



Interviewing Guide

Congratulations! You got the interview! Now what?

The best way for you to succeed in an interview is to:

1. Research (yourself, the position, the organization, the industry)
2. Dress appropriately, know where you are going and arrive on time
3. Practice, practice, practice!

Table of Contents

Types of Interviews.....	2
Before the Interview.....	2
During the Interview.....	3
After the Interview.....	3
Behavioral-Based Questions.....	4
Sample Interview Questions.....	5-6
Tips for Answering Interviewing Questions.....	7-8
Questions to Ask the Employer.....	9

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

SCREENING: The purpose of a screening interview is to eliminate unqualified candidates who don't meet the requirements for the position or who would not be a good fit with the organization.

TELEPHONE: Often used in the screening process to determine if the employer wants to invite you to interview on-site. Keys to successful telephone interviews:

- Give the interview your complete attention
- Have your resume and a copy of the job description nearby
- The employer can't see your body language; therefore, it is important to communicate your enthusiasm through your words and tone of voice. Stay confident, upbeat and positive!

ONE-ON-ONE: Standard type of interview, with one interviewer and one applicant. Your goal in this interview is to establish rapport with the interviewer and communicate your skills and qualifications, as well as your fit for the position/organization.

GROUP: This type of interview can include multiple interviewers and multiple applicants. Gives the interviewers the opportunity to observe your ability to "think on your feet" and interact in a group setting. The key to this type of interview is to make eye contact with each member of the group as you are speaking and to do so in a relaxed and confident manner. Group interviews are commonly used for graduate school interviews.

MEAL: The interview takes place while eating, typically over lunch. Follow the interviewers lead in ordering food and dining etiquette. A great way to prepare is to attend a dining etiquette program at SNC if possible.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. **Analyze the position.** Review the job description so you understand the required job duties and qualifications. Be prepared to discuss how your skills and background fit the qualifications for the position.
2. **Research the company/organization.** Learn about the employer's mission, products/services, culture, industry reputation, etc.
3. **Research the industry/career field.** Learn about the issues or major news related to the career field.
4. **Practice, Practice, Practice!!!** Know your skills and qualifications and be prepared to talk about them. Use the list of frequently asked questions and tips in this packet to help prepare. Schedule an appointment with a career counselor for a mock interview to practice your interviewing skills and get feedback.
5. **Attend an interviewing workshop** hosted by Career Services to learn more about improving your interviewing skills (www.snc.edu/career/students/calendar.html).
6. **Utilize online and library resources** to research frequently asked interview questions and strategies for answering those questions. (Ex: www.collegegrad.com/intv/)
7. **Dress appropriately.** What to wear? Suit, suit, suit! Part of a good first impression is how you look in addition to how you carry yourself. Check out our Dress for Success handout for more specifics on what to wear to an interview (www.snc.edu/career/students/handouts.html).
8. **Prepare your 60 Second Commercial.** Use this strategy to answer the interview question "Tell me about yourself", to introduce yourself at a career fair, to network at a professional event or to mingle at a party. Please see the 60 Second Commercial handout on the Career Services web site for more information on creating your own unique 60 Second Commercial.
9. **Map out directions to the interview site.** If possible do a trial run to determine what route you will take, how long the drive will be and where you will park. Utilize the online maps feature on Career Connections.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. **Carry these items to the interview:** several copies of your resume on quality paper, copies of your references, professional looking portfolio to take notes and carry your resumes/references, directions to the interview site. Leave your cell phone in the car!
2. **Upon arrival:** arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview, treat the receptionist with respect, check your appearance in the restroom, take along a breath mint, try to relax and take a few deep breaths.
3. **Be aware of your disposition.** Greet everyone you meet with a smile, good eye contact and a firm handshake. Always be aware of your nonverbal behavior. Maintain a relaxed, but professional posture and a positive tone of voice. Show excitement for the position.
4. **Listen and relax!** Enjoy the conversation and listen carefully by focusing and giving the interviewer your full attention.
5. **Think before you speak.** Before you answer a question, organize your thoughts, be sure you understand the question, and clearly communicate your response.
6. **It is ok to ask for a minute to think about a question.** It is perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment to collect your thoughts before responding to a question. Simply say to the interviewer “May I have a minute to think about that.” Interviewers would rather you take a minute to think about your response and give a well thought out answer, rather than have you ramble on because you didn’t take enough time before responding. If you are really stumped on a question it is ok to ask, “Can we return to that question later?”
7. **Be specific and give examples.** Do not diminish past experiences. It adds to your credibility when you can give specific examples with a few strong points.
8. **Be honest!**

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. **Collect business cards from each interviewer.** This ensures you have the correct contact information for sending a thank-you and for asking follow-up questions after the interview.
2. **Evaluate your performance.** What parts of the interview went well? What parts need improvement? Be sure to address the areas for improvement to ensure that it goes better during the next interview.
3. **Thank the interviewer.** Always write a thank-you note to the interviewer. Send a letter within 1-2 days to each person you met with. If you are limited by time, an e-mail thank you is acceptable; otherwise a handwritten note is better. This is your opportunity to remind the interviewer of your great qualities, share something you may have forgotten to share in the interview, and again express your interest and enthusiasm for the position.

BEHAVIORAL-BASED QUESTIONS

The basic premise of behavioral-based interviews is that *past behavior predicts future performance*. Behavioral-based interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision by focusing on your actions and behaviors rather than subjective impressions. These types of questions are structured to obtain specific, behavioral examples. Recall situations that highlight favorable behaviors or actions, such as course work, class projects, volunteer experience, work experience, leadership, teamwork, activities. Utilize the **STAR** technique to help you highlight relevant pieces of your example and give structure to your answer.

S = Situation (Describe a situation)

T = Task (Describe the problem that needs to be solved or a task that needs to be completed)

A = Action (Explain the steps taken to complete the task, individually or as part of a group, identify skills utilized)

R = Results (Talk about the positive results, or what you learned from a negative result, quantifying if possible)

Examples of Behavioral-Based Questions

- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction?
- What is the toughest challenge you have faced?
- Tell me about the position that has given you the most satisfaction.
- What have you learned from your work/internship experiences?
- How do you work under pressure?
- When have you failed?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Describe a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Describe a situation where you had to do several tasks at the same time.
- Tell me about a time:
 - When you had a major problem and explain how you dealt with it.
 - When you made a poor decision and how you corrected it.
 - When you had to adapt to a difficult work situation.
 - When you worked with someone you disliked and how you handled the situation.
 - When you worked as part of a team and one team member wasn't carrying his or her weight.
 - When you had to exert leadership in a crisis situation.
 - When you had to persuade someone to your point of view.
 - When you had to overcome disappointment.
 - When you went above and beyond expectations.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS/SKILLS/STRENGTHS:

Tell me about yourself.

Why are you interested in this position?

What are your qualifications for this position?

How would you be able to contribute to our company/organization?

What is your strongest personal asset?

Name 3 strengths that you have and why you consider these strengths.

What would one of your friends/teachers/supervisors say about you?

What would a supervisor or professor tell me are your strengths?

Why should we hire you instead of several other equally qualified candidates?

EDUCATION RELATED:

How and why did you select St. Norbert College?

What led you to this major and what courses did you like most/least?

How has your education prepared you for this job?

What honors/awards have you received?

What courses have you enjoyed most?

How will you prepare for the transition from college to the workplace?

What have you gained from your extracurricular activities?

If you had the chance to repeat your college career, what would you do differently? Why?

Do you plan to continue your education?

WORK RELATED:

What jobs/internships have you had?

What was your relationship with your supervisor?

How has your experience prepared you for a job with our organization?

What did you enjoy most on your last job? Least?

What did you learn from your most recent job?

WEAKNESSES:

What is your biggest weakness?

What would you say is an area in which you need improvement?

What would you change about yourself and why?

INITIATIVE/TEAMWORK/LEADERSHIP:

Tell me about a major accomplishment and how you achieved it.

Tell me about a situation in which you showed initiative.

Tell me about a group in which you were involved. How did you contribute to make this group achieve a goal?

Tell me about a time you assumed a leadership role.

Have you ever supervised anyone? What did you learn from that experience?

DECISION-MAKING:

When did you choose to enter this occupational field and why?

Tell me about a recent significant problem you faced and how you handled it.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PROBLEM-SOLVING/CONFLICT MANAGEMENT:

Tell me how you handle stress.

Tell me about a time you had a number of assignments due. How did you make sure you completed all of them on time and did a good job?

Tell me about a time when you were confronted by a fellow student, co-worker or a customer. How did you handle it to resolve the conflict?

Tell me about a time you were faced with a difficult situation and how you handled it.

ATTITUDE:

What didn't you like about St. Norbert College?

Tell me about a professor or supervisor that you didn't like and why.

What types of people annoy you?

MATURITY:

How many days of work (or school) did you miss this past year?

Tell me about a mistake you made and how you handled it.

THINKING ON YOUR FEET:

Define teamwork. (or any word... teamwork... success... quality)

What was the last book you read or movie you saw?

If you could be a _____, what type would you be?

GOALS/DIRECTION/OTHER:

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

How do you see this position fitting into your career goals?

What do you believe to be the major trends in your career field at this time?

What salary range do you anticipate for this position?

How do you balance the needs of work and school with your personal life?

ORGANIZATION:

Why are you seeking a position with our company?

Tell me what you know about our organization.

In what ways do you think you can contribute to our organization?

How long would you stay with this company?

Describe what you believe to be an ideal work environment.

TIPS FOR ANSWERING SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.	Be concise. Relate your experiences, academics, and career goals to the job opening. This is your <i>one minute commercial</i> (keep it brief). See the 60 second commercial online for information on creating your own unique response to this question: www.snc.edu/career/students/handouts.html .
What interests you in having a career with us? What do you know about our company?	Research the organization and position ahead of time. What current issues are they facing? Have they been in the news? Discuss products, services, and other details learned when researching the company. Think about how your skills, experiences, and education fit with the position. Show excitement and initiative. One of the biggest turnoffs for employers is when applicants don't know why they want to work specifically for their organization. Go to www.snc.edu/career/students/jobsearch.html for resources to use when researching companies.
Describe two strengths you will bring to our company, that you feel sets you apart from other candidates.	Using job description, highlight the skills the organization is seeking. Give an example, using the STAR technique, of how you have demonstrated the skills they are seeking. State how your strengths will help the organization.
Describe two weakness, or areas of improvement.	Don't avoid this question. Name your weaknesses, but then describe how you are compensating for the weakness – give an example. Share what you will do differently next time (this shows growth, self-awareness). Avoid listing weaknesses directly related to your prospective job.
Give an example of a time when you took on a leadership role amongst your coworkers and how others responded to you as the leader.	STAR technique. Incorporate skills such as initiative, motivation, leadership, interpersonal skills, and communications skills. Utilize the Transferable Skills Handout online (www.snc.edu/career/students/handouts.html) to assist in identifying your skills.
This position will require you to be a strong team member. What is your opinion of what characteristics constitute a “strong team member”?	STAR technique. Highlight your communication, organizational, and problem solving skills. Showing that you were open to other's ideas and that you were willing to collaborate are important.
Describe a situation in which you were faced with multiple deadlines and how you handled it. (Multi-tasking question)	STAR technique. Explain your time management skills and how you took initiative in setting and accomplishing goals. Highlighting your flexibility and ability to operate under intense pressure and time constraints is also important.
Describe a time when you were in conflict with a co-worker and what the outcome of the disagreement was.	STAR technique. Never blame another person. Explain how you respected the other person's opinion, how you dealt with the conflict through positive action (conflict management skills, problem-solving skills), how you remained calm, and how you arrived at positive solutions. Then explain how you will use the experience to foster positive change.

Describe a time when you had to discuss some unpleasant feelings to a supervisor.	STAR technique. Explain the process you used to communicate with your supervisor. Demonstrate tact and maturity in dealing with the situation. Explain how you dealt with conflict through positive action and how you will use the situation to foster positive change.
Detail a past project or event that you planned.	STAR technique. Explain how you organized the work, people, and resources to accomplish the objective. Highlight your leadership and organizational skills and self motivation.
Have you ever accomplished something you didn't think you could?	This question addresses your goal orientation, work ethic, personal commitment and integrity. Provide a good example that illustrates a time when you overcame numerous difficulties to succeed. Prove you are not a quitter and that you will "get going when the going gets tough."
Describe one thing you found most challenging about a previous job.	STAR technique. How did you work to overcome the challenge? What did you learn?
What is your most significant accomplishment?	STAR technique. This is an opportunity to make a great impression. Telling a two-minute story including details and personal involvement can paint an impressive picture of your accomplishment. Discuss any sacrifices you had to make to achieve this accomplishment and why it was important to the company.
How would you describe an ideal working environment?	Relate your answer to what you already know about the organization and the specific job you are applying to. Focus on what is important to you and what will allow you to excel in the position. An ex: An opportunity to grow both professionally and personally, where you will be treated fairly, be given space for creativity, yet feel comfortable asking for guidance.
Describe a time where your performance went above and beyond expectations.	STAR technique. Use an example, such as handling an irate customer or a time where an associate needed assistance with an urgent project that may or may not have had anything to do with your responsibilities. Be sure to demonstrate a "whatever it takes" attitude.
How would your friends and family describe you?	Truthfully describe yourself, highlighting qualities that employers would look for (dependable, organized, trustworthy, genuine, reliable, etc).
Where do you see yourself in 5 years from now?	They may be testing to see if you plan on staying with their corporation. Be sure to research the process of moving up in the organization. Let them know you are seeking a challenging and rewarding career, and that you hope to grow in your profession with the support of their company.
What other types of jobs or companies are you considering?	You do not need to name other organizations, or jobs, for which you are applying. Explain that you are looking at organizations who offer challenging work with career opportunities that closely match your long-term goals, which is one reason you are interviewing with them.
Is there anything else you would like me/us to know about you?	A strong concluding statement is really important. You should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reiterate your interest in the job ▪ Briefly re-highlight your key qualifications ▪ Thank the interviewer for their time/consideration ▪ Invite them to contact you if they have any questions or need additional information
What questions do you have for us?	The only wrong answer is "NONE". Be prepared to ask 3-4 questions. You want to be sure you are a good fit for the company and that they will meet your needs. See p. 9 for examples of questions you can ask.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE EMPLOYER

Typically at the end of the interview, the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions. You should ALWAYS have questions prepared to ask the interviewer. If you don't have questions prepared you might damage your chance of a successful interview.

Avoid asking questions about include: salary/benefits, information about the company that is readily available on their website or brochures, personal questions, and questions that have already been answered during the course of the interview.

Consider asking: specific questions about the position, qualities and skills the employer is looking for in candidates, advancement and promotion, training programs, location and travel. Below are some possible questions to ask.

- What are the challenging facets of the job?
- What are the organization's plans for future growth?
- What are the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you enjoy working for the organization?
- To what extent will I be responsible for determining my work objectives?
- Where could a person advance who is successful in this position? Within what time frame?
- How is job performance evaluated?
- How would you describe the culture of your organization?
- If I work hard and prove my value to the company, where might I find myself in five years?
- What is a typical day in the position for which I am interviewing?
- Does your organization encourage employees to pursue additional education?
- What other positions/departments will I interact with the most?
- What are the top three challenges that I'll face in this job?
- How do you feel my style will complement the team culture?
- How would you describe the management style in this organization?
- What kind of training is given to new employees?
- How did the opening for which I am applying occur?
- Does the organization support membership and participation in professional organization?
- What skills are important for someone in this position?
- What are the next steps of the hiring process/what is the timeline of the hiring process? (These are great questions to end with if the interviewer has not already covered this topic.)