

# How to Interview



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## Guides

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# HOW TO INTERVIEW

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## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations, you have an interview! An invitation to one indicates that the employer is impressed with you on paper, therefore wants to meet you in person to further evaluate your qualifications and experience, as well as assess your personality, motivation and communication/interpersonal skills.

Your job is to facilitate this process by conveying a good sense of who you are and what you have to offer. In addition, it is a great opportunity to assess if the job and organization do mesh with your values, interests and skills.

This guide contains information and tips to help you go into an interview feeling polished and confident. If you have additional questions or would like further practice, you can **schedule a mock interview** with one of the experienced Career Advisors at CaPS.

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## WHEN YOU GET THE CALL

Politely request/confirm the following information:

- Time, date and location
- Number of interviewers
- Contact number
- Format 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.

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## PREPARATION

### Know yourself

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

- 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

Although you have hopefully already spent some time researching this employer in order to target your CV and Cover Letter, it is important to brush up on your research again before an interview. Being well prepared and knowledgeable reflects well on your enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism, plus 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 skills and values fit with the stated goals and structure of the organization
- Brainstorm questions you would like to ask in the interview

## Anticipate

- (Re)connect with your references so that they know what positions you are interviewing for and are aware they may be contacted in the near future
- Anticipate the kinds of questions you may be asked based on this employer's 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 history and 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. Don't assume that the interviewer has read your CV!

\*\*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
- Book a mock interview with a Career Advisor at CaPS

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# 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 and excessive jewellery
- “Test drive” your outfit a day or two before to make sure you are comfortable sitting and moving

### **Be prepared and punctual**

- Bring extra copies of your CV, a list of references, and a portfolio if applicable
- Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the start time
- If you 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 cellphone/mobile device!

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

Remember that the interview starts the minute you walk in the door of the organization! Aim for a positive and attentive attitude and be friendly and respectful towards everyone you meet.

- Shake hands confidently and firmly
- 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

### **Skype and telephone interviews**

- Minimize background noise and distracting visuals
- Dress for success even when you can’t be seen: it impacts your confidence and mindset
- Listen carefully and clarify information when needed
- Test run any relevant technology the day before
- Look at the camera rather than at the screen

### **Follow up**

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

- Send a thank you note within 24 hours of your interview. Thank the interviewers for their time, mention anything you found particularly interesting, and be sure to indicate your continued interest in the position. Consider whether a hand-written card or an email is most appropriate for the situation
- Follow up with the interviewers and inquire about the status of your application if you have not heard from them within the agreed time frame

# APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS TO EXPECT

## General information

Broad questions, usually designed to get the conversation started.

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

## 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”?
- What are you willing to do to make a client happy? Where do you draw the line?
- How would you deal with a customer that 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]
- What do you know about [social issue x. example: environmental sustainability]?

## Fit

Employer wants to know: Will you fit in with our team/work culture?

- What is the ideal working relationship between an employee and his/her 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 like least?

- Have you ever had a misunderstanding with one of your co-workers? How was it resolved?
- Tell us about a time you had to sacrifice your personal needs for the larger good of a team
- What would you do if members of your team were not doing their fair share of the work?

### **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?
- What do you believe our strengths are?
- 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 important is this job to you?
- 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 flex 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

# APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS TO ASK

## 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?
- What are the expectations of the supervisor?
- What is a typical day like?
- Why did the previous person in this position leave?

## About the organization

- How does this position contribute to the larger organizational structure?
- What are the department's current projects?
- What are the company's values and how do you incorporate them 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 orientation program for new employees?
- Are there opportunities for professional development and training?
- Are employees encouraged to be active in professional organizations?

## About evaluation and advancement

- How will 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?
- When will you be making your decision to fill this position?

# PROGRAMS & SERVICES



## Ask a Career Advisor

Ask your career questions online and one of our career advisors will get back to you, usually within 48 hours.



## McGill Mentor Program

Explore jobs and industries of interest. Get connected to a McGill alumnus/ae working in your dream field.



## Career Leadership Program

Become a Career Leader and promote CaPS across our campuses while developing your own leadership skills.



## myFuture

Log on for an extensive listing of jobs and internships. Register for CaPS events, browse publications and view employer profiles.



## Job Finding Club

Work intensely for two weeks with other graduating students to learn the best strategies for finding the job you want.



## P.A.C.E.

Join other students in this 10 hour/4 week program which helps you explore personal goals, values, interests and career options.

# ONLINE RESOURCES

CaPS Website - [www.mcgill.ca/caps](http://www.mcgill.ca/caps)

Your main portal to the services offered by CaPS and a wealth of information related to career exploration and job search.

Explore by Major - [www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/explore/major](http://www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/explore/major)

CaPS has compiled targeted career information for your major to give you some ideas of where to go next.

MyWorldAbroad - [myworldabroad.com/mcgill](http://myworldabroad.com/mcgill)

The authoritative guide to international careers. 4,000+ searchable resources, articles and inspiring student stories.

General Job Listings - [www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/job/jobsearch](http://www.mcgill.ca/caps/students/job/jobsearch)

This page contains links to many job listings sites to help you find career and job opportunities.

Vault Career Insider - [careerinsider.vault.com/career-insider-login.aspx?parrefer=7165](http://careerinsider.vault.com/career-insider-login.aspx?parrefer=7165)

Downloadable career guidebooks, insider company surveys, industry profiles, career tips, jobs and internships. Information on companies in consulting, finance, law, marketing, public relations, accounting and business-related industries can be found here.

Going Global - [online.goingglobal.com](http://online.goingglobal.com)

16 million worldwide job and internship listings, employer profiles, and country-specific career information.

Career Cruising - [public.careercruising.com/en/](http://public.careercruising.com/en/)

Comprehensive resource to look up Canadian occupational information, educational paths and university programs.

