



# COLLEGE OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

## Preparing for the Interview

### What is a behavioral interview?

Behavioral interviews are typically the default interview offered in North America. Employers use them to learn more about their candidates' personalities, skills, and past experiences. They vary in length, from as short as 15 minutes to 60 minutes long, and are used by all kinds of employers and campus organizations. These interviews are hosted in-person, on Zoom or other conferencing platforms, and over the phone.

Other types of interviews include technical interviews, case interviews, and multiple-mini-interviews (MMI), but behavioral interviews can still form the basis of these other types of interviews.

## Preparing for the Interview

- **Sign up for a practice interview**

Doing well in an interview is a skill in and of itself. The more you do them, the better you'll get. Learn the kinds of questions you may be asked and develop the best answers. If your qualifications are weak in some areas, practice helps you learn to express them in a positive light.

- **Know your resume**

Be ready to talk about everything and anything on your resume. Employers sometimes ask about specific experiences on your resume, because they want to know that you really engaged with the activity.

- **Understand email etiquette**

Email etiquette can be company and industry-dependent. Generally, you'll want to use a professional email address (most likely NetID@cornell.edu) and be sure to email your questions during regular business hours (approximately 8 AM-5 PM).

- **Come with experiences to talk about**

Many questions are based on experiences that you have had, and they start with, "Tell me about a time when..." Even when the questions themselves are unexpected, it helps to have certain experiences that you have already reflected extensively on, and which could be applied to multiple scenarios.

- **Research the organization ahead of time**

Look at magazine articles, newspapers and trade journals, in-house brochures, and web-pages. Talk with customers/clients to familiarize yourself with the organization. Visit the Alumni Affairs and Development Office and check CUeLinks to see if we have any Human Ecology alumni working there. With this information, work facts based upon your research into your interview conversation.

- **Make sure to have answers for questions ahead of time, and have questions to ask the interviewer**

Many companies have their interview questions posted online, either on their website or in reviews by past interviewees. Otherwise, different industries have their own set of questions that are commonly asked. It is a good idea to consider what questions are likely to be asked before the interview, and to have notes about what you might say to reduce stress on interview day. You should also come up with questions about the company--see the "During the Interview" document.

- **Double-check the room/location of the interview, and visit it ahead of time if possible**

If it is possible at all, try to visit the interview location ahead of time. It can greatly decrease interview day stress, as you'll already know what routes to take and where the room is. If it is an online interview, check out the space where you intend to be.

- **Have a central thread that defines you**

Many applicants have trouble deciding what they want to talk about. It is highly recommended to think about how you want interviewers to remember you when discussing your application, and to align this thread with the position. For example, a student might define their thread as "human-centered campus service, through the development of mobile applications". These are often highly specific and may be unique to the individual.

- **Prepare what you are going to wear**

The way you dress for your interview depends largely on the type of job you are applying for, the season, your age, and of course your own personality. You should always be yourself at an interview, business meeting, or any other event in your professional career. Before the interview, get a sense of the company's culture by looking at their website and talking to any employee contacts. When in doubt, classic choices like a suit, simple dress, or a sports jacket/blazer with trousers will generally be appropriate.

**General Tips:**

- *Be careful with bright colors and patterns. Dark and neutral colors are standard for many industries.*
- *Try on your clothes in advance to ensure that they fit comfortably.*
- *Avoid bulges or loose change in pockets.*
- *Keep your phone away and on silent.*
- *Bring a briefcase or portfolio if necessary. It can be helpful to have a resume on hand for your own or the employer's reference.*
- *Make sure your clothing and shoes are clean and free of holes or excessive lint.*
- *Do not wear excessive amounts of cologne or perfume.*
- *Fingernails should be trimmed and cleaned.*
- *Be cognizant of company culture related to any tattoos or piercings you may have on any visible body parts.*
- *Bring a bottle of water with you to stay hydrated and have a clear voice when speaking to your interviewer.*

## **Cornell Resources for Preparation**

### **The Human Ecology Career Exploration Center**

Sign up three business days in advance for a tailored practice interview at the Career Exploration Center, or do a walk-in! The CEC also offers handouts and resources for interview strategies.

### **Barnes Hall Career Services**

Practice interviews can be scheduled at least one business day in advance, but they are not provided on the same day as actual interviews. To schedule, please either stop by 103 Barnes Hall or call (607) 255-5296.

### **Cornell Optimal Resume/Optimal Interview Questions**

Every Cornell student has access to the Optimal Resume services, including the Optimal Interview section. This provides students a good platform to practice answering a variety of interview questions, from behavioral questions to business questions. Students can choose between four different formats: video (in which their response will be recorded), audio (in which only the audio of their response will be recorded), text (in which students will type in their response), or just listening (in which they will just hear the interviewer asking the question but none of their response will be recorded). Access to Optimal Resume can be found at <https://cornell.optimalresume.com>.

### **Mann Library Interview Room**

Reservations for the room are required and can be made online at <http://mannlib.cornell.edu/use/spaces/all/interview-room>. Each slot is 30 minutes long and students must bring their own device, such as their laptop.

### **Study Rooms in Olin/Uris Library**

Both Olin and Uris library each house 3 study rooms that students can use to have their video interviews. Students can book these interview rooms at <http://spaces.library.cornell.edu/>.

### **Rooms in Human Ecology**

Human Ecology students can reserve a room in MVR or the Human Ecology Building to conduct their video-interview by contacting Kenna Snow-Tompkins at [kms3@cornell.edu](mailto:kms3@cornell.edu).



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## During the Interview

### Basic Structure of an Interview

Interviews typically have the following sections:

#### 1. Introductions

During this section, each person involved in the interview introduces themselves, and shakes hands. The interviewer begins by talking about themselves and their role in the company, before turning it over to the interviewee.

#### 2. Tell me about yourself.

As the transition between the introduction and questioning period, the interviewer typically asks the interviewee, "Tell me about yourself." This gives the interviewer the chance to give their elevator pitch (See the CEC's Elevator Pitch handout for more information).

#### 3. Questions from the interviewer

The interviewer then proceeds with the bulk of the interview by asking behavioral questions. See the "Strategies for Answering Questions" handout.

#### 4. Questions for the interviewer

The interviewer asks the interviewee if they have any questions for them.

#### 5. Closing

The interviewer usually gives an indication of when the interviewee will hear back, and the interview ends.

### Mannerisms and Conventions

#### Starting with a greeting.

Prior to the pandemic, these greetings centered around a handshake and name introductions. These days, however, with the advent of teleconferencing, greetings may or may not include a handshake, and they may or may not include pronouns. There may also be other niceties, such as asking, "How are you?"

#### Arrive early.

Arriving early to the interview is a sign that you will be on-time for your commitments and shifts at work. Arriving late can indicate starting off on the wrong foot, and give an unprofessional or unreliable first impression.

#### Listen to the Interviewer.

Adjust to the interviewer's style and try to ascertain why particular questions are being asked. If you're uncertain what they're trying to obtain, ask for clarification. If necessary, take a moment to formulate your response. It is always better to take a pause than to stutter or appear flustered by a question. You can ask to return to a question at a later point in the interview, but it is then your responsibility to return to the question later on. Be sure to respond completely to all aspects of the question. You can ask for the interviewer to repeat a question, as well.

#### Don't monopolize the conversation.

While interviewers usually want more than a simple "yes" or "no" answer, you should also avoid long discourses. Make your answers accurate, descriptive, to the point, and as interesting as you can. Sharing examples can demonstrate your point in a concise way.

#### Be positive.

This is not the place to knock your school, past employers, professors, etc. An optimist is more useful in an organization than a pessimist. If you can be enthusiastic about past experiences, you are likely to be positive about future employers. View your problems or issues as obstacles and challenges instead. Take responsibility

and show the impact you are able to make. No one likes a complainer!

### **Remember that people hire, not organizations.**

Your goal is to establish rapport with the interviewer, and encourage him/her to like and respect you and what you have to offer. Brand yourself and share who you are. Aside from having the skills, people will remember your impression and how you communicate your thoughts. The textbook answer to a question won't show your individuality. Frame your responses with a theme running throughout your interview. Provide examples that connect and fill your story.

### **Point out why you like the organization.**

Why do you think the organization is a particularly good one? Are there factors which led you to single it out among many others of its type?

### **Express Interest.**

Assuming the job/organization interests you, take time near the end of the interview to express that interest. Unless you say you like the job/organization, the employer has no way of knowing this.

### **Learn what happens next.**

Is your file complete? Is additional information needed? Are your references complete? What are the next stages of the process and the projected timeline?

### **Express thanks.**

Thank the interviewer for his/her time and interest, as well as the opportunity to learn more about the company. Remember to give a firm handshake and maintain good eye contact. If you feel good about the company and job, share this with the interviewer. And finally, make sure you have the contact information of the interviewer so that you can send a thank-you email or letter. (See information on follow-up letters in this packet.)

### **Don't mention salaries.**

Don't be the first person to talk about money. Salary negotiations may come up during your interview. If it does, be sure to express your interest in the company and your worth over what the exact salary is, or turn the tables and ask your interviewer for an expected range.

## **Asking questions**

You also have an opportunity, throughout the interview, to obtain more information about the organization, available positions, work locations, and related information to assist you in your choice of employer. You will also be given the opportunity to ask additional questions of the interviewer. This can serve as an opportunity to display your knowledge of the organization. Some questions to ask might include:

- *What are the people who held this position previously doing now?*
- *How much responsibility is given a new employee in this department?*
- *Upon what criteria are employees in this department evaluated?*
- *With whom would I work closely in this job?*
- *What are the opportunities for advancement in this organization?*
- *What is the company philosophy?*
- *How would you describe the company culture?*
- *What are the company/department goals for the next five years?*
- *What types of people succeed in this environment?*
- *What qualities have successful hires displayed?*
- *Could you describe your training program?*
- *What have you enjoyed the most about working at this company? What is something that you think could be improved upon at this company?*



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## Strategies for Answering Interview Questions

### The STAR Method

The STAR method is used as a framework for answering interview questions. It allows the interviewee to format their answers in a way that is logical and tells a story.

#### Situation

Begin with the background and scene of the story. Where was this? When did it happen? Who was involved?

#### Task

Discuss the task that was given, or what responsibility you had.

#### Action

Discuss the actions that were taken to complete the task given.

#### Result

Discuss the impact of the actions. How many people were served? What kinds of documents or presentations were produced? What were the broader results and implications?

### Common Questions

#### Tell me about yourself.

This question often proves to be challenging for interviewees and puts them in an awkward or defensive position at the start of an interview. Do not be caught unaware by such a question. If you've done your preparation, you know something about the organization, the job, and perhaps even the interviewer. Therefore, you know what you need to communicate in order to make an effective self-presentation. Use this open-ended question as an opportunity to take charge of the interview at the outset, and talk about your strengths, successes, and qualifications for employment. This is your opportunity to share what you most want to share. See the "Elevator Pitch" document for more details.

#### What are your goals?

This is an ambiguous question since people generally have several types of goals-- personal, social, and professional. For the purposes of the interview, it is safe to assume that they're talking about your career goals. Use your answer to highlight important personal or work characteristics as they relate to the position for which you're interviewing.

#### Why do you want to be a [position]?

You should have an answer to this question before arranging an interview. You should focus on the duties of the position, the work environment, and/or your interest in the field. Be ready to demonstrate a match between what this position holds and what you have to offer.

#### Why [field/industry]?

Companies want to know that you are making a well-informed decision to apply to the company, and that you will be passionate about your work. Make sure to highlight stories that show you tried other paths, or have demonstrated commitment to your current path.

#### What can you add to our organization as an employee?

Interviewers must determine not only your interest in obtaining a job, but also in working for their organization. If you've taken the initiative to find out about the organization, its products or services, market share, growth potential, etc., you're in an excellent position to answer this question. Sources of information on organizations include annual reports, recruiting literature, business indices, trade journals, newspaper articles, and webpages.

Given knowledge of the organization, you can more effectively relate your skills to the requirements of the employer.

### **Why are you interested in our firm/school/company?**

Make sure to research the employer ahead of time to get a better feel for their values. Check their website, participate in coffee chats, and learn about the work culture to understand what makes them stand out.

### **What are your strengths and weaknesses?**

This question can be difficult for interviewees and requires deeper self-reflection prior to the interview. It can best be answered by reference to skills and abilities developed in a variety of employment and other settings. Cite references or comments from previous employers as evidence of strengths. Refrain from mentioning weaknesses that may be detrimental to the job. Similarly to this, refrain from mentioning strengths in disguise, such as that you work too hard or are a perfectionist. To some employers, these may be seen as strengths and not actual weaknesses. Simply put, be yourself and be honest. Show that you are cognizant of your own weaknesses and share your efforts towards overcoming them.

### **Tell me about your experiences working in a team.**

### **Tell me about a time you experienced failure/adversity.**

### **Tell me about a time where you took initiative.**

These are questions that benefit most from the STAR method, as interviewers are typically looking for a story that highlights the qualities they are looking for. It is helpful to have a list of multifaceted experiences to call upon.

## **Additional Resources for Questions**

### **Career Exploration Center Guides**

The Career Exploration Center offers a number of guides containing sample questions and tips that are specific to different types of interviews. We have a Case Interview Preparation Guide developed in partnership with a consulting group on Cornell's campus and an MMI: Multiple Mini Interview Guide developed in partnership with the College of Human Ecology's pre-health advisor. You can pick up copies of the guides at the CEC in 1203 MVR.

### **Glassdoor**

Glassdoor is a expansive resource that can provide insight into different aspects of a company or organization. Previous employees contribute to the website by sharing their experiences. Through the Cornell Career Services website, you have unlimited access to Glassdoor features. You can search companies/organizations and browse through questions that applicants have previously been asked during interviews.



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## Virtual and Recorded Interviews

### **The Telephone/Videoconference Interview**

Now more than ever, recruiters and hiring managers are using phone and videoconference interviews as a mode of initial contact with job applicants. It is therefore critical to be prepared to effectively showcase one's skills and experiences through these mediums.

#### **Turn off phone notifications and do not leave other phone applications running.**

Disruptive noises, distractions, or interruptions can cause a shift in focus and ultimately impede your chances of moving forward in the interview process.

#### **Have Internet access.**

Because the interviewer cannot see you, you can have the company's website open so that you can ask appropriate questions or address relevant topics. Only use this as support; you should always have questions for the interviewer prepared beforehand.

#### **Try standing up or try the "power pose" if you are not on-camera.**

Standing brings up your energy level. When it comes to the "power pose," think Wonder Woman or Superman. You can place your hands on your hips with your chest out in an open, expansive manner, or you can have your hands above your head. Research has shown that striking this pose for simply one minute can make a big difference in boosting your confidence and energy levels.

#### **Answer each question thoroughly, yet briefly.**

Allow the interviewer time to respond or ask questions. Avoid interrupting the interviewer if they are in mid-sentence. If you have more to say, ask the interviewer if there is time to provide additional details.

#### **Find a quiet space.**

Ensure that there are no external sources of noise or distraction, such as construction, roommates, etc. You can reserve the interview room in Mann Library for up to two hours.

#### **Headphones.**

There are both advantages and disadvantages to utilizing headphones. They can help in freeing your hands to take notes or to make hand gestures as you are speaking. They may potentially avoid playback from regular computer speakers and allow the interviewer to better hear you. However, you have to be sure that the mouthpiece is close to you so that the interviewer can best hear you. Some may find that headphones make them look silly, especially for a videoconference interview. Though, quality of communication is what is most important. You can address the use issue head-on and let the interviewer know that you will be using headphones to communicate with them.

#### **Test your set up in advance.**

Ensure that your computer, audio, video screen, and all other electronics of your set up are functioning properly prior to the start of your interview. Give yourself ample time to make any adjustments to your set up or have back-up options available in case the technology is malfunctioning.

#### **Clarify.**

You should ask the interviewer if they can repeat anything that was unclear or inaudible to you. You should also periodically check with the interviewer to make sure that they heard your responses by asking clarifying questions, such as "Was that clear?" or "Were you able to hear me clearly?"

#### **Smile!**

Just as an in-person interview, smiling affects your tone of voice. This is a great way to show your enthusiasm and positive attitude to make a more favorable impression.

### **Follow up.**

Take notes during the interview and send a thank you email immediately afterward. In the thank you note, refer to a positive point in the conversation, e.g. "I was really please to learn about the opportunities for growth at Deloitte, and this has heightened my interest in the position."

### **Have the following on hand at the time of your scheduled telephone interview:**

1. Your resume for reference
2. Name(s) of the person/people you will be talking to
3. Your notes and questions
4. Pen and paper or another note-taking system to record notes, new information, phone numbers, and names

### **Tips specific to video calls:**

- Use an appropriate username for Skype, Google Meet-up, Zoom etc.
- Look into the camera.
- Be mindful of body language.
- Dress as if for an in-person interview.

## **The Pre-Recorded Interview**

The pre-recorded interview has grown in popularity, particularly platforms such as Hireview. This is when you are given a set of interview questions and asked to record yourself answering them. The recorded answers will be uploaded and saved for the company's or organization's reference.

### **Deadlines.**

You will likely be given only a certain amount of time to complete the interview questions. Therefore, it is important that you are mindful of deadlines. You do not want to miss the due date for your responses and harm your chances of obtaining the position. In many instances the window for completing the interview would be in a span of 2-7 days. If you get a lower amount of time to complete it most companies will give you a point of contact to reach out to you if those times do not work for you--please utilize this.

### **Avoid rushing or being hasty**

Despite the deadlines, you should also not rush or be hasty with your responses. As with a traditional, in-person interview, you want to portray yourself in the most calm and natural way, as if you were talking to a person. Your responses should avoid sounding robotic or over-rehearsed. Please ensure that you take a look to see if you get an number of chances to record your interview or if you only get one. In some instances, once you finish your interview, it will be sent automatically to the employer. It's helpful to practice beforehand, such as on the photobooth feature, or in front of the mirror in case you only get one chance.

### **Test your setup**

As with telephone and videoconference interviews, be sure that your setup is working. You may want to do a trial run and record yourself before you begin answering the actual interview questions.

### **Dress**

While you will be able to record your responses at a location of your choosing, be aware that you may be asked to submit your responses via video, not just voice recording. This means that you will still be visible to the employer who evaluates your responses. You should be dressed appropriately as for an in-person or videoconference interview.

### **Have an elevator pitch ready and practiced**

Particularly for recorded interviews, try to find out ahead of time how much time you will have, and craft an elevator pitch that fits in the allotted time. See our "Elevator Pitch" handout.



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## After the Interview

### After the Interview

*The interview does not end at the interview itself. Be mindful of your interactions before and after the interview, especially if you are on-site at a company, university, or medical school. You should not be on any mobile devices as you are waiting for your interview. Everything that you do from the moment that you are on site is an indication of your level of commitment, professionalism, and performance. From the receptionist to the employees walking out the door, you never know who you might be talking to, and who may be observing your behavior, or who has influence over the hiring and recruitment.*

### Follow-Up Letters & Emails

*A follow-up letter or email is another opportunity to say thank you to your interviewer. It also is a way to keep your name and credentials in the interviewer's mind, as well as to drive home a point that you may not have been able to make during the actual interview.*

*On your way home from the interview, take note of this information before you forget:*

- *Name(s) and title(s) of person/people you met*
- *Job description*
- *Why you believe you can do the job*
- *Aspects of the interview that went wrong and why (a great learning resource)*
- *What was said at the end of the interview*
- *The agreed upon next step*

*In your letter, be sure to convey:*

- *Appreciation*
- *Confidence*
- *Interest in the job*
- *Dedication*
- *Awareness*

*Keep it short (don't exceed one page) and send the letter within 24 hours. Be proactive. If you haven't heard from them after a week or two, call and follow up with the interviewer.*

### The Wait

Once the interview is over, interviewees typically feel a combination of a lot of things, including fatigue, excitement, and nervousness. The CEC takes the approach that interviewees should reflect and feel proud of your accomplishments. Interviews are tough and stressful, and the time after an interview is a good opportunity for self-care. Here are some questions you might ask yourself and reflect on:

- How do I feel now?
- What were some moments in the interview that I am proud of?
- What were some moments in the interview that I think could have gone better?
- What can I do before my next interview to ensure that it goes just as well or better?