

## CAREER GUIDE



## INTERVIEWS



SAINT VINCENT  
COLLEGE

CAREER AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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# Interview Preparation

**AN INTERVIEW** is used to assess your suitability for the position of interest. There are several types of interviews, and each company may elect to use more than one style of interviewing. To better prepare for an interview, students are encouraged to become familiar with the different types of interviews that may be encountered. Just like a resume is used to get you an interview, the interview is what will get you the job. Be sure to follow the proper interview guidelines by speaking with your career consultant. Afterward, landing the perfect job will be that much easier.

## How Do I Prepare for My Interview?

- **Self-assess!** Take time to critically think about your education, experiences and skills and how they relate to the career you are seeking.
- **A large portion of your interview is how you prepare for your interview.** Have thorough, organized responses to anticipated interview questions. Support all of the skills and knowledge you claim to have with examples.
- **Do a “dry-run” to the interview site.** Be sure you know the route to avoid getting lost and assess the parking situation.
- **Do your research.** Know where the company is, what the company does, its culture and details about the job description. Thoroughly read the company’s website and any recently published articles.
- **Arrive early, dress to impress and have your materials well-organized and error free.** Arriving approximately 15 minutes early is the standard. Be sure you are dressed professionally (no exceptions.) You should be prepared with multiple copies of your resume, reference page, transcripts, work samples and any other materials you believe will help showcase your abilities.
- **Notify the employer ahead of time about any accommodations needed** (i.e.: wheelchair accessible buildings, interpreter, enlarged print materials).
- **Respond to the interviewer with the appropriate media.** If the employer called you to set up an interview, you should respond by calling.
- **Do not drink the night before your interview!** Alcohol impairs long-term memory and shortens attention span up to 48 hours after drinking.
- **Make sure that you are well-rested and alert for the interview.**
- **Turn your phone off, entirely, prior to the interview.**
- **Ask for the names and titles of your interviewers.**

## What Else Should I Be Aware of During My Interview?

- **Be enthusiastic and smile.** Remember your manners and always greet and leave with a firm handshake. A positive, upbeat attitude makes you likable! Address the interviewer(s) by name.
- **Remember to provide examples when answering questions and do not hesitate to ask the interviewer for clarification or to repeat a question if you are unsure.** Be prepared to ask several of your OWN questions.
- **A successful interview is a conversation, not a one-sided interrogation.**

## Use the SOLER Approach

Be aware of non-verbal cues.

- S** Face Interviewer **Squarely**
- O** Maintain **Open** stance
- L** **Lean** forward slightly
- E** Maintain good **Eye** contact
- R** **Relax**

# Types of Interviews

## Traditional Interview

You should always be prepared to answer some traditional interview questions. Many times, employers will combine another type of interview with traditional interview questions.

## Case Interview

This interview is most commonly used among consulting firms. During a case interview, you will be given a scenario, asked to identify the problem and to solve the identified problem. This type of interview is not as common and can be difficult. Often the employer will be looking at “the process” of HOW you went about solving the problem, not necessarily the solution. The focus is primarily on analytical skills, but other skills are reviewed such as attention to detail, how you handle pressure and time management.

## Phone, Facetime or Skype Interview

Telephone, Facetime or Skype interviews are scheduled for a variety of reasons. Most often, they are used as a method of prescreening job applicants for employment to narrow the pool of candidates before determining who is going to be invited for an on-site interview. This saves the company money and time. Often, this type of interview is considered the “first-round” interview. The questions you are asked may be more general and less technical — basic questions about your classes, career interests, and why you applied. They will want to know your availability and even ask you some preliminary behavioral questions and, although less common, some technical questions to determine your skill level for the particular opening. The interview can last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour.

## How to Prepare

Now that you have begun internship or full-time job searching, be prepared for unexpected calls from employers. Although most employers call Monday through Friday during business hours, it is possible to receive a call from a prospective employer in the evening or during the weekend.

- Answer your phone professionally at all times.
- Only answer if you are in a quiet place; otherwise, locate a place that is free of distractions as soon as possible and call the employer back.
- Always have a professional voicemail message on your phone and a professional ID for your Skype account. State your name and message clearly and slowly.
- If you miss a call from an employer, return the call as soon as you can the same day or, if in the evening, early the next day. Leave your full name, contact information and best time to be reached.
- Read the job description to which you applied and research the company.

- Review your resume and be prepared to elaborate on any portion of it if asked.
- Prepare a list of questions for the employer.
- Do not chew gum, eat or smoke during your interview.
- Dress professionally. If you “dress the part” you will naturally project yourself with more confidence. Following the same philosophy, smile. That too can radiate over the phone or through Skype.
- Speak slowly and concisely. Since the listener cannot see your body language, your verbal skills become even more important. Convey your enthusiasm and confidence by speaking at an appropriate tone and volume.
- Do not interrupt the interviewer. If you are unclear about a question or topic, it is appropriate to ask for clarification.
- Pausing momentarily to think or arrange your thoughts before speaking is perfectly acceptable.
- Throughout the conversation, refer to the employer as Mr., Ms. or Dr. unless they have invited you to use their first name.
- In addition to your resume, have a pen and paper available to jot down notes or questions you may want to ask at the end.
- When the interview ends, thank the employer for his/her time and ask about the next step in the process.

If you have a disability you believe may affect your phone interview (examples can include stuttering, hearing disability or a speech impairment), it may be beneficial to inform your interviewer ahead of time. This can be done through email or at the beginning of the phone interview. Be sure to mention any accommodations you need (i.e.: TTY). This will make the phone conversation more comfortable for you and the interviewer.

Here is an example of how to inform your employer of a disability before the interview:

*“I am really excited to speak with you about this opportunity to interview with X company. I believe my qualifications and experiences will contribute to X company’s continued success. Before our phone conversation, I want to inform you that I do stutter. I want to reassure you that my stutter only affects the fluency of my sentences but does not affect my communication skills. During our phone interview, please don’t be afraid to ask me to repeat myself.”*

## Behavioral Interview

Behavioral interviewing asserts that “the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation.” In a behavioral interview you will have to demonstrate your knowledge, skills and abilities, collectively known as competencies, by giving specific examples from your past experiences. Many examples are acceptable and could include previous internships or other relevant work experiences, course projects, accomplishments, difficult situations and leadership roles held in on- or off-campus organizations.

Answering behavioral questions requires that you give relevant examples to “prove” you have that skill or strength. The S.T.A.R. technique is an excellent way to answer such questions.

While many candidates are intimidated by this method, a behavioral interview gives you the opportunity to demonstrate to a prospective employer why you are well-suited for the job.

## Group Interview

Group interviews may take place in order to determine how you interact with various groups of individuals. It could involve several people taking turns asking questions or presenting scenarios for you to solve. During this type of group interview (also referred to as a panel interview) there will be more than one interviewer. If this happens, be sure you respond to all interviewers even if only one is asking the questions. Maintain eye contact with all interviewers.

Group interviews could also include several candidates being interviewed at once. Be sure to be honest in your answers and try to focus on your experience, not how other candidates answered the questions. The interviewers will be focusing on one answer at a time, so be sure to remain calm and demonstrate all that you can about why you are the most qualified person for the position.

## Stress Interview

Stress interviews are very uncommon. They are sometimes used by financial service employers, advertising agencies and government agencies that perform clandestine operations. The purpose of these interviews is to see how you react to a stressful situation. You may be asked difficult questions in a pressuring manner or be given a complicated project to work through in a tense atmosphere. One example that has been used is “What is charisma and do you have it?”

### The S.T.A.R. Technique

When providing an example from a past experience, include the following information and your answer will be concise.

**Situation**—what was the situation?

**Task**—what task were you doing?

**Action**—what action did you take?

**Result**—what was the result (choose only positive experiences)?

### Try One!

When practicing a behavioral Interview, be sure to use the S.T.A.R technique. Try to practice using the guide below.

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Result: \_\_\_\_\_

# Questions Asked by Interviewers

## Most Common “Traditional” Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
3. Why are you interested in working for us?
4. Why should we hire you?
5. Where do you want to be five years from now?
6. Why did you choose your major? Saint Vincent College?
7. What courses did you enjoy the most? The least?
8. Are you willing to relocate? Are you willing to travel?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working alone? In groups?
10. Do you possess good communication skills?
11. Which is more important to you, money or the type of job and why?
12. How do you feel about working with people from diverse backgrounds?
13. How do you feel about being an entry-level employee?
14. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
15. What do you do in your free time?
16. Do you think your grades are a good reflection of the type of work you can do for us?
17. Tell me about your greatest achievement.
18. Tell me about your work experience.
19. What was the last book you have read?
20. Why are you qualified for this position?

## Most Common “Behavioral” Interview Questions

1. How would a previous employer describe you? A professor? A friend?
2. What motivates you to put your best foot forward?
3. Tell me about a mistake that you have made recently and what you have learned from it.
4. How have you demonstrated your ability to contribute to a team effort?
5. Give me an example of how you have performed successfully under stress.
6. Tell me about a difficult co-worker. How did you handle him or her?
7. How do you prove your credibility to a team member or employer?
8. How do you handle disappointment and criticism?
9. Tell me about a time you set a goal and failed to reach it.
10. In what ways do you feel that you will be able to contribute to this company?
11. What did you enjoy most about Saint Vincent? What would you change about your experience?
12. If you were the boss, how would you motivate your employees?
13. When working in a team, how do you get others to follow your ideas?
14. If you could change one thing about your previous job, what would it be?
15. Tell me about the most difficult decision you have ever made.

*Practice your responses to these questions, so you are comfortable answering them naturally.*

# Illegal Interview Questions

**AN EMPLOYER** may ask a question you do not feel comfortable answering. Many of these questions might be illegal. Illegal questions may include but are not limited to topics regarding:

- Religion
- Age
- Gender
- Personal Information
- Disabilities
- Marital/Family Status
- National Origin
- Sexual Orientation

If you are asked an illegal question, you have one of three options:

1. You can answer the question. If you decide to answer, frame your response in a positive way.
2. You can ask the intent of the question (e.g. "How is this relevant to this position?"). Then answer the question in the best way possible.
3. You can refuse to answer the question, however, keep in mind that this may harm your chances of getting the job.

If you believe you have been asked an improper or illegal question, DO NOT accuse the interviewer to his/her face, but instead bring your concern to the Saint Vincent Career and Professional Development Center. We may be able to address the issue with the employer, at a later date, without doing harm to your job or internship search.



## Practice Your Interviewing Style

Big Interview is an interview training system that provides hands-on practice with mock interviews tailored to your specific industry, job and experience level.

Access Big Interview through the Career and Professional Development Center's website.



# Questions to Ask the Interviewer

**THE MOST CRITICAL QUESTION** in the interview and the one that often makes for sweaty palms and a racing heartbeat is often the last one. The recruiter smiles, leans forward and says: **“Do you have any questions?”** Many candidates do great on the interview but do not prepare questions to ask the interviewer and neglect this most critical question. This is your moment to leave a lasting impression. Do not ask questions that are clearly answered on the employer’s website or in the interview. You can, however, ask for further information on a question that arises from doing your research. There are topics you should never initiate, such as salary or benefits. That said, there are many great questions you can ask that will help you land the internship or job of your dreams. Good questions show that you are genuinely interested in working for the employer and that you want to ensure it is also a good match for you.

- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- What are you looking for in an ideal candidate?
- When should I expect to hear from you? (This should always be the last question.)
- What is the next step in the interviewing process?
- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- What is the company’s policy on providing seminars, workshops and training so employees can keep up with their skills or acquire new ones?
- How and by whom will my performance be reviewed? Are there specific criteria upon which I would be evaluated? And how frequently are reviews given to new employees?
- What does the company expect in the way of personal and professional growth for a person hired into this position?
- How much guidance or assistance is made available to individuals in developing career goals?
- What’s a typical day like for someone in this position?
- What do you like about the company?
- I’ve been told that I work very well as a team member. What are some of the ways your company encourages teamwork?
- I love your published mission and values. How are these reflected in day-to-day life at the company?
- To whom does the individual in this position directly report?
- What are the challenges and rewards of working in your department?
- How would you describe the work culture in your department?

## Do Not Ask

- About the salary or compensation of any kind
- About another company that may be a competitor
- About how many hours you will work

# Navigating the Job Search and Interview with a Disability

**DECIDING IF** you should disclose your disability in an interview or face-to-face event can be a difficult decision. If your disability is visible, it is only natural that the interviewer will have questions regarding your abilities in relation to the position. In this situation, it is best if you address any potential concerns immediately. If you decide to disclose an invisible disability, wait until after you have accepted the position. Be aware that if you want accommodations, you must disclose your disability to the employer.

## Before an Interview or Employer Event

If you need specific accommodations to succeed at the interview or employer event you should tell the Career and Professional Development Center ahead of time. They may be able to contact the appropriate people to set up the accommodations.

## During an Interview or Employer Event

### If Your Disability Is Visible:

An employer may have questions regarding your ability to complete the job, but he or she is not allowed to ask if you have a disability. This can create an uncomfortable situation for the employer and you. If your disability is visible, it may be best to initiate the conversation about your disability and set a positive tone while you address his or her concerns.

- Positively frame the conversation by starting with your abilities, references, past work and progress to how you expect to complete the tasks for them.
- Use examples of how you have completed similar tasks in the past. It is easiest for employers to understand how you will complete tasks they may assume are difficult by giving them a picture of how you have already done so elsewhere.
- Suggest reasonable accommodations that will help you successfully complete the position's responsibilities. Articulate how the accommodation will enable you to complete the tasks successfully because it has helped you in the past.
- Be confident about your skills and how you can contribute to the company. If you are confident in yourself, they will be confident in you too.

### If Your Disability Is Invisible:

- You should not disclose a disability unless you believe it is essential the employer know.
- If you decide to disclose an invisible disability, wait until after you have accepted the position.
- Disclose if you believe it is necessary or if you need accommodations to complete your job.

## Disclosure Example

*"You may not be aware but I have a visual impairment. At times, it is difficult to read small print. In the past, I have used NaturalReader, a free text-to-speech software that reads aloud any Word, web page, PDF file or email. I have used this successfully for materials such as class instructions, emails and newspaper articles. With the assistance of NaturalReader, I have never had my visual disability negatively impact my work. I intend to use this free program in my next position, and I will bring headphones into work to ensure I do not disrupt my co-workers. As for print-outs, I would ask to be sent the print-out ahead of time and I will enlarge the font on my own. With this assistance, my work will not be impacted by my visual disability."*

## Resources

### Job Accommodation Network

[www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org)

Confidential consultation on the type of accommodations that will best fit your needs

### Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

U.S. Department of Labor  
<https://www.dol.gov/odep>

## The ADA on Disclosure

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits interviewers from asking about your disability. However, if you bring up your disability, they are then allowed to ask questions about it **only as it relates to the position you are applying to and the skills needed**. They cannot ask how you acquired the disability or how many vacation/sick days you take.



# Use Your Common Sense...



Is your email address professional? It should consist of your name or initials.

Is your voicemail message clear and professional?

*"Hello. You have reached Jennifer Smith. Please leave your name, number and message and I will return your call. Thank you."*

Keep your social media pages private. Google your name and review the results.

Mirror the employer's method of communication. Return a call with a call, and an email with an email.

If you are not sure how to respond or handle a situation, call the Career and Professional Development Center for assistance. We offer guidance based on scenarios many students and alumni have encountered.

## What Are the Next Steps After My Interview?

Write a thank-you note to the employer and send within 24 hours. (See page 20)

Critically think about how you did, what you could have done differently and what you may want to ask in a second interview or upon a formal offer.

Haven't heard back? Wait one to two weeks before following up. When you do, re-introduce yourself and give the date you interviewed, reiterate your interest in the position, and ask the status of the opening.