



Career Guidance for Transfer and Degree Completion Students

Interviews

You've worked hard on your resume and cover letter, applied to jobs you're excited about, and now you've received the call you've been waiting for: an invitation to come in for an interview. This is your opportunity. Based on your resume, they believe you have the right skills and training. Now you need to demonstrate in the interview that you are the right fit for the position and the company. This guide will help you prepare for success in the interview and increase your chances of receiving a job offer.

The most important interview advice? Keep these three words in mind:

Focus on your **Skills** (especially those mentioned in the job description)

Back them up with **Evidence** (examples of how you gained and used those skills)

And talk about **Results** (positive change, awards, good performance reviews, feedback from

For additional Career advice, to have your resume critiqued, or to conduct a mock interview, contact:
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INTERVIEW TIPS

TOP TIPS FOR ACING THE INTERVIEW

- Always be polite and cheerful to everyone you meet, including the receptionist.
- Enter and leave the interview with a firm handshake.
- Make eye contact throughout the interview. If it is a panel interview, engage all members of the panel.
- Smile. Show you are going to be a friendly member of their team. Smile and nod your head to emphasize points and to finish answers.
- Figure out a strategy for calming your nerves. Take a deep breath, a sip of water, whatever works for you. And remember, it is normal to be nervous. Don't let that hold you back from delivering great responses.
- Sit up straight and try not to fidget. Good posture shows interest and professionalism.
- Speak up, but never interrupt. Be enthusiastic, without being pushy.
- Laugh and be relaxed. They want to hire someone with a good personality, so feel free to laugh if appropriate.
- Thank them for their time and for meeting with you.
- **BE YOURSELF.** Employers are interested in hiring a good fit for their team, and they are using the interview to determine that fit. Show them who you are and express your enthusiasm for their company.

TIPS FOR TRANSFER AND DEGREE COMPLETION STUDENTS

- Tell your story—explain how the job fits with your skills and future plans. A company wants to know what your goals are and if you will be a good long-term employee.
- If you lack experience in your new field, focus on the new skills you have learned as a student. As well, highlight the transferable skills you have developed as part of your work history, regardless of industry. Many employers will value reliability, teamwork skills, and a good work ethic just as much as they will value related skills.
- Focus on the positive as you explain your change. Don't dwell on the past and don't talk too much about it—focus on the future.
- Be aware of culture changes: your new field may have very different expectations than your previous work environments.
- Demonstrate your flexibility and ability to adapt to change.
- Talk about your plan for building your new skills and/or talk about how you quickly pick up new skills. No one has all the right skills, and everyone needs training—it's okay to recognize that.
- Be prepared to explain why you have made a change and develop a narrative that works. Tell the story honestly, but not with every detail and always avoid negativity. If it works, you could even include this as part of the **“tell me about yourself”** introductory question. For example:

I am a graduate of the Human Services degree program at Rowan University. In the past, I owned and operated my own early childhood education facility where I was responsible for all aspects of the business. After successfully running the business for a number of years, I decided to go back to school to obtain my degree, because I wanted to become someone who can truly advocate for children and their rights and needs. As a student, I have completed field placements at the Camden County Department of Child Services and the State Department of Children and Families. I believe that my compassionate approach, my proven ability to connect with children, and my up-to-date training and licenses will be a strong asset to your team.
- Know your value and believe in yourself. If you want them to pick you as the strongest candidate, you need to believe that you are the best candidate.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

- Know the company's products and/or services.
- Look through their entire website (and those of their parent organizations if applicable).
- Look into what associations they belong to or if they have recently been in the news.
- Learn about the person (people) interviewing you, including their title(s) and how to pronounce their name(s).
- Read everything you can find about the position and the field. Talk to people who do similar jobs at other companies.
- Review your skills and accomplishments.
- You **MUST** practice before an interview. Think about the types of questions they will ask you and practice your answers with family and friends.
- Think about the information you **most** want them to know about you and make a plan to present that information throughout the interview.
- Book a mock interview with a Career Advisor/Counselor.
- Try **Big Interview**, an interactive practice tool available to Rowan student. Students can register at: <https://rowan.biginterview.com/>

DRESS AND ACT THE PART

- The standard approach is to dress one level more formal than you will when you get the job (for example, if a company is business casual, you should dress business formal).
- When applying for a corporate job, think conservative and dress in traditional colors.
- If applying for a non-corporate position, you may express your personality more through your clothing. Check out what the employees wear, and base your decisions on your observations.
- Carry a nice portfolio or brief case in which to carry your references, copies of your resume (bring 5-6) and a notepad.
- Ensure your clothes are neat, clean and pressed. Polish your shoes. Be well groomed including hair and nails. (First impressions from your appearance are important.)
- Do not overuse make-up, perfume or jewelry, as they can be distracting.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview. Know the route and where you will park, so there are no last minute panics. You should always be at least 15 minutes early.

SKILLS EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR

- Effective oral and written communication skills. Listens well and demonstrates respect for the ideas of colleagues and managers.
- An ability to think critically, identify problems, and ask good questions.
- Demonstrates problem solving skills, offering solutions and implementing changes.
- Demonstrates an ability to make decisions or take initiative (does things without constantly being told).
- Demonstrates leadership skills, including helping others and delegating responsibilities as necessary.
- Takes advantage of opportunities to contribute ideas and information.
- Gets along well with others and demonstrates a positive working relationship with colleagues.
- Is a go-to person in the office, always ready to help out, provide advice and utilize their particular expertise.

When preparing for an interview, think of examples of past activities and accomplishments that illustrate each of these skills and be prepared to speak about those experiences using the STAR technique (see next page).

DURING THE INTERVIEW

FIELD QUESTIONS WITH EASE

- Sell yourself as a problem solver. Situational questions are designed to see how you work and if you are continuously learning. Talk about your skills, not just your experience.
- Remember that you cannot predict all questions. Do not panic if they ask one you were not prepared for. If you have been reviewing your skills, you will be able to answer with confidence. Also, remember that there are multiple right answers. They want to see your ability to think on your feet.
- Use the STAR approach (see below).
- Have questions of your own (see attached list for suggestions).
- End the interview thanking them for their time and expressing your continued interest in the position. Some great closing lines may be: “I am very interested in the position. What are the next steps to take?” or “Thank you very much for your time. Here is my reference list. I look forward to hearing from you about next steps in the hiring process.” or “I am looking forward to hearing from you. May I ask when you will be making a decision about the position?”

THE STAR APPROACH

Many employers use questions about how you have behaved in the past, as a way to determine how you may work in the future. These are called behavioral interview questions, and they typically start with “tell me about a time...” or “give me an example of a time...” The key with these questions is to tell a specific story from your related experience history that will demonstrate to employers how you problem solve and what types of skills you use well in the workplace.

The STAR technique helps you to frame your story in the best possible way while keeping the response concise and on-track. Keep this acronym in mind as you deliver your interview responses.

Situation

Describe the situation in a concise and informative manner. The problem or situation could be from an education, employment, sport or volunteer situation. Provide brief context, but don't spend too much time on this part of the response.

Task

Explain your role. Were you working on your own? Were you a supervisor? Working as a member of a team? What did you need to do in order to resolve the problem?

Actions

What was the action you undertook? What **skills** did you use to resolve the situation? Did you use any skills you had learned during your training? Things you learned from school? This is the most important part of your response, so spend some time here. This is the part where you get to sell your problem solving skills.

Result

What was the result? Was everyone happy? Did it result in any changes? What was the feedback from supervisors and colleagues on how you handled the situation? What did you learn from the situation? Would you do anything differently if faced with a similar situation again? What was the learning outcome?

FINAL STEPS

QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

How to respond
when they ask:
*“Do you have any
questions for us?”*

Do not underestimate this part of the interview. This is your chance to demonstrate to the employer that you truly are interested, and are already thinking about yourself as a member of their team. As well, this is your opportunity to determine if the job and company are going to be a good match for you.

Always prepare more questions that you think you'll need. They may answer some of them in the course of your conversation. Typically they will allow time for approximately three questions—prepare at least 5 or 6 to ensure that you have back-up questions.

This is a good list of sample questions, but your questions will be strongest if they are based on your research on the company and the specific job description for the position. When brainstorming your questions, ask yourself these two questions: What do I need to know in order to decide if this is the right job for me? AND What would I need to know in order to hit the ground running?

- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- In your opinion, what is the best part about working for this company?
- How will my performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- What are the company's values?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- Are there opportunities to take seminars, classes, and professional development to learn more and grow within the role and the company?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- What changes would you like to see implemented in this role by the successful applicant?
- What are the most important skills to have in order to be successful at this company and in this role?
- Why is this role available?
- What career path is available for someone in this role?
- What type of person is not successful in your company?

Never ask questions about vacation days, benefits, or pay. They can wait for the negotiation phase.

FOLLOW UP

- Keep track of every company you interview with, including the recruiter's name and address, your notes, and correspondence.
- Send a **thank you note** by email within 24 hours (to everyone on the interview panel).
- Make a follow up phone call approximately one week after your interview, or around the time they said they would be making their decision. Do not be pushy, but remind them of your genuine interest in the position.
- If you do not get the position, ask for feedback as to why and how you could improve for next time.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself. (First question in the vast majority of interviews.)
- How has your employment and educational experience prepared you for a career in _____?
- What will it take to attain your goals, and what steps have you taken toward attaining them?
- How would you describe yourself in terms of your ability to work as a member of a team?
- Have you ever had difficulty with a supervisor or colleague? How did you resolve the conflict?
- Tell me about a major problem you recently handled. Were you successful in resolving it?
- Would you say that you can easily deal with high-pressure situations?
- What quality or attribute do you feel will most contribute to your career success?
- What personal weakness has caused you the greatest difficulty in school or on the job?
- Describe the relationship you had with your previous or current supervisor? Tell me about the best boss you have had; what made him/her effective and good to work for?
- Tell me what you know about our company. Why did you decide to seek a position in this company?
- Would it be a problem for you to relocate? To what extent would you be willing to travel for the job?
- How do you solve a problem?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Tell me about a time when you showed initiative.
- Describe a time that you disagreed with a policy and what you did about it.
- Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about your biggest professional failure and what you learned from it.
- Sometimes it's easy to get in "over your head." Describe a situation where you had to request help on a project.
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you tell or talk to about it? Did the manager take any steps to correct your colleague?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.
- Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle that situation? How did that make you feel?
- Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project. Specifically, what steps did you take to prepare for and finish the project? What would you do differently?
- Describe some projects or ideas that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- **Unusual Questions:** You may be asked something non-traditional. Don't panic! They want to see your sense of humor and how you think on your feet. As well, they may be looking more for that fit piece. Remember that there is no right answer, and that they are likely just trying to see your problem solving skills in action, or to learn a bit more about you.