

# Interviewing

## USC CAREER CENTER

### How do you make a strong first impression?

- **Look like a professional**

92% of employers surveyed said that appearance influenced their opinions about candidates. A business suit that is properly fitted is most appropriate.

According to researchers, you have less than 30 seconds to make a positive impression at an interview.

Make your 30 seconds count!!

- **Shake hands firmly**

This communicates professionalism and confidence. It isn't the time to crush your interviewer's hand or offer a limp, lifeless handshake.

- **Maintain eye contact with your interviewer**

When the interviewer is speaking, demonstrate active listening by looking at the speaker. You should not be caught looking at the floor, the room, etc.

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UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH CAROLINA

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING:

One of the most common methods used today, behavioral interviewing focuses on specific examples of past behavior as a means of predicting future behavior. Questions such as, "Tell me about a time when...." are typically asked in a behavioral interview. Use the **STAR Method** to respond to behavioral questions.

**Situation:** Discuss a specific situation or problem that you encountered

**Task:** Explain the task that you had to complete or the ideas you used for resolving the problem

**Action:** Tell specific actions which you took, steps you followed, obstacles you had to overcome, etc.

**Results:** Highlight outcomes, goals achieved, accomplishments, etc.

**Example:** "Tell me about a time when you feel you provided exceptional customer service."

### ***SITUATION:***

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"When I was working for the university's catering office, I was responsible for booking reception rooms for special events. A woman called two weeks before her daughter's wedding to cancel her reservation for the reception room. A death had occurred in the family and the wedding was postponed until further notice."

### ***TASK:***

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"The customer was obviously very upset about the unfortunate circumstances and I knew it was my job to carry out the logistical procedures for canceling a room, as well as to put her mind at ease about the reception arrangements."

### ***ACTION:***

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"Although deposits are generally non-refundable due to loss of revenue, I felt certain it was not too late to book another event, so I checked with my manager regarding the possibility of refunding her deposit. We were able to rebook the room with another event, return her full deposit, and I assured her we could re-schedule the reception whenever the family was ready."

### ***RESULTS:***

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"The customer wasn't expecting to get any money back and was pleasantly surprised, as well as relieved, that canceling the reception plans wasn't a hassle. She wrote a very nice thank-you letter to my manager commending the way in which I handled the situation, and my manager complimented me for taking initiative with this customer."

## **SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS:**

### **Analytical/Problem Solving**

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- Give me an example of when you identified potential problems and resolved the situation.

### **Communication**

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get a point across.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to handle an irate customer.

### **Creativity/Innovation**

- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you developed/implemented.
- Tell me about a time when you created a new process or program that was considered risky.

### **Decision Making**

- Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the past year.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed.
- Discuss a time when you had to make a quick decision.

### **Goal Setting**

- Give me an example of an important goal that you have set and tell me how you reached it.
- Tell me about a goal that you set and did not reach.

### **Flexibility/Adaptability**

- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control.
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to be tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.

### **Integrity/Honesty**

- Tell me about a time when you challenged the status quo to do what you felt was right.
- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a tough problem that challenged fairness or ethical issues.

## SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS (cont.):

### Interpersonal

- Give me an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual and how you dealt with it.

### Leadership/Initiative

- Tell me about a time when you were able to provide a co-worker with recognition for the work they performed.
- Describe a leadership situation that you would handle differently if you had it to do over again.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a leadership role and were faced with resistance.
- Tell me about a time when you showed initiative and took the lead in a team project.

### Organization/Time-Management

- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you were unable to complete a project on time.
- Give me an example of a recent assignment that required the greatest amount of effort with regard to organization.

### Strengths/Weaknesses

- Describe for me a time when you failed at something and how you responded.
- Tell me about a time when you did not live up to your full potential.

### Teamwork

- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team and a member was not doing their share of the work.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work in a team in which the members did not get along.

**Sources:** Used by permission.

- Michigan State University, Human Resources. *Behavioral-Based Interview Questions*. Online Available: <http://www.hr.msu.edu/Depts/comp/behavior.htm>, 2011.
- University of Maryland - Robert H. Smith School of Business, Society for Human Resource Management Student Chapter. *Sample Behavioral Interview Questions Grouped by Skill*. Online Available: [http://www.inform.umd.edu/Student/Campus\\_Activities/StudentOrg/shrm/sample\\_questions.htm](http://www.inform.umd.edu/Student/Campus_Activities/StudentOrg/shrm/sample_questions.htm), 2010.

**Additional interviewing resources can be found on our website,  
<http://www.sc.edu/career/tipsheets.html>**

## QUESTIONING SYTTLES:

### **DIRECTED**

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This interview style will have a definite structure. The interviewer will generally have an itemized agenda, as well as a list of specific questions he or she wants to ask you.

### **NON-DIRECTED**

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This interview style will be less structured. The interviewer may ask very broad, general questions and not take charge.

### **TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/GENERAL QUESTIONS**

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“What do you think about...?”

“Do you...?”

“Have you ever...?”

### **SCENARIO/CASE QUESTIONS**

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This interview style is designed to evaluate your probable performance or technical knowledge by asking hypothetical "what would you do if...?" questions. A specific problem or situation will be given, and you will be asked for solutions or recommendations. Your problem solving abilities and thought process may be equally or more important than your response to the question.

### **ETHICAL DILEMMA QUESTIONS**

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This interviewing style is designed to determine how you would respond to an ethical situation. Your responses to ethical dilemma questions may be used to assess your work ethic and/or if you hold the same philosophies or values as the organization.

### **STRESS QUESTIONS**

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This interviewing style is not as common as others and is used for positions where it is important to determine how candidates react to and hold up under pressure (such as law enforcement). Stress interviews often include particularly tough scenario or ethical dilemma interviewing styles, particularly no-win questions. Stress interviews also frequently include timed or problem-solving tasks.

## INTERVIEWING TIPS:

### ***Before the Interview***

**INVESTIGATE the employer.** The Internet is an invaluable tool for learning about an organization's products, services, benefits, philosophy, facilities, operating budget, etc.! It is also important to research the company culture and the history. Try talking with contacts inside the organization. In addition, the Career Center's Resource Room contains an employer information section to assist students with employer research.

**CREATE a profile of the position for which you are interviewing.** What qualifications does this position require? What are the duties and responsibilities for this position? How do your skills fulfill the requirements/transfer to this position?

**PREPARE for questions.** Identify your experiences, skills, and characteristics related to the position. Formulate answers to commonly asked interview questions. Know how to identify and respond to the hidden agenda of trick questions. In addition, compile a list of questions ***you will ask***.

**COMPILE relevant information.** Some organizations will ask you to fill out an application in addition to providing your resume. This may require information such as past addresses, phone numbers, salary history, supervisors, etc. Take extra copies of your resume, as well as a nice pen and notepad or leather folder for taking notes. If appropriate, take your portfolio.

**PRACTICE.** It is essential to rehearse prior to a successful interview. Practice your interviewing skills using InterviewStream, an on-line mock interview service that allows you to record yourself with your webcam. A Career Center staff member will provide constructive feedback to assist you in developing stronger interviewing skills. To schedule a mock interview, inquire at the Career Center front desk. You can also rehearse with friends or in front of a mirror.

**DRESS APPROPRIATELY.** Make sure your shoes are polished and attire is well pressed with no stains. Groom yourself appropriately (showered, clean hair, clean fingernails, etc.). Keep jewelry and perfume/cologne to a minimum.

### ***During the Interview***

#### **Making the First Impression**

- Arrive at least ten minutes early. Account for possible rush hour traffic.
- Introduce yourself to the receptionist and indicate who you are there to see. Remember the interview starts the moment you enter the door and doesn't end until you leave.
- Know how to pronounce the interviewer's name. Repeat his/her name when you greet him/her.

#### **Your attitude**

- Show confidence, interest, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. Do not be arrogant, aggressive, or immature.
- Be yourself. Smile, relax, be friendly, not stiff and staunch.
- Be honest in all your answers.
- Be courteous, polite, and respectful at all times.
- Allow the interviewer to lead the interview.

## ***During the Interview (cont.)***

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### **Verbal Communication**

- Use proper grammar. Do not use “um,” “like” and “you know” when you speak.
- Pause for a moment before answering, in order to formulate an organized response.
- Answer questions thoroughly by using examples and stating results.
- Express yourself succinctly and clearly. Don’t monopolize the conversation or ramble.
- Make sure you answer the question asked. If a question is multifaceted, be sure to address each part.

### **Nonverbal Communication**

- Shake hands firmly with the interviewer and anyone else to whom you are introduced.
- Make eye contact when speaking to someone.
- Always wait until you have been offered a seat, or until the interviewer sits.
- Be aware of your posture at all times—stand tall, sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair during the interview. Cross your legs at your ankles when sitting.
- Beware of talking with your hands too much—fold your hands in your lap.

### **Your past**

- Don’t be evasive. While past failures need not be volunteered, don’t try to cover them up. If you do have a “blemish” in your past, simply explain the circumstances around it without giving excuses or blaming others. Discuss what you learned from the situation.
- Never speak poorly about former supervisors, colleagues, or employers. If you were unhappy, simply explain that it was not a good fit.

### **Be attentive**

- When introduced to others, remember their names.
- Pay attention. Don’t ask questions about information that was already addressed in the interview.
- Ask for a business card at the close of the interview to ensure that you have proper contact information.

### **Negotiating Salary**

- The employer should be the one to introduce this topic. It generally will be discussed during the second interview or at the time of the offer.

## ***After the interview***

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- Thank interviewers for their time and shake hands firmly with a smile.
- Indicate that you look forward to hearing from them soon and welcome them to contact you if they need any additional information.
- Send a thank-you letter within 24 hours reiterating your interest in the position.
- Follow-up promptly by providing any credentials, references, transcripts, or samples of work that might have been requested by the interviewer.

## INTERVIEW CHECKLIST:

- Research organizations at the Career Center Library, the Thomas Cooper Library, the Business Library, or on the Internet.
- Research the latest trends (e.g. salary ranges) of your intended profession.
- Talk with Career Center staff about interviewing techniques.
- Practice interviewing through InterviewStream. Sign up for a **Mock Interview**.
- Develop a brief overview of who you are and your professional/academic background as it relates to the position for which you are interviewing.
- Identify *why* you want the job. Practice your response.
- Identify what you have to offer the company. Develop this statement (elevator speech) and practice your delivery.
- Analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Be able to state them clearly.
- Develop a list of *behavioral questions* you think the interviewer might ask and write down possible examples you could provide using the **STAR method**.
- Develop a list of questions to ask the interviewer.
- Select professional interview attire.
- Confirm time, day, and location of your interviews, as well as who will interview you.
- Make sure you have adequate directions. If needed, drive to the location in advance to determine how long the trip takes and to make certain you know where you are going.
- Consider on-campus Interviewing through USC JobMate.