THE INTERVIEW

The interview is an opportunity to demonstrate to an employer why you are the best fit for the position. Essentially, it is your marketing pitch. It is important to use this opportunity to stress how you will contribute to the company while highlighting your skills and accomplishments. The employer also uses interviews to get a sense of your personality and how you will fit in the workplace. However, the interview is also your opportunity to evaluate the company, the people you would be working for and with, and get a sense of whether or not you are interested and comfortable with the job expectations. Make sure that you take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the position.

Types of Interviews

Depending upon the company and the position, it is possible that you will have to participate in multiple interviews. If this is the case, each round of interviews may be a different type. For instance, the first round may be a phone/screening interview, following by a standard in-person interview and concluding with an interview day.

Phone/Skype Pre-Screening
- This type of interview tends to last 15-30 minutes.
- Typically used to evaluate whether or not the candidate has the minimum qualifications for the position and should move on to the next round.
- Despite the lack of physical environment, they should be prepared for just as an in-person interview. Candidates should dress professionally for Skype interviews.

Standard In-Person
- These interviews tend to last 30-60 minutes.
- Candidates are asked a series of questions by one or more members of the company.
- Often provide time for the candidate to ask the employer(s) questions about the company and position.

Group
- In a group interview multiple candidates interview together for the same position.
- Organizations use these this interview style to see how candidates interact with colleagues as well as your overall skills and abilities.
- The objective is to keep your answers focused on you and your skills.

Interview Day
- An interview day is when a candidate is scheduled for multiple interviews with a company during a single day.
- A candidate will interview with a variety of individuals in the company, ranging from human resources, to a potential supervisor, to the head of the department.
- Each interview will last 30-60 minutes and there may be one or more group interviews included as well.

Types of Interview Questions

During an interview you will likely be asked a couple of different types of questions. It is important to become familiar with the different types of interview questions and how to prepare for each one. The three most common types of interview questions are:

Behavioral Questions:
- According to this style, past behavior is an indicator of future performance.
- You will be expected to provide specific examples demonstrating the traits the company seeks in a candidate.

Scenario Questions:
- For these questions, candidates are asked how they would handle work-related hypothetical situations.
- Employers use these questions to evaluate a candidate’s work style and ability to handle typical assignments.

Analytical
- Employers view these questions as a way to evaluate analytical ability and problem-solving skills.

Visit us at Chiang Ching Kuo Hall (CCK) or contact us at (718) 990-6375, careers@stjohns.edu.
Specific Interview Questions & Answers

“Tell me about yourself.”

Why Employers Ask
• To see how a candidate is able to communicate and to get an overall sense of the candidate’s experience and objectives.

What Makes it Tricky
• This is a personal question for which employers want an impersonal answer.
• Poor answers to this question typically include too much personal information and/or occur when a candidate is unable to clearly articulate his/her skills and accomplishments. Candidates also often don’t know when to stop.

How to Answer
• Provide a 1 to 2 minute summary of your skills, relevant experience, and what led you to apply for the position.
• Focus on your background and what makes you a good fit for the position.

“What is your greatest strength?”, “What is your greatest weakness?”

Why Employers Ask
• To see how well a candidate is able to evaluate his/her own abilities and skills.
• To determine if a candidate’s strengths fit with the needs of the position and if the candidate has a weakness that would impair his/her ability to do the job.

What Makes it Tricky
• Candidates can tend to be very general without giving an example of a strength.
• Candidates don’t often know what kind of weakness is “safe” to discuss.

How to Answer
• Be sure to highlight a strength that is directly related to the position and that will allow you to contribute to the company.
• Be sure to provide a concrete example of this strength and keep your answer concise and to the point.
• When discussing weaknesses, highlight something that used to be a weakness, but that through your professional and personal development you have overcome, or that you now consider an asset.
• Discuss an area where you believe that you could improve your performance and identify your plan to improve.

“Please tell me about a time where you had difficulty communicating with a co-worker or team member.”

Why Employers Ask
• To evaluate how well a candidate is able to communicate and what steps he/she will take if he/she experiences problems communicating with colleagues.

What Makes it Tricky
• A candidate is asked to describe a negative situation.
• Being overly negative about the colleague in an example, or highlighting something negative about your communication styles and/or skills can be frowned upon by an employer.

How to Answer
• Briefly describe the negative situation and then focus on what you did to resolve any miscommunication and make the project successful.
• Incorporate how this situation helped you improve your overall communication skills and what steps you would take to avoid similar misunderstandings in the future.
• Make it relatable to the company.

Visit us at Chiang Ching Kuo Hall (CCK) or contact us at (718) 990-6375, careers@stjohns.edu.
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What made you apply for this position?
3. Why did you choose St. John’s University? Your major?
4. Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it.
5. What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
6. Describe your three greatest accomplishments to date.
7. What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
8. How will this position enable you to reach your goals?
9. What unique characteristic(s) will you bring to the company?
10. How do you facilitate group communication?
11. What area of your skills/professional development do you want to improve?
12. What do you know about the company? What interests you most about this job?
13. What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this field? Why should I hire you?
14. Think about a difficult boss, professor or colleague. How did you successfully interact with this person?
15. Describe when you or a group that you were a part of was in danger of missing a deadline.
16. How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do?
17. Describe a situation where class assignments and work/personal activities conflicted. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time?
18. How do you handle stressful situations?
19. How do you work under pressure?
20. How well do you receive feedback?
21. Of your creative accomplishments, what gave you the most satisfaction and why?
22. Describe your work ethic.
23. Describe your ideal supervisor.
24. Do prefer working individually or in a team? Why?
25. What methods do you employ when brainstorming?
26. How do you determine and evaluate success?
27. Describe an instance when you had to solve a problem.
28. How would you describe your leadership style?
29. What is a weakness of yours?
30. What are your strengths?
31. What changes would you bring to the company?
32. Where do you see yourself in five years?
33. What was the best job you ever had and why?
34. What do you like the most and least about working in this industry?
35. What questions haven’t I asked you?
36. What questions do you have for me?
37. What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/60 days/90 days on the job?
38. Discuss your resume.
39. Discuss your educational background.
40. Describe yourself.
Understanding What They’re Asking

One of the toughest obstacles in any interview is understanding what the interviewer wants to hear. However, much of what you are asked throughout the interview stems from one of several central basic questions or themes, such as your “strengths” or “leadership abilities.” Understanding which theme the question may fall under will allow you to understand what the question is asking and enables you to focus your answers on exactly what the employer wants to hear. Below are examples of questions that trace back to similar themes.

What are some of your strengths?
1. What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
2. What three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
3. What unique characteristic(s) will you bring to the company?
4. What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this field? Why should I hire you?
5. Describe your work ethic.
6. Tell me about yourself (broadly integrate strengths into your answer)
7. What can you offer us that someone else cannot?
8. What would your direct reports say about you?

Help them understand why you’re the best person for the job. Stay focused on why your background makes you an ideal candidate and tell them how you are going to contribute to that department and that company.

Do you have strong teamwork/leadership skills?
1. How do you facilitate group communication?
2. Describe when you or a group that you were a part of was in danger of missing a deadline.
3. How well do you receive feedback?
4. Describe your ideal supervisor.
5. How would you describe your leadership style?
6. Tell me a time you went above and beyond the scope of your role.

It is important to show enthusiasm for working on a team/independently if the position specifically requires it. Give specific examples you have participated in successfully.

Do you have strong problem solving and analytical skills?
1. Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it.
2. Think about a difficult boss, professor or colleague. How did you successfully interact with this person?
3. What methods do you employ when brainstorming?
4. Describe a situation where class assignments and work/personal activities conflicted. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time?
5. How do you handle stressful situations?
6. How do you work under pressure?

Show them how you would can handle the everyday problems that may arise in the position. Use past experience that show your resiliency and always make it relatable to the job.

What are your career ambitions/how does (this) relate to them?
1. Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years?
2. What is the best job you ever had and why?
3. How do you measure and evaluate your success?
4. Of your accomplishments, what gave you the most satisfaction and why?
5. How will this position enable you to reach your goals?

Show them that you’ve done some self-assessment and career planning. Let them know that you hope to develop professionally and take on additional responsibilities at that particular company.

Visit us at Chiang Ching Kuo Hall (CCK) or contact us at (718) 990-6375, careers@stjohns.edu.
HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS WITH EXAMPLES - The S.T.A.R.S. Method

The best approach to preparing for an interview is to apply the S.T.A.R.S. method when constructing your success stories. Success stories are examples from your work, school or life in which you demonstrated initiative, leadership or teamwork skills to solve a problem or make a decision. Complete the following exercise based on the example:

**SITUATION:** Describe what happened; its context; how big, interesting or otherwise impressive; your use of timing and organization; and the interpersonal situations involved. Ex: “Both cashiers called in sick and I was asked if I would handle the cash register even though I had not been trained in its use.”

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**TASK:** The objective, assignment or problem to be solved. Ex: “I agreed and was assigned to the cash register for the entire day.”

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**ACTION:** How YOU accomplished the task. Ex: “I had a very brief emergency training session from the manager and handled all sales until the evening cashier came in.”

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**RESULTS:** Use numbers, what the result means for the organization or for you. Ex: “When they corrupted the totals at the end of the day, they found that I hadn’t made any errors. The manager was impressed and eventually moved me from the stock room to the cashier’s desk.”

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Skills:** Highlight the skills you utilized. Ex: “Through quick decision-making, I demonstrated to the management my skill in handling new and stressful situations.”

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Visit us at Chiang Ching Kuo Hall (CCK) or contact us at (718) 990-6375, careers@stjohns.edu.
PRACTICING YOUR ANSWERS

In addition to knowing the organization, knowing how to articulate what is on your resume is the key to interview success. Below is a self-discovery activity to help further illustrate skills and attributes:

List 5 strengths (skills or personality traits):

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Give a brief example of how you have used each of your strengths in a work situation:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

List 5 Areas of Improvement (a.k.a weaknesses):

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Give a brief example of how you have overcome or are working on your areas of improvement:

_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________________________________
Off-Limits Interview Questions

Federal law and state laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of an applicant’s race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. Therefore, the following questions are considered illegal to be asked by a prospective employer:

1. Are you married? Divorced?
2. If you’re single, are you living with anyone?
3. How old are you?
4. Do you have children? If so how many and how old are they?
5. Do you own or rent your home?
6. What church do you attend?
7. Do you have any debts?
8. Do you belong to any social or political groups?
9. How much and what kinds of insurance do you have?
10. Do you suffer from any illness or disability?
11. Have you ever been treated for any of these conditions or diseases?
12. Have you been hospitalized? What for?
13. Have you ever been treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist?
14. Have you had a major illness recently?
15. How many days of work did you miss last year because of illness?
16. Do you have any disabilities or impairments that might affect your performance in this job?
17. Are you taking any prescribed drugs?
18. Have you ever been treated for drug addiction or alcoholism?
19. Do you plan to get married?
20. Do you intend to start a family?
21. What are your day care plans?
22. Are you comfortable supervising men?
23. What would you do if your husband were transferred?
24. Do you think you could perform the job as well as a man?
25. Are you likely to take time off under the Family and Medical Leave Act?

What to do if you are asked these questions

It is absolutely appropriate to politely decline answering any of these questions. However, its understandable that a candidate may feel nervous about doing it. Here are some things to say:

1. Why do you ask that?
2. Does this question pertain to the job responsibilities?
3. I’m not really comfortable answering that question. Perhaps you can ask me to explain something else as it relates to the position.

Keep in mind that most employers know these questions are illegal. However, some may get caught up in conversation and ask these questions to make small talk. Be firm and pay attention to what makes you uncomfortable.
BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research the company, industry, and the individual(s) with whom you are interviewing
- Take time to learn about the company and the industry in general. Not only will this help you stand out to the employer, but it will help you decide how you feel about the company.
- Review well-known trade publications, professional journals, newspapers, and company websites.

Evaluate your skills, abilities, experience and your overall professional brand
- Think about what skills, abilities, and experiences you want to highlight. Come up with a list of examples that highlight these areas and your professional brand.
- Prepare examples from work experience, internships, student organizations, class, or any other situation that demonstrates your skill set.

Review a list of potential interview questions
- Look at sample interview questions and think about how you will answer them. This will help you come across as a prepared professional to the employer, while also making it easier to answer the questions that you did not prepare for ahead of time.
- Write some talking points on the notepad in your portfolio. You can refer to this during the interview.

Sample Questions to Ask During an Interview
1. What are typical career paths of your employees?
2. What personal qualities or characteristics are most important for success in this job?
3. What are three things that work well here?
4. What are the challenging facets of the job?
5. How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
6. What might be some immediate goals or tasks in the first 90 days?
7. How is worker performance measured and reviewed?
8. Do you have a mentor program? How about formal training programs?
9. What changes do you anticipate in the industry? How do you see them impacting the company?
10. Can you please describe the hiring process and the next steps in the interview process?
11. Describe the feedback, positive or negative, that you received from your clients.
12. Could this position lead to any future career opportunities? (If Interning)

Remember to:
- Get a good night's rest the night before and eat a little while before your appointment.
- Map the location, estimate travel time, plan for security procedures (bring government-issued identification), and identify parking arrangements.
- Bring plenty of resumes

Questions for the Interviewer
Interviews are not just about the employer seeing if you are the right fit for the job. It’s your opportunity to see if you feel you too are the right fit. If the job description meets your career objectives and experience level, the environment one in which you can thrive, and the organization aligns with your personal values. Therefore, it's a good idea to prepare questions to ask the employer so you can glean the information you need to make the best decision about a potential job offer.

Visit us at Chiang Ching Kuo Hall (CCK) or contact us at (718) 990-6375, careers@stjohns.edu.
DURING THE INTERVIEW

When introducing yourself, remember to:
- Speak in a friendly and confident manner.
- Give everyone a quick, firm handshake.
- Remember to keep one hand free during introductions.

When answering questions, it is important to use the following strategies:
- Be confident and energetic.
- Employers want to know that you can do the job and that you are excited about the opportunity.
- Remember to utilize the “S.T.A.R.S.” method when answering questions. Let employers picture you completing the job requirements and contributing to the company.
- Always be sure to address the question and be brief. The interviewer will let you know when to elaborate.
- Focus on the positive. While everyone knows that bad things happen, it is important to stay positive and not talk negatively about anyone or any situation when describing these situations. Otherwise, employers will wonder how you would talk about their office and whether you will be a negative influence.

Pay attention to your body language
- Employers will often make judgments about a potential candidate based on their body language.
- Sit up straight, use gestures to show that you are paying attention (i.e. nod your head to acknowledge a question), and avoid any distracting or negative body language (i.e. tapping your finger on the table).
- Avoid using exaggerated hand gestures.
- Maintain strong eye contact with the employer(s).

Make sure to ask the employer some of the questions you prepared ahead of time
- You can ask questions early on in the interview, so you can incorporate that information into your responses.
- Asking questions will help you figure out whether or not you want to work for the company and if the company is a good fit for your personality and work style.
- This also demonstrates that you are knowledgeable about the field and company, have an understanding of how current events and trends could affect the company, and show your interest in your chosen field.

Try to stay relaxed during the interview
- While it is natural to have some anxiety during an interview, try to avoid demonstrating this to the interviewer.
- Be aware of your nervous habits and take steps to prevent them.
- If you begin to feel nervous or notice that you are talking more rapidly, take a breath and calm down.

Do not be afraid to ask the employer to repeat a question, to clarify a question, or even ask for a minute to think. If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t make it up. Be honest and ask to come back to that later on. You could always respond to that question in your Thank You Letter.

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW
- Ask for a business card from everyone who interviewed.
- Ask where they are in their interviewing process.
- Ask when you can expect a decision to be made, and if they wouldn’t mind a follow-up phone call or email.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW
Write down notes after the interview regarding topics covered. This is good for follow up interviews and to evaluate a potential offer.

Think about what you thought went well and what did not go well during the interview
This will help you prepare for future interviews and identify areas where you can improve for future interviews.