

Interview Toolkit



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Co-op Program
Faculty of Applied Science

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Version: Month Year

Understand the common types of interviews

Purpose of an Interview

Interviews allow for an exchange of information between you - the prospective candidate - and the employer. This meeting provides the employer with an opportunity to obtain more detailed information about your skills, interests, and qualifications. It is also an opportunity for you to learn more about the job and the employer to assess whether the position is in line with your personal goals and interests.

For many people, interviews can be a nerve-wracking experience. However, it's important to remember that the recruiters are already impressed with your skills and experience. If they did not think you could do the job, they would not take the time to meet with you!

Different Types of Interviews

There are six types of interviews. The following describes each type of interview and tips to succeed with each interview type.

For all interviews:

- Be prepared, punctual, polished, and professional.
- Listen carefully and be cognizant of your body language and tone of voice.

ONE-TO-ONE

This is the most common interview type, where employers meet with each candidate individually.

- Demonstrate confidence: make good eye contact, give a firm handshake (if appropriate, this may not be standard), and smile often.

GROUP

Multiple candidates are interviewed at the same time. Employers often employ these types of interviews to save time and to be able to better identify candidates who work well together. As such, these interviews often include a group activity that requires all candidates to work together to solve a problem or complete a task.

- Be prepared to introduce yourself to the interviewers and the other interviewees.
- Listen not only to questions being asked, but your fellow interviewees' responses too, so you are in tune with where the conversation is headed and can respond appropriately when it is your turn to speak.
- Don't view the other candidates as your competition, but rather an opportunity to demonstrate to the prospective employer your leadership skills, how you interact with others, and work as part of a team.

PANEL

Two or more interviewers take turn asking questions. Oftentimes interviewers are from different departments of the company (e.g., human resources and engineering) and thus their questions will be framed from a different perspective.

- Make eye contact with all interviewers, not just the interviewer who asked the question - you don't know who will ultimately be making the hiring decision.

TELEPHONE

Typically used for pre-screening purposes or if the interviewee is not in close proximity to interview location. Verbal communication skills are especially important during a phone interview as the employer cannot see your facial expressions or gestures:

- Find a quiet, comfortable spot, with good reception (if using a cell) that is free from distractions.
- Smile when speaking in order to convey your interest and enthusiasm.
- Dress as though it was an in-person interview in order to put yourself in the right mindset for the interview.

LIVE VIDEO

Similar to a one-to-one interview, but conducted over the internet using video chat software such as Zoom or Skype or Google Hangouts.

- Ensure your computer equipment (internet connection, camera, and microphone) are all functioning well and the settings are correct (test your set-up with a friend).
- Close any applications or windows on your computer that could interrupt the interview or slow the connection.
- Dress as though you were meeting the employer in person.
- Be at eye level with the camera – not looking up or staring down – with a simple background behind you.
- When listening, feel free to nod and smile as appropriate to further demonstrate that you are following along.
- Make eye contact with the interviewer by looking at the camera, not the screen.
- Conduct the interview in a quiet, well lit environment, free of loud noises, possible disturbances, including other people or pets.

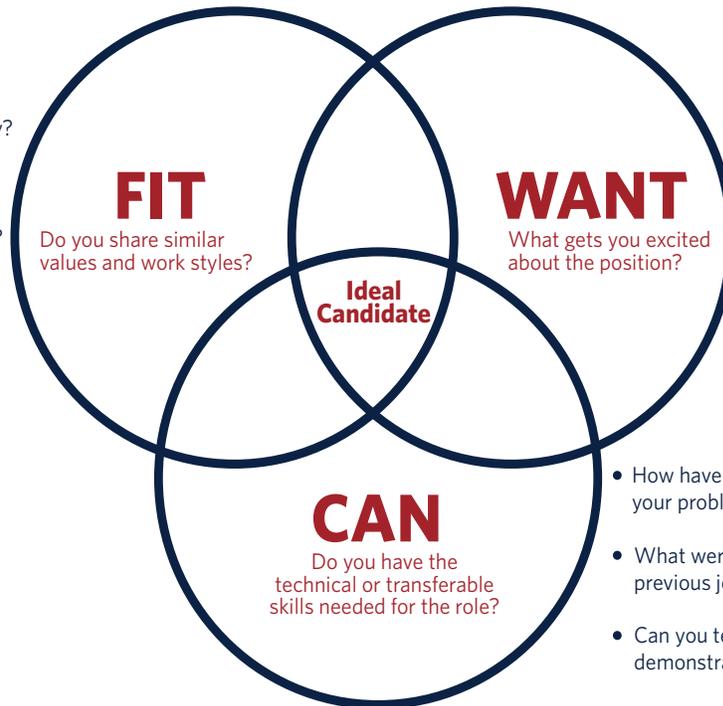
RECORDED VIDEO

Like a telephone interview, more and more employers are opting to employ a recorded video interview as a means to pre-screen candidates. In a recorded interview, candidates are given a set of interview questions and asked to record themselves answering these questions. Typically candidates are given 20-30 seconds to read the question and prepare a response. After that, candidates will be given about three minutes to record a response.

- Dress appropriately. Although this is pre-screening interview, treat it like a real in-person interview.
- Many employers provide practice questions for candidates to try in order to become comfortable with their software and its interface. Use this as an opportunity to verify that your computer's settings (i.e., your speaker and microphone volume levels) are set appropriately. You will also be able to watch your practice responses so you can look more polished, prepared, and professional when answering the real questions.

Preparation, preparation, preparation

- Under what conditions do you work most and least effectively?
- How would you describe your relationship with your past supervisors? With co-workers?
- Tell me about some activities you were involved in that required teamwork.



- Why did you apply for this job?
- How does this job contribute to your goals?

- How have you developed and applied your problem solving abilities?
- What were your main duties in your previous job? What did you learn?
- Can you tell me about a time when you demonstrated effective communication skills?



TIP

When providing examples of your work and accomplishments from a team experience, e.g. engineering student team, ensure to outline what were your contributions, accomplishments, and learnings. It is fine to acknowledge the success and challenges of the team, but you must remember the interviewer is looking to hire you, not your team.

Do Your Research

Learn as much as you can about the company, its industry, and the position prior to the interview. Time spent researching will go a long way to helping you answer possible interview questions, thus enabling you to stand out amongst other less prepared candidates.

1. RESEARCH THE COMPANY AND ITS INDUSTRY

- Visit the company's website to gain a better understanding of who they are and what they do; review their mission statement and learn about their products, services and client base; and check any social media pages they may have.
- Search online for articles and reviews to learn what others say about the company.
- Use tools like [British Columbia's WorkBC Labour Market and Industry reports](#) the federal government's [Market Research and Statistics from Innovation](#), Science and Economic Development Canada, or [UBC Library's Industry & Market Research](#) resources to learn more about the industry.

2. LEARN ABOUT THE POSITION

- Understand what the employer is looking for by studying the job description. What skills and experiences are they looking for? What are the main responsibilities of the role?
- Reflect on what most interests you about the position, the organization, or industry.
- Look at the job description and use it to predict what type of questions could come up in the interview. For example, if a job posting mentions a qualification of knowledge of AutoCAD, you can make up a practice question such as "Tell me about a time when you did a project using AutoCAD?"

3. LEARN ABOUT THE INTERVIEW AND INTERVIEWERS

- Find your interviewer on LinkedIn and look at their background and career progression. This may give you insight into the types of questions they may ask you. An interviewer with an HR background will likely want to assess your cultural fit, motivation, experience relevant for the role, how you work with others, your career goals, etc. Someone with a technical background may want more details about your experience and technical knowledge related to the position and ask you technical questions.
- Through their LinkedIn profile, you may find you have something in common such as shared interests, you studied at the same university, or come from the same city.
- Check [Glassdoor](#) for interview tips and sample questions

Prepare questions to ask about the company or the position based on your research at the end of the interview. Refer to page 9 and the Resources section of this toolkit for example questions.

Know the Types of Interview Questions

Interviewing is a learned skill. Take the time to practice responding to a variety of interview questions with a friend, family member or Co-op Coordinator.

There are five main types of interview questions:

TRADITIONAL - These questions are often general and are asked to discover information about your history or communication skills. For example:

“Tell me about yourself”. It’s one of the most common interview questions, and it’s often the first question asked in the interview. To make a great first impression, it’s important to have a strong and well-prepared answer. When answering this question, you may be tempted to launch into your life story. However, use this opportunity to highlight why you will be great for the job. The [Tell Me About Yourself Toolkit](#) will help you prepare a great answer for this question.

“Describe your strengths and one weakness”. Review this document to learn how to answer the strengths and weaknesses question.

SITUATIONAL - These questions focus on hypothetical situations. They answer “What If” questions. Situational questions are meant to draw out your analytical and problem-solving abilities and allow the interviewer to assess how you would handle a particular situation if presented in the workplace. For example, an interviewer may ask “What would you do if the priorities on a project you were assigned suddenly changed?”

TECHNICAL - Employers ask technical questions to assess your technical skill set, analytical, and problem solving skills. These questions are used to assist in determining if you have the right skills and knowledge required for the position. These types of questions are specific to each discipline. Review the [Technical Interview Questions Toolkit](#) or the [Technical Interview Toolkit - ECE Related Roles](#) for tips and information on technical questions.

UNCONVENTIONAL - Be prepared for unusual, innovative or non-traditional questions. You may be asked questions to assess your ability in handling the unexpected, problem solving, or thinking under pressure. For example, “Why are manhole covers round?”, “How many windows are there in Vancouver?” or “How are M&Ms made?”

BEHAVIOURAL-BASED - Behavioural-based questions are used to assess your past actions to predict your future behaviour. You will be asked to provide specific examples from your past experience(s) that demonstrate particular criteria an interviewer is seeking. An example is “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer.” Additional examples of behavioural-based interview questions can be found [here](#).

The best way to answer a behavioural-based question is to use the **START Technique**. The way you respond to behavioural-based interview questions makes the difference between an average answer and a great answer. In other words, employing the START Technique could mean the difference between successfully securing a job and being the runner-up.



TIP

It is important when answering “unconventional” questions to keep in mind that you are being assessed on your ability to think your way through the problem posed, and not the answer itself. There are often no “right” answers to these types of questions. Your answer should demonstrate your thought process; what assumptions you are making and how you are arriving at your answer to the unconventional questions.

KNOW YOURSELF

- Take the time to evaluate your goals, interests, strengths and weaknesses.
- Review the position posting and identify the specific skills, qualifications, training, experience, and/or personal qualities required.
- Complete a [Skills Matrix](#) in order to better articulate your skills and experiences when answering interview questions.

START Technique

The START Technique stands for **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult, and **T**ransfer.

- **Situation** - Provide a very brief description of the situation so the employer has some context for your answer.
- **Task** - Summarize what your tasks and responsibilities were as related to this situation.
- **Action** - Explain what action you took to remedy, improve, or change the situation.
- **Result** - Use specific, qualitative and quantitative details, to explain the results of your actions.
- **Transfer** - Explain what personal or professional insights (i.e., what you learned) or skills you gained that you will transfer to the position you are being interviewed for.



NOTE

When using the START Technique your goal is to:

- Describe what the situation was
- What you did
- What was the outcome
- What you learned from that situation and how you can apply what you learned in the position you are interviewing for

Here are two interview questions that demonstrate the difference between an average response and the START response.

Question 1

AVERAGE RESPONSE

When I was working at Milestones as a waiter, I often had to take responsibility for extra tables or work longer hours when co-workers did not show up for their shifts. It was really hard work but it helped keep the customers happy and took the pressure off other servers who were new to our restaurant and couldn't handle any more tables.

START RESPONSE

I'm definitely not afraid of hard work and I like helping out my team when it comes to work and school. When I was working at Milestones as a waiter (**Situation**), I often had to take responsibility for extra tables or work longer hours when coworkers did not show up for their shifts (**Task**). I developed a system so I could take the same parts of the order for different tables at the same time. For example, I got all the drinks orders at once so I'd only have to go up to the bar one time (**Action**). Because of this system, I was able to handle a section that had three more tables than other servers (**Result**). Therefore, whether it's working extra hours to make sure we get a game out the door on time, or helping a co-worker debug difficult code, I am prepared to work hard to get the job done (**Transfer**).

Question 2

AVERAGE RESPONSE

I try to present my ideas as convincingly as I can by focusing on the facts of my ideas and persuading people that my idea or solution is the best. If there are people who have different ideas about the way things should be done, I don't ever put their ideas down but instead I focus on my ideas being better suited to the problem at hand.

START RESPONSE

Last year, I was responsible for fundraising at my local church because I was President of the Youth Group (**Situation**). My team and I were responsible for coming up with a new way to raise at least \$2,000 within our congregation for a village we wanted to sponsor in Africa (**Task**). Many in the group wanted to sell tickets to a raffle but I didn't think this was the best idea because there were so many up-front, fixed costs that we could possibly lose money. I went to talk to the pastor and learned that four years ago the church ran a raffle and lost money. I then updated my team at the next meeting, provided financial reports from the last raffle, and presented them with my fundraising idea (**Action**). Because I used facts and had the support of my pastor, everyone decided to go with my idea instead (**Result**). Although I am still developing my work experience and engineering knowledge compared to more senior workers, my team members at XYZ Company can expect me to contribute ideas, and I will have to support my suggestions with facts to help establish credibility within your company (**Transfer**).

Dress for Success

First impressions count! Be prepared and dress the part. Do some research to determine the company culture and typical attire, or speak with a former co-op student. If in doubt, dress more formally.

Prepare Questions to Ask

Be sure to end your interview by asking some intelligent questions to the interviewer in order to further demonstrate your preparation and interest in the position.

Prepare a list of at least 5 to 8 questions as you may find that answers to a number of your questions are provided over the course of the interview. By preparing an ample list of questions ahead of time, you ensure that you are left with at least 2 to 3 solid questions you can ask the interviewer at the conclusion of the interview.

Use your pre-interview research to identify the areas you wish to ask about at the end of the interview. You can also use this as an opportunity to determine if this position and organization is a good fit for you. Some possible questions to consider are:

- What is the most important aspect of this position?
- How would you describe the culture of your company?
- How would you measure my success, and what could I do to exceed your expectations?
- Which part of the position has the steepest learning curve? What can I do in order to get up to speed quickly?
- What are your expectations for this role during the first 30 days, 60 days, 4 months (or first term)?
- Is there a training or orientation program for new employees?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the job?
- What is your favourite part of working here?
- What are the biggest challenges or opportunities facing the company or team?

Go Prepared

Bring the following to each interview or have the electronic documents ready to share or email if you are interviewed via Zoom (or similar video style interview):

1. A pen and notepad – to jot down names, company information, or questions that arise during the interview. These items can also demonstrate you're prepared and organized. However, if you are tempted to fidget with the pen and note pad rather than use them effectively, simply leave them at home.
2. Copies of your resume – one for each interviewer and yourself.
3. A list of references – see the [Reference List Toolkit](#).
4. List of questions to ask the interviewer.
5. Samples of your work (optional).
6. Other items that may have been requested by the employer when scheduling your interview (e.g., driver's licence, PD references, proof of citizenship, etc.).



TIP

- Plan your route and travel time beforehand.
- Have the company's telephone number and name of interviewer on hand.
- Arrive 10 minutes before the start of your interview - arriving too early can be bothersome for employers who many have other meetings or interviews in progress.

Always leave extra time to arrive at a job interview in case you lose your way or get stuck in traffic. If you are running late, call the employer as soon as you become aware of the possibility that you may not be able to arrive on time.

Try a mock interview with a coordinator or peer advisor. We will help you prepare and provide you feedback to improve your interviewing skills. You will do much better in your interviews by practicing.

Resources for Equity Deserving Students

In this section, you will learn to leverage your interviews to assess if the environment and role will enable you to apply your strengths and abilities and if the workplace culture is inclusive.

APPROACH THE INTERVIEW WITH CONFIDENCE

Interviews are an exchange of information. The employer has the opportunity to assess if you are suitable for the role by asking questions to find out who you are and what you have to offer; and you have the opportunity to find out if the role is a good opportunity and if you have a shared set of values with the company.

LEVERAGE YOUR STRENGTHS

Your unique experiences have given you opportunities to develop strengths and strategies to thrive in the world. Consider how you have been shaped by your experiences and practice translating them into skills and assets employers understand and value.

Evaluating employers' inclusivity before and during the interview

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Consider what's important for you to know about the company, the role, and the team you will work with. If you haven't already done so, do your research to find the information you need to know to determine if the opportunity is good for you.

Here are a few ways to do your research with examples of questions you can investigate.

Note: You can develop your own questions to investigate based on your own needs and values.

1. Research the company's website and other sites such as Glassdoor

Here are some questions you can ask yourself as you research the company:

- Has the employer been recognized for diversity and inclusion?
- Does the organization have any statements that welcome diverse applicants including LGBTQ+ individuals to the organization?
- Who are the organization's donors/sponsors? Do they support any causes for equity-deserving groups (e.g., LGBTQ, people of color, people with disabilities, etc.)?
- Do any statements, policies, equity committees or workplace initiatives exist to support employees from equity-deserving groups?

2. Check out profiles of employees on LinkedIn

This can help determine if there is a diverse employee base. You can also see if there are any LinkedIn connections you have (or could make) that work at these organizations. Here are some questions you can consider asking these LinkedIn connections:

- How does the organization support employees from equity-deserving groups?
- What are others saying about their experience working with and receiving services from the organization?
- Does the company deal quickly and effectively when concerns are raised by their staff?

During the interview

Towards the end of the interview, the interviewer will ask if you have any questions about the organization or the job. Use this opportunity to ask any remaining questions that you have.

Here are examples of questions for the interviewer:

- What does diverse staff representation look like in your organization?
- What equity and/or inclusion initiatives are in place at your organization?
- Are there social groups that foster inclusion and community at your organization?

3. Disclosure

In the context of a job search, disclosure is letting the employer know something about yourself that might not be immediately evident, whether that is something that may impact the job or not. Disclosure is a choice and not always necessary.

For many groups (e.g. being part of the LGBTQ community, identifying as indigenous, etc.) you may wish to disclose because you want to work in an environment that is supportive of your identity. Also during the question portion of the interview, you may wish to ask questions listed above. Much of disclosure depends on your comfort level, and what you feel willing to share.

Note: it is illegal for an employer to ask you about your gender, sexual identity, ethnicity or religion. Though this does not prohibit you from your own disclosure.

Disclosure - additional information for students with disability

If you are a person living with a disability, since your condition may impact your working ability, you may be wondering if, and when, to tell an employer about your disability or chronic health condition. Refer to [UBC's Career resources for students with disabilities](#) to help you decide if, when, and how you may disclose to a potential employer. This page provides information on your legal rights, employer's entitlements, disclosure and requests for accommodations, tips for success, and more.

Additional Resources

Here are links to additional tips, resources, and information:

[Canada's Best Diversity Employers](#)

[Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#)

[Disclosing Your Disability: A Legal Guide for People with Disabilities in BC](#)

[Inclusion BC](#)

[International Student Guide](#)

[Lime Connect](#)

[Pride at Work](#)

[Start Proud](#)

[Student Services Directory of Resources](#)

[UBC Career resources for historically marginalized students](#)

[UBC Equity and Inclusion Office](#)

At the Interview

Each interview generally starts with introductions and the interviewers often provide a brief overview of the company and/or position and the format of the interview. Be prepared to introduce yourself too! This will be followed by formal questions and then an opportunity for you to ask questions to the interviewer(s).

It is possible, if you are at the employer's site, to be given a tour of the facility or site as part of the interview or there may be assignment as a component of the interview. Often you will be advised of this before the interview or in the overview portion of the interview.

GENERAL TIPS

- Introduce yourself to the interviewer(s) with a firm handshake (if appropriate), good eye contact, and a smile.
- Be aware of the positive and negative body language you may be conveying. Have good and consistent eye contact with the interviewer(s). Sit up straight and project your voice, using a positive tone. It is important to be enthusiastic.
- Maintain a professional and courteous manner at all times.
- Avoid using casual expressions such as “yeah”, “ya know”, “stuff”, and filler words such as “like” or “umm”.
- Answer questions honestly.
- Interviewers may tell you about their company and the position. Listen closely and consider questions you may want to ask later.
- Listen carefully to the questions. If you are not sure what they are asking, request a clarification. Take a moment to mentally prepare your answer before you begin speaking.
- Stay focused on the question and avoid long and meandering responses. If you get off-track during your response, stop and tell the interviewer you would like to start your answer over again.
- Shake hands (if appropriate) before leaving. Thank the office staff on your way out, because the impression you leave with others in the work environment may influence the interviewers.
- As soon as possible after the interview, take note of any information of key interest to you that took place during the interview. This information can then be used in your thank you note and/or for your future interviews as you reflect on your interactions and responses.

ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

The Canadian Human Rights Act prohibits questions pertaining to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability, or conviction for an offence for which a pardon has been granted or in respect of which a record suspension has been ordered.

If an interviewer asks for any of this information, politely request clarification as to the relationship between the question and the job requirements.

Follow up

After every interview send a personalized and tailored thank you email to each of your interviewers within 24 hours of the interview as it shows both courtesy and respect. Sending a thank you email can also help you stand out amongst other interviewed candidates who did not send a thank you, provides you another opportunity to showcase your communication skills, and keeps you at the top of the interviewer's mind.

Your thank you should be short, professional, and contain some or all of the following elements:

- Thank the interviewer for taking the time to speak with you. Include the date of the interview and acknowledge something you learned during the interview about their industry, company or work.
- Reaffirm your interest in the company.
- Remind the interviewer why you are the best candidate by highlighting the key skills and the experience you possess that match the position.
- Optional: Address any areas that you did not get the opportunity to discuss at the interview or provide further details on other skills or experiences you did discuss.
- Optional: If necessary, dispel any concerns you feel the interviewer may have about your suitability for the position.
- Close the letter with a final thank you and a reminder that you look forward to hearing from them soon.



NOTE

If the interview was scheduled via the Co-op Program and you did not receive the interviewer's business card at the interview, the Co-op Program **can not** disclose the interviewer's contact information, nor can the Program forward your thank you email to the interviewer on your behalf. In these instances, seek out the interviewer's contact information from the company website or send them a message via LinkedIn.

Example

Subject Line: Thank you - Civil Engineering Co-op Interview (student name)

Dear Ms. Jones,

Thank you for the opportunity to interview with you on May 16th, for the Civil Engineering Estimation position at Alpha Construction. I was very interested to hear about your upcoming project working with the Abadi Memorial Hospital upgrades and how you and the rest of the estimating department are integral to its construction.

As I mentioned in the interview my technical experience using AutoCAD on the UBC Concrete Canoe team would be beneficial in this role. The collaborative aspects of working on the canoe team is also directly correlated with the team structure at Alpha Construction, as you stated I will be working closely on a day to day basis with you and the other two team members.

Again thank you for your time and consideration

*Regards,
Engineering Co-op Student*

Reflect

After every interview, take time to reflect on your interview performance. Write down key points from the interview.

- What did you do well?
- Where could you improve?
- What issues, facts or general information arose during the interview that you would like to prepare for or avoid in future interviews?

If you did not perform well in the interview, arrange to meet with your Co-op Coordinator to discuss your performance to develop strategies to help you improve for your next interview.

Resources

The links below are for resources referenced throughout this toolkit. If you have any challenges accessing the links, please contact your Co-op Career Advisor.

[Tips from Employers](#)

[Examples of Interview Questions](#)

[Skills Matrix](#)

[Interview Checklist](#)

[Interview Preparation Sheet](#)

[“Tell me about yourself” Toolkit](#)

[Technical Interview Questions Toolkit](#)

[Technical Interview Toolkit - ECE Related Roles](#)

[Reference List Toolkit](#)