

Interview Preparation Guide



A resource for students at every stage of the interview process

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1. Before the Interview: Preparation Checklist

Interviewers are not trying to trick you. They have a role to fill and a short window to judge fit, and they want YOU to be that candidate. They are generally asking three questions: Can you do the job (skills and relevant experience), will you do the job (motivation and genuine interest), and will you fit (work style and team dynamics).

Most interviewers already think you could work out based on your application. Come in as a collaborator, not an opponent, and deliver clear, evidence-based answers no matter how structured the interview is.

Prepare Yourself

- ☐ Review your application materials – these are why you have the interview! Remember what you shared and what you need to focus on.
- ☐ Map your skills directly to each requirement in the job description (see “[Before the Interview: Behavioral Questions](#)”).

Research the Organization

- ☐ Review the website as a customer would, not just the careers page. This could help you identify the company’s or product’s value, targeted goals, and how your role will support
- ☐ Search [Glassdoor](#) and [LinkedIn](#) for honest employee reviews and culture insights
- ☐ Connect on LinkedIn with professionals, the interviewers and alumni that are associated with the company
- ☐ Check recent news on: leadership changes, product launches, funding, or awards

Logistics Checklist

- ☐ Confirm the format: phone, video, or in person
 - **For phone:** Be sure you have strong connection, minimum background noise, and add their number or turn off settings that direct unknown callers to voicemail.
 - **For video:** test camera, mic, connection, lighting, and check your background
 - **For in person:** plan your route, arrive early, and bring a printed resume, a notepad, and a pen
- ☐ Know the dress code; business professional is the safe default
- ☐ Request disability related accommodations from your interview coordinator in advance
- ☐ Prepare references in advance and let them know you have listed them

FREE Helpful Pre-Interview Resources

Resource	What It Covers
O*NET Online	Salary ranges and required skills by occupation
Glassdoor	Employee reviews and company specific interview questions
LinkedIn	Research interviewers, alumni, and company news
Yoodli	AI speech coach for pacing, filler words, and clarity
UW Seattle's AI Prompt Guide	Use prompts with your preferred AI platform to help you develop targeted support
Technical Mock Interview Resources	A UWB student took the initiative to create a mock interview platform that supports technical interview practices. This resource is not affiliated with UWB, but a great tool from a fellow peer!
What is Career Readiness?	NACE Career Readiness, the core competency framework employers prioritize
Handshake: UWB Career Center	Handshake Career Center, book adviser appointments and find job postings, upcoming events and career fairs

This guide was developed by Career Services for student use. For personalized support, schedule an appointment with a career adviser at www.uwb.edu/career-services/appointments

2.a Before the Interview: Preparing for All Questions

Types of Questions

- **General Questions:** To know you better (Ex. Tell me about yourself)
- **Behavioral Questions:** To understand how you approach challenges (Tell me about a time when...)
- **Situational Questions:** To understand how you approach situations relevant to the work (A customer walks in upset. What would you do to ensure a positive conversation?)
- **Technical Questions:** These types of questions are assess your level of knowledge either for the work you will be doing (typically seen in technical fields)

See industry specific questions and preparation in [Interview Prep by Major and Field](#).

Prepare Your Stories

Knowing what you did is not the same as being able to explain it well. Develop four to six versatile stories covering leadership, problem solving, teamwork, resilience, and technical ability (check the job description to align your stories with skills they are seeking). Write them out, then practice saying them aloud, since there is a real gap between knowing a story and articulating it.

Recording helps: most people speak faster and less clearly than they think. Practice with a Career Coach in a mock interview appointment or a tool like [Yoodli](#) free through the UWB Career Services page.

General Interview Questions Decoded

Understanding why a question is asked changes how you answer it. The goal is a genuine, specific, evidence-based answer to the underlying concern, not a rehearsed right answer.

Question	How to Respond
Tell me about yourself	Give a ninety second narrative connecting your recent background to this role. Give themes, not a resume recap.
Why do you want to work here?	Reference specifics: an alumni conversation, a company initiative, recent news, or the mission. Never quote the website.
What are your greatest strengths?	Choose strengths relevant to the role and back each with a brief example.
What is your greatest weakness?	Name a real limitation, not a hidden strength, and describe what you are doing to address it.
Tell me about a conflict with someone in authority	Be specific and honest, focus on the resolution and what you learned, and avoid criticizing the other person.
Where do you see yourself in five years?	Be honest but open ended, and show this role fits a coherent path.
What are your salary expectations?	Research using O*NET or Glassdoor beforehand and offer a specific range grounded in your experience.
Do you have any questions for us?	ALWAYS have questions! See below for some examples.

2.b Before the Interview: Behavioral Questions

These types of questions, like "Tell me about a time when...", are the backbone of most interviews because past behavior predicts future behavior. The STAR method is the most widely used framework for answering them.

Example: Tell me about a time you led a team through a challenge.

STAR	Definition	Example
Situation	Set the scene briefly: when, where, and who was involved	During junior year I led a four-person capstone team. Two weeks before our presentation, the dataset our analysis relied on became unavailable due to an API change.
Task	Your specific goal, responsibility, or the stakes involved	I needed to find an alternative data source and keep the team on track within two weeks, without shrinking the scope.
Action	What you personally did, step by step; use I, not we; this is the core of the answer	I called an emergency meeting that evening, split the search into parallel tracks, contacted a professor who pointed us to a public USDA dataset, and built a revised timeline with short daily check ins.
Result	What happened, ideally quantified, and what you learned	We delivered on time and earned the highest grade in the class. The new dataset actually gave richer regional insight, and I came away believing constraints can improve outcomes when you stay solution focused.

Tips for Strong STAR Answers

- Keep the Situation and Task brief!
- Spend most of your time on Action, this differentiates you
- Always use I, not we
- Quantify results: percentages, time saved, users reached, dollars raised
- Prepare five to seven versatile stories from any context – use the job description to identify skills
- A story where things did not go perfectly is fine, however make sure in your Result, you share your lesson learned

3. Before the Interview: Managing Interview Nerves

Interview anxiety is nearly universal, and it affects how you communicate and think. Research by Alison Wood Brooks at Harvard Business School found that telling yourself I am excited, rather than trying to calm down, improves performance on anxiety inducing tasks. Helpful tips on the day: arrive or log on early, avoid heavy caffeine if you are prone to nerves, do something active in the morning to reduce cortisol, and review your notes without cramming right before.

Technique	Why It Works
Prepare thoroughly	Converts fear of the unknown into manageable uncertainty
Practice out loud, not just mentally	Rehearsing in your head builds a false sense of readiness
Expansive posture for two minutes beforehand	Research by Amy Cuddy suggests it can shift your psychological state
Slow breathing, four counts in, six counts out	Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
Name what you are feeling	Affective labeling research shows naming an emotion reduces its intensity
Remember they are rooting for you	They invited you because they already see potential

4. During the Interview: How to Stand Out

Arriving early is one easy way to “stand out” in your interview. As you prepare to put your best foot forward, below are tips to consider.

Elevate Your Look

- Dress to impress! Either business professional or business casual
- Professional, comfortable shoes – you never know when you are doing walking tours
- Little to no perfume/cologne
- Avoid too many accessories that make noise
- Be sure your smart watch is set to silent during the interview
- Find more tips at www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/how-to-dress-for-a-job-interview

Communication Tips

- Speak at a natural pace - slow down intentionally when nervous.
 - For a phone interview, be sure you are articulating your words and be aware of the way you sound: Confident, optimistic about the role and clear
- A pause of a few seconds before answering is fine, it feels longer to you than to them.
- Listen to the full question before forming your answer! Feel free to ask them to repeat the question.
- Ask for clarification if needed rather than guessing. This is a sign of professionalism.
- Answer the question, then stop; over explaining is a common trap.
- Use specific numbers and outcomes wherever possible

Body Language

In-person	Virtual
• Make natural eye contact, • Sit upright and lean slightly forward • Give a firm handshake • Avoid fidgeting or checking your phone or watch • Be courteous to everyone you meet	• Look at the camera rather than your own image • Minimize distractions • Keep notes and water nearby • Sit so your face and upper chest are visible

Before You Leave, Ask:

- How to follow up (business card, LinkedIn, or email)
- What the next step in the process involves
- The expected timeline for a decision

5. During the Interview: Questions to Ask Your Interviewer

This is one of your most important moments, not an afterthought. Prepare four to six questions since some may already be answered during the conversation.

Know WHO you are speaking with:

Recruiter	Hiring Manager	Hiring Committee
A recruiter knows the job description, but not the work. Recruiters are responsible for managing the initial stages of the hiring process. They focus on sourcing, attracting, and screening candidates to create a pool of potential hires.	Hiring managers know the role. Their role is more focused on evaluating candidates to ensure they meet the specific needs of the team and can perform the required tasks.	Hiring committees can be a group of professionals that work directly with the role or department. They know what they need of this role for collaboration.
Ask about: company culture, salary expectations, or understanding broad job information. • How would you describe the company's culture? • What qualities and attributes make for a successful employee in this company? • What are the next steps in the process and the expected timeline? • Could I have your contact information for follow up questions?	Ask about: Team expectations, department goals, leadership styles, expectations on the role, onboarding/training, or clarification/realistic expectations from the job description. • Who would I report to and how would I collaborate with my supervisor? • What does success look like in this role during the first ninety days? • What are the biggest challenges someone in this position faces early on? • How would you describe the team dynamic and how people collaborate? • How does the organization support professional development?	Ask about: How this roles best supports them, team expectations, collaboration expectations, or their dedication/understanding of the company. • What do you enjoy most about working here? • What made you choose this organization? • How does your role interact with this one? • What is a project/task that you hope remains with the new hire?

Questions Not to Ask

Do Not Ask	Why
What does your company do?	Signals you did not research the organization
How much vacation do I get?	Prioritizes perks before you have an offer
When can I expect a promotion?	Signals entitlement rather than curiosity
Did I get the job?	Creates pressure and signals impatience
When can I negotiate the salary?	Salary negotiations happen when the job is offered

6. After the Interview: Tips and Tools

Thank You Email:

Sending a thank you email within 24 hours can make all the difference:

- Reference something specific from the conversation
- Reinforce one or two qualifications that align with the role
- Add questions you wanted to ask or didn't have time to
- Express genuine continued interest
- If you forgot to mention something important, this is your chance!

Email Template:

Subject line: [Role Title] Interview: Thank You for the Opportunity

Dear [Name],

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about the [role] position at [organization]. I genuinely enjoyed our conversation, particularly when we discussed [specific topic]. It gave me a clearer picture of the team and the work.

The more I learned about the role, the more confident I am that my background in [relevant experience] would let me contribute meaningfully from early on.

I remain excited about the opportunity and look forward to next steps.

Sincerely, [Your Name]

Navigating the Waiting Period

One polite follow-up email is appropriate if you have not heard back by the stated timeline. It's important to keep applying elsewhere!

If you receive another offer before hearing back, contact [Career Services](#) for guidance on requesting a timeline extension professionally.

Post Self-Assessment Checklist

Use this after a mock or real interview to see where you are strong and where to focus. Rate each dimension from 1, needs significant work, to 4, strong. Complete this within an hour of the interview while details are fresh. For any 1 or 2 score, schedule time that week to practice that dimension, and ask a career adviser to score you as well so you can compare.

Dimension	What to Evaluate
Preparation	Did you research the organization, role, and interviewers?
Communication clarity	Were your answers clear, structured, and concise?
Use of STAR structure	Did behavioral answers have a clear situation, task, action, and result?
Specificity and evidence	Did you use concrete, quantified examples rather than generalities?
Questions asked	Did you ask thoughtful, well-prepared questions?
Professional presence	Was your demeanor confident and engaged?
Fit and motivation	Did your answers show genuine interest in this specific role?

7. Interview Prep by Major and Industry

The behavioral and communication skills above apply everywhere, but each industry has its own conventions and resources.

Computer Science and Technology

Expect live coding, whiteboard problems, or take-home projects alongside behavioral questions. Many companies use online assessments as an initial filter. Think out loud, clarify constraints before diving in, start with a working solution before optimizing, and know time and space complexity. Review arrays, strings, hash maps, trees, graphs, sorting, recursion, and dynamic programming, and practice system design for senior roles. Recruiters emphasize the need for interviewees to have the ability to communicate their thoughts coherently and even describe using AI.

- [NeetCode.io](https://neetcode.io), free, a curated roadmap of core problems by topic
- [LeetCode](https://leetcode.com), free plus paid tier, the standard for practice problems
- interviewing.io, free plus paid tier, live mock interviews with engineers

Business and Finance

Consulting interviews center on case interviews. Finance and banking interviews add technical questions on valuation and accounting. Know your "why this firm" answer, practice case frameworks such as profitability, market entry, and pricing, review financial statements and valuation methods, and follow the *Wall Street Journal* or *Bloomberg* regularly.

- Case in Point, a classic consulting case prep book
- [PrepLounge](https://www.preplounge.com), free plus paid tier, live case practice with peers
- [Wall Street Prep](https://www.wallstreetprep.com), paid, modeling and technical finance prep

Data Science and Analytics

Interviews combine SQL and Python coding, statistics, machine learning concepts, and business problem solving. Master joins, window functions, and aggregations in SQL; know pandas and scikit learn; understand A/B testing and hypothesis testing; and always connect analysis back to a business decision.

- [StrataScratch](https://www.stratascratch.com), free plus paid tier, real questions from top companies
- [DataLemur](https://www.datalemur.com), free, SQL questions with explanations
- [StatQuest](https://www.statquest.com) on YouTube, free, clear stats and ML explanations
- [Kaggle: The World's AI Proving Ground](https://www.kaggle.com), a great resource if you're looking to sharpen your SQL skills or brush up on core concepts.

Engineering

Interviews vary by discipline. Review your core fundamentals, be ready to walk through your design process and tradeoffs, know your CAD or simulation tools, and expect behavioral questions to matter as much as technical depth. Bring a one-page project summary or portfolio link.

- [IEEE Career Center](https://www.ieee.org/career), free, resources for electrical and computer engineers
- [Engineering.com](https://www.engineering.com), free, discipline specific interview tips

Social Science, Humanities, Law and Policy

The main task is translation: converting academic work into language employers recognize. Frame projects in professional terms, such as describing an independent research project as project management. Highlight research design, synthesis, and communication skills, and for government or nonprofit roles show clear mission alignment.

- [Idealist.org](https://www.idealists.org/), free, prep and listings for nonprofit and public sector roles
- [USAJOBS.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov/), free, guides for federal applications and interviews

Health Sciences and Pre-Med

Interviewers assess readiness to enter the field, including empathy and self-awareness, not just scores. Multiple Mini Interview (MMI) formats use timed, scenario-based ethics stations that evaluate your reasoning process rather than a single right answer. Know current healthcare issues such as access, equity, and burnout, and reflect genuinely on clinical experiences.

- Check out the [UWB Pre-Health page](#) to find interview support for a variety of pre-health educational career paths
- [MMI Interview: The Ultimate Guide](#), [Shemmassian](#) resources with guided support
- UW Medicine [Admission Interview Website](#)
- [Student Doctor Network](#), free, school specific interview experiences shared by applicants