



Oregon State University
Cascades

Interviewing

OSU-Cascades Career Development Center

Your resume and cover letter resulted in you getting invited for an interview. Congratulations! Now what?! The purpose of the interview is to confirm the information that you shared in your application, and to see if you would be a good fit for the company. They know that you can do the job, now they want to know how well, and if they will enjoy doing it with you.

What Do Employers Want to Know?

Do you really want this job?

What potential do you have to be successful at our company?

Why should I hire you?

Do Your Research

It is essential that you research the company and position beforehand. Employers want to know that you clearly understand the job, that you know who they are, what they stand for, and who they work with. You can access information about companies from their website, LinkedIn, local newspapers and publications, and databases such as Business Source Premier and Mergent Online available through the OSU Libraries.

Reflect on Your Skills and Experience

Employers want to understand your strengths and potential shortcomings in order to assess your potential within their company. They are likely to ask you what related skills and experience you would bring to the position, as well as areas that you may need to develop to perform the job better. Many employers will ask behavioral interview questions which are a good predictor of future performance. Behavioral interview questions are explained on page 4.

Before the interview, make a list of your skills and key assets that you would bring to the job. Prepare at least 10 “power stories” which are specific examples that show how you have successfully executed ten different skills that relate to your future position. Use the worksheet on pages 7 and 8 to prepare your power stories. Also reflect on areas that you would like to develop and how you are possibly working to improve on them.

Set Yourself Apart

You want to get across what makes you a unique candidate for the position. You can do this first and foremost by being yourself. Try not to stiffen up or become dull in the pursuit of professionalism. Be professional of course, but show your enthusiasm with a smile and allow your passion for what you do to come through when you speak. Employers want to know not only what you do but who you are. Help them to feel confident that you would be an enjoyable person to work with and a good member of their team, in addition to being competent and reliable.

Think about your skills that go above and beyond what they are looking for on the job posting. What experiences will set you apart and make you unique from all of the other candidates that are applying for the same position? Be sure to mention these skills during the interview (i.e. “In addition to A, B, and C skills that you are looking for, I would bring D, E, and F which would be an asset to the company and assist in achieving future company goals”). Be confident and let them know that if they hire you, you will not only produce, but you will exceed their expectations.

Practice, Practice, Practice!

A candidate going into an interview without preparing is like an athlete playing in a championship game without ever going to practice. You don’t want to end up on the bloop reel do you?! There are many ways that you can prepare; you can practice by yourself or with family and friends, you can schedule a mock interview with a counselor in the Career Development Center, or you can use a free online program called InterviewStream. To access InterviewStream go to <http://osucascades.edu/cdc/interviewstream>.

Common Types of Interviews

Phone

Phone interviews are typically the first step after applications have been reviewed. Most phone interviews are about 30 minutes long and will consist of basic interview questions (pg. 5). The benefit of a phone interview is that you are able to have notes in-front of you highlighting your research, skills, and examples that you want to share. The drawback is that you have no visual confirmation that what you are saying is in line with what they are looking for. If there is a long pause on the phone, the interviewer might be taking notes on your response, or, they could be waiting for you to answer the second part of the question. If the silence gets uncomfortable, don't hesitate to ask if you fully answered their question for confirmation.

Make sure to reserve a quiet and private space for your interview. Even though it is a phone interview, it is best to dress the part. You will feel more confident in a suit than sitting in your sweatpants on the couch. Also, try to stand while you are talking and remember to smile; your voice carries more confidently when you are standing and smiles can be heard in your vocal tone.

Online

It is becoming more common for employers to request Skype or Google+ interviews. The structure of an online interview is similar to that of a phone interview. The benefit of an online interview is that you can see if the interviewer is smiling and/or nodding as you are responding. You can still have notes on the computer screen in front of you if you like. Make sure to dress up for an online interview, top to bottom. And don't forget to smile!

If you do not have access to a camera for online interviews, contact the Career Development Center.

In-person

In-person interviews typically follow a phone or online interview. This can be a one-on-one interview or a panel interview. Some companies may even require multiple in-person interviews before they extend an offer.

Employers will typically get into more behavioral interviewing questions (pg. 5) during the in-person interview while also revisiting the basic questions asked during the phone or online interview.

When going to an in-person interview, take copies of your resume printed on resume paper to give to each interviewer. It is also best to bring a padfolio with a pad of paper and a pen to take notes on information that they share with you about the company during the interview. However, It is not appropriate to bring your own notes about the company and position to the interview.

First Impressions

Dress for success! It is better to be over dressed than underdressed so you can never go wrong with wearing a suit to a professional interview. Make sure that your suit fits you well; not too loose, not too tight. Avoid patterns and bright colors and limit your use of makeup, jewelry, and cologne or perfume. Make sure to be well groomed with nails clean and trimmed and hair pulled back if it is longer than shoulder length.

When the employer comes out to greet you, stand and offer them a firm handshake with a big smile on your face and make eye contact. First impressions are everything, make sure you leave a strong one!

Non-Verbal Communication

Over 80% of what you say during an interview does not come out of your mouth. This is your non-verbal communication and consists of body language, posture, eye contact, facial expressions, hand gestures and tone of voice. You want to sit up straight in the chair; not ridged, but attentive, with your chest up and leaning forward instead of slouching. Try to keep both feet on the ground and your hands folded in your lap or on the table in front of you. Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview. Poor eye contact can be interpreted as lack of confidence or dishonesty in your responses. Keep a smile on your face to express your enthusiasm for the position. A smile also helps to maintain an upbeat and positive tone of voice. Allow the employer to really listen to your answers by not being distracted by your non-verbal communication.

Tell Me About Yourself...

This is one of the most commonly asked interview questions but can be difficult to answer. Just as you would tailor your resume or cover letter to a specific job, you will tailor your response to this question depending on who is asking it.

Your response should only be 30 to 60 seconds long. Take time to research the company/position and reflect on what is most important for them know about you. Make sure to include this information in your response. What are you currently involved in (school, work, activities)? What have you done in the past that directly relates to the position? What related strengths would you bring? What is your purpose for applying to the position?

For example, Sally is in the process of applying for marketing internships, she wrote down the following things:

Current:	Past:	Strengths:	Purpose:
Junior at OSU-Cascades Business Administration ASCC	Campus Ambassador Volunteer: Boys and Girls Club, event planning	Creativity Teamwork Communication Leadership	Apply education and gain real world experience

Here is Sally's response to the "Tell me about yourself" question:

"I am currently a Junior majoring in Business Administration at the Oregon State University - Cascades and am heavily involved in Student Government where I collaborate with team members to plan and market events on campus. In the past I have been a Campus Ambassador to welcome perspective students to campus and market what the University has to offer. I have also volunteered at the local Boys and Girls Club to help plan fundraising events. Through my education and experiences I have successfully worked as part of a team as well as stepped up to take leadership when situations needed it. I have also developed strong communication skills and the ability to implement creative ideas. I am excited about this internship because it will allow me to apply my skills and knowledge to the field of marketing while gaining professional experience."

You don't need to go into too much detail regarding your related experiences; that is what the remainder of the interview is for. You simply want to highlight your greatest selling points to whoever is asking the question in order to engage their attention with your first response.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Employers will often ask about strengths and weaknesses. The general rule of thumb is to offer three strengths and one weakness. Don't just list out your strengths, back them up with specific examples of how you have portrayed each strength in the past. Weaknesses don't need to be something that you are bad at. This could be a skill that you are able to perform but maybe not with equal comfort or at the same level as other things. What are some areas in which you would like to develop? Make sure that your weakness would not directly impact the position that you are applying for. It is best to state your weaknesses, but then state how you are working to improve it through practice. Tip: Do NOT say that you are a perfectionist or tend to take on too much work. These are the two most common responses and employers will tend to tune out if you use them. This may be true for you, but try to find a different way to express it.

Conflict

Employers also tend to ask about a time when you experienced conflict in the workplace. Conflict does not have to include anger or aggression. This could be a simple misunderstanding, miscommunication, or a difference in ideas. The employer is looking to see if you are open to communication with your colleagues and supervisors, if you are willing to compromise or at least except the ideas and opinions of others. Everyone experiences conflict in some way. Be sure to take ownership of your role in the situation and NEVER bash another employee in your answer. Saying that you haven't experienced conflict will be seen by the employer as you avoiding to answer the question.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interviewing questions usually begin with “Tell me about a time when...” or “Give me an example of...” followed by a task or situation that would require you to utilize skills that relate to the position that you are applying for. What skills will they ask about? You can find the answer on the job posting itself. Look at the qualifications or requirements section listed at the bottom of the job posting. For any skill listed there, you should prepare a SPECIFIC example to share how you successfully used that skill. This will show the employer your potential for continuing to utilize each skill in the position that you are applying for.

There is a certain structure in which you want to respond to behavioral questions, and some companies will even take notes on your responses in this structure to see how well you prepared beforehand. The acronym that we use for this structure is CAR:

Context: Paint a picture for the employer. Where were you? Who were you with? When was this? What was the project, assignment, or problem that you were working on? What did you have to do?

Action: What did YOU do in the situation? I repeat, what did YOU do. The employer is not hiring your entire group, just you. Focus on YOUR role and how YOU portrayed each skill.

Result: Without this, there is no proof that the previous three things actually happened. Make sure to include a result or outcome for every story that you tell.

For example: “Tell me about a time when you stepped up to take a **leadership** role when the situation needed it.”:

C: In my Marketing Research class last semester we were split into groups of three for a semester long project. Our assignment was to contact a local company and analyze their marketing strategy in order to suggest improvements to their marketing plan.

A: My group consisted of people who were all fairly quiet and preferred to work independently. Recognizing this, I took initiative to start discussion on the project. I asked questions about who would be interested in what portions of the assignment and delegated out tasks accordingly. My independent responsibility was to research and contact local companies to find an organization that would be interested in working with us. I recruited three different companies that were close to campus so we were able to pick a company that we were all interested in. Since the members preferred independent work, I didn't plan out of class meetings but made sure to maintain communication with everyone before or after class and at least twice a week via email. I held members accountable for their parts of the project and was available for questions or concerns if they had any.

R: In the end we were able to work very well together. We compiled a report and presented our suggestions to the company who stated that they will be implementing our ideas to improve their marketing strategy this summer.

Common skills that employers will ask about are leadership, teamwork, analytical skills/problem solving, communication, conflict management, customer service, and time-management. Again, look at the job posting for a better idea of what skills are important to the employer for the position that you are applying for. Make a list of these skills and develop your CAR power stories with a SPECIFIC example for each skill. Utilize the worksheet on pages 7 and 8.

Example General Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- What do you know about our company?
- What motivated you to get into this field?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What related experience would you bring to this position?
- Tell me more about your experience at _____.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What motivates you?
- Who is your role model and why?
- What has been your greatest academic achievement thus far?
- What have you learned from your experiences outside the classroom?
- In what ways could you make a positive contribution to our organization?
- Have you ever had any failures? What did you learn from them?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?
- What are your future career goals?
- Why is there a gap in your employment history?
- What would your past supervisor say about you?
- Describe an ideal work environment?
- How would you describe success?
- How can you help our company increase productivity?
- What are two or three accomplishments that have give you the most satisfaction and why?
- How do you like to be supervised?
- Why is your GPA not higher?
- What are your thoughts on having to travel or relocate for a position?
- What are you passionate about? Why?
- What do you do for fun?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you the best candidate?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Example Behavioral Questions

- Tell me about a time when you stepped up to take a leadership role in a situation.
- Tell me about a time you worked as part of a team to reach a common goal.
- Give a recent example of when you used heavy analytical thinking to solve a problem.
- Tell me about at time you failed to reach a goal and how you handled that.
- Tell me about a time you experienced conflict with a supervisor or coworker and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to gather information from multiple sources to make a decision.
- Give an example of when you had to manage multiple tasks with competing deadlines.
- Tell me about a time you had to communication complex information to someone who didn't understand.
- Tell me about a time when you made a mistake and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision that was not popular for the group.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure.
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise with others.
- Give me an example of when you portrayed strong customer service skills.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult or challenging client.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use persuasion to convince someone to do something.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick to make a decision.
- Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past and how you reached that goal.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Do You Have Any Questions For Me?

It is important that you have questions prepared for the interviewer as well. Interviewing is a two way street, you need to make sure that this position is a good fit for you too, and this is your opportunity to do so. Prepare three to five questions beforehand. DO NOT ask about salary, vacation or benefits during this time. Those are topics you can address after you are offered the position. Here are some examples of questions that you could ask:

- What would a typical week be like in this position?
- What are the some of the goals that are expected to be accomplished in the first 6 months? 12 months?
- I noticed on LinkedIn that you started here as a _____ and have moved up into your current role. What was that transition like for you and what do enjoy most about working here?
- What are the opportunities for advancement within the company?
- What is the company's philosophy regarding professional development?
- I know you have grown by 20% in the past five years. Do you see that type of growth continuing?
- What qualities do you think distinguish your best performers?

And the last question you should ALWAYS ask:

- Where are you in the hiring process and when should I expect to hear from you?

This will give you an idea of what your follow-up time is like.

Follow Up

You ALWAYS want to send a thank you note to every person that you interview with. Make sure to get their full name and contact information during the interview, this can easily be done by asking for a business card. If they are making a decision quickly on the position you will want to send an email right away. If you have a week or two before you expect to hear from them, it is best to send a hand written card. A card is more personal and will sit on their desk for a longer period of time, while an email will immediately go down the list of communications for the day and soon be deleted.

Your thank you letter does not need to be long. You want to reiterate your interest in the position and the strengths that you would bring. Thank them again for their time and mention something personal that they stated in the interview if possible (i.e. "Have a great time on your hike to Tumalo Falls this weekend!"). Then state that you look forward to hearing from them and sign the card.

What If I Don't Have an Answer?

The most anxiety provoking thing about interviewing is not knowing what questions you will be asked. Doing your research on the position and company, and reflecting on at least 10 good examples that show how your skills relate to the position are great ways to ensure success in your interview. But reality is, employers are bound to ask you something that you haven't ever thought about. Interviewers actually do this on purpose. They want to see how you think on your feet because often in the world of work you will be required to do the same.

If you are asked a question that you are not prepared to answer, don't hesitate to say "That is a good question, I may need a minute to think about it". Prefacing the silence that is about to ensue with a statement like this can make that silence a lot less awkward and allow your attention to focus on your response instead of how uncomfortable you feel. If you just need an extra second or didn't understand the question, you can ask "Could you please repeat/restate the question?" You can also ask if it is possible to skip the question and come back to it later on in the interview.

Questions?

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C.A.R. Stories Worksheet

List 10 Skills/Traits

1) C: Context

A: Action

R: Result

2) C:

A:

R:

3) C:

A:

R:

4) C:

A:

R:

5) C:

A:

R:

6)

C:

A:

R:

7)

C:

A:

R:

8)

C:

A:

R:

9)

C:

A:

R:

10)

C:

A:

R: