



## College of Agricultural and Life Sciences

### Interviewing Strategies Guide

#### **PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS**

When preparing for an interview, it is important to consider what interviewers are looking for during the process and what you are looking for in the position.

#### **What do employers look for during interviews?**

Typically, interviewers want to know these things:

- Can you do the job? (Competencies: knowledge, skills, and personal attributes)
- Will you do the job? (Motivation)
- Will you fit in with the organization?
- Are you sincerely interested in this job?

#### **Interviewers/employers also look for these competencies and qualities in potential candidates:**

Communication	Strong Work Ethic
Critical Thinking	Interpersonal/Teamwork Skills
Motivation/Initiation	Flexibility/Adaptability
Leadership	

#### **What should you look for during interviews?**

It is important that you can demonstrate a clear understanding of yourself. This means that you should be able to communicate your competencies, values, interests, and goals, and be able to relate them back to the employer/organization. Here are some important questions to consider:

- How does the organization's mission match with my interests?
- Does the nature of the job sound interesting?
- How does the organization run? Do you like this style of operation?
- How do the employees interact with each other? What is their overall dynamic?
- Does this job match my career interests?
- Are you excited about the possibility of obtaining this position?

The above questions are important considerations when preparing for your interview because they can reveal how well you may fit in with an organization. It is important that you can articulate to an employer that you can fit in/are a good match to their organization. What questions can you ask the interview (that are not on the website) that can help you answer these?

#### **Research the Organization**

You will want to research the organization that you're applying to. How much should you know before the interview? As much as possible.



Be aware of any industry or organization news that could come up in the interview. Know their competitors, their history, and mission. Check the organization's website, newsletters, and social media to be sure you're

knowledgeable of current events. Consider talking to your network to get valuable insight and tips. Researching the organization can also be helpful when thinking of questions to ask the employer.

### **Types of Interview Questions**

**Opener/Self-descriptive:** Opening questions are generally similar, and because of this they are easy to be prepared for. Your answer should address your experiences, qualifications, and goals.

#### **Examples**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Introduce yourself
- How would you describe yourself?

**Behavioral:** Behavioral questions are designed to see how you've handled challenges in the past and what you've learned from it. Though a past example is preferable, you may provide a theoretical case and the way you'd handle it to show your critical thinking competency.

#### **Examples**

- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team.
- When was a time when you had to work under pressure?
- Describe the most innovative or creative thing you have done in your work experience

**Negative:** Negative questions address one of your weaknesses or failures in order to determine if you have some level of self-awareness. You should also demonstrate that you are able to put into action a process for improvement. So what are you doing to strengthen your weakness or prevent failure?

#### **Examples**

- What is your greatest weakness?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with a co-worker. How did you handle it?

**Situational:** Situational questions are designed to see how you would make decisions on the job. You may be given a situation or case and asked to describe how you would handle it. It is advisable to give examples if possible.

#### **Examples**

- What would do if you found out a co-worker wasn't contributing to a project?
- If you were to put together a team, what qualities would you look for in teammates?
- What would you do if you faced resistance or opposition when introducing a new idea or policy to a team or work group?



**Discipline/Department Specific:** Questions that are specific towards the organization or position you are applying is a great chance for you to demonstrate your knowledge of the organization or in your field. It is also a chance to better clarify why you are a good fit for the position.

**Examples**

- Why have you chosen to pursue this degree at our university?
- What are some challenges faced by professionals in this field?
- How are you staying up to date with news in this area?
- What characteristics/habits do you believe are important for success in this program?

**Closing:** Closing questions are always asked in some form. You should summarize your competencies, directly addressing why you are a good candidate.

**Examples**

- Why should we hire you?
- Why do you believe that you are a good candidate for this position?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add

**DURING THE INTERVIEW**

**TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS**

- When entering an interview room, shake hands, make eye contact, and introduce yourself to every individual in the room.
- Always greet interviewers with a firm handshake.
- Use titles such as Ms., Mr., Dr., etc. unless prompted to do otherwise.
- Speak clearly and deliberately at a conversational speed.
- Be sure to demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence, and genuineness in your tone.
- Maintain eye contact with interviewers.
- Sit up straight in your chair. Don't lean too far forward or too far back.
- Be confident, friendly, and sincere.
- Turn off your cell phone completely.
- Arrive approximately 10+ minutes early.
- Bring a few copies of your resume on resume paper to provide to interviewers.
- Dress polished and professional for your field.
- When exiting the room, shake hands, make eye contact, and thank each of your interviewers.



## RESPONDING TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When answering interview questions, your answers should typically be 30-90 seconds. Think of your responses to those questions as opportunities to share who you are and what you could bring to the organization, as it relates to the job. When responding to questions:

- Touch upon aspects of your skill-set, education, and experience that are relevant to the position you are applying for. In addition, offer examples.
- Understand that everything on your resume is fair game. Be able to talk in-depth about those experiences.
- If a weakness or an area of development comes up during the interview, explain how you are improving and developing that skill set.
- When outlining your career goals be sure they align with the position and organization you are applying to.
- Ask your own questions about the organization, position, training, and working environment- doing so shows genuine interest.
- Request that your interviewer clarify their question if necessary or inquire whether you've fully answered their question.

## S.T.A.R METHOD

The S.T.A.R. Method is a technique for answering questions that helps you structure your answers in a way that gives the interviewer all of the relevant information about a specific qualification for a job. Consider using the STAR method for situational questions, behavioral questions, or questions that prompt you to recall a problem.

- **Situation-** Tell the interviewer about a specific challenge or situation. Give your audience context and enough detail to understand the story.
- **Task-** What were you trying to achieve? What was the assignment? Tell the interviewer what you were trying to get accomplish in this situation
- **Action-** What did you do? If there was a problem or challenge, how did you handle it? Tell your interviewer what you did and why.
- **Results/Reflection-** What was the outcome of this situation? Did you meet your objective? Don't forget to tell your interviewer what you learned from this experience, and how have you applied that knowledge since.

## ASKING THE INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

Asking the interviewer questions is an opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and enthusiasm in the organization. Interviewers appreciate and expect questions. Also, think about what you wish you knew in past positions. Here are some tips regarding questions for the interviewer:

- Ask open ended and intentional questions to determine if a job is a good fit for you.
- Ask questions that help you align your values with the organization's values.



- Review the website to generate ideas, but do not ask questions explicitly answered on website.
- Avoid asking about salary. It is the interviewer's job to initiate conversations regarding salary. It may not even be discussed during the first interview.
- Ask about supervision style and how they measure success.
- As a final question, ask for the interviewer's contact information, such as a business card, if you do not already have it. This will allow you to send a thank you email after your interview.

## **PRACTICE**

**The best way to feel more comfortable during an interview is through intentional practice. Fortunately, the Career Connections Center can help! Here are some resources to help you practice your interviewing skills:**

- Stop by the center for an Express Drop-In Mock Interview
- Log into Gator CareerLink and use the Virtual Mock Interview Module
- Make a Career Planning Appointment to practice with a Career Connections Center staff member

## **OTHER TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

### **PHONE INTERVIEWS**

Phone interviews are short interviews designed to serve as a first round interview before bringing the candidate on-site. To help you maintain your focus during a phone interview:

- If possible, perform the interview in a quiet room to minimize distractions.
- Turn off call-waiting to avoid any interruptions.
- Minimize background noise, e.g., avoid typing, playing music in the background, or taking the call on speakerphone.
- Answer the phone by stating your name. "Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Have your resume and a short list of accomplishments nearby to remind you of things to mention during the interview.
- Smile. Even though your interviewers cannot see it, smiling brings energy and excitement to your voice.
- Be concise. You will not have non-verbal cues from the interviewer about when to stop speaking.
- Ask for clarification on questions if you need it.

### **VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS**

Virtual interviews help companies save resources while still seeing your personality and mannerisms. Here are some tips to make your virtual interview a success:

- Be sure that your username or handle is professional.
- Make sure your profile picture is appropriate.
- Ensure that you are in a quiet, well-lit location with a solid internet connection.
- Close other applications on your computer, especially if they might make noise during the call.
- If you are using a laptop, be sure that you are plugged into an outlet.



- Address any technology problems immediately. It's better to stop the interview than to give an inaccurate answer, because you didn't understand the question.
- Dress like you would for an in-person interview.
- Be sure your background is not cluttered or distracting to the interviewers.
- Avoid wearing patterns like stripes, hounds tooth or gingham. They have an odd effect on the camera that can be distracting.
- Look directly into the camera, not the screen. It gives the impression of making eye contact.
- Be sure that the camera frames your face, shoulders, and hands. Body language and nonverbal cues are important, so you want to be sure that the upper half of your body is visible.
- Smile and try to keep a pleasant facial expression for the duration.
- Use your notes sparingly. The interviewer can see your eyes, so it is important that you are not obviously reading from your notes.

### **FOLLOWING UP AFTER AN INTERVIEW**

**Follow-up with a thank you email or card within 24 hours of an interview.** After an interview, you may not hear right away as to whether or not you've been hired. You can email either the HR Representative or Hiring Manager a week after an interview to see if they have any additional questions or need further information. After that, only initiate contact via email or phone once a week. The hiring process can be lengthy, so be patient.

**If you are given an employment offer,** ask the employer how much time you have to respond to the offer if you have not already been told. Be sure to respond within that time frame. If you need an extension in response time, politely ask the employer. Be sure to give a good reason as to why you need an extension. The employer is not obligated to give you an extension so be sure to be professional and polite when making any requests with the employer.

### **WHAT IF THE INTERVIEW DOES NOT GO WELL?**

Reflect on the experience and learn from it. Examine what went well, then identify and reflect on what you would have changed and note it for the future. The interview experience may have felt worse for you than how it actually happened, so try to not be so hard on yourself but also learn to accept mistakes and move forward into determination and positive actions. If you did not receive the position, let them know you are sorry to not get the offer, but enjoyed meeting them and would love to be considered for other positions in the future and remind them of your key strengths. Sometimes it simply comes down to best fit for the position, and you will find the right one.