



THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

BEST PRACTICES AND TECHNIQUES

Career Development Center

jccc.edu/career-development

Here to Help You

AT ANY STEP IN YOUR CAREER PATH

- Discover yourself and your Strengths
- Explore majors and careers
- Write a strong résumé
- Apply for an internship
- Impress during an interview

Career Development Center

913-469-3870 | Student Center, 2nd floor

Hours:

Mon.–Wed. 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Thu. 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Fri. 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

○ COMMUNICATE YOUR DISTINCTION

Job interviews might seem daunting, but they are essential to ensuring you are a good fit for the position. For employers, the interview answers such questions as:

- ▣ Do you have the right skills?
- ▣ Are you competent?
- ▣ Are you genuinely interested in the job?
- ▣ Will you fit with the team and company culture?

Equally important, interviews help determine if the opportunity is a good fit for you.

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PREPWORK

The most important part of the interview comes before you meet with anyone. Here's what you need to know about preparing like a pro.

→ RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

Research Yourself

- ▣ What skills do you have and how are they relevant to this position?
- ▣ How does your experience align with this job?
- ▣ Do you have any specialized training?
- ▣ What are your personal values, attributes and strengths?
- ▣ What are your interests and goals?

Research the Company and Industry

- ▣ What is the company's mission statement and values?
- ▣ How did it get started? What does it do?
- ▣ How does its website work? Is it updated regularly? What kind of vibe does it give off?
- ▣ Who are the company's main competitors?
- ▣ What do you know about the industry as a whole?
- ▣ What is the company's culture as described on their web page? What kind of reviews do you see on such sites as Glassdoor and LinkedIn? What image do they present on social media?
- ▣ What is its social media presence?
- ▣ What kind of news or trends can you find about the company?
- ▣ Who is on the company's leadership team? Do you have any connections with current employees?

! PRO TIP

Before you start applying, update your voicemail so it sounds professional for future employers. Use both your first and last name and enunciate. Clean up your social media accounts and online presence. Google yourself!

! PRO TIP

Research the company using employment websites such as CareerBuilder, Dice, Glassdoor, Indeed and LinkedIn. You can also find average salaries for your region.

Research the Position

- ▣ What kinds of day-to-day responsibilities will this position require?
- ▣ Do you need to know specific software, hold a certain certificate or degree, or have a minimum amount of experience, and do you have them?
- ▣ What qualities do you need to succeed in this position, and do you have them?
- ▣ Who would be your direct supervisor or manager? Who manages that supervisor or manager?
- ▣ Does this position require you to travel or work outside a typical workweek? What else might it require?

! PRO TIP

Highlight key words, phrases and skills in the job description that align with your experiences.

→ WHO, WHAT, WHEN AND WHERE

You know **why** you're having an interview. Now make sure you know these essential details:

- ▣ **Who will be interviewing you?** Ask for the names and job titles of each interviewer.
- ▣ **What type of interview will you be doing?** Initial screening interviews, group interviews, and any other types require different preparation. See page 6 for information on how to prepare for the different types of interviews.
- ▣ **When will the interview occur?** Confirm time and date and find out how long the interview will last. Factor in travel and walk time. Plan to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early.
- ▣ **Where will the interview take place?** Ask for specific directions to the building and the office/room if you're at all unsure how to get there. Determine where you will park. Find out if there are parking fees or meters.

! PRO TIP

Do a trial run. Drive to the interview site a day or so in advance of your interview. If possible, leave at the time your interview will be so you know how long the trip will take, what traffic might be like and how the parking lot will look.

KNOW THE DIFFERENT INTERVIEW SCENARIOS

Here's what you can expect from five common interview types: the telephone, video, group/panel, meal and second/final interview.

Telephone

Telephone interviews are often the first type of interview you'll have and may be conducted by a recruiter. The employer uses this to assess your potential before requesting a face-to-face interview.

Take this opportunity to show that you can communicate in a professional, friendly manner. A recorded interview is also sometimes used in these initial interviews. You receive prerecorded questions and record your answers, then send the file back to the recruiter.

Tips:

- ✓ Find a quiet area to conduct the interview.
- ✓ Keep paper and pencil by the phone, and take notes on items you want to remember or ask.
- ✓ Prepare notes on your skills, experiences and qualifications.
- ✓ Sound positive with a high level of self-confidence.
- ✓ Listen attentively.

Video

Video interviews are becoming more common for first and second interviews. Much like the telephone interview, a recruiter will assess your potential before moving on to a more in-depth interview.

Take this opportunity to use eye contact and open body language to show your professionalism and interest.

Tips:

- ✓ Follow the same tips for the phone interview.
- ✓ Double-check your audio, video and internet connection in advance.
- ✓ Choose a well-lit room so the interviewer can see you clearly.
- ✓ Dress professionally and frame yourself from the chest up.
- ✓ If you aren't familiar with video chats, practice with a friend so you know where to look.
- ✓ Be mindful of items displayed in the background, such as posters or knickknacks. Keep it simple and professional.

Adapted from "Phone Interviews for Savvy Candidates" by Hugh Anderson, "How to Survive a Team Interview" by Marlene Caroselli, and "Smart Strategies for Interviewing at Meals" by Taunee Besson. All pieces originally posted at careerjournal.com.

Group/Panel

Group/Panel interviews can be conducted by hiring experts or members of a team who provide a variety of perspectives about your potential.

Take this opportunity to show off your interpersonal skills.

Tips:

- ✓ Prepare to discuss your strengths and qualifications relevant to the job requirements.
- ✓ Introduce yourself and shake hands with each member of the panel.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact with each member of the panel.
- ✓ Find a way to connect with each interviewer and show your ability to be a strong team member.

Meal

Meal interviews give potential employers a chance to get to know you personally before offering you a job and evaluate how you might interact with clients or customers in a social setting.

Showcase your professionalism and good manners.

Tips:

- ✓ Use your host as a guide when ordering a meal. A good strategy is to choose items in the mid-range price.
- ✓ Avoid exotic or hard-to-eat menu choices, alcoholic beverages and smoking.
- ✓ Do not make a show of your dietary preferences (vegetarian, weight loss and so on).
- ✓ Keep the conversation focused on the job and prepare relevant questions ahead of time.

Second/Final

Second and/or final interviews are used to further assess specific job-related qualities and evaluate if you are the best candidate for the position.

Take this opportunity to decide if you really want to work for this company.

Tips:

- ✓ Research the employer in detail. If possible, talk with past or current employees.
- ✓ Ask strong questions to help you decide if the company/job opportunity matches your values and aligns with your own goals.

! PRO TIP

*Learn how to represent yourself confidently in social settings with **JCCC's First Impressions workshops**, held in the spring and fall semesters. A certified etiquette and protocol trainer will teach you how to make small talk and conduct business over meals.*

→ GETTING-TO-KNOW-YOU QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

- ▣ Include information about your education, experience and professional goals.
- ▣ Link your goals to the position and company.
- ▣ Do not talk about your personal life unless it is applicable to the position.

Example: "I have an Associate of Applied Science in Health Information Systems. I'm currently an account executive at Smith, where I handle our top performing client. Before that, I worked at an agency where I managed three major national healthcare brands. While I really enjoyed the work that I did, I'd love the chance to dig in much deeper with one specific healthcare company, which is why I'm so excited about this opportunity with Metro Health Center. I know that Metro Health Center is known for its impressive support of innovation and research, and this is the kind of health center I would like to invest myself in."

Adapted from "A Simple Formula for Answering 'Tell Me About Yourself'" by Kathryn Minshew
themuse.com/advice/a-simple-formula-for-answering-tell-me-about-yourself

Why should I hire you?

- ▣ Reiterate your qualifications and strengths as they relate to the position.
- ▣ State your interest in the company and the position.

Example: "Based on what you've said and from the research I've done, your company is looking for an administrative assistant who is both strong in interpersonal skills and in tech skills. I believe my experience aligns well with that and makes me a great fit. I am an effective communicator who is skilled in giving oral presentations, speaking on the phone, and communicating via email. I am also fluent in relevant software programs, including content management systems and spreadsheet suites."

Adapted from "Why Should We Hire You" by Alison Doyle
thebalancecareers.com/why-should-we-hire-you-best-answers-2061261

Additional Common Interview Questions

- ▣ Why did you seek a position with this company?
- ▣ Do you have any samples of your work?
- ▣ You're overqualified. Why do you want this position?
- ▣ Why have you changed jobs so often?
- ▣ Have you ever been fired or laid off?
- ▣ What are your long-range and short-range goals?
- ▣ Why are you leaving your current job?

! PRO TIP

Practice your interview skills using these possible questions with a friend or in front of a mirror.

→ BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Behavioral interviewing is based on the idea that past behavior predicts future behavior. Employers look for behavioral patterns and common responses to problems and work situations.

Before you interview, think of five to 10 past scenarios related to the topics on page 11 so you are ready to provide answers to similar questions.

Organize your response to behavioral-based questions in four steps:

- ▣ **Situation**—Briefly describe the situation.
- ▣ **Task**—What goal were you trying to accomplish?
- ▣ **Action**—Emphasize steps you took to solve the problem.
- ▣ **Result**—Describe the positive result or outcome as well as what you learned or how you grew from the experience.

Be prepared to share honestly and in a way that shows you either handled the situation effectively or learned from your mistakes. If you don’t have a personal example that addresses what they ask, you can say, “I have not experienced that particular situation, but...” and share an example that is similar.

Practice!

How will you answer?

Here are common questions that assess your:

Leadership skills

- Give an example of a time you used facts and reason to persuade another person. Be specific.
- Are you a leader? Give me an example.

Adaptability

- Sometimes it is necessary to work in rapidly changing circumstances. When have you found yourself in this position? Tell me exactly how you handled the situation.
- With examples, convince me you can adapt to a variety of people, situations and environments.
- Provide an example of a time when you worked effectively under pressure.
- Describe the steps you've taken to stay familiar with your job responsibilities.

Problem-solving skills

- Describe a time you had to deal with a colleague who disagreed with you.
- Identify the analytical tools with which you feel competent, then give an example showing your ability to use those tools to identify solutions to a problem.
- Describe a time when you thought on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give an example of when you used good judgment and logic to solve a problem.
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

Organization and decision-making skills

- Give an example of any time management skill you have learned and applied at work. What resulted from the use of this skill?
- Describe a work problem that you faced and your method of tackling it.
- Give an example of when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Give an example of an important goal you set and how you reached it.

Ability to be a team player

- Provide an example of a time when you organized a team effort at work. Highlight the aspects of the situation which best demonstrate your skill.
- When you're working as part of a team, what role do you tend to play?
- Give an example of how you've supported team members in the past.

➔ STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS QUESTIONS

Many people get nervous when it comes to answering **strength and weakness questions**. Honestly assess what you consider your biggest strength and areas where you can improve before the interview so you are prepared when these questions come up.

Some examples of how to answer a strength question:

- ▣ I have a strong work ethic and take pride in producing high-quality work.
- ▣ I consistently meet deadlines and even complete them earlier than requested.
- ▣ I enjoy it when I complete everything on my to-do list.
- ▣ I want to provide excellent work and have a strong desire to achieve my goals.

Some examples of how to answer a weakness question:

- ▣ I sometimes overextend myself because I want to be considered a valuable team member.
- ▣ I sometimes will take on too much work because I don't always recognize when I'm overloaded.
- ▣ I am not comfortable with conflict and sometimes will back down from unreasonable behavior just to keep the peace.
- ▣ I sometimes ignore other parts of my life because I am focused on my job.

Don't simply supply the strength or weakness. Share an example of your strength in action or how you overcame a weakness. This will require preparation on your part to honestly assess your strengths and weaknesses in advance.

You'll also want to provide examples that apply to the position you're interviewing for or show you can relate to the realities of the workplace.

Practice!

How will you answer?

What do you consider to be your greatest strength?

- ▣ State the strength and provide specific evidence of you demonstrating that strength.

Example: "I enjoy interacting with people and helping them solve problems, both on the phone and also via email or electronic chatting/messaging. I've been an online customer service representative for over five years, and I really enjoy interacting with people across the globe. My employer has a high standard for customer satisfaction, and I've been trained to defuse unhappy clients so they can be helped and, in fact, satisfied with our services. We are measured both on how satisfied people are after they've spoken with us, and also if they purchase additional products and services as a result of our interactions. I'm proud to say that I am usually among the leaders in our group and have received at least one service rep of the month award every year."

Adapted from "How to Answer This Interview Question: What's Your Greatest Strength? (75 Possible Strengths Plus Sample Answers!)" by Susan P. Joyce job-hunt.org/job_interviews/answering-strength-question.shtml

What do you consider to be your greatest weakness?

- ▣ Explain the strategies you use to manage this weakness or keep it from negatively impacting your performance.

Example: "I used to struggle with public speaking. When I started college, I was terrified of doing it and I didn't do a very good job. To improve, I first took the small step of promising myself I would speak up in small groups in class. Then I worked up to taking a public speaking class, which made a big difference. Now, even though I still get nervous, I feel it doesn't hold me back. In fact, recently I gave a speech at a conference to more than 100 people and received good feedback at the end."

Adapted from "The Best Way to Answer What's Your Biggest Weakness?" by The Muse Editor themuse.com/advice/the-best-way-to-answer-whats-your-biggest-weakness

Tips to Ease Anxiety

- ▣ **Practice relaxation techniques.** Try deep breathing and refocus your mind.
- ▣ **Have realistic expectations.** Instead of thinking, "What if this is my dream job and I blow it?" rephrase it to, "I'm really interested in this position. I will do the best I can. If it doesn't work out, I'll learn from any mistakes and move on."
- ▣ **Know your worth.** You have valuable skills and can succeed at the position.

PRO TIP

Sign up for a mock interview at the Career Development Center, or choose the Résumé & Interview Services option at jccc.edu/career-development.

→ YOUR TURN: WHAT TO ASK POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS

Just as the interviewer is seeing if you are a good fit for the position, you also want to determine if this position is the best fit for you.

Ask strong questions:

- ▣ What do you most enjoy about working here?
- ▣ What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next three months?
- ▣ What are some challenges that the person filling this position will face?
- ▣ What particular initiatives is your department focusing on this year?
- ▣ Can you tell me more about the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- ▣ What can you tell me about the culture, values, and how people work together?
- ▣ How will my performance be evaluated?

! SHOW YOU'RE A PRO

- ✓ **Be prepared.** Bring copies of your résumé, a good pen, any items requested by the employer, your portfolio, a list of references and questions to ask the interviewer.
- ✓ **Check in with reception.** Let reception know you've arrived. Be there five to 10 minutes before your interview.
- ✓ **Be freshly showered.** Ensure your fingernails are clean and go easy on the cologne.
- ✓ **Dress appropriately for the job.** Ask what the dress code is if you're unsure. In general, more conservative is a safe choice.
- ✓ **Silence your cell phone!**
- ✓ **Be confident and courteous.** Make eye contact, extend your hand for a handshake. Nod when appropriate.
- ✓ **Speak naturally.** Use your natural tone, pace and volume.
- ✓ **Say thank you.**
- ✗ **DON'T** cross your arms, gossip, fidget, chew anything or check your cell phone at any point.

→ OFF LIMITS: HOW TO HANDLE AN ILLEGAL QUESTION

Laws forbid employers from discriminating against any person on the basis of sex, age, race, national origin, disability, genetic information, pregnancy or religion.

If you are asked an illegal question, examine the intent behind the question. It is up to you to decide if the question was asked with ill-intent or if it was an honest mistake. Answer the legal version of the illegal questions the employer asked or restate the question using the legal terminology and ask if that is the information the employer wants to know.

Examples of Illegal Questions and the Legal Equivalent

ILLEGAL	LEGAL
NATIONAL ORIGIN	
Are you a U.S. citizen?	Are you authorized to work in the United States?
ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE	
Where were you/your parents born? What is your native tongue?	What languages do you read/speak/write fluently?
AGE	
How old are you? When did you graduate? What's your birth date?	Are you over the age of 18?
MARITAL STATUS, DEPENDENTS	
What's your marital status? With whom do you live? How many kids do you have? What are your child care arrangements?	Would you be willing to relocate? Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? Would you be able and willing to work overtime?
RELIGION, POLITICAL BELIEFS OR AFFILIATIONS	
What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?	List any professional or trade groups or other organizations that you currently belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job.
PERSONAL APPEARANCE	
How tall are you? How much do you weigh?	Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
DISABILITIES	
Do you have any disabilities? Complete the following medical history. Have you had any past illnesses or operations? What was the date and outcome of your last physical exam?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of this job? Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?
CRIMINAL RECORD	
Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been convicted of____? (the crime should be related to the performance on the job)
AFFILIATIONS	
If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged?	In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

THAT'S A WRAP: WHAT TO DO ONCE THE INTERVIEW ENDS

Your job doesn't end when the interview is over. As you prepare to exit:

- ▣ Show interest in the position and company by summarizing why you want the job.
- ▣ Ask about next steps in the process.
- ▣ Obtain business cards from each interviewer.
- ▣ Thank the interviewers for the opportunity.

After the Interview:

- ▣ Write down relevant information you will want to remember and repeat at your next interview.
- ▣ Evaluate your performance—what went well, where can you improve.
- ▣ Send a thank-you note to each interviewer within 24 hours of the interview.
- ▣ If you haven't heard from them, follow up with a phone call one week after the interview to ask about the position status and let them know you are still interested.
- ▣ Be patient. What seems like a long time to you is much shorter to them.

→ CRAFTING A PROFESSIONAL THANK-YOU NOTE

Thank-you notes show your professionalism and interest in the job. It also keeps your name in front of the hiring team and can make you stand out among a large field of candidates. Send a handwritten note or email to the interviewer(s) within 24 hours after the interview.

Tips:

- ▣ Make it short and conversational.
- ▣ Personalize it by using the interviewer's name.
- ▣ Include any important information that wasn't covered in the interview.
- ▣ Follow this format:
 - Note the date of the interview and thank them for the opportunity.
 - Mention something memorable about the interview.
 - Summarize your strong qualities in terms of the job requirements.
 - Emphasize your interest in the position and the organization.
- ▣ Sign your first and last name. Include your phone number and email address.

Thank-you Note: Envelope and Card Example

Janet Smith
12345 Elm St.
Overland Park, KS 66210

Fiona Knightrider
Director of Marketing Communications
Filbert and Knightrider Agency
27189 W. Bob Jones Parkway
Anywhere, Kansas 66510

Dear Ms. Knightrider:

Thank you for meeting with me on Wednesday, June 12, to discuss the Marketing Assistant position. I enjoyed learning more about your organization and the projects being accomplished at Filbert and Knightrider.

As you will recall from our interview, I have experience working as an intern in a team environment where I was instrumental in the development of a successful marketing plan. I enjoy the challenges of this career field and my marketing degree program prepared me to analyze consumer trends and develop responsive strategies.

I am excited about the opportunity to work for Filbert and Knightrider and look forward to hearing from you again.

Sincerely,
Janet Smith
913-555-1234; jsmith@provider.com

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE OFFER COMES—AND IF IT DOESN'T

Job offers in most cases will come by phone. Program the company's phone number into your contacts or be familiar with the phone number so you recognize it. Check your voicemail and email regularly.

When the offer comes, thank the caller and clarify the timeline for accepting the offer. Ask any other questions you may have.

Factors to consider before accepting the position:

- ▣ Salary and benefits
- ▣ Job/industry stability (including turnover and layoffs)
- ▣ Physical work environment
- ▣ Fit with co-workers
- ▣ Work hours
- ▣ Opportunity for advancement
- ▣ Ability to use skills and be challenged
- ▣ Training and development

A company will offer what they believe to be fair based on your experience, education and skills. If you feel their offer is inconsistent from what you've researched, you can ask if there is any room to negotiate. Don't be too aggressive; that could lead the company to rescind the offer. Don't discuss your personal financial situation.

If you feel you have enough information to make an informed decision, accept or decline the offer. If they don't mention it first, request a written document that outlines the details of the offer, including benefits.

If you prefer to think about it and discuss with family members, ask for time to consider and agree upon a time to call back. Be sure to get a phone number and the best time to reach them.

Negotiating Part-time Job Offers

Part-time job offers are often informal, and you have little to no room for salary or hourly rate negotiations. Do research local salary and hourly rates if the question arises. You may be able to negotiate other options, such as flexible time off, reimbursement for professional development and tuition.

If you decide the job isn't a good fit:

- ▣ Inform the employer as quickly as you can.
- ▣ Decline the offer both verbally and in writing.
- ▣ Thank them for their time and highlight any positive aspects of the hiring process, the organization, or the overall experience of applying for the position.

PRO TIP

Answer your cell phone professionally at all times during your job search using your first and last name.

PRO TIP

Reach out to your professional references to let them know you have been hired and thank them for their part in the process.

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE OFFER COMES—AND IF IT DOESN'T

If multiple companies show interest:

- ▣ Weigh all factors. Create a pros and cons list and analyze it according to what is most important to you.
- ▣ Don't automatically accept the highest offer. You might be tempted to accept the higher paying position, but many other factors will impact your career satisfaction.
- ▣ Ask for time to decide on an offer. If you've been offered one position but are waiting to hear about another job you'd prefer, it's okay to ask for a few days or even a week to think over the offer.
- ▣ Be tactful when declining an offer. Be sure to indicate any aspects about the organization that you found positive.

If a company chooses another candidate:

- ▣ It's okay to feel disappointed. Give yourself time to grieve and then move on.
- ▣ Spend time analyzing the process and what you could do differently in the future.
- ▣ Review your résumé and reflect on the interview.
- ▣ Consider reapplying. A one-time rejection is not always permanent.
- ▣ Don't burn bridges even if the experience was negative. Send a thank-you note for the opportunity to meet with the interviewers.

→ UNDERSTANDING TOTAL COMPENSATION

Sometimes it is not what one makes but what one takes. The benefits of working for a certain company and in a certain position can often outweigh the actual earnings.

Benefits you will want to consider for a full-time position:

- ▣ **Insurance:** How much are the premiums for medical and life insurance? Are there disability options? Does the company offer prescription, dental or vision insurance? Are there options for flexible spending or health savings accounts?
- ▣ **Paid time off:** How much vacation, sick/disability leave can you accrue, and when does that benefit start? Does the company offer maternity, paternity or family leave?
- ▣ **Retirement plans:** What kinds of retirement options does it offer? Does the company match any contribution? How long before you are vested?
- ▣ **Bonuses/annual evaluations:** Are bonuses or raises offered? Is the amount determined by the company's yearly success or your performance?
- ▣ **Relocation expenses:** If there is any chance you may need to relocate, will the company reimburse any of the expenses?
- ▣ **Tuition reimbursement:** Does the company support your educational goals and career growth? If not tuition, does it cover professional development costs?




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