

# GUIDE TO interviewing

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ONLINE INTERACTIVE BOOK 



# Table of Contents

Interview Timeline.....	4
Types of Interviews.....	5-6
Preparing for an Interview.....	7
Pre-Interview Checklist.....	8
Activity: Telling Your Story.....	9-10
Focusing on Your Stories: STAR Method.....	11
Activity: Identifying Your Stories.....	12-13
Common Interview Questions.....	14
Tips and Advice for Interviewing.....	15
Illegal Interview Questions.....	16
Practicing Professionalism .....	17
Asking the Interviewer Questions.....	18
After the Interview.....	19
Contact the Career Center.....	20

# the purpose of interviews

Interviewing is an important step in the job search and hiring process. If done effectively, the interview enables the employer to determine if an applicant's skills, experience, and background meet the job's requirements and align with the company's mission, vision and values. Interviews also provide space for the applicant to ask questions to determine if the role aligns with the applicant's values and needs. It is important to note that the interview process can look different based on the industry or the position applying for.



# Timeline

Interviews typically take place after your resume and cover letter have been reviewed. They are used as a second step in the hiring process to determine if you are a strong candidate for the position. While the timeline can vary for every organization, you can expect to wait 1-4 weeks after your application is submitted, or the application deadline, before hearing back from an organization. There are typically many people on a hiring committee who need to review your application and they often do not begin reviewing until after the application closing date has passed.



**myth:** *“There is only one right way to answer interview questions.”*

## truth

**There is no single correct answer for every interview question.**

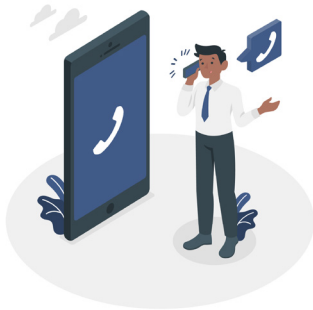
When responding to interview questions, you want to make sure that you answer the question asked, but there are variations of what that can look like. Most importantly, you want to emphasize your unique skills, values, and work ethic.

Employers are more interested in learning about your thought and decision-making processes.

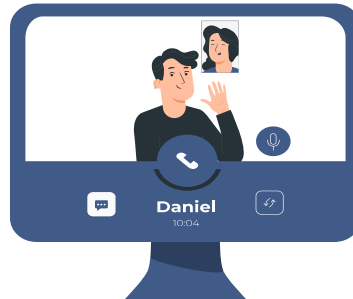
# TYPES OF interviews

## Location

Interviews can be conducted over the phone, virtually, or in person.



Phone Call



Virtual Meeting



In Person

## Format

### Individual

This involves interviewing with an individual person, typically the supervisor for the role.

### Group

A group interview is a meeting format with several candidates and is often used when employers are looking to hire multiple candidates on a short timeline. This interview style can often be found in industries like food service, retail, hospitality, and in graduate programs.

### Panel / Search Committee

A panel interview is an interview with two or more members of a hiring team. Panel members can include potential supervisors, managers, team members, human resources specialists, and other decision-makers within a company.

### **Phone Screen or Recorded Interview**

If an interview consists of multiple rounds, a phone screen or recorded interview is typically the first step. This type of interview involves speaking with an HR representative over the phone or recording answers to interview questions through an online platform. This information is used to determine if the candidate is qualified for a second interview.

### **Rounds**

Interviews can often be conducted in rounds over several weeks. Your interview could consist of 1 or several of the types of interviews listed here. Some organizations may have 3, 4, or 5 rounds of interviews depending on the type of position and organization's hiring process.

### **Aptitude Tests or Presentations**

Some organizations may require you to complete an assignment, test, essay, roleplay, or give a presentation as part of the interview process. These additional requirements can take place at any part of the interview process.

**myth:** *“There’s no way to prepare for an interview.”*

### **truth**

While preparing for an interview can look different for every person, you should always prepare for an upcoming interview. See “6 steps to prepare” on page #6.

# Preparing for an Interview

## 1 Know Yourself

Understanding yourself is the first step to becoming a successful interviewee. This involves identifying your personality, interests, skills, and values and understanding why they make you a good fit for this position. Realize how your education and professional experience support your career objectives and how they provide value to a potential employer. Identify 3-6 examples (stories) to support all the above. (See Telling Your Story activity, pages 8-9)

## 2 Research the Organization

It's important during your preparation to gather key facts about the organization. Study their mission statement, review articles about them, follow them on LinkedIn, and review the company website. Understanding the organization's values, goals, and objectives can also help you clarify whether the organization will be a good fit for you. Use the information you find to ask thoughtful questions throughout the interview and show the employer that you've done your homework.

## 3 Review the Job Description

Before every interview, you should review the job description for the position you are applying for. What skills are required? What are the responsibilities? How can you align your current skills with what the employer is looking for? Having a thorough understanding of the job description allows you to anticipate questions related to the responsibilities of the role. You want the employer to know that you are eager and excited for this position and have a strong understanding of the responsibilities required.

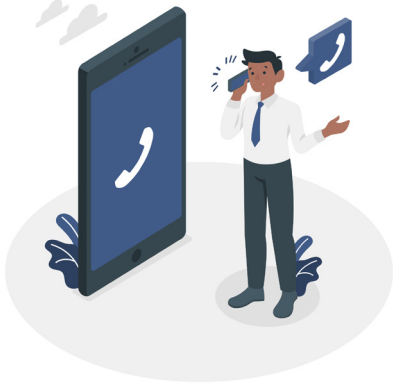
## 4 Identify Questions You Can Ask

While it's often hard to remember while you're in the middle of one, the interview is a two-way street. As much as they are interviewing you, you are also interviewing them to determine whether the organization is a good fit for you. By doing your research and really thinking about what is most important to you in this next position, you can identify meaningful and impactful questions to ask. What questions do you have about the job description? What things do you wish you knew about the job? What do you need in this next position to make it a good fit for you? The interview is a great time to ask those questions!

## 5 Practice Makes Perfect!

It's always important to practice your interview answers! Practicing out loud can help you understand how you sound when responding to questions and identify areas for improvement. Recording yourself, or practicing with a career counselor, friend, or family member, or even in front of a mirror can all be beneficial ways to increase your confidence leading up to an interview.

# pre-interview checklist



## Phone Interviews

- Set up a professional voicemail (make sure that inbox isn't full)
- Find a quiet location without distractions (not while driving)
- Ensure strong reception
- Do not eat or chew while on the phone
- You can use headphones or put phone on speaker
- Smile! Your positive attitude will come through the phone

## Virtual/Recorded Interviews

- Find a quiet location
- Dress as though it was an in-person interview
- Check internet connection, video, and audio capabilities in advance
- Turn off any applications that may make a noise or cause distraction
- Use a neutral background
- Ensure good lighting (not having the window behind you)
- Look into the camera for better “eye contact”



## In Person Interviews



- Consider the culture of the organization when choosing what to wear
- Avoid wearing perfumes or scented lotions
- Arrive early (and give yourself time to get lost)
- Check parking in advance
- Turn off your phone
- Bring a folder or padfolio with extra copies of your resume (with pen and paper for taking notes)



During your interview, you will be asked to share stories, experiences, and skills that help your interviewer get to know you. It's important during this process to be yourself and share the key elements that make you who you are. Most interviews tend to start with a question like, "Tell me about yourself," which can be a great opportunity to start your interview off strong. The activity below can help you become more comfortable identifying and sharing those key elements.

**What do you care deeply about? Think about professional interests that fascinate, excite, or energize you.**

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**What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?**

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**How are you unique? What differentiates you from other applicants?**

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**What is most important to you in your next position?**

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**List 2 of your strengths below:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**List 2 areas for improvement below:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

**List 3-5 accomplishments you are most proud of:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**What are your career goals?**

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# Focusing on Your Stories

At the end of the day, interviews are all about the stories you tell to exemplify your skills, experiences, personality and work ethic. Stories are what allow us to make a deeper connection with our interviewers and help them understand our work style. Focusing on your stories can eliminate the need to pick one “right” story and instead encourage you to view your stories from different vantage points. When sharing a story in an interview, the “S-T-A-R” method can be a helpful tool in structuring your stories. We recommend spending roughly 20% of your story on the Situation and Task, and about 80% on the Action and Result.

## Situation

Set the scene for your story. Describe where you were working, who you were working with, what the project was. to give your listener some background information. It's important to not spend all your time setting the scene and to keep this portion concise.

## Task

Describe the problem you were facing or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand.

## Action

Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you're discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell them what you might have done, tell them what you did along with the reasons and purpose behind those actions.

## Results

What did you accomplish? What were the results? How are you a better employee now because of this experience? How did the event end? What did you learn? Be sure to quantify your results whenever possible.

**situation:** *“While attending school full time at CU Denver, I also worked part-time as a Sales Associate at Target in Denver. Because I had worked there for several years, they promoted me to Shift Lead ahead of the holiday season to help with seasonal traffic.”*



**task:** *“One day while I was at work, a customer got upset because we didn’t have the item she was looking for and she yelled at one of our Associates, taking the Associate by surprise. They yelled back at the customer. As the Shift Lead, it was my responsibility to de-escalate the situation.”*



**action:** *“Whenever a situation escalates to this point, I always try to think about the most immediate need. In this situation, I encouraged my employee to take a break in the back room, while I talked with the customer. I apologized to the customer for the way my Associate had reacted and asked them to explain the situation to me. We were ultimately able to order the item they wanted from another store that she could pick up that day. After I spoke with the customer, I went to the back room and checked in on our Associate. I wanted to make sure they were okay after what had happened. I also had a conversation with them around how we communicate with customers and maintain professionalism in the workplace.”*



**results:** *“As a result of my actions, the customer was satisfied with their purchase and able to obtain the item they wanted for the holidays. My Associate let me know they felt more validated that I had checked on them to make sure they were okay. They told me they had never been in that situation before, and appreciated that I took the time to educate them on appropriate procedures. During this experience, I learned how important it is to hear both sides of the story, remain calm, and proceed one step at a time.”*



One great way to prepare for an interview is to identify 3-4 stories that you can use to answer behavioral interview questions. For each question, list the Situation, Task, Action, and Result. You should keep interview answers to about 3 minutes or less, so it's important to be succinct. Use the space below to write out your stories using the S-T-A-R method to structure your response.

**1. Describe a time when you had a conflict with a supervisor or coworker and how you handled it.**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Results: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Provide an example of a time you had to adjust quickly to a major change over which you had no control.**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Results: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Tell us about a time when your performance didn't live up to your expectations.**

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Results: \_\_\_\_\_

# COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why are you interested in this position?
3. Why do you want to work for this company?
4. Why should we hire you?
5. What are 2 things you do well and 2 things you could improve upon?  
(Could also be asked as what are your strengths and weaknesses)
6. How would your coworkers describe you?
7. What are your short- and long-term professional goals?
8. Tell me about a time that you failed.
9. Describe a situation where you were in conflict with a peer, supervisor, or co-worker.
10. Give an example of a time when you exceeded expectations.
11. Describe a time when you demonstrated initiative and took action on an issue or problem without waiting for direction.
12. Describe a time when you demonstrated an ability to problem solve.
13. What does diversity, equity and inclusion mean to you?
14. How have you demonstrated your commitment to diversity in your personal or professional life?



# Tips and Advice for Interviewing

## Overcoming Nerves

We understand that interviews can be nerve wracking or prompt uneasy feelings. Think about a time when you felt nervous and consider what helped you feel more comfortable. Did you go for a walk? Call a friend? Have a cup of coffee? We all develop coping mechanisms to navigate uncertain circumstances. Lean into those and find what works best for you to best prepare for your interview.

## Below are additional tips and strategies to set yourself up for success:

- When answering interview questions, use examples and quantify your experiences whenever possible.
- Know that it's okay to pause before you respond! Sometimes we are better able to select a story when we take 10-15 seconds to think about our response first.
- Practice clear communication by saying things like, "Let me think about that", or, "I'm going to jot down a couple of notes."
- It's okay to take notes during an interview!
- Be yourself! Interviews often force us to feel like we have to perform. Try to focus on what you want them to know and the elements that are most important to you.
- If you can't think of a specific story or example to share, consider how you would respond in that situation.
- It's okay to ask your interviewers to repeat a question.
- Don't forget that they consider you qualified and have decided they want to get to know you better.
- As much as they are interviewing you, you are also interviewing them to determine if the position is a good fit for you.

# Illegal Interview Questions

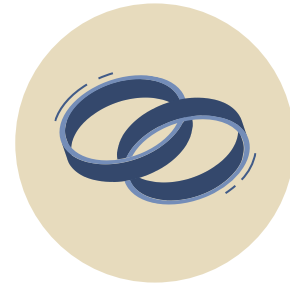
Federal, state, and local laws prohibit questions regarding:



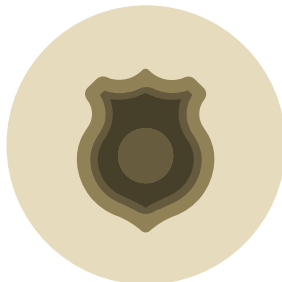
**Race, sex,  
religion, age**



**Citizenship**



**Marital status,  
pregnancy,  
childcare**



**Military status,  
arrest records,  
conviction records**



**Disabilities**

They can ask if you are able to perform essential job functions, but not about your disability status

If asked an illegal question, you can answer minimally, as it applies to the job, or you have the right to refuse/deflect.

***“I don’t think that question relates to the job or my abilities, but I would be happy to answer a different question, if that is okay.”***

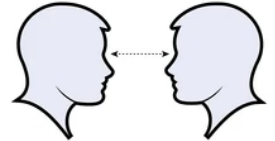


# practicing professionalism

Practicing professionalism means presenting yourself in the best possible light. Elements of professionalism include the way you dress, communicate, carry yourself, and interact with others.

## Make good eye contact with your interviewer.

If you're interviewing with more than one person, typically called a panel interview, begin your response to each question by looking at the person who asked the question, then make eye contact with the other members of the panel as you go through your response.



## Identify appropriate dress.

Part of showcasing your professionalism includes selecting appropriate clothing for the interview. Be sure to research the organization and be sensitive to their culture and environment. Remember, it's always better to be overdressed than under!



## Smile!

While interviews can sometimes be intimidating, it's important to remember that smiling can show your excitement for the position and make your interviewers feel more at ease. A lack of smiling in American culture can sometimes come across as disinterest, and employers want to hire someone who is eager to work at their company.



## Be courteous and respectful.

Remember that every single person you interact with during the interview process may be asked about their experience with you. This includes the office staff, custodian, mail carrier, and anyone else who is part of the organization. Being kind and courteous to everyone you meet during your interview can go a long way to showcasing your character.



# ASKING THE INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

Most interviewers will wrap up their questions by asking what questions you have for them. Don't miss this opportunity! This is your chance to get answers to help you decide whether this job or company is a good fit for you.

## 1 Questions about the job

This could include things like what your day to day will look like, what types of projects you'll be working on, clarifying the scope of work, or anything that was confusing in the job description.

Here are some options to consider:

- a. What does a typical day look like in this position?
- b. What areas are there for collaboration in this role?
- c. What are the most immediate projects I would take on?
- d. What's the performance review process like here? How often would I be formally reviewed?

## 2 Questions about the company or specific initiatives they have

Asking questions in this category can show that you've done your research on the company and are invested in their work. If there is anything you found particularly interesting in your research, this would be a great time to ask questions about that. You can also ask questions to better understand their company environment or structure.

- a. How does this position support the DEI initiatives at your organization?
- b. I saw you recently competed a \$2 billion community center. What has the impact of that project been like?
- c. What are the most immediate projects I would be working on?
- d. What are the biggest challenges I might face in this position?
- e. Who will I work with most closely? What other departments or units will I interact with?

## 3 Questions about what you value in a position or things not listed in the position description

When asking these questions, you really want to consider what is most important to you in this next position. What do you value most in your career? What types of questions could you ask that would help you determine if it's a good fit for you?

- a. How do you train and support new employees in the first 3 months?
- b. What do you think your employees value most about working for your organization?
- c. What does work-life balance mean to your organization and how do you support that?
- d. What are the working hours for this position?
- e. What do the growth opportunities look like in this role?

## 4 Questions about next steps

Before you end the interview, make sure you are clear on what the next steps are. You will need to know what the rest of the process will look like, anticipated deadlines, and if it's okay to follow up. Some questions you can ask include:

- a. What are the next steps after today?
- b. When can I expect to hear from you?
- c. Who will be my contact moving forward?
- d. What is your anticipated start date?

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After asking your questions, make sure you understand what happens next and when you can anticipate hearing back from them. Be sure to write down the names of your interviewers and ask for a business card or email address to follow up. If you haven't heard back by the deadline they gave you, it's appropriate to reach out 1-2 days after that deadline. Then be sure to express your strong interest in the position and in their organization.

### Follow Through

Send a thank you note to the interviewer(s) within 24 hours of the interview. In the note, you should thank them for their time, share something that you took away from your interview, and remind them of your qualifications to meet their needs/solve their problems. **Most thank you notes are sent via e-mail.** However, if a recruiter is interviewing a lot of candidates, emails can get lost in their inbox and risk being deleted before being read. In addition to a thank you email, you can also send a thank you card. This will ensure that you stand out from the competition, as most people do not mail a thank you note.





# congrats!

YOU LEARNED ABOUT PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

At LynxConnect, we're here to support you throughout the employment process!  
Schedule an appointment in [Handshake](#) to talk with a professional.

## need more help?

CONTACT THE CAREER CENTER:

**CU Denver Career Center**

Tivoli Student Union, Suite 439 | 303-315-4000 | [ucdenver.edu/lynxconnect/career-center](https://ucdenver.edu/lynxconnect/career-center)