

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS
Career Education & Alumni Engagement Center, Saint Michael's College
<http://www.smcvt.edu/career>

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

Preparing Myself:

- Do a practice interview with one of our career counselors and/or complete one with our online software.
- How will I dress for the interview? You should research the work environment to make sure you are appropriately dressed. Is everything clean and pressed, and properly mended? Are my shoes polished/heels not scuffed? Am I prepared for any type of weather? When in doubt, be conservative in dress and appearance. You should be remembered for what you have said, not how you were dressed. Remember that some people are sensitive to perfume and aftershave and they should be applied lightly or not worn at all. Jewelry should be minimal and should not jingle (same with coins or keys in a pocket). Hair should be neat. Check to make sure all fasteners (buttons, zippers, hooks, etc.) are secure. Turn off your cell phone.
- Do I know the location of the interview? How long will it take me to get there? Have I allowed extra time for traffic and other delays? Is there parking available, and do I have enough cash with me to cover the cost if I am not reimbursed in advance?
- How long will my interview take? Mental preparation for an interview of an hour is different from preparing to spend the day at the organization.
- Do I know the name of my interviewer(s) or for whom I should ask at the reception desk? Can I pronounce the name(s) correctly? If not, it's appropriate to call and ask or ask at the reception desk.
- Carry a pad holder/portfolio and a pen/pencil. It's ok to take minimal notes during the interview – especially if you are given a contact for follow-up; as long as it doesn't interfere with the flow of information. Remember that your job is to maintain eye contact with the interviewer and remain engaged in the conversation.
- **ANALYZE YOUR SKILLS. KNOW YOUR RESUMÉ.** What are my skills, and how do they match with the position that is available? Can I convey to my interviewer that my background and experiences mesh with the position description? Am I ready to give examples to illustrate my skills?
- **ANTICIPATE QUESTIONS** based on the type of job for which you are interviewing. For example, if you are interviewing for a sales position, the interviewer may hand you a tape dispenser or pen off their desk and ask you to “sell” it to them.
- What questions do I want to be prepared to answer at the interview? See the commonly asked question list at the end of the handout.
- Make a list of people who can serve as your references, along with their titles, phone numbers, email addresses, and any additional contact information. Carry it with you in case you are asked to supply that information at the interview. Also, carry extra copies of your resumé.

Background Information/Research on the Organization:

- Do I know the organization's basic operations and location of related facilities? Location of home office; names of parent companies or subsidiaries; breadth of operations; private company or publicly traded on the stock markets; training programs, etc.
- What is the organization most famous for in the industry? Where does it stand against its competitors? What makes it different from other companies in the field?
- Have I read enough news to be aware of current events that are impacting the industry as a whole, and the company itself - mergers, acquisitions, industry trends, etc.?
- What are some of the future prospects of the company? Expansions, new products/services, etc.
- Prepare questions to ask about the organization. Write them down and leave enough space for notes.

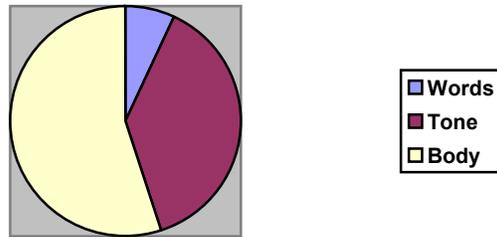
THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

- Remember that the interview begins as soon as someone from the organization can possibly see you. This can happen as you are pulling into the parking lot, walking into the lobby, using a restroom (please wash your hands) or entering the reception area. The interview is not finished until you have left the premises and are out of eyesight. Do not use any electronic device during this time.
- Carry mints with you to insure your breath is fresh. However, plan ahead so you are not chewing on them as you meet your interviewer.
- You may accept the offer of water/coffee/tea from your interviewer (don't bring your own). Be careful that you don't spill it on their desk or on you.
- Greet the interviewer by his/her title and last name (Ms. Smith, Dr. Jones). Do not use first names unless asked to do so.
- Shake hands firmly. Make eye contact. This is your chance to make a strong first impression.
- Don't complain about the weather, the traffic, or anything else. You are not there to bring problems; you are there to SOLVE them.
- Be prepared for those first big questions:
"Tell me about yourself."
"What can you tell me about our company?"
- Background research on the company and positions available becomes important in preparing you to relate your background and skills in context. If your research provides very little information about the position, try to get the interviewer to describe the position and duties to you fairly early in the interview so that you can then make the most of your skills in light of the description.
- Be specific, concrete and detailed in your answers. GIVE EXAMPLES. The interviewer will be looking for examples of your previous behavior as a predictor of what you will do in the future.
- Answers questions as truthfully and frankly as you can.
- If you don't understand the question, don't be afraid to ask for it to be repeated or rephrased.
- Typically, an interviewer will ask if *you* have any questions at some point. Use this opportunity to ask the questions you have prepared. Take a reminder list of the questions with you. Do not ask for information that is readily available elsewhere (e.g., you could have learned this information through your research on the company) if you want to make a good impression on the interviewer.
- Remember to thank your interviewer for her/his time, and express your interest in the position. If the interviewer has not given you information on a decision time-frame, it may be appropriate to ask.

FOLLOW UP

- Remember to get business cards of the people you speak with, or stop to ask the receptionist on your way out to get proper spelling of names, and correct business titles and addresses so you can write **prompt** thank you notes.
- Take notes on what you feel you could improve upon for your next interview. Jot down what you talked about or learned during the interview for future reference.

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL MESSAGES



Not all of what you convey to an employer in an interview is through the answers you give to questions. In fact, only 7% of your impact is through words. The chart above shows the impact that your “non-verbal messages” (tonality and body language) make on an interviewer.

EMPLOYER’S PERSPECTIVE

What is the employer looking for? What makes a good candidate “good”?

- Consistency in all communication with the interviewer – professional resumé, cover letter, phone manner (including voicemail message), interviewing style
- Interviewee is well prepared, has done background research on the company
- A firm handshake, good eye contact, smile, appearance of self-confidence
- Dressed neatly and appropriately for company environment
- Can articulate skills and strengths in relation to position available
- Ability to describe even difficult situations in a positive way
- Appears interested in the company
- Timely follow-up, relating your interview experience/conversations in the thank you note
- Respect for the interviewer’s time and the time allotted for your meeting
- Put yourself in the employer’s shoes – what would you be looking for

BE AWARE THAT THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN’T CONTROL

There are many variables in the interviewing process over which you have no control. The two big variables are:

You can’t control the competition for the job. You may be very qualified for a position, and someone else is given the offer. You just don’t know who else has applied for a position, and what unique experience they may bring to the job.

You can’t control who your interviewer will be. Not all interviewers are skilled at the art of conducting a thorough interview. They may be filling in for someone, may not have had any interview training, or are just not interested in the process. If your interviewer seems distracted or uninvolved in the interview process, you may want to re-think whether or not **you** want to work for the company, since this is the person the organization chose to represent them.

OTHER TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

In most cases, you will be interviewing one-on-one with an interviewer. However, there are other situations you may encounter in your job search:

Panel interview: You may be interviewed by two or more people at the same time.

Group interview: You and other prospective employees may be interviewed at the same time. In some cases, the interviewer will leave you and ask you to solve a problem as a group. The company may be interested in how you work as a team member and what you are able to contribute.

Phone interview: In most cases, this is an interview to screen whether or not you would be a good candidate for a job before you are asked to come to the office for an interview. It's important to treat this as a "real" interview, perhaps even dressing up, sitting at your desk, and making notes about what you want to convey to the interviewer. More information on telephone interviews can be found at

<http://www.smcvt.edu/Experience/Careers-and-Internships/Interview-Skills/Informational-and-Telephone-Interviews.aspx>

Non-traditional settings: Some interviews may take place over meals, in more "relaxed" or "comfortable" settings (a lounge area, on a walk outside), or on a tour of the facilities. It is important to remember that these are STILL INTERVIEW SITUATIONS. Be careful about letting down your guard. The company representative will be making notes and offering feedback to others about your candidacy.

Testing: An interviewer may ask you to take a personality test, a skills assessment inventory or ask for a demonstration of your computer/technical skills. Others may ask you to produce a business document or a writing sample.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO IN AN INTERVIEW

DO . . .

Express yourself clearly with a strong (not too loud or too soft) voice, using good diction and grammar

Pay close attention to your personal appearance - dress as if you already work there

Arrive early for the interview, but not too early - about 10 minutes is appropriate

Offer a firm handshake

Make good eye contact with the recruiter, but don't stare him/her down

Fill out applications neatly and completely. Bringing a list of your references and your resumé may help with this

Have as much knowledge about the industry, employer, and position as possible

Take criticism gracefully

Equip yourself with a strong knowledge of the company

Have prepared questions about the company and the position

Display a sense of humor in a professional manner - you do not need to tell jokes

Show self confidence

Bring a pen/pencil (test to make sure it works) and notebook or portfolio with you to the interview

Remember the interviewer's name

Take time to think before answering difficult or unexpected questions - it's ok to pause

Visit the Career Education & Alumni Engagement Center for interviewing prep and practice interviews

Follow up with a prompt thank you note restating your interest in the position

Be yourself

THINGS YOU SHOULDN'T DO IN AN INTERVIEW

DON'T . . .

- Be overbearing, overaggressive, or conceited
- Show a lack of interest or enthusiasm
- Distract from your message by fidgeting or playing with your watch, jewelry, coins, or keys

- Emphasize money as your main interest in the job - unless it's commission sales where money is a motivator
- Expect too much too soon - be open to the idea of starting at the bottom and working your way up
- Make excuses for unfavorable factors on your record (low GPA, not much work experience in the field, etc.) Instead, briefly explain in a confident manner what happened and what you *learned about yourself*
- Condemn past employers or institutions of education - keep comments positive
- Display a marked dislike for school work or professors
- Be indecisive
- Display intolerance or prejudice
- Accept the interview unless interested in the job - don't just "shop around"
- Be late to the interview
- Contradict yourself in responses
- Glorify your past experiences - getting a job for which you are *underqualified* is not recommended
- Assume that all employers will be delighted to hear of your plans for graduate school
- Smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, or chew gum, even if offered, or if the interviewer does so

QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

As stated earlier, you will have done your research on the organization and will have the basic background information. Questions for the interviewer should be more in-depth and not cover easily accessible information. Instead, concentrate your questions on what you couldn't find, or think ahead toward company goals, industry trends that might affect this organization, and information on the internal culture. Always let an interviewer know you have done your up-front research. At some point, mention "While researching your website website..."

Here are some examples of questions to ask:

1. What is considered a typical career path? What is the time frame for advancement? Is there a policy of promotion from within?
2. How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
3. Describe the typical first year/internship assignments/required coursework.
4. Tell me about your training program. How has company training impacted your growth and development?
5. What do you see as the most challenging parts of this job?
6. What are the company's plans for future growth? What challenges face the company and the industry in the next few years?
7. What current industry trends are reflected in changes the company has made?
8. What do you feel sets this company apart from its competitors?
9. How would you describe your corporation's culture and management style?
10. What is the overall structure of the department where the position is located?
11. What do you enjoy most about working here?

12. What are the necessary characteristics for an employee to have to be successful?
13. Would you describe a "typical day" for someone in this position?

QUESTIONS RECRUITERS FREQUENTLY ASK COLLEGE SENIORS

1. Please take 2 to 3 minutes and give me a verbal resumé.
2. What do you feel is your major strength/weakness?
3. How did you decide to attend Saint Michael's College?
4. Where do you see yourself in 3 to 5 years?
5. What have been your major accomplishments in the last 2 years?
6. What is the most frustrating situation you have had to deal with? How did you handle it?
7. Tell me about a group project you were involved in. What was your role?
8. Why did you choose this career (major)?
9. If I was talking with your best friend, how would they describe you?
10. Are you willing to spend 6 months (or more) as a trainee?
11. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
12. Why should I hire you?
13. What are you looking for in an organization?
14. What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
15. Tell me what you know about our organization.
16. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
17. What motivates you?
18. Do you have plans for continued study/advanced degree?
19. How do you plan to keep current or up-to-date in this field?
20. How do you work under pressure?
21. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
22. What is more important to you, money or type of job?
23. What college subjects did you like least, and why?
24. Is there anything we haven't covered that you'd like me to know about you?

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR?

Communication Skills	Team Building Abilities
Leadership Skills	Creativity
Problem Solving Skills	Coping Skills/Adaptability/Self Control
Decision Making	Initiative/Motivation
Ability to Juggle Multiple Tasks	Commitment to Completing Tasks
Organizational and Planning Skills	Current Technical Abilities