

# The Stony Brook University Career Center's Guide to Interviewing Like a Champ

You've gotten yourself an interview! Congratulations! You're well on your way to securing an awesome job. An interview is simply an employer's way of getting to know the candidates for a job, so they may select the best fit for their organization's needs. Think of an interview as a final examination. It's your chance to show a potential employer that you've got what it takes to be a part of their organization. Like any examination, the interview is best taken when you're well prepared. While there's no way of knowing exactly what questions you will be asked (just like a college final!) you can follow 10 simple rules to help you give your best performance possible!

## Prologue: The 10 Commandments of Successful Interviewing

THOU SHALT...

1. [know yourself](#)
2. [know your industry](#)
3. [know your prospective employer](#)
4. [practice your interview](#)
5. [be rested and overdressed](#)
6. [arrive 15 minutes early](#)
7. [be prepared for anything](#)
8. [be confident in both body and speech](#)
9. [ask questions](#)
10. [remember your manners](#)

[Click here](#) for a handy (and concise) checklist of everything you need to know!

## Chapter 1: In the Days Before Your Interview

### 1. Know Yourself

One thing you can be sure of: nearly all the questions you will be asked on your interview will be about YOU. It is important to remember that the only thing your

interviewer knows about you is what is listed on your resume. Be prepared to explain each point in detail.

Sharing stories is an incredibly important part of the interviewing process. An employer isn't just looking for a person with a certain skill set, but someone who can provide examples of how she applied her skills in a professional setting. Take some time and write down your biggest triumphs from past jobs. These stories could be about projects you completed, group-work you led, even a story about how you overcame a weakness. If you're having some trouble getting started, refer to the "Common Interview Questions" at the end of this packet.

Know your strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has things they're good at and things they're bad at. Being able to recognize both is important for the interviewing process as employers are looking for candidates who are self-aware. Single out your three strongest skills and be ready to share a story about how you applied them in a professional environment. Be prepared to discuss a weakness with a story about how you are working to improve/overcome it.

Know where you're going. Employers want goal-oriented employees. Ask yourself where you see yourself in the future. What do you still want to learn after you graduate? What sorts of projects do you want to undertake, and how will this job help you realize your goals?

Also know why you're interested in the job you're applying for. If you're applying for a job "just because," you're going to sound incredibly unenthusiastic to your interviewer and are probably not going to get hired (or even interviewed again). Be prepared to explain how this position fits your career goals.

## 2. Know Your Industry

Who are the major companies in your industry? If you're applying for a job at Staples, you'll probably also want to know what Office Max and Office Depot are up to! Pay attention to industry-specific current events, especially mergers, new regulations, newcomers to the market, IPOs, etc.

### 3. Know Your Prospective Employer

Visit the employer's website. Find answers to the following questions:

- What does the organization sell/manufacture/do?
- Who do they serve?
- What is the organization's mission statement?
- Where is the organization's headquarters? Regional branches? YOUR branch?
- Who is the CEO of the organization? Your regional manager? What is the position of the person who is interviewing you?
- Is it a public or private organization?
- When was the organization founded and how has it expanded over the years?
- What are some new projects the organization has under development?

From this research, prepare a list of questions to ask the person interviewing you.

### 4. Practice Your Interview!

The Career Center is here to help! We offer both interviewing skills workshops and mock interviews throughout the semester to help you become the strongest candidate possible. For more details visit <http://www.stonybrook.edu/career> or call to schedule an appointment (631-632-6810).

Refer to the list of common interviewing questions at the back of this packet.

## Chapter 2: The Day of Your Interview

### 5. Be Rested and Overdressed

The most important thing you can do for the day of your interview is get 8 hours of sleep the night before. Being well rested the day of your interview will help you be more alert, more relaxed and more personable.

The second most important thing is to have a good breakfast. Treat yourself to a hearty, protein-rich breakfast to give you a boost of energy without jitters!

The third most important thing is to have a well-polished look. Dress professionally!

Dressing professionally does not have to mean dull, stiff or boring. You can still explore your personal style within an atmosphere that requires professional dress. When putting together an interview ensemble, remember one simple rule – **quality over quantity**. Employers understand that you, as a college student, have limited funds. You don't need to drop your life savings on a closetful of interview clothes when one great suit and a few nice shirts will do.

There are no set laws for dressing for your interview. Different industries have different expectations for candidates. The information below is an excellent starting point, especially for most non-technical and non-fashion jobs.

When getting dressed the day of your interview, be sure to double-check with your prospective employer whether you're expected to wear "Business Formal" or "Business/Smart Casual."

### **Business Formal**

#### **Ladies:**

- Head** – Neat, well-groomed hair.
- Suit** – Matching jacket and pants/skirt.
- Shirt** – Collared shirt in white or pastel colors.
- Hands** – Briefcase instead of handbag/purse for added professionalism.
- Stockings** – Conservative hosiery at or near skin tone.
- Shoes** – Closed-toe, low heels or flats. NO HIGH HEELS OR PLATFORMS.

#### Other hints:

- Avoid fads in hairstyle.
- Avoid perfume – you don't know if the interviewer is allergic.
- Avoid too much makeup.
- Keep jewelry conservative.
- Don't bring your backpack, even to an on-campus interview.

- Skirts must be a professional length (no more than a dollar-bill width above the knee when seated).
- Bring an extra pair of hosiery, in case you get a tear in the pair you're wearing.
- No open-toed shoes, flip flops or Birkenstocks.

**Gentlemen:**

- Head** – Short, trim, well-groomed hair. No hat.
- Neck** – Tie with a conservative pattern that complements your suit.
- Suit** – Matching jacket and trousers. Dark, solid colors (black, navy, dark gray) work best, but a light pinstripe complements a broad diagonal-striped tie very well!
- Shirt** – White or blue long-sleeved button-down collared shirt. No short sleeves or polo.
- Belt** – Leather belt that matches your shoe color with conservative buckle.
- Socks** – Thin fabric “dress socks” in a dark color – similar to that of your suit.
- Shoes** – Oxfords or loafers, cleaned and polished the night before!

**Other hints:**

- Your shirt buttons, belt buckle and pants fly should form a straight line from neck down.
- The end of your tie should fall between your navel and belt buckle.
- You should be clean-shaven. If you prefer to keep your facial hair, keep it evenly trimmed and tasteful. No chin straps, mutton chops or 5 o'clock shadows!
- Don't bring your backpack, even to an on-campus interview.
- Avoid cologne/body sprays – you don't know if the interviewer is allergic.
- It's best to leave your jewelry at home. One ring or a simple chain is fine.
- ABSOLUTELY NO WHITE GYM SOCKS!**

**Business Casual/Smart Casual****Ladies:**

- Head** – Neat and well-groomed hair.
- Suit** – Many options here: cardigans and sweater sets with dress slacks, knee-length dresses, free range of matching colors. NO SUN DRESSES.
- Stockings** – Conservative hosiery at or near skin color.
- Shoes** – Closed toe, low heels or flats. NO HIGH HEELS OR PLATFORMS. NO SNEAKERS, TENNIS SHOES, CONVERSE OR OPEN-TOED SHOES.

**Gentlemen:**

- Head** – Short, trim, well-groomed hair.
- Neck** – Tie is optional.
- Suit** – Collared button-down shirt and slacks. AVOID LOUD COLORS AND PATTERNS. A sports jacket is a nice addition, although not required.
- Socks** – Dress socks that match your slacks. NO WHITE GYM SOCKS.
- Shoes** – Oxfords or loafers, cleaned and polished the day before. NO SANDALS, SNEAKERS, CONVERSE OR TENNIS SHOES.

**Additional tips (for both ladies and gentlemen)**

- When in doubt, play it safe. Button that top button, err on the side of covering skin and keep colors tame.
- Leave your backpack at home or in your car.
- Carry a leather portfolio, legal pad or anything professional-looking to write on.
- You want to look good, but you also want to look intelligent and responsible. You are taking a step forward in your career, not going out for drinks!

## 6. Arrive 15 Minutes Early

This requires no explanation. You should know exactly where your interview is and plan multiple routes to get there in case traffic problems force you to take a detour. You should be walking in the door 15 minutes before your interview is scheduled to start. Part of success is being there on time!

## 7. Be Prepared for Anything

There are four types of interviews you will be facing over the course of your career: screening, in-depth (technical), behavioral and group interviews. You should approach each interview with confidence, poise, sharp dress and respect.

**The Screening Interview** – Typical of On-Campus Recruiting and the first interview, a *Screening Interview* is typically a short-duration interview designed to eliminate poorly qualified candidates from further employment consideration. These interviews are frequently conducted by a organization’s human resources or recruiting department and are based on general questions to measure how well a candidate will fit with the organization.

**The In-depth/Technical Interview** – These interviews are almost always held in the building where you’ll be working and are led by a supervisor or hiring manager. Questions will be job-specific and designed to determine the extent of your knowledge of the industry and your skills.

**The Behavioral Interview** – This technique is used by interviewers to get a candidate to tell specific stories about past professional experiences. Often these will end up coupled with Screening Interview questions. For example: “Many of your projects will involve working closely with technology professionals. Are you comfortable with working in groups? Have you ever worked with professionals in a previous job?” These questions can also focus on using specific job skills to complete projects.

Sometimes you may be asked to perform a simple task to demonstrate your skills. For example, you may be asked to make a mock phone call to a customer.

**The Group Interview** – Two or more interviewers will be asking questions to a group of several applicants at one time. Questions may be asked of the entire group, or one or two candidates only. Be sure when answering a question that you meet eyes with every member of the interviewing panel. Also treat your fellow candidates with respect; you never know which of them you may end up working with...or FOR!

You should also be aware that organizations might decide to have you interview with multiple people throughout the day. Do not schedule other important meetings or appointments on the day of your interview, because you don't know how long you're going to be there.

#### **8. Be Confident in Both Body and Speech**

Being confident does not mean not being nervous! It simply means pretending to not be nervous. Before you step into the interview, take a moment of introspection. You already feel great because you had a good night's sleep and a good breakfast, and you look great because you're rocking your best clothes! You look just like (fill in your favorite celebrity)! Now get in there and act like it!

During your interview, pay attention to your body language. Are you sitting up straight? Are you in control of your nervous habits (hand wringing, leg shaking, etc.)? Are you making eye contact with the person you're talking to? Most importantly, are you SMILING?

Also pay attention to what you're saying. Are you speaking slowly, at a good volume and enunciating? Do you understand what questions the interviewer is asking, and are you responding appropriately? (Don't be afraid to ask an interviewer to clarify something you don't understand!) Are you spinning even your most negative experiences in a positive manner? Are you comfortable with pausing briefly in your speech to collect your thoughts without saying "like" or "um"?

## 9. Ask Questions!

Every interview is going to end with the following question: "Do you have any questions for me?" *Don't be caught off guard by this!* You should have a list of questions about the organization, position and the application process prepared when you enter the interview. Use these questions as a chance to show an employer just how interested you are in this position!

- Ask the interviewer things about the company you're curious about based on your research.
- Ask what projects you may be assigned if you get the job.
- Ask about employee development programs.
- Ask how your work will be evaluated.
- Ask about the future of the department and how your position fits in with the bigger picture.
- Ask your interviewer for his/her card and the next steps in the interviewing process.
- DO NOT ASK ABOUT SALARY AND BENEFITS

## Chapter 3: After Your Interview

### 10. Remember Your Manners

At the conclusion of your interview, ask if there's anything else you need to do to complete the application process. The last thing you should say to an interviewer is always, "Thank you, it was very nice to meet you. I am excited about this opportunity." Remember to make eye contact and offer a firm handshake.

On your way out, thank everyone who helped you find your way. Do not linger to chat!

As soon as you get home, e-mail the person who interviewed you a thank you letter. [Refer to the attached sample thank you letter for help.](#)

## Most Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your biggest strengths?
- What are your weaknesses (and how have you overcome them)?
- What are your 3 biggest accomplishments from your last job?
- Why did you choose Stony Brook University?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What was your favorite class? Your least favorite class?
- If you could change anything about your college experience, what would it be and why?
- Tell me about a time you experienced conflict when working in a group. How did you overcome it?
- How do you handle constructive criticism?
- Tell me about a time when your problem solving skills were tested.
- What do you think your references would say about you?
- What do you think your past co-workers would say about you?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? In 25 years?
- Has there ever been a time when you chose honesty over being agreeable? What was the outcome?
- How do you handle pressure/deadlines?
- How do you handle difficult clients/customers?
- What has been your most successful speech/presentation-making experience?
- How do you transform good ideas into successful practices?
- Have you ever improved a conventional practice at a previous job? How did you handle proposing your changes to your supervisor?
- How would you handle a task or project you feel unqualified for?
- Why should I hire you?
- Do you have any questions for me?

## The Step-by-Step checklist

Use this checklist for each interview to keep track of your interview preparedness!

### 1. Know Yourself

- I know my resume.
  - Be ready to clarify anything on it for an interviewer.
- I know my interests, goals and strengths.
  - Be ready to tell 3 stories about how you applied skills in a professional environment.
- I know why I'm interested in the job and tell the interviewer so!
- I know where I want my career to go and why.
- I know what leadership positions I have held in the past.
- I know my weaknesses.
  - Be ready to tell at least 1 story about how you overcame your weaknesses in a professional environment.

### 2. Know Your Industry

- I know the major companies in the industry, including my prospective employer's competitors.
- I know some of the jobs available in the industry.

### 3. Know Your Prospective Employer

- I know what the organization does.
- I know who the organization serves.
- I know where the organization's headquarters and major branches are located.
- I know the name of the CEO of the organization, the manager of my branch, the head of my department and the name and title of my interviewer.
- I know the organization's mission statement.
- I have thoroughly researched the organization's website.

### 4. Know Your Interview Techniques

- I know my answers to the [common interview questions](#) located in this packet.
- I know that the Career Center is here to help with mock interviews!
- I have scheduled a mock interview or have otherwise practiced answering these questions.

**5. Be Well Rested and Overdressed**

- I got 8 hours of sleep the night before the interview.
- I ate a healthy, protein-rich breakfast so I have lasting energy for the day.
- I put on my best clothes (refer to the [Interview Dress](#) section).

**6. Arrive 15 Minutes Early**

- I know exactly where my interview is being held and how to get there, including an alternate route in case I get detoured.
- I arrived at the location of the interview 15 minutes early and respectfully let the receptionist know who I am, who I'm meeting with and why.

**7. Be Prepared for Anything**

- I asked in advance the [format of the interview](#) (group, individual, practical etc.).
- I am well versed in different interview styles and am prepared to handle anything.
- I am courteous and respectful with anyone I meet while interviewing.

**8. Be Confident in Body and Speech**

- I sat still, with my back straight and with little shifting.
- I made the appropriate amount of eye contact.
- I spoke at a proper volume and took care to enunciate.
- I listened when spoken to and responded to the interviewer appropriately.
- I spun even my most unpleasant experiences in a positive light.
- I was comfortable with pausing to collect my thoughts (and did not say "like" or "um").

**9. Ask Questions**

- I showed the interviewer my interest in the job by asking work-related questions.
- I asked questions that were based on my research.
- I did NOT ask about salary or benefits, unless I was offered the job.
- I asked my interviewer for his contact information.

**10. Mind Your Manners**

- As my interviewer showed me out, I asked if there was anything else in the application process I'd need to complete.
- As I left the building, I thanked everyone who helped me, but did not linger to chat.
- As soon as I got home, I wrote a [thank you email](#) to my interviewer.

## A Sample Thank You E-mail

Arguably the most important part of the interviewing process is thanking the person afterwards. This small show of appreciation takes no more than 5 minutes and demonstrates to your interviewer that you are serious and professional.

**E-mail subject:** Thank you for interviewing me.

**E-mail body:**

Dear Mr. Smith,

I want to thank you again for interviewing me for the Web Design position at Awesome Enterprises. It was a pleasure meeting you and getting to know your company better. I am excited about this job opportunity and hope to speak with you about it soon.

Sincerely,

Janet Jones