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# INTERVIEWS



Source: [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/10 common college interview questions and how answer them](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/10-common-college-interview-questions-and-how-answer-them)



Durham College Career Development  
[hired.durhamcollege.ca](https://hired.durhamcollege.ca)

# **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

## **Research the company/organization and position**

### **Find out all that you can about the company/organization**

- Visit their website and LinkedIn page (if available).
- Learn about their locations, products and services, the management team, recent news announcements, and their vision, mission and values.

### **Review the posting**

- Review the key qualifications and be ready to discuss how your skills meet the needs of the employer.

### **Know where the interview is to take place**

- For an **in-person interview** ensure that you are aware of the location and the travel time, and account for any possible travel delays (e.g. weather, accidents, construction, rush hour). For a **virtual interview**, be sure the technology being used for the interview is installed and working before your meeting. Test the internet connectivity, microphone and camera to ensure you will be able to proceed without a delay.

### **Ask about the interview structure**

- How many people will you be meeting with? How long is the interview? Is there a presentation or a technical, communication or aptitude test?

### **Research salary information**

If not included on the job posting, you may be asked about salary. Use sites such as the [Job Bank](http://www.jobbank.gc.ca) (www.jobbank.gc.ca) to determine an appropriate salary range for similar positions in your region.

### **Scan through your social media**

- Be prepared to explain anything you or your connections have posted. If you don't want employers to see it, make it private.

## **Be ready to discuss how you will benefit the employer**

### **Be prepared to discuss all the points on your resumé**

- Consider a couple of examples that show how you have gained or used each skill that you have included.

### **Review the Course Specific Learning Outcomes section of your course outlines**

- Think about your skills and the industry specific terms you can use to describe those skills to an employer.

### **Be ready to demonstrate your accomplishments**

- Rehearse relevant stories about school, work, and volunteer experiences.

# YOUR INTERVIEW

## And The Industry-Specific Skills You'll Be Tested On

Below, we've collected the expertise  
you'll need to show off when you're speaking  
to a future employer



REVIEW THE JOB POSTING  
FOR KEY QUALIFICATIONS AND  
BE READY TO DISCUSS HOW  
YOUR SKILLS MEET THE NEEDS  
OF THE EMPLOYER



RESEARCH THE COMPANY'S  
WEBSITE, LEARN ABOUT  
COMPANY LOCATION,  
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES,  
THE TEAM, AND THE COMPANY'S  
VISION, MISSION AND VALUES



RESEARCH RECENT PRESS  
COVERAGE AND COMPANY  
ANNOUNCEMENTS



CHECK OUT THE  
COMPANY'S SOCIAL MEDIA  
FOR CULTURE CLUES

Adapted: Infographic courtesy of: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/common-interview-questions-by-industry>

## **INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

### **Have a notepad and pen ready**

- Just like any other meeting, you may want to take notes.

### **Resumé and cover letter**

- For an in-person interview print additional copies of your resumé and cover letter in case one of your interviewers requests an extra copy.
- For a virtual interview have it easily accessible in case you have to share it with the interviewer(s).

### **Prepare your list of references**

- Prepare your list of references . For each reference, include a name, title, organization, division or department, telephone number, and email address, as well as a few words to briefly explain the relationship (See page [14](#) for more information).
- Ask former work supervisors, field placement supervisors or faculty as references. Request their permission and supply them with a copy of your resumé and the job posting or provide them with a job description to ensure they know what position you have applied to.
- Print a copy, for an in-person interview, in case it's requested by the interviewer.

### **Make a list of meaningful questions**

- Come prepared with a list of questions that you would like to have answered by the employer. See page [11](#) and [12](#) for tips on how to handle this part of the interview.

### **Be positive and confident and look your best**

- A clean and neat appearance is critical to the interview process. Try to get a good night's sleep so that you feel rested for the interview.

### **Shower and take great care in your personal hygiene**

- Avoid perfume and cologne as some companies/organizations have scent free workplace environments.

### **Dress appropriately for the position**

- Business attire is best, but for some positions business casual clothing may be appropriate. Be conscious of how visible tattoos and/or piercings may appear to a potential employer.

### **Be punctual**

- Do not be late, arrive to the interview 10 to 15 minutes early but don't arrive too early either as your interviewer(s) might not be ready to meet you.
- For a virtual interview, make sure you are ready to log on 10 minutes prior to your interview time.

### **Treat the receptionist with due respect**

- They may be asked about the initial impression you made.

**Test your technology**

- Employers use various online video/web conferencing software (MS Teams, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts) for virtual interviews. Once the platform has been determined by the employer familiarize yourself with the platform.
- The tools required for this kind of meeting typically include a computer with a built-in or external video camera and microphone, a reliable internet connection, and headphones if desired.
- Test your equipment before the call to ensure it is working properly to avoid potential technical glitches.

**Adjust your background, camera and lighting**

- It is important to have a neutral or professional virtual background that is organized and not distracting to the interviewer.

## **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

**Make a great first impression**

- Greet the interviewer(s) with a smile and make direct eye contact. For an in-person interview, wait to be seated, and if you have several interviewers ensure you make eye contact with all interviewers.
- For a virtual interview, you make eye contact by looking into the camera, smile and be aware of your tone of voice.
- It is common to feel nervous in interviews, so be prepared and do the best you can.

**Listen carefully, ask for clarification, take notes if needed**

- If you are not sure what the interviewer is asking, politely ask for clarification.
- If a question seems to have multiple components, you may answer the first part and ask to have the second part repeated.
- If you feel your answer was rambling, ask the interviewer if you have answered the question adequately. If not, have the question restated.

**Take time to organize your thoughts**

- It is okay to pause a moment to think about an answer. The extra time will translate into a better answer, and will demonstrate to the employer that you have the confidence to think things through.

**Be ready to market yourself, your skills and your personality**

- Some questions may seem unusual. Try to think like the employer to better gauge what they are trying to find out. Remember to focus on your skills and how they relate to the job.
- Demonstrate your accomplishments by telling well thought out stories from your school, work, sport and volunteer experiences (see [page 9](#) for more information). Book a mock interview with a Career Development coach to practice answering common questions.

**Be aware of your body language**

- For both in-person and virtual interviews, make direct eye contact with each interviewer at some point during the interview.
- Maintain good posture, smile, and try not to fidget.
- Speak clearly and loudly enough so that everyone in the room, and online (if virtual) can easily hear your answers.

## **INTERVIEW FORMATS**

### **VIRTUAL INTERVIEW**

Virtual interviews can be conducted in two formats — live interview and pre-recorded interview.

**Live**

- Virtual interaction with interviewer via video/web conferencing software (MS Teams, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts)
- Questions asked by interviewer or panel of interviewers
- Answers to be provided in real time

**Pre-Recorded (Asynchronous)**

- No interaction with interviewer
- Pre-set questions are sent to candidate
- Responses to questions are recorded by candidate and sent to hiring manager/recruiter

### **PANEL INTERVIEW (IN PERSON/VIRTUAL)**

- Panel interviews involve two or more interviewers who take turns asking questions.
- More than one interviewer is a good thing, as a panel tends to be more objective in providing more than one opinion on the hiring decision.
- Ensure that you make eye contact with each panel member whether virtually or in person, starting with the person who asked the question and looking at each panel member while answering the question.

### **TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**

- Follow the same tips for a telephone interview as an in-person interview and:
  - Conduct your telephone interview in a quiet place
  - Keep at hand your resumé and your list of questions to ask
  - Have a pen and paper available to note any questions you may want to follow up on

## GROUP INTERVIEW

- Group interviews are common for retail, hospitality, law enforcement, sales and other service positions where you deal directly with the public. In these cases, many candidates are interviewed at the same time by one or more interviewers.
- In a group interview:
  - Interact professionally and positively with all other candidates
  - Be prepared to think quickly to formulate your answers
  - You may be required to work in a group to complete some kind of task; this is done to assess your problem solving, teamwork, and/or leadership skills

## EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING TO ANSWER 4 KEY QUESTIONS

### 1. Why are you here?

Examples of interview questions that may be asked include:

- Why are you interested in working for this company/organization what do you know about this company/organization?
- Why are you leaving your current position?

### 2. Can you do the job?

Examples of interview questions that may be asked include:

- If you were the candidate selected, what three tasks would you seek to accomplish first?
- Based on your knowledge of our company/organization, what challenges do you see impacting us in the future?

### 3. Can you work well with our team?

Examples of interview questions that may be asked include:

- Tell me about a time when you had a conflict and how you resolved the situation.
- What kinds of roles have you played on various teams? What role do you prefer?

### 4. Why should we hire you?

Examples of interview questions that may be asked include:

- Why do you want to work in the \_\_\_\_\_ field?
- What skills/experiences do you have that separate you from others with similar training?

## TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are four main types of interview questions that you may be asked during an interview:

- **Open ended questions** are used to determine how well you think on your feet and how quickly you can focus on the topic at hand. Stay focused on your skills and how they will benefit the employer.

- **Behavioural questions** are used to gather examples of your past behaviour to predict your future behaviour as their employee. Use the job posting to try to determine what skills the employer will ask about.
- **Situational questions** are potential situations used by employers to see how you would handle real-world problems.
- **Stress questions** are asked when the interviewer tries to see how well you react under pressure with questions that could be related or unrelated to the job posting qualifications.

## **OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS**

### **SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND TIPS:**

**1. Tell me about yourself.**

- Focus on your professional achievements, not personal ones, and summarize your education, why you chose this field, your work experience, and give some insight to your personality.

**2. What do you know about our organization?**

- Do your research; this is where you can demonstrate what you know.
- Tie your skills and experience to the organization, show your value.

**3. What is your biggest strength/weakness?**

- The employer wants you to demonstrate self-awareness.
- Your biggest strength should be something related to the job. This is an opportunity to sell yourself.
- Your biggest weakness should be something that you have worked to improve and/or something that is not critical to success on the job.

**4. What courses did you like best/least? Why?**

- The employer could be looking to discover your areas of strength, and how you handled negative situations. Talk about how and what you learned from the situation.

**5. What did you learn from your field placement/part-time/summer experiences?**

- The employer wants you to relate your practical experience to the position.
- Be positive and discuss how your practical experience enhances the concepts you learned in the classroom.



## BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

The STAR/SPAR strategy is a useful tool to prepare for and effectively answer behavioural questions:

Situation	Task/Problem	Action	Result
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Describe the background of a job or project so that the interviewer(s) can understand the situation.</li><li>Ensure you are <b>specific</b>, not general, in your answer.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What was the task you had to complete, or the problem you had to deal with?</li><li>Be specific and provide details on how the problem began.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Describe the action you took to deal with the problem.</li><li>Describe your role in handling and/or resolving the problem.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Adding in the result is one of the most important pieces.</li><li>How did the situation end? If the outcome was negative, let the employer know how you would handle it differently in the future.</li><li>What did you learn?</li></ul>
60% of your response time		25% of your response time	15% of your response time

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about a time you disagreed with your boss. How did you handle it?
2. Give an example of the most creative project that you have worked on. How did it turn out?
3. Tell me about a time when you had competing priorities and how did you manage them?
4. Describe a time when you lacked a certain skill to accomplish a job. What did you do about it?
5. Give me an example of when there was a problem at work that was caused by a lack of communication. What steps did you take to resolve it?
6. Tell me about a situation when your technical skills were needed to solve a problem.
7. Give an example of a time when you made a mistake at work. How did you handle it?

### TIPS:

- Use the job posting to try to determine what skills the employer will ask you about.
- Make a list of the stories that you would like to tell that demonstrate those skills. You may find that one story can illustrate a number of different skills.
- When you are asked a behavioural question, take a moment to figure out what story best fits the question and use it in your answer.

## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS

Similar to a behavioural question, the interviewer provides a potential situation and asks you to describe how you **would** respond. Occasionally, you may be asked to role play the scenario with the interviewer. Think like the employer, and try to figure out what he or she is attempting to discover about your skills or judgment.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. How would you resolve a conflict with an upset customer?
2. You feel a fellow co-worker is not “pulling their weight” (e.g. they are not doing their share of the work). How would you handle this?
3. You are working in a very busy office. The phones are ringing constantly, and there is a long line-up of customers waiting for your help. How would you handle this situation?

### TIPS:

- Use common sense and talk about how you **would** handle the problem.
- Employers are looking to explore your logical problem-solving skills, and whether you refer to company/organization policies and procedures to help deal with the situation.

## STRESS QUESTIONS

### SAMPLE TECHNIQUES AND QUESTIONS:

1. Staring at you and saying nothing for the first few minutes of the interview.
2. When you respond to a question, one interviewer agrees with you, the other will disagree or look disappointed with every word you say. This strategy is often used to see how candidates handle pressure or provide answers in pressure filled challenging situations.
3. Several interruptions such as cell phone notifications or staff members entering or leaving.
4. What would you say if I told you your interview isn't going very well right now?
5. If you could be a fruit, what fruit would you be and why?
6. You have 2 minutes to impress me. Go.

### TIPS:

- Do not get angry or upset as the interviewer is intentionally trying to stress you out. Stay calm while thinking of your answer.

## ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

Canada's Human Rights Code precludes interviewers from directly asking questions about:

- |  |                                      |                               |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| • Age  | • Ancestry, colour, race             | • Citizenship                 | • Ethnic origin                                  |
| • Place of origin                            |                                      | • Disability                  | • Family status                                  |
| • Marital status                             | • Creed                              | • Record of criminal offences | • Receipt of public assistance (in housing only) |
| • Sex, including pregnancy and breastfeeding | • Gender identity, gender expression |                               |  |
|  | • Sexual orientation                 |                               |  |

There are some exemptions. Speak with a Career Coach for more information.

### TIPS:

- Redirect back to the skills you have that they would be most interested in hearing about, or inquire about relevance to the job.
- Think about the motivation behind the question, and reassure them that you have the skills to do what they need you to do.
- You can highlight the illegal nature of the question, keeping in mind that you may take yourself out of the running for the job.
- You can answer the question, if you're comfortable doing so.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

It is helpful to remember that an interview is an opportunity to assess whether the company/organization is a good fit for you — where you can apply what you know, and continue to learn and grow.

### TIPS:

- Pay attention to the interviewer(s) and ask yourself if you would like to work for them.
- Does the company/organization culture seem appealing to you?
- Can you do the job and will it provide meaningful challenges for you?

Most interviews end with the opportunity to ask questions. You should always seize this opportunity and ask questions that should focus on the job itself, the company/organization, management and feedback, and next steps in the hiring process. It is not appropriate to discuss salary at this point unless the interviewer brings it up first.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS:

1. What would a typical day be like?
2. How would you define success for someone in this role after three months/six months?
3. What are the immediate priorities for someone coming into this role?

4. Can you tell me about the team I will be working with?
5. Is there a training manual or any resource material that I could read before starting?
6. What are the common characteristics of your most successful employees?
7. What industry trends do you anticipate affecting this position in the next year?
8. What additional courses or training do employees in this role tend to benefit from taking?

**TIPS:**

- Avoid asking questions you can answer by consulting the company/organization website or the job posting.
- Research industry trends and company/organization projects so you can ask about their impact on your role.
- Prepare up to 3 or 4 questions to ask the interviewers.

## **CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW**

- Express interest in the position by showing enthusiasm.
- Thank each interviewer and ask for business cards or their email to send thank you emails.
- Provide your list of references if requested.
- Find out the next steps in the process, and when they expect to make their final decision.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

- Make notes for yourself highlighting what you think went well and what could be improved.
- Write a thank you email and send it within 12 hours of your interview. Sending your thank you by email helps the interviewer(s) receive it before the hiring decision is made.

## **INTERVIEW THANK YOU EMAIL**

A thank you email is a brief, thoughtful message sent after you have been interviewed. In addition to being a professional courtesy, the thank you email serves to make a final contact with the potential employer at the critical moment in the process when a hiring decision is being made.

Because so few job candidates remember to send thank you emails, those who do tend to stand out favourably among the competition.

1. **Timing is critical** - write a thank you email immediately after the interview and send it within 12 hours. However, don't follow up too quickly — wait until you're on a laptop or computer at home or work to properly write this email (i.e. not on your phone).
2. **Tone is equally important** - regardless of how anxious you may be for the job, focus on summarizing your strengths for the position in a professional manner.
3. **Try to have something new to say** - mention an additional benefit for the employer if you were to be hired or include a relevant accomplishment that you may have forgotten to mention. Keep it brief.

## INTERVIEW THANK YOU EMAIL TEMPLATE

*For email subject: Job position and posting #*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (Add name of the interviewer):

In this paragraph, thank the interviewer and express your appreciation for the opportunity to meet with them to discuss the position. Refer to your positive impressions of the company/organization.

In this paragraph, offer some new information, perhaps a point that you didn't mention in the interview that would make you even more valuable to the team OR remind the employer of the key skills and/or accomplishments that make you the ideal candidate for the position. Repeat the job title you are applying for and show continued interest in it.

In the last paragraph, let the employer know that you look forward to hearing from them. Make it clear that you are willing to come in and discuss the job further.

Sincerely,

Your name

## INTERVIEW THANK YOU EMAIL SAMPLE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (Add name of the interviewer):

Thank you for meeting with me today about the Graphic Designer position. I found the discussion both informative and interesting, and am enthusiastic about the job opportunity and joining your team.

Now that I have learned in greater detail the specific tasks of your graphic designers, I am convinced that my technical and creative skills would make an impactful contribution to your graphic design team. My training in design and layout ensures that I could immediately be a productive employee.

You will find that I am an energetic and hard-working member of any team effort. I am eager to join the graphics department at your Toronto office, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Kelly Stevens

## REFERENCES

Your references page should be ready to submit at an interview unless otherwise requested. Use the same heading as you did with your resumé and cover letter. Try to have at least three references and list them in order of importance with your best reference first. Include the relationship if the reference's job title does not clearly indicate their relationship to you.

Use "professional" references instead of friends and family. Managers (current and former), field placement/volunteer supervisors, faculty or athletic coaches would be suitable; but be sure to ask for their permission. Provide each with an updated copy of your resumé and the job posting, and let them know that they may expect a reference call and from whom.

## REFERENCES

### KELLY STEVENS

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#### Required information:

- Contact name
- Their job title
- Company/Organization name
- Phone number
- Email address

The mailing address for your reference is optional to include.

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**For assistance in preparing for interviews, book an appointment  
with Career Development:**

Book an appointment online at **Hired** (<http://hired.durhamcollege.ca>)

Virtual appointments available via MS Teams

**Oshawa campus:** Student Services building, SSB 212

**Whitby campus:** Room 103B (Beside Enrolment Services)



Hired Portal

[hired.durhamcollege.ca](http://hired.durhamcollege.ca)

- Search full-time, part-time, contract, summer, & volunteer job postings
- Book one-to-one coaching appointments
- View upcoming recruiting events
- Explore valuable Career Resources for your program
- Employer Information Sessions

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