

# INTERVIEW GUIDE



STUDENT, GRADUATE & CO-OP  
EMPLOYMENT CENTRE



# INTERVIEW GUIDE

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Job interviews can be a source of concern, or even downright nerve-racking, if you haven't had much experience with them. To help you prepare and feel more confident when it comes to explaining your qualifications, use the following Interview Guide well in advance of your interview.

## Research the Company



The first step in your preparation for an interview is to ensure you have researched the company and industry. You should have already started this process when you created your cover letter and resume so you can expand on that initial research to ensure you are aware of the company's business, products and/or services, competitors, recent news events, locations, and names of key individuals.

Information may be available from the company website, from individuals you may know who are currently working in the company, or from the business pages in various newspapers and/or company annual reports.

Being well prepared for the interview in this manner will set you apart from other candidates and allow you to 'talk the talk' of the industry and prove you are focused on, and keenly interested in, working for that particular company.

## Analyze the Job Posting

In addition to gaining a solid understanding of the company, you want to ensure you have analyzed the job posting to assess what key skills, strengths, abilities, and experience they are looking for. Again, you should have done this when preparing your job application, so review those key competencies so that you can begin to anticipate interview questions based on those competencies.



## What to Wear?



Wearing appropriate attire for your interview is key to making a good first impression. The majority of employers prefer candidates to dress in professional business attire or business casual attire; however, attire will be different in different types of industries and some employers will be more casual than others. Match your attire to that of the most senior individuals you would be interacting with if successful in obtaining the position and if in doubt, dress professionally. At least a day prior to your interview, select and prepare what you will wear (i.e. ensure your outfit is clean, ironed, and there are no stains, holes, etc.)



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## What to Bring?

Depending on the type of position you are applying for, what you bring to the interview can vary; however, regardless of position/industry, it is always a good idea to bring a professional folder with the following:

- Copies of your cover letter and resume (one copy for each of your interviewers)
- Your references list (see the Professional Resume Guide for an example)
- A list of questions for your interviewer
- Your business cards
- Pen and paper



You may also consider bringing a professional portfolio/binder containing the above items in addition to any of the following that may be applicable:

- Copies of letters of reference
- Copy of your transcript(s)
- List of projects you have worked on
- Copies of projects you have worked on
- Copy of your Co-op Work Term Report(s),
- Articles you have written
- List of professional training/certifications
- Copy of marketing materials you have produced (Marketing background)
- Lists of languages, platforms and applications (IT background)



Make sure you do not have your cell phone or other electronic device with you, or at least make sure you do not have it turned on.



Most importantly, bring your positive attitude! Approach your interview with a reasonable degree of confidence and self-assurance but don't 'put on an act' as employers are generally quite good at detecting whether or not an individual is being genuine. Employers are invariably impressed with the student/candidate who displays real interest and enthusiasm so don't forget to also bring your smile!

## Interview Etiquette

- Be on time for your interview! In fact, it is best if you arrive about 10 minutes early. Nothing creates a worse impression than being late. Note that most often, the receptionist is the door-keeper and his/her opinion is often considered in the process even if he/she is not formally involved in the interview itself.
- Prior to the interview, know where the interview will be located and how you will get there on time. If you're not familiar with the location, find it on a day prior to the interview.

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- Shake hands with both the receptionist as well as your interviewer(s) and make sure you introduce yourself clearly with your first and last name. Ensure you have heard the interviewer's name as well.
- Do not smoke or chew gum.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s) but make sure you don't stare him/her/them down and try not to fidget as it will distract the interviewer from what you are saying.
- Let the interviewer take the lead and do not interrupt when he/she is talking.
- Listen carefully to the questions and ask the interviewer to restate a question if needed.
- Avoid using a monotone voice, pronounce words clearly, don't mumble, and try not to speak too quickly or too slowly. Be concise, stay focused and to the point, and be direct. Smiling goes a long way in terms of making sure the tone of your voice is positive.
- Reinforce your professionalism and your ability to communicate effectively by avoiding 'uhs' 'you knows' and slang.
- Thank each interviewer and shake each interviewer's hand at the end of the interview (smile and make eye contact with each interviewer) and send a thank you note/email to each (see the Thank You Note/Email section within this Interview Guide).

## 9 Etiquette Tips for Nailing Your Next Interview

What are the keys to a successful job interview?  
Prepare thoroughly, make a good impression,  
conduct yourself properly and  
follow up appropriately.



 <p><b>Research.</b> * Review the company's website. * Google the company's key players. * Find out more about the interviewer, Quotes? Awards?</p>	 <p><b>Rehearse.</b> Practice looking in the mirror and answering questions out loud.</p>	 <p><b>Dress the part!</b> * It's always better to overdress than underdress. * Keep it simple, clean + professional.</p>
 <p><b>Arrive early.</b> * Know where you're going + how much travel time you need. * Freshen up, catch your breath + stay calm.</p>	 <p><b>What to Bring:</b> * Copies of your resume. * A list of references. * A list of questions to ask the interviewer.</p>	 <p><b>How To Act.</b> * Don't chew gum. * Don't bring in food or drink. * Turn off your cellphone.</p>
 <p><b>Smile.</b> * Smiling conveys that you are confident, friendly + approachable.</p>	 <p><b>Ask Questions.</b> * This demonstrates your interest + enthusiasm in the employer.</p>	 <p><b>On the way out...</b> * Let them know you want the job. * Say thank you, and... <b>* SEND A THANK YOU NOTE!!!!</b></p>

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## Preparing for Interview Questions

### Common Interview Questions

There are a number of interview questions that are fairly common; therefore, preparing your answers to these questions in advance will help put you at ease and make you feel more confident.



1. Tell me about yourself. *(This is often an ice-breaker question. Keep your answer job or skill related. For example, you could provide an overview of your education and experience and then list two or three of your main strengths relevant to the position.)*
2. What do you know about the type of work we do? *(This is your chance to tell what you know from the research you completed ahead of time.)*
3. What is your weakness? *(Avoid stating a weakness that might be a requirement for the position. Try to be genuine in your response and focus on the positive in terms of what you have done or are doing to deal with or overcome that weakness. For example, "My spelling is not always perfect, so I always use a spell checker.")*
4. What are your strengths? *(Select two or three skills that are relevant to the position and will show you are a strong candidate for the position and the company. Provide a specific example to demonstrate each strength that you mention.)*
5. Why did you leave your last job? *(Answer with a positive statement. Try not to say: "I was fired," "terminated," "quit," "had no babysitter," or "couldn't get along with coworkers or my supervisor". You can say: "new job," "contract ended," "seasonal," "temporary," "career change," "returned to school," to raise a family," or "relocated.")*
6. Why have you been unemployed for such a long time? *(Tell the truth. Emphasize that you were looking for a good company where you can settle and make a contribution or that you were pursuing your Certificate/Diploma/Degree (whichever may be the case).)*
7. Why should we hire you? *(Make a positive statement, such as "I would like the opportunity to work with you and believe that I can do the work." Re-state that you feel you would be successful in the position based on your strengths and re-iterate what those strengths are (provide specific examples as proof of those strengths if you haven't already done so).*
8. Do you have references? *(Provide the interviewer(s) with your reference sheet (Refer to the Professional Resume Guide for further detail). Be sure to contact your references ahead of time and obtain their permission to use them as references. Be sure to include their name, title or relationship to you, company address, phone number, and email address.)*





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## Behavioral Interview Questions

In addition to the common interview questions listed above, most employers will also ask you a few behavioral interview questions based on the skill set they are looking for. A behavioral interview question is one that asks for you to provide a specific example to demonstrate a particular skill so that the employer can determine what you did in a previous situation and find out how things turned out. Your past is a fairly reliable indicator of the future so these types of questions allow the employer to learn a lot from the things you have already done rather than just on what you say you can do.



If the position requires the successful candidate to have strong communication skills, a behavioral interview question might be:

**“Tell me about a time when you had to change your communication style to suit the needs of your audience.”**

If the position requires the successful candidate to take responsibility and work hard to learn from mistakes, the behavioral interview question might be:

**“Tell me about a major mistake you made, what you did to correct it, and what you learned from it.”**

If the position requires the successful candidate to have strong interpersonal skills and the ability to deal with conflict, the behavioral interview question might be:

**“Tell me about the last time a customer or co-worker got upset with you and what you did to resolve it.”**

To prepare for behavioral interview questions, try to anticipate the [5 main skills](#) the employer might ask you about based on the job posting and plan an example response for each of those 5 main skills using what is known as the S.T.A.R. technique. By having [5 stories planned out](#) (don't memorize them word for word or you will end up sounding robotic in the interview), you should be fairly prepared for some of the behavioral questions the interviewer might ask based on the requirements of the position.

**S = Situation**

**T = Task**

**A = Action**

**R = Result**



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**Situation:** Provide the background context for the start of your example (i.e. Where is the example coming from? Was it from a particular position you held? Was it when you were pursuing your Certificate/Diploma/Degree? Remember to include the **who, what, where, and when**.

**Task:** Describe the task you were responsible for in that particular situation. Keep it specific but concise and make sure you highlight what the challenge was that you faced in that example.

**Action:** This is the part where you **describe exactly what you did**. This is the **how** you dealt with the situation. What was your role in completing the task? Use action verbs to explain what you did.

**Result:** Explain what the outcome of the situation was and how you specifically contributed to that outcome. What did you accomplish? What did you learn? What were the results of your actions? Is there anything you would have done differently?

Here is an example of a behavioral interview question on leadership and a response using the S.T.A.R. method (pulled from [TheInterviewGuys.com](http://TheInterviewGuys.com)):

Interview Question: **“Tell me about a time when you took the lead on a difficult project.”**



Candidate Response:

- S** = A few years ago, I was working as a Service Advisor at a car dealership. One morning in our department staff meeting, the Service Manager announced that we had been receiving an unacceptable amount of negative reviews for the service we had been providing our customers. His solution was to create a committee that would analyze the situation and put forth actionable improvements, and for this he asked for volunteers.
- T** = I had been looking for an opportunity to show that I was capable of taking on more responsibility, and, being a person who enjoys working in group situations, I was the first to volunteer. The Service Manager was quick to make me the lead of the committee, which put me in the position of the leader of a group of 4 who were tasked to come up with a solution.
- A** = Over the next three weeks, we analyzed each of the customer service reports and discovered that the vast majority of negative reviews were a result of lengthy wait times for customers. Knowing that we had to come up with a solution to decrease the amount of time our customers were left waiting, I then lead brainstorming sessions to find a way to fix the problem. Based on the feedback from these sessions, I focused on changing the way our mechanics worked on each work order so that each mechanic worked mainly on their specializations.
- R** = After implementing this suggestion, the mechanics were able to work faster and more efficiently, which translated into wait times dropping by 18%. This was a situation that required me to lead 4 people and find a solution that created a positive outcome and solved a critical issue, which I believe I was able to do.



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Here is an example of a behavioral interview question on teamwork and a response using the S.T.A.R. method.

Interviewer Question: **“Give me an example to demonstrate your teamwork ability.”**



Candidate Response:

- S** = During my last semester at Okanagan College as part of my Entrepreneurship course in the Business Administration Diploma program, I worked as part of a team of four on a large semester-long term project.
- T** = We were required to create a business plan for our own small business start-up and pitch our venture idea to stakeholders who would evaluate its potential viability.
- A** = I took the initiative to book an initial team meeting for our team to discuss our individual strengths/areas of expertise so we could begin to determine who would work on each aspect of the project. I also compiled a project timeline by working backwards from the deadline and planning out, week by week, what we needed to accomplish, and some suggestions for team meeting times. I presented this to the team and everyone was appreciative of my efforts.
- R** = I believe, in large part because of my initial preparation for our first team meeting, we were able to set our team meetings and focus on each other’s strengths, which allowed us to bond fairly quickly. We were able to successfully complete the business plan within the set deadlines and work cohesively throughout the semester. Our team received the top grade of 93% on the project.

## Practice, Practice, Practice!

Once you have prepared your answers to the common interview questions as well as your five story examples to be used to answer behavioral questions, practice saying your answers out loud. The more you practice, the better your interview skills will become and the better prepared you’ll be when it’s time for real job interviews.

You can rehearse your interview responses in front of a mirror so that you can see what you look like or you can record yourself on video and play it back.

Even better, have a friend/family member act out the role of interviewer so you can begin to build your confidence in your responses. Alternatively, feel free to contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment office to arrange a mock interview ([coop@okanagan.bc.ca](mailto:coop@okanagan.bc.ca)) where one of our Coordinators will provide you with an opportunity to practice in an interview simulation setting and then provide you with feedback and tips on improving your interview skills.



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## Sample Interview Questions

In addition to the most common interview questions listed previously, the following is a list of additional sample interview questions based on Education and Career Plans, Experience & Skills, Job Specific/Technical Questions, and Personality/Personal Characteristics Questions. Use these sample questions as a means of practicing your responses prior to the interview.

### Education and Career Plans

- Why did you choose to study \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the objective of the Okanagan College \_\_\_\_\_ program?
- What are you enjoying most about the program? Why?
- Why did you get involved with the Co-op program at Okanagan College? What do you hope to get out of participating in the Co-op program?
- How well are you doing in your courses/What are your grades like? (If not good, why?)
- Which courses do you enjoy best? Least? Why?
- Which area(s) of the \_\_\_\_\_ field interests you most? Why?
- What do you think it takes to succeed in the \_\_\_\_\_ field?
- You're in school now, but what do you expect to be doing in two to five years?



### Experience & Skills

- Which past jobs have you enjoyed the most/least? Why?
- Under what circumstances did you leave your last job?
- Describe your working relationship with your last supervisor.
- Are you currently working part-time? If yes, do you plan to continue working the part-time position or would you resign in order to take a Co-op position?
- What experience do you have related to this position?
- How computer literate are you (beginner/intermediate/advanced)? What kinds of computer equipment and software have you used?

### Job Specific/Technical

- Why would you like to work for our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- We are looking for a student who will want to come back here for their second and maybe third work terms, and possibly a permanent position after graduation. How does this suit your plans?
- This position requires someone with acute attention to detail. Do you qualify? Please tell me about a time when attention to detail was critical in your work or school experience. (*This is a behavioral question – use the STAR method to respond*).



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- This position requires someone with strong interpersonal communication skills. Give me an example from your past experience to demonstrate that you have this ability. (*This is a behavioral question – use the STAR method to respond*).
- What salary are you expecting during your first work term? Why?
- How would you summarize your overall knowledge and skills in the \_\_\_\_\_ field? (Mention strengths and areas of special interest).

*Employers will likely ask some technical questions to test your professional level of expertise; occasionally there may be written tests. Depending on the position, you may be asked to construct a brief business letter or memo to demonstrate your business writing skills or to provide a portfolio.*

## Personal

- What are your strengths/weaknesses (think of as areas for improvement; mention what you are doing to deal with or overcome the weakness)? How do you know? Please provide examples of each (relate to work environment or, if no prior work experience, relate to your education).
- Which three adjectives best describe you? (i.e. reliable, collaborative, etc.)
- Please provide an example of how you have shown initiative in a past job or volunteer experience. (*This is a behavioral question – use the STAR method to respond*).
- What do you consider your greatest accomplishment? Why?
- Do you prefer working on your own or in a team? Why?
- What are some of your leisure interests?
- Do you have a car or some other reliable form of transportation?
- Are you willing to relocate for Co-op/permanent employment?

## Questions to Ask the Employer

Always be prepared to ask the interviewer(s) questions as well. If you do not have any questions prepared, the employer may interpret this as lack of interest in the opportunity/organization or that you have not done your due diligence in terms of researching the company/position or preparing for the interview.



Make sure you ask about the work itself (not something that is listed on the job posting) and the people you will be working with. You can read through the company website to find information that you may want to ask questions about (i.e. projects the company has worked on, the strategic direction, etc.)

**DO NOT ASK** about salary, benefits, vacation, or other working perks until you are offered the position.

### Sample Questions to Ask the Interviewer:

- Can you tell me why this position is vacant?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the team I will be working with?
- What are the immediate priorities in this job?



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- What would be the most important assignments that need to be accomplished in the first few months in this position?
- How will success be measured in the position?
- Would there be any training provided or available?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your leadership style (if interviewing with the individual you will be reporting to)?
- What sort of opportunities are there for advancement within the company?
- What is the biggest challenge the successful candidate will face in the position?
- What type of employees are most successful at this company?
- What will the next step in the hiring process be?

## At the End of the Interview

At the end of the interview, be sure to reiterate your interest in the position, bring up any additional skill or reason you feel you might be a strong candidate (if you didn't get a chance to discuss it through the interview questions asked), request a business card from each interviewer if you do not have his/her contact information (so you can send a thank you note later), and thank each interviewer for his/her time (with a firm handshake).



## Thank You Email

After your interview, be sure to write a thank you note or email to each interviewer. This is very important because it gives you one more chance to remind the employer about the skills/qualifications you can bring to the company.

### Tips for thank you note/email:

- Neatly hand written or type the thank you note/email.
- If writing a handwritten card, you can have the card ready to mail (with a stamp on the envelope) so that you can address it and fill it out and mail it immediately after your interview.
- Address the note to the interviewer.
- Keep it short (no longer than one page).
- First paragraph: Thank the employer for the interview and reiterate your interest in the position
- Second paragraph: Briefly state a few of your skills without repeating the information on your cover letter or resume word for word. Include any important information not mentioned in the interview.
- Final paragraph: Thank the interviewer and state that you look forward to hearing back
- Sign the note with your first and last name





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- Proofread the note to check for spelling or grammar errors and ask another person to proofread the note as well
- If sending a thank you note, mail it immediately after your interview so it arrives within the next couple of days. If sending a thank you email, do so within 48 hours after your interview.

## Sample Thank You Email:

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

It was a pleasure speaking with you today about the Assistant Account Executive position at the Smith Agency. The job, as you presented it, seems to be a very good match for my skills and interests. The creative approach to account management that you described confirmed my desire to work with you.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring to the position strong writing skills, assertiveness, and the ability to encourage others to work cooperatively. My artistic background will help me to work with artists on staff and provide me with an understanding of the visual aspects of the work. In addition, my detail orientation and organizational skills will help to free you to deal with larger issues. I neglected to mention during the interview that I worked for two summers as an Administrative Assistant, which helped me develop my administrative support skills.

Thank you for taking the time to interview me. I am extremely in the position and look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Your Typed Name

## Dealing with Rejection and Moving Forward

Receiving a rejection email or phone call from an employer can be difficult but you're not alone. Everyone who is now successfully employed has, at one time or another, either lost a job or has been turned down for one. Getting rejected from a job you have applied for is not the end of the world.



You can either complain about your bad luck or you can take charge of your life by adopting a positive attitude while realizing that feelings of stress and anxiety are normal, expected, and need not be long lasting. You can allow yourself to feel and do something to get out the angry energy (go for a run or walk, dance around, visit with a friend, cry, etc.). Let yourself move through the emotions you are



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feeling but then refocus, don't stop applying to other desired positions, and try to maintain an optimistic outlook.

Be sure to ask what or how you could improve (either over the phone or via email), ask the employer to keep your resume on file for future opportunities, and thank them for their time and consideration. It's important to not burn the bridge by expressing your anger.

If you feel you could use some extra assistance with interview preparation, please reach out to us in the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment office by emailing [coop@okanagan.bc.ca](mailto:coop@okanagan.bc.ca)



## Offered the Position?

Congratulations! All of your interview preparation and hard work has paid off!



When you're offered a job, if you are thrilled about the opportunity and happy with the compensation package, you can accept the offer immediately; however, even if you are fairly certain you want the job, you do have the option of taking the time to evaluate the job offer to be absolutely certain that the position is right for you. You can express your gratitude and state that you're extremely interested in the position but you can also ask the employer for some time to consider the offer (usually 24 to 48 hours).

During the decision-making process, evaluate the offer by considering the entire compensation package, not just the salary. Think about the benefits and perks, travel time, the hours, and the company culture. Take the time to review all the pros and cons so that you can make an informed decision.

If you have evaluated the offer and are interested in the position but feel the offer could be stronger, you can consider negotiating. In order to negotiate effectively, make sure you have researched average salaries for the type of position and consider what combination of salary and additional benefits would work for you – this will become your counter offer. \*\*You have to know when to stop negotiating and either accept or decline the offer.

If you require assistance with decision-making process or salary negotiation, please contact the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment office ([coop@okanagan.bc.ca](mailto:coop@okanagan.bc.ca)).

\*\*If you are a Co-op student, please contact your Coordinator in the Student, Graduate, & Co-op Employment office **prior to declining an offer.**