**Before the INTERVIEW**

**STEP 1: Research the employer**
Learn the following about potential employers using multiple resources (the company website, Glassdoor.com, newspapers, industry journals):
- Mission/Vision
- Products/Services
- Organizational structure, possible career paths
- Current news
- Aspects of organizational culture (dress code, professional development)

**STEP 2: Practice, practice, practice!**
- Use the questions in this guide as you prepare. Write out answers to your questions and then practice saying them out loud. Your goal should be for your answers to take two minutes or less.
- Complete a mock interview using the InterviewStream online platform. Access this exclusive resource through GWork; look in the Quick Links menu on the right side of the home page and click on “InterviewStream.”

**STEP 3: Develop a plan for the day of the interview**

**Phone or virtual interviews:**
- Reserve a quiet place to conduct your interview that has no background noise/distractions and looks professional (typically NOT dorm rooms).
- Dress as if the interview is in person (professional attire).
- Test cell phone reception and/or internet connection in advance. Use a land line if possible.

**In-person interviews:**
- Confirm the exact location with your contact.
- Consider conducting a test-run getting to the interview site to avoid getting lost or being late.
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the scheduled time.

**STEP 4: What to wear**
- Professional attire: always opt for a suit (jacket and pants/skirt); it’s better to be overdressed!
- If you are wearing commuting shoes to get there, stop elsewhere to change shoes; you should enter the building in your complete interview attire.

**STEP 5: What to bring with you**
- Printed copies of your resume and references.
- A list of questions to ask the employer.
- Pen and paper to take notes during the interview (ask permission).
- Professional portfolio/folder to hold your items.

Colonial Crossroads—Marvin Center 5th Floor
careerservices.gwu.edu
gwcareercenter@gwu.edu
202.994.6495
Get READY to tell your story

Take a minute to think about your favorite commercial, movie, book, or song. What do they have in common? Each one tells a story that caught your interest near the beginning and then kept your attention until the end. You want to do the same thing in an interview: tell a story that communicates your strengths while keeping the interviewer’s attention. To accomplish this, preparation and practice are essential.

How can you prepare to tell your story well in an interview? Prepare your answers using the **SOAR** method:

**Situation:** Describe vividly the task/situation you were in by providing basic information that allows the listener to understand the context: department/organization, timeframe, key people involved, etc.

*Example:* Last summer I worked with a team of five interns on a literacy project for elementary students at an Anacostia elementary school. The goal was to provide instruction to at-risk students through weekly interactive one-hour sessions.

**Obstacle:** Set the problem up: describe the challenge or obstacle you had to overcome.

*Example:* The program was only in its second year and needed a lot of development. We did not have access to lesson plans, materials, or teacher assistance.

**Action:** Which specific steps did you take to address the challenge?

*Example:* My team met once a week to develop lesson plans, brainstorm and plan activities, gather needed materials, and delegate responsibilities for the coming session. At our first meeting, I volunteered to research curriculum that similar programs were already using and then presented the results to the team. After the curriculum I recommended was selected, I created a semester outline of each week’s topics so that we could easily plan ahead.

**Result:** What were the concrete outcomes of your actions? Provide quantitative and qualitative results when possible; use a positive example unless asked otherwise.

*Example:* The sessions were a huge success. Not only were the children engaged each week as a result of the activities we planned, but they also improved their reading skills an average of two grade levels. We also received consistently positive feedback on the parental evaluation forms.

---

**Standard INTERVIEW QUESTIONS asked by employers**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What led you to choose: GW, your degree, major, or field of career interest?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? What are your short and long-term goals?
- What do you consider your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- Walk me through your resume. Tell me about your last work experience or a specific job on your resume.
- What do you know about our organization? What important trends do you see in our industry?
- Why are you interested in working for our organization?
- How do you work with deadlines? Or under pressure?
- Do you prefer to work individually or on a team? Why?
- Why are you leaving your current job (or a past job)? What do you like/dislike about your current job?
Behavioral Interview Questions asked by Employers

Accepting feedback: Tell me about a time when . . . a supervisor/professor provided constructive criticism about your work; you had to handle an unfounded complaint about something you did.

Adaptability: Tell me about a time when . . . you were asked to do something unexpected; a situation you were in changed suddenly; you were operating without a safety net – your normal support systems were not available.

Analytical Reasoning / Critical Thinking: Tell me about a time when . . . you exercised good judgment and logic in solving a problem; you worked on a very complex project. What happened, what did you do?

Communication: Tell me about a time when . . . you used your written communication skills to get an important point across; you successfully communicated with someone who you did not get along with well (or visa versa).

Creativity: Describe a situation in which . . . you effectively developed a solution to a problem by combining different perspectives or approaches; your first solution to a problem did not work, so you had to try other solutions.

Customer Service: Tell me about a situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or coworker.

Flexibility: Describe a situation when . . . you dealt with rapid changes; a supervisor/customer changed the direction of a project at the last minute; you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

Initiative: Tell me about a time when . . . you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done; a situation in which you generated new ideas or suggestions; you were excited to work on something.

Interpersonal Skills: Describe a situation when . . . you made an unpopular decision that impacted others; you had to work closely with a new team that did not know each other well; you worked with someone you did not like.

Leadership and Taking Ownership: Tell me about a time when . . . you were responsible for directing other people; you motivated others; you had to work in a group that was not functioning well. Describe your leadership style.

Learning New Things Quickly: Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time.

Learning From Mistakes: Give me an example of a time when . . . you failed; something you tried to accomplish did not succeed; how did you respond to the situation?

Motivation: How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do?

Persistence: What has been the most difficult project for you to see through to completion?

Persuasiveness: Describe a situation in which . . . you were able to successfully convince someone to see things your way; when you failed to sell your proposal or viewpoint to other people.

Planning: Describe a time when . . . you had to meet specific target goals; you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.

Problem-Solving/Decision-making: Tell me about . . . the most difficult problem you have encountered at either work or school; the most complex problem/assignment you have ever worked on.

Productivity: Describe your most significant accomplishment within the past year.

Research: Give me an example of when you had to use your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.

Resolving Conflict: Tell me about . . . a difficult person/group/supervisor with whom you’ve worked; when you had to resolve a conflict with someone at work or school. What made the situation difficult? How did you respond?

Teamwork: Tell me about a situation when . . . you were part of a team that achieved success; you worked with a person who did things differently from you; someone on your team dropped the ball.

Time Management: Tell me about a time when . . . you had too many things to do and were required to prioritize your tasks; you had to meet a scheduled deadline that caused a high level of stress.
Prepare \textbf{QUESTIONS} you would like to \textbf{ask:}

- What is the management philosophy of this company?
- What are your company’s greatest challenges?
- In what areas of the organization do you expect growth?
- To whom would I be reporting and what kind of communication channels are there?
- What are the ideal attributes needed to succeed in this position?
- What is a typical day like in this position?
- How and when would I be evaluated in this position?
- Can you tell me about the history of the position and why it is open? Are there any anticipated changes in the future?
- What are the career opportunities in this organization for someone entering this position/department?
- How will the selection process proceed from here? When might I expect to hear from you regarding a decision?

\textbf{During the INTERVIEW}

\textbf{Present yourself as a professional:}
- Greet the interviewer, smile, and shake hands firmly.
- Be professional, but be yourself.
- Show interest and enthusiasm - sit up straight, make eye contact, and be alert.

\textbf{Listen, answer, & ask:}
- Listen carefully; don’t interrupt the interviewer.
- Convey your strengths in the beginning - don’t wait to be asked! Integrate these into the “Tell me about yourself” question or resume questions.
- Try not to answer more than what you are asked. Plan on 1-2 minutes for each of your answers.
- Allow yourself time to answer a question; it is appropriate to pause and take a few seconds to formulate an answer. Do not feel the need to fill every second with conversation.

\textbf{Do’s & Don’ts:}
- Be sure your cell phone is on silent and is kept out of sight the entire time you are on site.
- Do NOT bring up salary in the first interview. However, you should be prepared with salary range information in case the employer brings it up.
- Request a business card from each interviewer so you can follow up with them afterward.

\textbf{After the INTERVIEW}

\textbf{Write down key information:}
- Record your impressions of the job and organization, a list of further questions, pros/cons.
- Write down the names (check spelling), titles, and contact information of each of your interviewers.
- Jot down the questions you were asked - this will help with future interviews. Post them on glassdoor.com.

\textbf{Send thank you notes:}
- Send a brief thank you note/letter/email to reiterate your interest in the position. This will allow you to clarify any information and cite any additional information that further supports your candidacy.
  - Should be emailed or mailed to each person you met within 24 hours of your interview
  - Indicate your appreciation for the opportunity
  - Refer to something about the position or employer that caught your interest or impressed you
  - Ask questions or indicate your understanding regarding the next steps
  - Thank the interviewer again