Tips for Different Interview Formats
(virtual, phone & panel interviews)

Virtual interviews take 2 primary formats:

1. **A live interview** when you are speaking with your interviewer (employers will provide details beforehand about which platform they will use: Skype, Webex, Google Hangouts, Zoom).
2. **A recorded video interview** when you are speaking only to your webcam and your answers are being recorded (the most common platform used by employers is called HireVue).

Best practices for all virtual interviews:

- **Do a trial run.** Download the necessary software in advance and test equipment beforehand.
- **Using headphones with a mic is not only OK, but preferable.** This will cut down on background noise. Test them beforehand to insure you can hear and be heard clearly.
- **Plug into an ethernet cord if possible** so you’re not relying only on wifi.
- **Dress as if it were an in-person interview.** Do not dress casually even if you are just at home.
- **Position your webcam at eye-level & place your laptop on a stable surface.**
- **Look at your camera, not at the screen.** You want it to feel as much like a face-to-face interview as possible.
- **Proper lighting is essential for high-quality video,** so adjust accordingly.
  - Be sure that your face is easy to see and isn’t shadowed because of backlighting. A simple desk lamp can serve as your main light source. Your computer monitor should not be used as your light source!
  - Turn on any available lights in the room and check to make sure there is no glare on your monitor.
- **Be mindful of your background.**
  - Position yourself in front of a wall with neutral colors - avoid patterns, wallpaper, & mirrors.
  - Be sure that the area visible on your camera is clean - a tidy workspace conveys professionalism & organization to your potential employer.
- **Use a quiet location that is free of noise & distraction.**
  - Eliminate all possible distractions & interruptions: turn off your cell phone, and if you’re at home, make sure people in the house know you are recording an interview.
  - Turn off all appliances or devices that may create ambient noise or disrupt your interview.
- **Practice beforehand using the InterviewStream platform - especially focus on looking at your webcam** as if you were having a conversation with someone sitting in front of you.
  - InterviewStream is available to all GW students for free here. You can practice recording answers to questions, can watch them back and re-record your responses to improve.
  - Eye contact is of the utmost importance, so remember to look directly into the camera to answer the questions as you practice (instead of looking at the computer screen).
  - It may seem awkward at first, but the more you rehearse looking into the webcam instead of at the person on the screen, the more comfortable you will feel during an actual interview!
Tips for live video interviews:

• Have a back-up plan for handling potential technical difficulties.
  o Prior to the interview, exchange phone numbers with your interviewer and make sure you have an accessible, fully-charged phone. Consider having FaceTime or other similar account available to you (and be sure you know how to use it).
  o At the beginning, ask the interviewer what to do if the connection is interrupted.

• The best way to handle a technical problem is to acknowledge the issue, apologize and move on. If there are sound issues, don’t be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat a question. Know how to mute your microphone, if needed.

Tips for recorded video interviews/HireVues:

• HireVue-specific tips:
  o The basic format of a HireVue is: a question will appear in writing on your screen and then you will answer it while a clock counts down on the screen. As hard as it is, don’t focus on the clock!
  o Employers control the settings for the interview, which includes how many questions are asked, how long you have to answer each question, etc. Some employers will give you a chance to re-record an answer, but some will give you only one shot at your answer. Some also provide 20-30 seconds after you read the question before they start recording your answer - but others do not.
  o HireVue uses artificial intelligence (AI) to assess eye contact, along with general facial expressions (do you seem like a real person with soft skills - or more like a robot?)
  o HireVue provides additional tips here.

Phone interviews

• Pick a quiet location that’s free of distractions where you have a strong cell signal.
  o For pre-scheduled phone interviews: be aware of your surroundings – you don’t want your call to drop or for there to be sirens in the background.
  o For unexpected calls from a potential employer: if you’re at work, proceed with caution. If it’s not a convenient time or you lack privacy, ask if you can call back at a later time.

• Be sure your phone is fully charged – and keep your charger handy as back-up.

• Have hard copies on hand of your resume & relevant notes. Doing so will help if you draw a blank. Do not click around on your laptop or shuffle papers during the interview.

• Stand up. It opens your airways and allows you to speak less softly.

• Smile. It comes through in your voice!

• Don’t volunteer too much information. Unlike an in-person interview, a phone conversation reduces your ability to pick up on the interviewer’s non-verbal cues. If you are uncertain if you’ve satisfied the interviewer’s question, you can ask, “Would you like more detail?”

• Don’t interrupt or cut off the interviewer. Wait until the question is fully asked before you chime in with your response.

• Inquire about next steps. At the conclusion of the call, thank the interviewer and ask when you can expect to hear back.

• Ask for an email address. Without one, you can’t send a thank you note.
Panel Interviews (in-person or virtual)

- Research the panelists and develop a list of questions specific to each person. If you’ve done your homework, you’ll be able to formulate specific questions for each individual, thereby helping to build rapport amongst the group.
- Respond directly to each question. When one of the individuals asks you a question, be sure to direct most of your attention to this individual. Maintain eye contact and casually scan the room to observe the reaction of others.
- Don’t let one person throw you off. If one person appears distracted or disinterested, resist the tendency to focus all of your attention to this one individual. It could be that this individual is having a bad day or always appears disinterested.
- Take notes. If you’ve spoken to several individuals during your interview, it may be difficult to discern who said what at the end of the day. Taking notes during an interview will allow you to reference specific information, which will help you personalize your follow-up thank you notes.
- Ask a question that engages the entire group. Try to ask at least one question that requires input from everyone in the room (e.g. “What is the best part about working for this organization?”)
- Ask for business cards. Collecting all contact information will ensure that you avoid leaving anyone out when sending thank you emails.

Panel interviews provide a window into company culture.

Panel interviews offer a unique format in which you are able to gain more insight into a team’s culture than you would through a one-on-one interview. During the panel, be sure to take note of the following:

- How do the individuals interact with each other?
- Do these individuals act differently when the boss is in the room?
- Does it appear to be a collegial environment, or are some individuals distant from or hostile towards one another?
- Is everyone treated with the same level of respect?
- Overall, does it seem like a healthy work environment where everyone’s opinion is valued?

Remember these insights when you are presented with the offer and are evaluating the opportunity.