Steppingblocks

Interview Guide

Whether you're interviewing for a summer internship, a work-study position on campus, or a full-time job after graduation, this guide will give you the tips and tools you need to succeed!

Steppingblocks
Interview Guide

For a lot of students, interviewing can be intimidating and overwhelming. It can be scary to feel like your chances of getting a dream job are fully riding on whether or not you can answer questions correctly. The good news is that interviewing doesn't have to be scary. With the right knowledge and tools and with lots of practice, you can become a confident and successful interviewee. In this guide from Steppingblocks, you'll learn about interviewing and the tools to help you get the job!

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What is an interview?

Interviews are a common aspect of many selection processes, especially when it comes to job or internship positions. A typical job or internship application looks something like this:

1 **Submit Your Application**
Job applications can vary, but typically companies want candidates to submit a resume, a cover letter, and/or manually fill out an application form.

2 **Participate in the Interview Process**
Some positions may only request one interview, whereas others may want candidates to do multiple rounds of interviews to narrow down the finalists. This process can take 2-6 weeks.

3 **Get the Job!**
Once the interview process is completed, employers will make an offer to their chosen candidate. Candidates typically have about a week to accept or turn down the offer.

The interviewer's goal during the interview process is to learn more about each candidate, and find the person whose skills, experiences, and qualifications align best with the position they are looking to fill.

Steppingblocks Pro Tip

Interviews are not only for the interviewer's benefit! As the interviewee, the interview is a great opportunity to learn more about the position, the work environment, and the benefits of the role. Through the interview, YOU can discern if the position is a good fit for YOUR interests and goals.

Interview Types: An Overview

Employers will have different interview processes when hiring for a role, and therefore there are a number of types of interviews that companies utilize when they hire. Below is an overview of different interview types. A company won't ask you to engage in ALL of these types of interviews for one position, but you may encounter each of these as you apply to different organizations with different processes.

Screening Calls

Screening calls are typically brief conversations, about 15 minutes, and are conducted over the phone or virtually. In these calls, employers ask a few questions to see if you meet some of the basic qualifications of the role, such as education level or depth of experience. These calls are meant to eliminate anyone who is clearly not a match before going more in-depth.

Phone Interview

Phone interviews are typically used in the early stages of an interview process, but can ultimately be used at any stage. In a phone interview, typically one person for the organization is doing the interviewing, and could be someone from Human Resources or the department that is hiring.

Virtual Interview

Virtual interviews are increasingly common, as they allow employers to interview more candidates without having to bring them into the office. They are especially common for positions that are entirely remote. Virtual interviews may take place at any stage of the interview process, and may have one or multiple interviewers asking questions of the candidate.
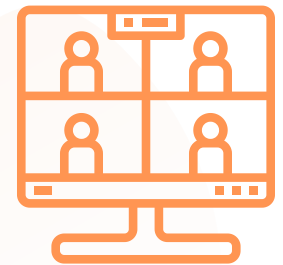
In-Person Interview

Typically, companies will bring their final candidates to meet in-person towards the end of the hiring process. During in-person interviews, candidates may meet multiple members of the team, and will potentially interview with several members of the team.

Interview Structures: What to Expect

While interview structures and processes may vary between organizations, most interview conversations tend to follow a similar structure:

- **An Introduction:** Most interviews start with an introduction of everybody present. Sometimes you will be interviewed by one person from the company, either a representative from human resources or someone from the department you'd be joining. Other times, you might be interviewed by multiple people at once.

- **Questions *for* the Candidate:** Typically, the main portion of the interview involves the employer asking the applicant a series of questions. These questions are meant to get to know you better, and help demonstrate how you would do in the role and what you would bring to the organization.

- **Questions *from* the Candidate:** Most interviews include time for the candidate to ask questions of the interviewer(s). This is the opportunity for you to ask questions and learn more about the company and position.

- **Closing:** By the end of the conversation, the interviewer(s) should explain what the next steps in the process are, and when you can expect to hear back about your candidacy.

Other interview types may include:
- **Case Study Interviews -** In case study interviews, employers will ask candidates to prepare a presentation or response to a case study ahead of time. This presentation is usually meant to reflect a real-life scenario of the role, and to allow candidates to role-play or demonstrate their qualifications for the role.
- **Group Interview -** Group interviews are not common, but may come up. In a group interview, candidates are grouped together and evaluated. Interviewers may ask questions of the entire group to see how people interact, or they may give the group a task to work on together and show off their teamwork skills.

Preparing for the Interview
When it comes to interviews, preparation is KEY.

Do Your Research

Before any interview, you should always research on the company as part of your preparation process. This will not only set you up for success, but will show the interviewer that you are taking the opportunity seriously, and have done your homework. **Browse the company website, identify their core mission and values, check their social media pages, and search for news articles written about them.** Think about how your previous experience aligns with their mission and goals.

Study the Job Description

While you can't predict every question that you will be asked in an interview, you can anticipate things you might be asked about based on the job description listed in the job posting. Use the job posting to your advantage as you prepare for the interview. **Highlight the required skills and experiences, and be prepared to answer questions about each of them.** For example, if a job posting states they are looking for someone who has experience with social media platforms, be prepared to talk about previous specific experiences you've had with each platform listed.

Steppingblocks
Pro Tip

With Digital Career Counselor, you can find the top skills associated with a certain job title or major. This includes the highest-volume skills, most relevant skills, and skills aligned with the highest salary. For each skill, you can hover over the title to get a definition of that skill, as well as a link to YouTube to learn more about how to develop that skill. Check out the skills section in Search 360 as part of your interview preparation, and ensure you are proficient in the top skills in your field.

PRACTICE!

The MOST important thing to do before an interview is PRACTICE. **Practice introducing yourself, talking about your skills, detailing your previous experiences, and asking questions.** And don't just practice in your head - practice giving answers out loud. Practice with a friend, or schedule a mock interview with your school's career center. The more you practice, the more confident you will be and sound during the actual interview.

Interview Question Types

Interviewers may ask a variety of questions to try and get to know you and your accomplishments. It's helpful to know and prepare for these different types of questions you may be asked.

Skills-Based Questions

You may get questions about specific skills, especially if you are in a technical field. For these questions, you can confirm that you have experience with that skill, and provide an example of a time you used it.

Example:
Interviewer: Do you have experience with Adobe?
Candidate: Yes. In my internship last summer at a fashion design company, I used Illustrator to create tech packs for apparel designs, I used Photoshop to create mood boards, and I used inDesign to create lookbooks.

Experience/Behavioral Questions

Interviewers will likely ask questions to learn about your previous experience. To answer these questions, it's helpful to use the STAR (Situation/Task, Action, Result) method.

Example:
Interviewer: Tell me about a time when you took initiative.
Candidate: Absolutely. In my summer job as a camp counselor, I noticed that campers were constantly running late to get to and from each activity, which was messing up the daily schedule *(Situation/Task)*. I brought the issue up with other counselors, and suggested we institute a bell system across camp to alert campers to when it was 10 minutes left until the next activity *(Action).* This strategy was highly effective, and drastically reduced the number of days that we were behind schedule as a camp *(Result).*

Hypothetical Questions

Interviewers may ask you how you'd handle a hypothetical situation. They're not necessarily looking for you to have the exact right answer, but want to understand your thought process behind how you'd respond.

Example:
Interviewer: If someone on the team wasn't pulling their weight, what would you do?
Candidate: If someone on the team wasn't contributing equally to a project, I would first talk to the person, and see what's going on and try to resolve the issue that way. If the issue persists, I would speak with the appropriate manager.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself
- What makes you the ideal candidate for this position?
- What are some of your strengths?
- What are some of your weaknesses?
- Why do you want this position?
- What qualifications do you have for this position?
- What are your top skills?
- What unique attributes would you bring to our company?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What are your professional goals?
- What is your greatest achievement?
- What is your greatest failure?
- Describe a time when you had to work with a difficult person
- Describe a time when you faced a challenge in a work setting
- Describe a time when you made a mistake at work
- What do you know about your company?
- How did you hear about this position?
- What is your availability?
- What are your hobbies?
- How do you stay organized?
- How do you manage competing tasks and deadlines?
- Describe a time when you had to work with people who share different identities than you

For more on common interview questions and how to answer them, check out THIS VIDEO by Steppingblocks.

Steppingblocks Pro Tip

As you prepare for the interview, map out your answers to these questions and questions you anticipate getting based on the job description. Then, practice (out loud!) answering these questions. This will help you appear and feel confident in your interview!

During the Interview: DOs & DON'Ts

DO

- Greet your interviewer(s) with a firm handshake
- Be polite and friendly to everyone you meet, even if they are not your interviewer(s)
- Answer questions clearly and concisely
- Highlight your relevant skills and experiences, and link them back to the requirements of the job
- Listen carefully to the questions being asked, and ask for clarification as needed
- Dress to impress. This doesn't always mean a full suit or pantsuit, but always dress in neat, clean clothing that aligns with the culture of the organization
- Maintain eye contact with your interviewer(s) throughout the conversation
- Ask questions when prompted (typically at the end of the interview)

DO NOT

- Use an excess of filler words, such as "um" or "like"
- Ramble - do your best to answer each question thoroughly but concisely
- Focus on the negative - focus on your skills and experiences without dwelling on ways you may think you don't measure up
- Be late - show up early and give yourself extra time to find parking and the interview location

Virtual Interviews: DOs & DON'Ts

While virtual interviews became a necessity at the height of COVID, many companies have continued utilizing virtual interviews to hire new employees. With this virtual shift, it's more important than ever to not only be prepared for your interview, but to be prepared for a *virtual* interview. As we know, the online experience is different than in-person, so virtual interviews mean doing things a little differently.

Testing, Testing, 1-2-3

The last thing you want to do is spend the first twenty minutes of your interview troubleshooting your tech. Check your camera and microphone beforehand to make sure they're both working properly. If the device you're using isn't going to be plugged in for the interview, make sure it's fully charged. Check whether you can log into the account you want to use, and know your username and password.

Make a Good First Impression

Before the interviewer sees your face in the virtual room, they will see your name, your email, and your account image. Don't show up to a virtual interview or communicate with a potential employer using Pizzaluvr28@thebomb.com as your email address with a picture of you at last summer's sorority beach party. If you have a business email, use it. And if not, create a professional email account with a professional headshot.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Conduct the interview in a neutral space. Pick a place, preferably an office or classroom space, that has a good, professional background. If you don't have an ideal location, make sure you are using a virtual background or position the camera to show as simple of a background as possible. Avoid having anything in the background that would be distracting or off-putting to your interviewer. Check your lighting, and be sure you are facing the light and are not back-lit by a window or lamp. Ring lights for your computer or phone are a great way to ensure good lighting for your call. And remember, your camera should be ON for the interview!

Where do I look?!

In casual video calls with friends and family, it might not matter so much where you look. But in a virtual interview, a good tip is to look directly at the camera. This might feel weird for you, but it makes the other person feel like you're looking right at them. It's as close to eye contact as you can get with them (even if you might not feel it). And eye contact means connection. One way to help mitigate the weirdness of staring at a camera lens is to add a sticker or even googly eyes right above the camera and just focus on that.

Virtual Interviews (continued)

Wear Pants!

It can be tempting to not dress in fully professional attire in virtual calls, but not in virtual interviews. Wear pants, dress professionally, and make a good first impression. This is important for two reasons. One, you can't guarantee that an emergency won't happen where you have to stand up, or that your camera won't fall, giving your interviewer a surprise they weren't expecting. And two, psychologically you'll feel more professional if you dress more professional. So wear pants! Along with other attire that makes you look professional and presentable. Remember, dress for success!

This is an Invite-Only Occasion

Your virtual interview should be between you and your interviewer(s), meaning no special guests! Notify anyone who lives with you that you'll need the space quiet for the time of your interview. Don't allow people to walk around or talk in the background. Many people allow their pets to be in their online calls, but as much as we love them, they too can be a distraction. If you can, pick a place away from any and all distractions.

Awkward Silences for the Win

One of the things that makes virtual interviews different from in-person interviews is the lag. Have you ever talked over people or been talked over when on a video call? That's because of the lag. Combat the lag by speaking clearly and concisely, and give space between when they speak and when you speak. If you do end up talking over someone, don't sweat it - it happens! Politely apologize and invite the other person to speak.

Create a Distraction-Free Zone

You want to make it easy for you and the interviewer(s) to focus on the conversation. Silence your other notifications (on your phone and computer) to ensure you don't get interrupted. Do your best not to fidget excessively, and stay focused on the conversation. If utilizing a fidget device, try to do so discreetly, and avoid anything that makes noise or involved a lot of movement. Maintain eye contact and avoid anything that will distract your interviewer or detract from your answers in the conversation.

And most importantly… PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Asking Questions

At some point during the interview, typically towards the end, the interviewer(s) will ask if you have any questions for them. It is important to take advantage of this opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the company. Plus, asking thoughtful questions demonstrates that you are invested and interested in the position. When choosing questions to ask, consider what you want to know more about. Maybe you want to learn more about the company, or the department, or the employee benefits. It's important to ask questions so that you can have all the information you need to make a decision if you receive an offer. **Here are some examples of questions you can ask in an interview:**

- What does the day-to-day look like for this position?
- What is the history of this position?
- What qualities make someone successful in this position?
- What do you see would be the challenges of this position?
- What is the structure of the department?
- How would you describe your management style? (if interviewing with your future manager)
- Where do you see the company in 5 years?
- What is this company/department's proudest achievement?
- How would you describe the work environment and company culture?
- What is your favorite thing about working here?
- What are the benefits associated with this position?
- What is the training and onboarding process for this position?

After the Interview: Following Up

After you have completed the interview, it is important to follow up with your interviewer(s) and say thank you. Send each of your interviewers an individualized email to thank them for their time and reiterate your interest in the position.

Example:

Dear Casey,

Thank you so much for taking the time to interview with me today. I enjoyed getting to hear more about XYZ company and ABC department. I am confident that my skills in XYZ and experience with ABC make me an excellent candidate for this role. If there's any additional information I can provide about my candidacy, please let me know.

Warmest regards,
Alex

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- Discover job titles and majors that match your personality type
- See career outcomes from your school's alumni
- Search career outcomes from our dataset of over 135 million people
- Learn about top employers, skills, and salaries for your desired job type
- Explore career paths from real people

Digital Career Counselor gives you access to data that can help you make informed decisions, and be the best candidate you can be for your dream role!

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Digital Career Counselor

Want to learn more about how to use Digital Career Counselor? Check out the articles in our Help Center, or use the chat feature within the platform and someone from the Steppingblocks Partner Success team will help you.

We also encourage you to connect with your school's Career Center, where they can help guide you on your career journey!