to an employer. Create a LinkedIn profile to increase your online visibility in a professional way.



Get ...Now!

www.linkedin.com

A quick guide to get your LinkedIn profile started

LinkedIn operates the world's largest professional online network with more than 500 million users in over 200 countries and territories.

- **Use LinkedIn to:**

- Get connected with professionals
- Get connected to HACC alumni
- Share your resume online
- Research companies in your field
- Join groups and meet other professionals who share interests

- **Make your profile complete**

- Upload appropriate profile picture
- Provide catchy and informative summary

Example:

Social media master and super-user to enhance brand image. Earned Associate degree in Web Design from HACC, Central PA's Community College. Take a look at my profile and view my portfolio. I can't wait to show you what I've been working on!

- Offer work and internship experience including duties that highlight your skills related to the work you are pursuing.
- List where you are going to school and your major, also include high school (connect to those alumni, too!)
- Ask for recommendations from your contacts

- **Now that you are  ..what do you do?!**

- Make time to increase visibility by logging in regularly and updating profile
- Build your network (friends, professors, colleagues, alumni)
 - TIP: Start with people that you know!
- Join groups
- Ask for recommendations and introductions
- Search LinkedIn job postings

- **LinkedIn Etiquette**

- Keep profile professional
- Respond in a timely manner
- Send messages that are personal and informational
- Ask for introductions from your connections
- Offer recommendations and be honest when writing them

Thinking About Attending a Job Fair?

Who attends job fairs and why?

Job fairs may be the first step in landing an exciting and rewarding position, but you don't have to be looking for a job to attend. It is an easy way to explore career possibilities, learn more about a company of interest, and get contacts so you can begin to network. Job fairs are also a great place to gather information on internships or part-time work.

Employers attend job fairs to provide information about their organizations and career opportunities, to increase awareness and visibility, and to attract candidates for internships, part-time, and full-time jobs.

The advantages to attending job fairs are clear. They provide a non-threatening, low-pressure environment for job seekers and employers to meet and learn more about each other; but you do need to be prepared to make a good first impression.

What should I do before the job fair?

Research and prepare! Find out what organizations will be there and research those that you intend to speak with. Understand what the company does and what types of positions they offer. Come up with a list of questions to ask.

Clarify your goals. Why are you attending this job fair? Where do your career interests lie? Know yourself and your interests well so that you can convey them to the employers and answer any questions you may be asked.

Prepare a 30 Second Commercial.

An **elevator pitch** is a short summary or sound bite used to quickly introduce yourself to an employer or potential employer in a memorable way. It should be delivered in the time span of an elevator ride, approximately 30-60 seconds. A **great** pitch leaves a positive first impression (you only get one chance to make a good first impression!) During this time, mention your key strengths, adjectives that describe you, and show interest in the company or industry the person represents.

CREATING YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH Ask yourself these questions. Use your responses as an outline for your pitch.

- What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- What are you trying to "sell" or let others know about you?
- Why are you interested in the company or industry the person represents?
- What are the advantages of working with you?
- What are your best qualities?

POLISHING YOUR PITCH Review your responses and form them into strong, short, and powerful sentences. Practice saying your pitch until it feels natural and flows smoothly.

What should I do when I get there?

Arrive early. It's good practice for the 'real world' and you'll be first in line when employers are at their freshest – and so are you!

Plan. After you register, read the booklet with the room layout. Develop a strategy. Where are the employers you want to speak with? What are they looking for? Who are the top 5 employers you'd like to see?

When you approach a table:

Confidently introduce yourself with a firm handshake, a smile, and direct eye contact. When the recruiter introduces her/himself, repeat the name "it's nice to meet you, Ms. Smith." This will help you remember her name.

Some employers may not take your resume. The organization may only accept resumes via their website. Remember to apply after attending the fair. State in your cover letter that you attended the fair and spoke with Ms. Smith.

Before leaving, ask the best way to follow-up, and get the recruiter's business card.

Once you walk away from the table (before you approach the next employer), use the back of the business card to jot a note to yourself on what was said and how you need to follow-up.

If the line for an employer is long, pick up their brochure and read it while you wait. You may gain more insight into the qualifications they seek to align your skills with their needs.

What can I do after the job fair?

Follow Up. If you discussed a specific means of follow-up with an employer (i.e. phone call, email), make sure you do it! Send thank you letters to the employers from the organizations that most interested you. A thank you letter can set you apart from other candidates. The ability to write well and proofread is an important skill to employers. Be certain the letter is grammatically correct and free from typos! See pp 52-54 for further information.

Tips for the job fair:

- Dress professionally in a business suit.
- Distinguish yourself (i.e. a scarf, HACC pin, tie, or portfolio).
- Keep resume easily accessible (bring lots of copies on quality paper).
- Be confident and enthusiastic.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Avoid distracting or nervous behaviors.
- Ask questions that demonstrate knowledge of the company.
- Turn off your cell phone!



Make a Positive Impression: Voicemail and Email Etiquette

Voicemail Tips

Your outgoing message:

- No background music or TV
- No slang or familiar greeting
- Use a professional voice
- State your first and last name, slowly and clearly
- Keep it brief
- Update your voicemail message often. Use it to inform people if you will be out of town or unavailable to take calls
- Use an upbeat or positive tone of voice
- If you have another number where you can be reached, say so, but do it *slowly* so it can be understood

When leaving a message:

- Plan what you will say before you call
- Identify yourself, along with the date and time of your message
- Briefly state your message (why you are calling)
- Let the person know when they will best be able to reach you
- Slowly give your phone number ... twice



If someone leaves you a message:

- Return call promptly (within 2 days)

NOTE: Remember to empty your voice mailbox often! Employers may not try to reach you again if they hear a “mailbox full” message.

Email Tips

- List an appropriate subject – mention Muhlenberg if you are contacting an alumnus
- Choose a professional address/screen name – nothing obscene or immature-sounding
- Write message as if writing a formal letter without the employer’s address
- Use standard grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. DO NOT USE TEXT TALK.
- Make sure you have the correct spellings of your contact names
- Proof and spell check your email before you click the send button
- Send a test email to yourself before sending to employers
- Keep it brief
- At the end type “Sincerely” or “Very truly yours” and your full name
- Respond promptly to email messages you receive – within 24 hours

Remember to make an excellent impression in ALL you do!