Interviewing is the most critical part of your search. No matter what you end up doing or where you go, you will participate in an interview at some point in your life. Internships, medical school, co-ops and full-time jobs all use interviews as a way to get to know you and better understand how your skills and experiences bring value to their organization.

Interviews are a two-sided process. You are evaluating an organization and position while the employer is evaluating you. Your main goals should be to:

- Communicate - both verbally and nonverbally - your professional skills and abilities.
- Exchange information that will enable you and the interviewer to gain a better understanding of the potential “fit” between you and the position.
- Sell yourself into the next phase of the interview process.

We strongly encourage you to attend interviewing skills workshops, in addition to reviewing this information. Our interviewing workshops cover the basics, as well as give you a chance to practice answering interview questions. Go to our Web site, www.careers.wustl.edu, to see when the next workshop is being offered. For personalized help, schedule a mock interview with a Career Advisor by calling us at 314-935-5930.

Interviewing Tips for Success

- Research the organization before you go to the interview.
- Carry a portfolio or professional folder with extra copies of your resume and references.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the interview.
- Confirm directions.
- Turn off any electronic devices including cell phones, pagers and professional digital assistants.
- Offer a firm handshake.
- Make eye contact with the interviewer.
- Develop rapport and be on your best behavior.
- Be gracious with everyone you meet in the interviewing process.
- Share examples of accomplishments.
- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors and actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, team work, initiative, planning and customer service.
- Answer questions completely, using appropriate examples of your experience.
- Focus on what you can bring to the organization and the position.

- Prepare a list of questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview.
- Ask the interviewer for a business card.
- Always follow-up with a thank you letter.

Prepare for an Interview: Research, Research, Research

Just like class, you need to do your homework before an interview. Employers expect you to have solid knowledge of the organization. In fact, it is a critical factor in the overall evaluation of applicants. This knowledge illustrates that you have enthusiasm and interest in the organization and the position.

Start researching by looking at the organization’s Web site; locate the following information: age, history and mission of the organization, services or products, the organization’s culture/climate, competitors within the industry, growth patterns, reputation, number of employees, sales, geographic locations, organizational structure, and target customers or clients.

You should know information about the organization beyond its Web site. To accomplish this, communicate with people who work for or have connections to the organization. You should also read about the organization in newspapers, trade magazines and the business press.

Using national databases, such as LexisNexis, Career Search or Hoovers, is helpful when conducting preliminary research on an organization. For a list of online resources, please refer to the Web Links section of our Web site.

Some organizations hold information sessions on campus. These presentations give you an opportunity to learn about the organization and to meet recruiters on a more informal basis. Log into CAREERlink, on the Career Center Web site, for details.

In addition to researching the company, it is vital that you “research” yourself. Why did you apply for this job? Think back to your previous experiences (internship, work, academics, on-campus activities, and volunteer roles) to determine the skills and abilities you have developed. Think of ways you can describe your accomplishments and skills in relation to the job for which you have applied.
Promoting Yourself
During the interview, it is crucial that you are prepared to promote the key skills and qualities that are attractive to the employer. Think of the interviewing process as a dynamic promotional presentation or conversation rather than a passive question and answer period. Thoroughly evaluate the job description to determine the top three to five skills and qualities needed in a successful candidate.

Seek to fully understand the employer's needs. Often the job description will give you a glimpse into the areas the interviewer will probe with questions. It will also help you gain insight into the type of information you need to share to best promote yourself. Be prepared to highlight examples of how you have demonstrated the requisite skills through previous experiences and therefore can and will render these skills on the job.

Articulate that you are the best candidate for the job by directly relating your skills to the employer's needs. Develop an outline of the most important information you want to share with the interviewer. Be prepared to state confidently:
- Why you are interested in working for the organization.
- Why you are interested in the particular position.
- Your key skills, selling points and accomplishments that meet the employer's needs.
- What makes you unique and separates you from the competition.
- The main reasons the organization will benefit from hiring you.
- An answer to what you think might be the employer's main objection(s) regarding your candidacy.
- Your enthusiasm and “Will Do” attitude!

Success Stories
A simple method you can use to begin to prepare for an interview is to think about or write success stories. These stories will prepare you to effectively answer a variety of questions during an interview, especially behavioral questions. You can develop your own personal success stories by taking time to think about examples of situations when you have successfully demonstrated skills and abilities that are attractive to a potential employer. After you have identified a few examples, begin to ask yourself the questions below and tell the “story” as you would during an interview.
- What was the task?
- What was the purpose of the task?
- What was the result?
- What role did I play in reaching a result/solution?
- What did I learn?
- How did the project affect the company/agency/client/organization?

Dress for Success in an Interview
First impressions are everything. What you wear to an interview can be as important as what you say. If you are applying for a job, plan ahead and buy an interview suit. The cost of a suit may seem expensive, but consider it an investment in your future. Overall, it is always better to be too dressed up than to be too casual for the interview. Here are some guidelines for making a good impression:

What to wear
- Men: wear a two-piece suit with solid, conservative colors (navy, black or gray) and a white, neatly pressed shirt with a white t-shirt underneath. Wear a tie with a simple pattern, stripe or solid color and dark socks and dress shoes.
- Women: choose a conservative colored suit with pants or a knee-length skirt and a blouse. A brightly colored blouse can be worn for contrast, but avoid anything that might be considered loud or too low cut.
- Make sure that dress shoes are a solid color and are polished. Women, it is best to wear closed-toe shoes with a low heel.
- Wear hose or dark socks. Women, wear hose with no runs. Always bring an extra pair in case runs occur on the way to the interview.

Don't forget hygiene
- Make sure you have fresh breath and clean teeth, and that your hair is neatly trimmed and managed.
- Avoid cologne or perfume.

Consider accessories
- Women: Use makeup and jewelry conservatively and cover tattoos. Wear only one set of stud earrings and remove other exposed piercings.
- Men: Remove earrings and other exposed piercings. Avoid jewelry and cover tattoos.

Types of Interview Questions
In general, there are four types of interview questions: behavioral, traditional, technical and case study. In a first interview, the employer will most likely ask traditional and behavioral questions. Technical questions may be asked to evaluate whether a candidate has the specialized skills and knowledge that is required for specific jobs, from computer programming to engineering. Case study questions are most often used by management consulting firms. Below are some sample interview questions. While you never want your answers to sound rehearsed – the more you practice, the more confident you will be.

Traditional
Employers use traditional questions to obtain basic information about the applicant. The questions will focus on you instead of your experiences. The interviewer wants to put you at ease and get to know you better as a person. Your responses should be specific and you should avoid giving generic answers such as, “I am a people person,” or “I have excellent written and oral communication skills.”
Sample Traditional Questions
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Describe two of your strengths and a weakness.
- What did you learn from working at (X) company or organization as an intern?
- How will your experience with (student group/activity) help you in this position?
- What qualifications will make you successful in this field/position?
- How do you work under pressure? Please provide examples.
- What kind of management style do you prefer?
- What do you like to do in your free time? How do you relax?
- I am meeting with many candidates today. Why should I hire you? What makes you the best candidate for this position?
- Where do you see yourself in three to five years? How will this job fit into your plans?

Behavioral
A behavioral question is based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior and performance is to assess past behavior. Interviewers often ask this type of question to determine if you have the necessary skill sets and qualities for the position. Here are a few tips to help you with behavioral questions:
- Determine past experiences that show favorable behaviors or actions that relate to the specific position.
- Be able to describe relevant work, internship, volunteer or student group experience.
- Be as specific as possible and do not generalize or theorize. The interviewer is looking for a description of a specific past experience.
- Indicate your role in the process.

To be successful with answering these questions, consider using the STAR method to show a logical thinking and problem solving process.

Situation: Describe the situation.
Task: Identify the tasks required to address the situation.
Action: Describe the action you took to accomplish the task.
Result: Explain the result and how it resolved the problem.

Sample Behavioral Questions
- Explain a situation where you jumped in and immediately made a contribution.
- Tell me about a mistake you made. How did you solve the problem and bounce back?
- Tell me about a time when you have had multiple projects or tasks. How did you prioritize?
- Describe a situation when you had to establish credibility or a strong professional presence.
- Tell me about a time when you went the “extra mile” to do something because it needed to be done, even though it was not your responsibility.
- Tell me about a time when you came up with a unique solution to a problem within an organization. What was the challenge? How did you stay focused and resolve the issue?
- Describe a time when you recognized an opportunity to sell a classmate or professor on an idea. How did you come up with this idea and sell it? What was the result?
- Tell me about a difficult person with whom you’ve worked. What approach did you use with this person? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you have taken a leadership role in a team situation. How did you handle it? What was your leadership strategy? What was the outcome?

Sample Behavioral Question & Answer
Question: “Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?”

Answer: “Last year, I coordinated a student group event. It was my responsibility to manage a student who was not pulling his weight on a committee. The student and I met to discuss the situation. As we talked through the circumstances, I learned that he was going through a tough semester, personally. Together we decided it was best if he stepped off the committee. I was also able to refer him to support services on campus. The committee worked together to identify another student who could complete the tasks. We pulled the event off without a hitch and raised $10,000 for charity! Through this experience, I learned that being a leader means being compassionate, as well as working toward the achievement of goals.”

Technical Questions
Students in the School of Engineering & Applied Science may encounter some of these types of questions:
- Tell me about a time when you used creativity to solve a problem.
- What kinds of situations have you been in that required project planning?
- How would you decide what to test for given that there isn’t enough time to test everything?
- Describe the most interesting software project you’ve done in school.
- Give an example of a project you initiated.
- In what ways do you make a contribution to your team?
- Describe a situation where you had to learn something quickly.
- How many miles of road are there in the U.S.?
- Implement an algorithm to sort an array.
- Describe the differences between Windows 3.1, Windows 95/98, and Windows NT.
Case Study Questions
Case study questions are most commonly used in consulting interviews, but may be used in other settings such as teaching or social services. The questions will test your analytical ability. Listen carefully to the material presented. In these interviews, it is acceptable to ask if you can take notes and ask questions if you need more information or if something is unclear. The interviewer is looking for a logical thought process as well as a logical conclusion to solve a problem. Each question may take from half an hour to an hour to answer. A book called “Crack the Case” is an excellent study tool; a copy is available for review at The Career Center Library. For help preparing for your case interview, schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor.

Sample Case Study Questions
- What factors would you need to consider to decide whether an insurance company should start selling car insurance over the phone?
- The oldest Opera House in San Francisco is struggling and might have to close its doors. How can we save it?
- If we were looking to add a new type of window cleaner to our line of products, how would you go about developing a business plan?
- How would you go about designing the ideal Web site for our organization?
- A U.K. banking client asks, “Should we acquire a stock brokerage firm on the continent?”

Questions Asked by Applicants
Toward the end of your interview the recruiter will generally ask if you have questions; make sure you are prepared to ask a few questions. The questions you ask demonstrate your knowledge and sincere interest in the organization and position. Your solid questions and the discussion that flows from them will give you valuable insights into the organization, and can help lead you to an offer. Examples include:
- What makes an employee successful in this department?
- What are some of the challenges in this position?
- Why did you join this company?
- How would you describe your office culture?
- How does this position fit into the organization’s structure and this department?
- What are the department’s goals for the future?
- How will I be evaluated in my job?
- How do you encourage your employees to keep current with professional developments in the field?
- Why is this position open?
- Tell me about a typical day on this job.

At the end of the interview, reiterate your interest in the organization and the position. You might ask:
- What is the next step?
- How soon will I hear from you?
- Ask for a business card so you can send the interviewer(s) a thank you letter.

Final Preparation
The single most effective method to prepare for your interview is to practice the interviewing process. Begin by developing a broad list of possible interview questions. Then practice answering the questions until you are satisfied with your responses. Practice will increase your comfort level as well as improve your ability to communicate about yourself and your accomplishments.

When you are ready, ask a friend or family member to help you practice. Ask your mock interviewers for feedback regarding the effectiveness of your responses and your nonverbal communication. You may also schedule an appointment for a mock interview with a Career Advisor by calling us at 314-935-5930.

The Thank You Letter
You should send a thank you letter immediately after the interview. A thank you letter leaves a positive impression about you as a job candidate. It is another opportunity to show your enthusiasm for the position and differentiate yourself from other candidates.

A thank you letter has three parts:
- In the first paragraph, you should express your appreciation and briefly review the purpose of the actual interview.
- The second paragraph should include a statement in which you express your continued interest in the organization and the position. You should include something specific that was discussed in the interview. You can also bring up new information, briefly, if you forgot to include it during the interview.
- The letter should end with a statement that indicates a willingness to add any additional information that may be necessary to support your candidacy and the employer’s interest in you as a prospective employee. The letter should be typed and printed on resume paper.

It is best not to ask questions about compensation. Allow the employer to bring up the issue of salary. You should only discuss specific numbers once you’ve been offered the position. If you are asked for your salary requirements early in the interview process, indicate that it is negotiable. You will want to learn more about the position and employer before you discuss salary. (Refer to the final section of this handout for more information.)
References

References can make or break a deal in the hiring process. Most employers check references. This is usually done in the final stages of the hiring process. Follow these steps to maximize your job search through successful references.

Choose good references.
A reference can be a previous employer, a volunteer or internship supervisor, or an academic or student group advisor. This person should know you well and can speak to your performance. Usually three to five references are sufficient.

Ask for permission.
Before placing his/her name on the list, ask each reference “Would you be able to provide a strong reference for me?” Find out how they would prefer to be contacted.

Prepare your references.
Give your references an updated copy of your resume and let them know about your current job applications. You can even ask them to highlight certain aspects of your work or personality that strengthen your job application.

Do not provide references on your resume.
Wait for an employer to request references. List references on a separate piece of resume quality paper. Copy and paste the top portion of your resume onto your reference page, so that your name and contact information is included. Have copies ready in case an employer asks for them during an interview. References should be listed in the following format:

Name
Title
Company
Street Address
City, State  Zip
Phone Number
E-mail address
Your relationship with the reference.

Thank your references.
Send a thank you note to your references. Make sure you maintain a good relationship with these people. You never know when you’ll need them again.

Understanding the Job Offer and Negotiating What is Important
So, you are getting close to a job offer or maybe you are comparing multiple job opportunities. Congratulations! There are several factors to consider before accepting the position, especially if you are waiting to hear from multiple organizations. Keep in mind that your compensation includes more than just your salary. Benefits such as life insurance, health plans, vacation, retirement programs and holiday plans typically add another 30% to many salaries. Here are some areas you will want to consider:

- Health Insurance: How much will you pay in monthly premiums and/or deductibles? What type of plan or coverage choices will you receive? Can you set up a Medical Spending Account?
- Retirement Plan: Will you have a defined benefit retirement or a 401K contribution program? How much will your employer contribute to your retirement? When does your plan vest?
- Time away from work: How many days of vacation do you get per year? Are there sick day allowances? Will you have personal days and a flexible schedule?
- Performance Reviews: How often will you receive performance feedback and consideration for salary increases? What are typical opportunities for career growth? Are employees encouraged to find opportunities for growth in other parts of the organization? Are current employees routinely considered for new positions?
- Professional Development: Does the organization provide in-house training and development opportunities to attend outside conferences? Is tuition reimbursement provided for higher education (i.e., a master’s degree)?
Once you understand the job offer and the features of the job, working environment and culture of the company or organization, determine what is important to you. Make a list of the "musts" versus "wants" in your career before you decide to accept the position or negotiate.

Remember that negotiation is about more than just base pay. It is about managing the entire job acceptance process and weighing what you have determined is most important to you.

Not everything is negotiable. Many of the benefits employers provide are designed to be available to all employees. Some of the benefits are influenced by government approval; some benefits offered, like 401K retirement programs and Medical Spending Accounts, must comply with tax laws. If you need help evaluating a job offer, or have any questions about the negotiation process, schedule an appointment to meet with a Career Advisor.

If you do decide to negotiate, here are some tips to consider:

- Show your enthusiasm about the job, organization and you future supervisor. Know that you really want to work there and they want you.
- Know the organization as well as possible, so you can tell when the employer is being firm or when there is room for flexibility. Consider contacting WUSTL alums or other friends who work for the organization.
- Research the industry. Be sure to know the range of salaries within the industry and geographic area you are targeting. Use the Internet to assist you in learning about salary information. The Web sites salary.com and datamasters.com are great resources for salary information and cost of living comparisons for nearly 400 U.S. cities and metro areas. Also gather information from people who work in the field, including those who work in similar positions at other organizations.
- The best way to receive additional compensation is by increasing your job responsibilities. Organizations pay their employees fairly, based on the responsibilities to which they are held accountable. This is referred to as internal compensation equity. By demonstrating that you can perform additional responsibilities you are demonstrating how you will provide additional value. This allows you to work within their compensation system, without attacking their pay practices.
- Keep in mind that as a recent graduate with limited experience, you do not have a lot of leverage to negotiate. Make a reasonable and thoughtful requests. Avoid being confrontational.
- Remember that salary is not the only form of compensation you might be able to negotiate. Other forms include timing of your first review, sign-on bonus, stock options, bonus plans based on personal and company performance, vacation time, parking privileges and education reimbursements.
- If you are offered a salary that is near the lower end of your desired range for the position, remain quiet during the conversation. These moments of nonverbal communication show your dissatisfaction with the offer. The person making the offer may feel compelled by your nonverbal cues to improve the offer. This may also open a dialogue in which you can campaign for additional responsibilities or non-salary benefits.

Get It In Writing
It is your responsibility to ask the employer for the job offer in writing so you can review and understand the terms of employment. It is common to request time to consider an offer. The length of time depends on the industry and a number of other factors. Talk with the employer about how much time you’ll need to review the offer. Make sure to communicate your response to the job offer before this agreed upon deadline.