

# HOW TO INTERVIEW

REVISED 2023



**McGill**

**CaPS**

Career Planning Service

Service de planification de carrière

# HOW TO INTERVIEW

---

## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations, you have an interview! The employer is impressed with you on paper, and now wants to further evaluate your qualifications and experience, as well as assess your motivation and communication/interpersonal skills.

Your job is to facilitate this process by conveying a clear sense of who you are and what you bring to the role. In addition, it is a great opportunity to confirm if the job and organization align with your values, interests and skills.

This guide contains information and tips to help you interview with confidence on the phone, virtually, or in person.

---

## WHEN YOU GET THE CALL

Politely request/confirm the following information:

- Time, date and location
- Number of interviewers
- Contact number
- Format and platform of the interview
- Their name(s) and position(s)

If you have been offered a position elsewhere and need to decline the interview, explain the situation and thank the employer for their consideration.

---

## PREPARATION

### Know yourself

In order to talk about yourself, you need to know yourself well. Interview prep is like studying for an exam! The better you know the material, the easier it will be to answer the questions.

- Carefully consider what you would like the interviewers to know about you and how you want to convey this information verbally
- Think of specific examples from your past experiences which highlight your skills, qualifications and achievements, and demonstrate the match between your skillset and the employer's needs
- Review each of the experiences on your CV and think about how/why you got involved, what you learned and achieved, and any transferable skills of relevance to the position you are interviewing for

## Know the employer

You have hopefully already spent some time researching this employer in order to target your CV and Cover Letter, and it is important to brush up on your research again before an interview. Being well prepared and knowledgeable reflects positively on your enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism, and can help you anticipate the type of questions you may be asked.

- Research the industry, employer and position
- Make use of professional organizations, business councils and relevant websites
- Consider how your values compliment the stated goals and structure of the organization
- Brainstorm questions you would like to ask in the interview

## Anticipate

- Anticipate the kinds of questions you may be asked based on the employers' needs, and think about how you will answer them.\*\* This is especially important for difficult questions concerning conflict, weaknesses and salary expectations
- Employers will definitely want to know about your:
  - Work experience
  - Motivation and interest in the position
  - Specific skills and qualifications related to the job (i.e. analytical skills). For each skill, come up with a few examples that demonstrate your abilities.
- Give your references a heads up that you are job searching so that they are aware they may be contacted in the near future

\*\*For an in depth list of sample questions, see Appendix 1

## Practice

Sometimes things sound great in your head, but don't come out the way you planned! Practicing will help you feel more poised and confident, and ensure that you are communicating clearly.

- Ask a friend to run through sample questions with you
- Use Interview Stream, an online platform where you can access preset interview questions, record your responses and assess yourself

---

# DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

## Dress for success

- While norms vary greatly by industry/location, you absolutely need to look like the most polished and professional version of yourself!
- If in doubt err on the more conservative/formal side of professional attire

- Pay attention to personal grooming and avoid heavy fragrances
- “Test drive” your outfit a day or two before to make sure you are comfortable sitting and moving

### Be prepared and punctual

- Have extra copies of your CV and any other relevant documents at hand
- Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the start time, or logon a few minutes in advance
- If you have technical issues, are delayed, or cannot make it, call as soon as possible to apologize, explain and see if they are willing to reschedule
- Turn off your mobile device and any email alerts

### Be aware of both verbal and non-verbal communication

Remember that the interview starts the minute you are greeted! Aim for a positive and attentive attitude and be friendly and respectful towards everyone you meet.

- Greet your interviewers confidently
- Make direct eye contact, sit up straight and smile naturally
- Provide answers which are clear, complete and truthful
- Avoid slang and unnecessary fillers (“um...ah...”) and stay on topic
- Be a good listener as well as a good speaker
- Wait until after the interview to take notes

### Virtual and telephone interviews

- Find a quiet room with a simple background and good lighting
  - Minimize distracting visuals, and if you live with others, let them know that you are interviewing so that you will not be disturbed
- Professional attire is still important as it impacts your confidence and mindset
- Listen carefully and clarify information when needed
- “Test run” any relevant technology in advance
- Look at the camera rather than papers on the table; if you like to have notes, you can put post-its around the screen as reminders

### Follow up

It is crucial to remind the interviewers of your interest in the days and weeks following.

- Send a thank you email within 24 hours of your interview. Thank the interviewers for their time, mention anything you found particularly interesting, and reiterate your continued interest in the position.
  - Following the interview, if you are no longer interested in the position, still send a thank you email and let them know you will be retracting your candidacy
- If you have not heard from them within the agreed time frame, follow up with the interviewers and inquire about the status of your application

# APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

## General information

Broad questions, to get the conversation started.

- Tell me about yourself
- Explain the transitions between the items on your CV

## Work Style

- What is the ideal working relationship between an employee and their supervisor?
- Do you prefer to have a lot of supervision or do you work better independently?
- How do you deal with setbacks in your work?
- Tell us about a time when you worked in a team. What was your role?
- What do you like most about working with others? What do you find challenging?
- Have you ever had a misunderstanding with one of your co-workers? How was it resolved?
- What would you do if members of your team were not doing their fair share of the work?

## Skills

Employer wants to know: Can you do the job?

Often based on past experiences, these questions aim to broadly assess your ability to do this job. Your answers should provide clear examples, even when the question does not ask for one.

- What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
- Tell us about a difficult problem you encountered in a previous job and how you handled it
- What skills have you learned in your previous jobs and how will they be applicable here?
- How do you handle stress and pressure in the workplace?
- How would you describe good leadership?
- How do you motivate people?
- Tell us about a time when your ideas helped improve an aspect of your workplace
- How do you ensure that your written work is error-free?
- The job involves keeping track of many details. How would you ensure nothing is overlooked?
- What does it mean to be organized?
- How would you deal with a customer who is complaining bitterly about a product or service offered by the organization?
- Tell me about a time when you used [technology x] to improve your communication skills
- Describe your experience with [technical skill x. example: Microsoft Teams]
- What do you know about [social issue x. example: environmental sustainability]?

## Motivation

Employer wants to know: Do you want to do this job?

Be enthusiastic and excited about the organization and the position to which you are applying. It is extremely important that you convey your interest throughout the interview.

- Why do you want to work for us? / Why should we hire you?
- What do you know about our organization?
- If you were in charge here, what would be your long-term goals for the organization?
- What interests you about the position, organization and industry?
- How do you see yourself growing in this position?
- Where do you see yourself in a year, five years, ten years?

## Case questions

Not used by all employers, these questions aim to see your problem solving skills in action. As a result, it is important that you explain your thinking to the interviewer(s).

### Brain teasers

Many consulting firms give their applicants brain teasers to test their creativity and analytical skills. You may be given a time limit so do not become bogged down.

- A company has ten machines that produce gold coins. One of the machines is producing coins that are a gram too light. How do you tell which machine is making the defective coins with only one weighing? [taken from Vault Career Insider]

### Guesstimate

Firms which are looking for someone with good technical and mathematical abilities may ask you to answer a question like, "How many golf balls fit into a 747?" The right answer per se is less important than your thought process. The interviewer wants to see if you can think logically.

- How many new cars were purchased in Quebec last year?
- How many gallons of white house paint are sold in Canada each year?

### Project

These kinds of questions are designed to tap into your creativity and ingenuity. Try to relate your answer to the position for which you are applying. In other words, if you are applying for an engineering position, talk about design or engineering aspects of the project.

- Design the ideal toaster

### Appropriate Questions

Fair hiring laws were passed to promote fairness for job candidates. Yet, job applicants today are still sometimes asked questions that are illegal and irrelevant to job performance. Be sure to familiarize yourself with your rights to a fair chance in the interview and selection process.

# APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

## About the position

- What would be my primary duties initially? How will these change over time?
- What do you consider to be the most challenging aspects of the position?
- Is there a portion of the work that can be done remotely?
- What is a typical day like?

## About the organization

- How does this position contribute to the larger organizational structure?
- What are the department's current projects?
- How do you incorporate [value x] into your business practice?
- What makes this organization unique?
- What are the areas of anticipated growth for the company?

## About education and training

- Does the company have an onboarding program for new employees?
- Are there opportunities for professional development / mentorship / training?
- Are employees encouraged to be active in professional organizations?

## About evaluation and advancement

- How would my performance be evaluated?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- What opportunities are there for advancement in the organization?
- Does the organization typically promote from within?

## About the hiring process

- What would the next step of the hiring process entail?



## **Downtown Campus**

Brown Student Services Building  
3600 McTavish Street, Suite 2200  
Montreal, QC H3A 0G3  
514-398-3304  
[career.caps@mcgill.ca](mailto:career.caps@mcgill.ca)

CaPS



myFuture



## **Macdonald Campus**

Centennial Centre  
21111 Lakeshore Road  
Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC H9X 3V9  
514-398-3304  
[careers.caps@mcgill.ca](mailto:careers.caps@mcgill.ca)

