

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

INTERVIEW GUIDE



ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION

INTRODUCTION

With only two to three percent of applicants receiving interviews after resume submission and a third of hiring managers knowing they would **hire someone within the first 90 seconds of an interview**, this stage in the job search process is of utmost importance. Follow this guide to better **prepare, practice** and **perform** during your interview.



PREPARE

No matter how confident you feel about your interviewing skills, carving out time to prepare for an interview is a crucial step in the process. From doing a deep dive into the job description and your recent accomplishments, to researching the organization's mission, vision and recent achievements, preparing for an interview will help you feel confident when the nerves kick in.

Do your research:

- **Seek background information:** Know the company's mission and vision and how this role continues to impact that work. Spend time on each tab of the company's website.

commonly asked interview questions:
How does our mission align with your professional goals? What does our mission statement mean to you?

- **Get perspective:** What are some of the company's recent achievements? Have they been featured in any published documents or come out with any new initiatives or strategies? You should know.

- **Understand the needs of the employer:** Know the job description well and make a bulleted list of your skills and examples of meeting those needs.

commonly asked interview questions:
How does this position fit in with your five to 10 year plan?

- **Know who will be in the room:** If you're given the name(s) of your interviewer(s), know who they are and what they do at the company. Think through how this position may interact with their position.
- **Develop a list of questions:** The research you do at this stage should bring up many questions. Have at least five prepared and pick two or three of the most relevant questions to ask after you've completed your interview. If you do not have any questions prepared yet, check out this list of [suggested questions from The Muse](#).

Plan ahead:

- **Dress for success:** You want the interviewer(s) to remember what you said, not what you wore.
 - Rule of thumb: Dress for the position you want. Learn the company's work attire policy and go one step up from that.
 - Stick with plain, neutral colors or a single pop of color.
 - If in-person, refrain from wearing strong smelling cologne or perfume.
 - Comfort converts to confidence. Buying a new outfit you haven't "broken in" or wearing an uncomfortable blazer or pair of pants will not build confidence in the interview process. The more comfortable you feel in your clothing, the more it will translate to confidence in your nonverbal and verbal communication.



Baseline casual: Relaxed, but neat. Includes: sweaters, blouses, dark denim and tasteful sneakers.



Business casual: Polished professional. Includes: button down shirts and sweaters, skirts, trousers and dress shoes.



Executive casual: Elevated professional. Includes: jackets, skirts, trousers, ties and formal shoes.

Traditional business: Formal professional. Includes: pant or skirt suits, professional tops and button downs, dark colors and subtle patterns.

Boardroom business: Executive attire. Includes: two or three piece suits, blouses and button downs, closed toe shoes and dark colors (black and blue).

- **Pack your bag:** If it is an in-person interview, you should bring the following with you:
 - Resume and reference list (have a few copies!)
 - Notepad and pen
 - Business cards
- **Don't be late!** Map out your route in advance and leave enough time for potential delays.
 - Rule of thumb: Arrive to your destination 30 minutes early and enter the building 10-15 minutes before the start of your interview.

PRACTICE



Interviewing is like a muscle, the more you practice and train, the stronger the muscle gets. Once you've completed your preparation phase, it's essential to save time to practice so you can flex your interviewing muscles when you need to perform.

Prepare a list of responses to commonly asked questions. To kickstart your list, check out the list [Forbes](#) has created:

- Be prepared, not rehearsed.
- Instead of memorizing your answers, build a list of examples you'd like to use and fit them into your responses as questions come up.

Talk out loud to yourself, a spouse, mentor or friend.

- You may know what you want to say in your head, but wording matters. If you're asked about "a time you dealt with a difficult situation or coworker," you want to be sure you choose your words wisely and accurately.

Record yourself on your phone.

- Try recording yourself and play back your responses. Were they accurate and easy to follow?
- Did you highlight skills and abilities the hiring manager is looking for? Did you give concrete examples that lead back to your professional experience?

In a traditional interview setting, the process may look and feel like this:

First interview:

30-minute phone or virtual screening. The focus will be on traditional and competency based questions. This interview is either with a recruiter or a hiring manager. A few questions to consider preparing for:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What interests you about our organization and this position?
- How do your professional accomplishments align with this position?
- What are your weakness and strengths in relation to this position?

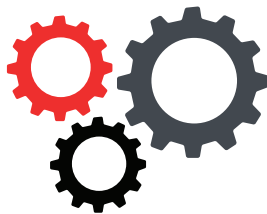
Second Interview:

Depending on the process, this may be the final interview. You may have been asked to take an online simulation before moving to this next round. This interview will consist of situational and behavioral questions, leadership and management questions and interpersonal and company culture questions. This interview may consist of multiple meetings, with multiple staff stakeholders. A few questions to consider preparing for:

- Can you tell me about a time that you...
 - Dealt with a conflict in the workplace?
 - Did and did not reach a goal? How did you get there?
 - Had to make a difficult decision under pressure?
 - Used data to make a decision?
- What is your management style?
- What can you add to our company?
- What would you hope to accomplish in your first 90 days on the job?



PERFORM



Everything you've done up until this point has prepared you for this moment. Remind yourself of that before you enter your interview. Get a good night's sleep, do something calming before your interview (like these [power poses](#) from Business Insider or a [meditation](#) from Youtube) to get yourself to a calm and confident state. Or check out these [Ted Talk videos](#) to get yourself hyped up.

Be aware of your body language:

- It only takes seven seconds for an impression to be made, so focus on how your body language can exude confidence and warmth.
- Maintain eye contact (when appropriate).
- Be mindful of your facial expressions.



Take notes:

- If you think you'll forget names, roles, etc., write them down to refer back to them later in the interview or in thank you emails.

When responding:

- If you receive a curveball question you weren't expecting, give yourself a moment to pause and think. An interviewer would rather have silence than an answer that isn't thought out. Add examples to your answers. Use the STAR method.

Situation: Set the scene.

Task: What's your role in it?

Action: What did you do to fix an issue or improve the situation?

Result: What was the outcome?

Don't forget: you're interviewing them, too!

- Use your list of prepared questions and address things like work culture, management styles, diversity, equity and inclusion practices. Steer clear of only asking about benefits.



IT'S OVER! NOW WHAT?

Clarify the timeline:

- Do you know when you should hear about next steps?



Reflect and improve:

- Immediately after your interview, jot down a few notes while it's still fresh. Make note of:
 - Questions you stumbled on.
 - Things you want to remember about your interviewers or the company.

Send a thank you note:

- Email or mail a handwritten letter 24-48 hours after your interview.
- Show appreciation for their time and thank them.
 - Mention something specific you talked about in the interview.
 - Express interest and excitement about the position.
 - A thank you should be sent to everyone who you interviewed with.

If you do not move forward:

- Seek feedback from the employer if you did not get the job.
- Always maintain correspondence and express appreciation; you never know when they'll be hiring again (and they could consider you for future positions).

Fast facts:

- Preparing for a virtual interview
- Preparing for an internal Interview
- Nailing a group interview
- Preparing for a job simulation



RESOURCES

Your Alumni Association is here to help you at any stage of your professional journey. Check out our **Alumni Association career resources** and some exclusive tips from Terps with years of experience in the industry.

Alumna **Kecia Hansard '89**, associate director, career and professional development at American University - Kogod School of Business, did a focus group came up with a list of new questions (post pandemic) being used with increased frequency by employers:

- During the pandemic, how did you use technology differently?
- How do you support others during difficult times?
- Talk about a time you managed a project when elements were ambiguous or evolving?
- When have you been an advocate for another person?
- Talk about a time you have been an ally for others?
- What is your definition of diversity, equity and inclusion?
- Can you give an example when you have worked in a cross-cultural team? Or when you have had to understand a diverse perspective?

Alumnus **Chad Ellsworth '04**, author, coach and speaker with Caped Coaching, LLC offers his advice to Terps below:

"My favorite piece of advice for interviews is to ace the first question, which nine times out of ten will be some version of, "Tell me about yourself and your interest in this position." Start with:

1. A compelling thesis statement, such as a belief about the organization's work or your passion.
2. Then, include a one or two sentence anecdote about one of your early examples of your interest in that type of work and pull the interviewer into a brief overview of the highlights of your experience relative to the position.
3. Finally, conclude with a sentence or two summarizing your experience and enthusiasm for the position.

Practice this response as much as possible. When you think about your answer to this question, do your best to remember bullet points, not sentences. This will help you deliver it in a conversational and natural way, rather than over-rehearsed."



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