

DREAM BIG

AT COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO

INTERVIEW PREP



BLUEPRINT
FOR SUCCESS



CAREER READINESS

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Congratulations! You've successfully navigated the application process and have been offered an interview. Now it's time to prepare. Don't worry, this guide is here to help you get ready efficiently and confidently. Here, you'll have access to effective strategies on how to respond to a wide range of interview questions, as well as key steps to take after the interview to leave a strong, lasting impression.

INTERVIEW STYLES

There are 4 common styles of interviews. These styles consist of phone, video, in-person, and group interviews.

PHONE INTERVIEWS do not require face-to-face interactions. They serve as an added layer of the screening process and can range from 15-45 min depending on how in-depth the interviewer goes.



Review the job description, prepare notes and a personal pitch. Find a quiet space, sit up straight, and smile while speaking—let your voice reflect confidence, focus, and genuine interest.

VIRTUAL/VIDEO (ZOOM) INTERVIEWS can be conducted on Zoom or Microsoft teams etc. They can be 1 on 1 or a panel of 2-6 representatives.



Dress professionally as if it's an in-person interview. Maintain good energy, posture, and give clear, concise responses. Look directly at the camera to simulate eye contact. Eliminate distractions to stay focused and present.

IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS are the most formal types of interviews. They can be held 1 on 1 or with a panel of 2-6 company representatives.

GROUP INTERVIEWS allow employers to meet with larger pools of candidates. This approach shows employers how interviewees handle stressful situations and how they interact with others. These usually involve either one interviewer and several candidates, but can also be one candidate and several interviewers.



Have a pre-written response to potential interview questions in front of you if not in-person, and include questions that you have brainstormed.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Preparing for the job interview involves conducting research and exploring where your interview may take place.

HOW TO PREPARE

- Be sure to do your research, noting when and where the interview is taking place, what you should bring, and any questions you might have.
- Learn about your interviewer(s) or panelists. Sometimes the individuals who send you information pertaining to the interview are not the ones interviewing, so feel free to ask if you are able to know the names of your interviewers. Sometimes this information is not readily given out, but if you research the employer or company online, there is a good chance you can learn about who you might be meeting.
- Examine how your values and goals align with the employer or company. Spend time considering what personal traits and behaviors make you the right fit for the job.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Below are the common types of interview questions. These questions consist of informational, behavioral, and situational questions.

INFORMATIONAL QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself and why we should hire you?
- What is your greatest strength and how would you use it here?
- What would you say your weaknesses are and how do you address them?
- Why do you want to work here?

HOW TO DRESS PROFESSIONALLY

Wearing neat, well-fitted, and professional attire helps create a strong first impression in any interview. Your appearance should reflect the company culture while showing that you're prepared and respectful of the opportunity.

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What would your co-workers or previous supervisor say about you as a colleague or employee?

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you had to meet a tight deadline. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time you made a mistake at work or school. How did you handle it, and what did you learn?
- Tell me about a time you had to learn something new quickly. How did you approach the situation?

SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS

- What would you do if you were assigned a task you've never done before?
- How would you handle a disagreement with a coworker on a project approach?
- What would you do if you missed an important deadline?
- How would you respond if your manager gave you unclear instructions?

PRACTICE THE STAR METHOD

Make a list of past accomplishments in your work history. Describe accomplishments using the STAR method below. Make sure to include details!

Situation: a short description of a circumstance or event you can discuss to support your response.

Task: describing the task or a "To-Do-List" you developed to approach the situation.

Action: sharing the actions or steps you took to accomplish the task or "To-Do-List"

Result: explaining the outcome of your actions and how it might have presented a solution or brought closure to the situation you were faced with.



Practice, practice, practice! Rehearse aloud or with a friend to build confidence and improve clarity in your responses.

CLOTHING

- Business Casual is a safe choice
- Wear a well-fitted outfit. This may include button-up shirts / blouse, dress pants / skirt etc.
- Neutral color (black, white, navy and grey) are recommended
- Avoid large and outrageous patterns
- Avoid clothes that hinder you from moving freely (make sure you can walk, sit, and stand in your outfit)

HAIR & MAKEUP

- If you wear make-up, wear it naturally
- Hair should be clean and styled
- Avoid dramatic changes leading up to the interview

ACCESSORIES

- Wear dress shoes or well-maintained shoes, no open-toe shoes
- Wearing a tie is optional depending on company culture
- Avoid distracting and excessive accessories

HYGIENE

- Perfume and cologne is acceptable, just make sure it isn't overpowering
- Avoid eating foods that leave a lasting scent in your mouth or clothes before your interview.

HOW TO ANSWER DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Sometimes interviewers may ask difficult questions that catch you off guard. Preparing in advance helps you stay calm and confident. Review common challenging questions and practice your responses. Even if you don't know the perfect answer, stay honest, focused, and show a willingness to learn or problem-solve.

EMPLOYMENT GAPS

When addressing employment gaps, focus on the positives. Highlight personal and professional growth, new skills gained, and lessons learned. Show how the experience made you more resilient and prepared for future opportunities.

REASON FOR LEAVING JOB

When discussing why you left previous jobs, stay professional and positive. Focus on your excitement for the new role and express your long-term commitment, showing that you're engaged and ready for growth.

SALARY NEGOTIATION

Approach salary discussions with confidence. Do your research to justify a reasonable range and avoid giving a single number. Stay positive, professional, and focus on the value you bring to the role.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Asking questions after an interview shows you're genuinely interested in the role and helps you determine if the company is the right fit for you. It also demonstrates your preparation, critical thinking, and engagement with the opportunity.

- Share any request you may have. Family commitments or vacations.
- How can one be successful in this position?
- What are some challenges I may face and how would you address them?
- What does a normal day look like in this field?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Immediately after you finish your interview, make some notes on what questions were asked, how you responded, and what your interviewer might have said during the conversation. It is a good way to document your experiences and the next steps (if you were given any) and reflect on the experience as a whole.

It is also a good idea to send an email to the people who connected you to the interview, the person who scheduled it, and the people who interviewed you, to thank them for their time and follow up with any instructions you were given. This should be done within 24 hours of the interview.

EXAMPLE OF THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear [name of interviewer(s)],

Thank you taking the time to meet with me today and for giving me the opportunity to discuss the details of the position. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to call me or email me. I look forward to the next steps and to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

[LinkedIn URL]