

# SBA Undergraduate Program Interview Toolkit

A good interview involves research, practice, delivery and follow-up. The following pages focus on the interview itself, from the questions you'll be asked, to the questions you should ask your interviewer, to appropriate business professional attire. This introductory page will cover the research you should do before you go, recommended follow-up for afterwards, and on-campus resources available to you as a student.

## Before the Interview

- **Research the employer:** Learn as much as you can about the company. Learn how the company wants to be viewed by reading carefully through the company's website. Are there forward looking statements about the company's goals and future growth? Also search for articles about the company and its industry online, checking national business publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Business Week*, as well as local publications such as the *Portland Business Journal*. Formulate questions you would like to ask at the interview.
- **Determine fit:** Be knowledgeable about the company's values, mission statement, and culture. Ask yourself: "*Does the firm's culture fit my style and career goals?*"
- **Network:** Attend student organization meetings and industry meetings to connect with and stay in contact with representatives of companies you're most interested in.
- **Practice:** Practice interview questions with friends and do one or more mock interviews if you can. The Advising and Career Services office (see below) offers mock interviews. In addition, many student organizations host mock interview days. Information about SBA student organizations is on our website: <http://www.pdx.edu/sba/student-groups>

## Follow-Up

- **Thank-you letters:** These never go out of style. Send a thank you note, handwritten if possible, within a day or two of your interview. A thank-you is a great way to keep your name fresh in the employer's mind, and to give you a chance to reiterate your interest in the position.

You can send your note in the mail if there is sufficient time, but if you believe a decision will be made quickly (or if the position is one with a technical employer), sending a thank you note via email is also acceptable. Should you use email, be sure to use complete sentences and proper capitalization and punctuation, just as you would if you were sending a letter.

## Salary Negotiations

- **Online Tutorial:** [www.pdx.edu/sba/success-shorts-for-students-14](http://www.pdx.edu/sba/success-shorts-for-students-14)

## Resources

### SBA Undergraduate Programs

UCB 486

503-725-3712

If you have questions about career planning, the job search process, resumes or interviewing, set up an appointment to meet with your SBA advisor. You can request an interview coaching session (a "mock" interview). If you have a quick question come to Express Advising to meet with a Peer Advisor. There won't be time for a full mock interview, but they can coach you through a couple of key interview questions or an "elevator" speech.

### Express advising hours:

Monday - Friday      9:30 – 11:30 am

Monday – Thursday      2:00 – 4:00 pm

# How To Dress For Interview Success

The way you dress for the interview speaks volumes before you utter your first words. Make sure that what you wear is not a distraction or hindrance in reaching your ultimate goal.

One well-chosen business suit will serve you well from interviews to the first day on the job and beyond. Consider alternating between several different shirts or blouses and coordinated ties, shoes or accessories.

## Men and Women

- Clothes: Conservative two-piece business suit (dark blue or gray solid is best) and conservative shirt/blouse (white is best, light color is next best). Shoes should be clean and polished.
- Hair and hands: Hair should be clean and well-groomed, fingernails trimmed and clean.
- Scents: No gum or cigarettes; Use aftershave or perfume, if any, sparingly.
- Jewelry: Be sure to wear a watch. (No telling time by checking your phone!) Avoid body piercings. If you wear gauges, wear neutral color solid plugs rather than gauges with visible holes.
- Tattoos: If you have tattoos on your arms or neck, cover with long sleeves, collar or scarf.
- Pockets: Should be empty, (except perhaps for a tissue or handkerchief). No bulges or tinkling coins.
- Portfolio: Bring a portfolio to hold spare copies of your resume, note paper, and a list of questions to ask your interviewer.

## Men

- Tie: Choose a conservative pattern. If you don't normally wear one, practice tying it so that it will look sharp.
- Shoes and socks: Wear dark shoes (black lace-ups are best) and dark socks (black or matching your suit – never white).
- Facial hair: Clean shaven is best, but if you wear a beard and/or a mustache, they should be short and neatly trimmed.
- Jewelry: No rings other than wedding ring or college ring, and no earrings unless you need to wear a plug for your gauge. Avoid chains, bands or visible necklaces.

## Women

- Shoes: You need to be able to walk and stand comfortably in them. Consider low heel shoes (2" inches) with a closed toe and back (no sling backs).
- Hose: If you are wearing a skirt, wear conservative hosiery at or near skin color. Make sure they have no runs in them.
- Makeup: Use makeup sparingly. If you use nail polish (not required), use either clear or a conservative color.
- Jewelry: No more than one ring on each hand (although two are OK if they are your wedding and engagement rings). Limit earrings to one pair, and keep all jewelry to a minimum.

Remember that while the above are general guidelines, what is most appropriate can vary greatly among different industries. Clearly, you could dress quite differently to interview for a position in advertising than you might for one in accounting. If you are still not sure how to dress for the interview, call the employer and ask. This is one time, however, when you *don't* want to call the hiring manager. Instead, make an inquiry of someone at the reception or in personnel.

# Most Frequently Asked Traditional Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you select your a major?
3. What class (classes) did you like best? Least?
4. Have you ever changed your major? What interests you about your major?
5. How is your education and/or previous experience applicable to this position?
6. What are your strongest assets? Name 5.
7. What is your immediate career goal?
8. Do you have plans for further study?
9. Do you think grades are a good indicator of ability to succeed?
10. What are your long range career objectives?
11. How would you describe yourself? How would someone else describe you?
12. How do you work under pressure?
13. How do you deal with conflict?
14. What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome?
15. What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
16. Are you willing to travel? To work overtime?
17. In what kind of environment are you most comfortable?
18. Describe the kind of relationship that should exist between a supervisor & supervisee.
19. Describe your ideal job.
20. What jobs have you enjoyed the most?
21. Tell me about your leadership activities?
22. What are your interests outside of work?
23. What skills have you developed that would prepare you for this job?
24. What two or three accomplishments are you particularly proud of?
25. Why should I hire you?
26. Do you have any questions for me?

*NOTE: Many interviews will be a mix of traditional and behavioral. Be prepared to give examples from past work or academic experience in answer to both types of questions.*

# Sample Behavior-Based Interview Questions

Tell me about a time when you...

1. Worked effectively under pressure.
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
3. Were creative in solving a problem.
4. Missed an obvious solution to a problem.
5. Were unable to complete a project on time.
6. Persuaded team members to do things your way.
7. Wrote a report that was well received.
8. Anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
9. Had to make an important decision with limited facts.
10. Were forced to make an unpopular decision.
11. Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
12. Were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
13. Were disappointed in your behavior.
14. Used your political savvy to push a program through that you really believed in.
15. Had to deal with an irate customer.
16. Delegated a project effectively.
17. Surmounted a major obstacle.
18. Set your sights too high (or too low).
19. Prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
20. Got bogged down in the details of a project.
21. Lost (or won) an important contract.
22. Made a bad decision.
23. Had to fire a friend.
24. Hired (or fired) the wrong person.
25. Turned down a good job.

List developed by Arlene Hirsch

Use these questions to prepare 3-5 stories that you can tell about yourself from different areas of your life, including work, school, other activities. Examples include: Describing a time when you dealt with a difficult situation or a dissatisfied client or colleague, developed or made the best use of an opportunity, worked with people in a group situation, made an important decision, or developed new skills to solve a problem.

Practice your examples out loud with a friend, and you'll be ready for whatever an interviewer may ask of you.

# Behavioral Interviewing Tips

Chances are your next interview will be a behavioral one. Many employers consider behavioral interviewing to be the most accurate predictor of a candidate's potential for job success. Here's what you need to know to get past your next behavioral interview and get the job.

## What Is a Behavioral Interview?

Behavioral interviewing is a standardized method designed to elicit information from a job candidate about relevant past behavior and performance. It is based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

During a behavioral interview, you will be asked a series of standardized questions. With each answer, you'll be expected to describe examples of behaviors, which the interviewer will use to assess your proficiency in one or more job-related competencies. These competencies can include anything from adaptability to leadership to problem solving. The interviewer will also observe, but not question, your impact or physical presence and communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal).

## Questions You Should Expect

You will be asked to describe specific situations that demonstrate your abilities in a requisite competency. Here are some examples of typical behavioral questions and the competencies they demonstrate:

- Describe a difficult problem that you tried to solve. How did you identify the problem? How did you go about trying to solve it? (Demonstrates problem solving)
- Describe a time when you tried to persuade another person to do something that he/she was not very willing to do. (Demonstrates leadership)
- Describe a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be done, and you took on the task to get it done. (Demonstrates initiative)

## How to Answer the Questions

A good answer should have three parts. Think of it as a “STAR” response.

1. **ST: Situation or Task.** Describe the context in which the behavior or action took place.
2. **A: Action.** Logically take the interviewer through the steps you took to handle the situation or resolve the problem. Keep your answer clear and concise.
3. **R: Results.** Explain your results even if you weren't as successful as you'd hoped. It's important to make it clear that you understand the implications of the outcome and why it happened.

## Preparing for a Behavioral Interview

1. **Know your resume.** This might seem obvious, but your resume is often the basis for many questions. Identify the competencies that your resume demonstrates.
2. **Be able to draw from a variety of experiences** that demonstrate your skills and abilities. Volunteer activities, military experience, clubs and organizations, and school and educational endeavors are all fair game.
3. **Be familiar with the job** for which you're interviewing. Discern the competencies that are required for success in the job and think of the components of your experience that best exemplify your abilities in those competencies. Remember that different companies and industries may require different competencies, even for the same position. For example, “self-managing” can mean very different things to a dot com than to a Fortune 500 firm.
4. **Develop a coherent and articulate STAR narrative** for each competency that you think you will be questioned. You should prepare at least one STAR response for each bullet point on your resume.

## Practice Questions

Imagine that you have an interview at a dot com. One competency that Internet companies usually require is flexibility—as many have vaguely defined job descriptions, loosely structured reporting relationships, and rapidly changing business models.

In order to evaluate your flexibility, your interviewer might ask: "Describe a time when you had to function in an environment that was different from one you had functioned in before. How did you adapt?"

## Examples of How to use a STAR Response

### 1. **ST (Situation/Task): Describe the situation.**

If you are a student with little work experience, you might compare your high-school and college environments. For example: "I went to high school at a small private school in the Midwest. Everyone knew each other. But then I chose to go to college at a large public institution in the northeast. There, I was virtually anonymous."

If you were in the military, you might think about your first job in the private sector. For example: "I went into the Navy straight out of college. In the military, there is a very defined hierarchy. When I took my first job as a civilian, I discovered that the hierarchy among subordinates, peers, and superiors was of a very different style."

If you were promoted, you might think about how it affected your relationship with colleagues. For example: "As a sales rep., I had a friendly rapport with my peers. But when I was promoted to division manager, not only did I suddenly have to relate to them as their supervisor, but I also had to deal with my former manager as an equal."

If you changed firms, you might think about the cultural differences you faced. For example: "I first worked at a company with a formal office culture. We wore suits, made appointments to meet, and had rigidly set office hours. When I changed firms, every day was like casual Friday. We just stuck our heads into someone's office if we wanted to talk about something and worked flexible hours."

### 2. **A (Action): Explain what you did.**

"I soon realized I needed to adjust for my new conditions. I got a feel for who did what and how they did it. By talking to people and getting some on-the-spot experience, I discovered how things got done and modified my work habits. Then I set some personal and professional goals and determined how to best accomplish them in my new environment."

### 3. **R (Result): Describe the results of your actions.**

"While I still find I work best when I do things a particular way, I now know that adapting to a new environment is one of the most important things if you want to make a significant contribution. I was able to build good and productive working habits and relationships in my new environment."

## Author Bio

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# How to Make a Good First Impression

If your resume is strong and you land an interview, you want to make sure you make a good first impression. Here are some dos and don'ts:

## **How to Make a Good First Impression:**

- Come on time, or even a couple of minutes early.
- Dress appropriately. On the conservative side if you're not sure. This includes making sure that you look clean and neat, with well groomed hair and nails.
- Introduce yourself to the person at the front desk.
- Have extra copies of your resume on hand, in case anyone wants to see it.
- Look people in the eye and give a firm (not crushing) handshake.
- Sit and stand straight.
- Unbutton your jacket when sitting.
- Appear relaxed and confident. Smile and continue to make eye contact throughout the interview.
- Take a cue from your interviewer and match your pace (long/short, fast/slow) to his/hers.
- Be prepared with enough information about the company to state why you want to work there.
- Be ready to ask some questions yourself.
- Show your appreciation at the end of the interview and ask for the job.
- Get your interviewer's business card so you can follow up with a written thank you.

*If you do all of these things you will greatly increase your chances of making a second impression at your next interview.*

## **How to Make an Indelible - But Not Good - Impression:**

- Show up late.
- Appear flustered, hurried, or Show you are nervous or unprepared by over-using "Um..." and "Uh..." when talking.
- Dress too casually or in clothes inappropriate to the office environment of your interviewer's firm.
- Smell of food (the lunch you just ate), smoke (what you did in the hall to get mentally prepared), or too-strong cologne or after shave.
- Give a sweaty, limp or overly-strong handshake.
- Make insufficient eye contact, use poor posture, or show that you're nervous or uncomfortable with your body language, e.g.: chewing gum, biting your lip, or playing with clothes or pen.
- Leave your cell phone on.
- Dance around tough questions, and/or make up answers.
- Give one word answers, or answers that are so detailed your interviewer forgets the original question.
- Exhibit insufficient knowledge of the company's business and structure.
- Forget the handshake or thanks that should be used as you exit the interview, or the follow-up or thank you that should come directly afterwards.

*If your behavior is more like this second list, then you will certainly be remembered, but you will never get the chance to make a second impression.*

# Questions To Ask Your Interviewer

Most employers will ask you at some point during your interview if you have any questions for them. This can serve many purposes, including making you feel more comfortable, giving you a chance to broach a subject not yet covered, learning how you think, and finding out if you've done your homework. You should plan for this and have several questions prepared ahead of time.

Remember the questions you ask reveal a great deal about you and your motivation. You are your questions. Take time to ask pertinent questions about the company and the position. Ask questions about the company and its culture, the position, and career paths within the company, but avoid sensitive issues such as financial condition or salary and benefits, especially on a first interview. It's best to wait until after you have been offered a position before asking about compensation.

Some sample questions are below. Your research about a prospective company should guide you as to which questions are appropriate. Your questions should demonstrate your professionalism and your real interest in the company, without making you appear demanding.

## **Questions about the position:**

- How did this position become available?  
(New position, internal promotion, someone left, or...?)
- How does this position fit within the company's organizational structure?
- Where could a person go who is successful in this position, and within what time frame?
- What are the most critical skills you are looking for? Success factors?
- What are the key objectives for this position?
- What are some of the more difficult problems that one would have to face in this position?
- What would a typical day be like?
- How is employee success measured?

## **Questions about the company:**

- How would you describe the corporate culture and working environment?
- What are the company's biggest challenges today?
- Do you see significant changes ahead?
- How do you see the company and its products/services changing in the next 10 years?
- If the company is privately held, you may want to ask if you may see a summary of its financial statements so you can learn more about its organization, historical growth and current financial situation.



# Informational Interviews

One of the best sources for gathering information about what's happening in an occupation or an industry is to talk to people working in the field. This process is called *informational* or *research interviewing*. An informational interview is an interview that you initiate- you ask the questions. The purpose is to obtain information, not to get a job.

## Reasons to Conduct and Informational Interview:

- to explore careers and clarify your career goal
- to discover employment opportunities that are not advertised
- to expand your professional network
- to build confidence for your job interviews
- to access the most up-to-date career information
- to identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

## Steps to Follow:

### 1. Identify the Occupation or Industry You Wish to Learn About

Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills, and evaluate labor conditions and trends to identify the best fields to research.

### 2. Prepare for the Interview

Read all you can about the field prior to the interview. Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry. Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered.

### 3. Identify People to Interview

Start with lists of people you already know – friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, neighbors, etc... Professional organizations, student organizations, the yellow pages, organizational directories, and public speakers are also good resources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of the person by job title.

### 4. Arrange the Interview

Contact the person to set up an interview:

- By telephone,
- By a letter followed by a telephone call, or
- By having someone who knows the person make the appointment for you.

### 5. Conduct the Interview

Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and be polite and professional. Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track, but allow for spontaneous discussion. Before leaving, ask your contact to suggest names of others who might be helpful to you and ask permission to use your contact's name when contacting these new contacts.

### 6. Follow Up

Immediately following the interview, record the information gathered. Be sure to send a thank-you note to your contact within one week of the interview.

**NOTE: Always analyze the information you've gathered. Adjust your job search, resume, and career objective if necessary.**

## 20 Questions to Ask at an Informational Interview

Prepare a list of your own questions for your informational interview. Following are some sample questions:

1. On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
2. What training or education is required for this type of work?
3. What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
4. What part of this job do you find most satisfying? most challenging?
5. How did you get your job?
6. What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
7. What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?
8. What is the salary range in this field?
9. How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
10. Is there a demand for people in this occupation?
11. What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
12. What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?
13. What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
14. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
15. What do you think of the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
16. From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
17. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself?  
Why? What would you change?
18. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
19. What do you think of my resume? Do you see any problem areas?  
How would you suggest I change it?
20. Can you suggest other people I should talk to?  
When can I call him/her, may I use your name?