

**Dickinson College**

**Alumni Career Services**

**Alumni Interviewing Guide**

Dickinson College  
Center for Advising, Internships  
& Lifelong Career Development

PO Box 1773  
Carlisle, PA 17014  
Phone: 717-245-1740  
Fax: 717 245-1618  
[career@dickinson.edu](mailto:career@dickinson.edu)

# Interviewing Guide

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## INTERVIEWING

An interview is granted for a job opening because you have been screened and approved. If you were introduced to the employer through your resume, your skill set and experience have been screened. If the opportunity came out of networking, your fit as well as skills and experience have probably been screened. The interview is an opportunity for you to learn whether the position fits your job preferences as well as for the company to determine whether you fit their qualifications. The process may consist of one interview or a series of interviews. It often starts with a phone screening by a human resources representative or an executive recruiter. Then there are one or more face-to-face meetings, typically at the organization's site. An interview usually includes a description of the job and questions and answers, and should be regarded as a dialog rather than a one-sided discussion. It is important to listen carefully to ascertain the interviewer's idea of the most important qualifications. Give examples that prove you will succeed in the job. In all phases of the interview, speak clearly and enthusiastically.

### **Interview preparation**

1. Research the company, position, and when possible, the interviewer.
2. Review your resume and be prepared to give examples of the skills you included in your summary statement. If you said you have excellent organizational skills, be ready to give examples.
3. Know the route to the interview site, how long it will take to get there and where to park. Assume delays in travel. Do not be late.
4. Dress in the style of the organization and wear clothing that is at least one degree more formal than what someone in the target position would typically wear.
5. Plan to take with you: a portfolio or briefcase, copies of your Word-version resume, copies of your reference sheet, a nice pen and any information you might need to complete an application form.
6. Understand and prepare for the two commonly used interview methods, traditional interviews and behavioral interviews. In both types the questions will relate to the specific job function and some, such as "Why are you interested in our company," will be more general.

## **Traditional interviews**

In a traditional interview, the questions usually have straightforward answers. For example,

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where would you like to be in 5 years?
- How would you describe yourself?

These are usually subjective and should be easy to prepare for. The Quintessential Careers website has an excellent section on interviewing.

For a list of traditional employment interview questions for experienced people, go to [http://www.quintcareers.com/interview\\_questions.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_questions.html).

For a similar list of questions for recent college graduates go to [http://quintcareers.com/interview\\_question\\_database/college\\_student\\_traditional\\_questions.html](http://quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/college_student_traditional_questions.html)

## **Behavioral Interviews**

Behavioral interviews focus on past behavior in situations common in the open position. The employer identifies skills, knowledge, experience and abilities needed to do the job and asks questions to learn if the candidate has these qualities. The premise is that past behavior is a good predictor of future performance. They are often posed as requests rather than questions. Some will be questions that could be asked of a candidate for any position, others will relate directly to the skills required for that job. Here are some examples of behavioral interview questions.

- Tell me about a time when you used your presentation skills to influence a decision.
- Give me an example of a goal you reached and how you achieved it.
- Describe a situation in which you have worked under pressure or met deadlines.

For a list of behavioral-interview questions for experienced job seekers go to [http://www.quintcareers.com/sample\\_behavioral.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/sample_behavioral.html).

For a list for recent college graduates go to [http://www.quintcareers.com/interview\\_question\\_database/college\\_student\\_behavioral\\_questions.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/interview_question_database/college_student_behavioral_questions.html)

The best responses to these types of questions are examples that are recent and relevant as well as specific and detailed. Use the PAR (CAR, SAR) format to prepare and relate answers. This is the same method used to develop accomplishment statements on the resume.

- **P** stands for problem, challenge or situation. What was the situation? What needed to be done?
- **A** stands for action, or the steps used to resolve it. What did you do? Give sufficient detail, and if you were a member of a team, describe your role.
- **R** stands for result. What happened? What was the result or outcome? What did you accomplish or learn?

To prepare for the interview, use this method to develop a list of stories responding to the behavioral requests. The stories can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Choose situations where you solved problems or made significant contributions. There are no correct answers to these questions. The interviewer is interested how you think and how you act.

Here is an example of a PAR (CAR, SAR) story.

- **Situation:** The leasing division was hiring 200 new employees in an effort to quickly and substantially increase sales.
- **Action:** I led a project team of corporate instructional designers, outside vendors and divisional subject matter experts. The team conducted a needs assessment, designed, developed and delivered a new six-week employee training program within an aggressive time frame.
- **Result:** Within six months booked business increased 35%.

## Ask Questions

An interview should be a dialog so candidates should have questions to demonstrate interest and qualifications, as well as to evaluate the company from the their point of view. Questions should focus on the position and be asked throughout the interview. Here are some general questions that could be used for any position.

- What are some of the objectives you would like to see accomplished in the short and long term?
- What are the most important qualities you look for?
- What kind of support does this position receive in terms of budget and staff?

For a list of other general questions a candidate can ask at the interview go to [http://www.quintcareers.com/asking\\_interview\\_questions.html](http://www.quintcareers.com/asking_interview_questions.html).

At the end of the interview you should know the fate of the incumbent, the responsibilities and authority of the position, the skills and knowledge of the person they are looking for, the resources available for the position and the first thing to accomplish if hired.

### **After the interview**

Thank-you notes should be sent to each interviewer within a day. In general an email is the best method, although handwritten or typed correspondence may be sent. The note should thank the person for the interview, restate interest, reinforce the skills, knowledge and experience you have that the organization is looking for and add anything that was left out during the interview. Understand the company's hiring timeline and follow up just after the stated time. For example, if you have been told that you will hear from the company in a week, wait a week and a few days to phone about your status.