

Complete Guide to Business Interviews



YOU'VE SUBMITTED YOUR APPLICATION. WHAT NOW?

After visiting CBA Career Services and having your cover letter and resume reviewed several times by the Professional Development Consultants, you finally felt comfortable enough to complete and send your job application to several of your favorite companies. What happens next? If you're selected for an interview, if you applied through CBA Connect or Futurelinks, CBA Career Services or SEPA will notify you when you are selected for this process. You will then set up your interview time through the system. If you applied through an external organization, the company will notify you that you were selected as an interview candidate.

An interview is a "two-way conversation" with a two-fold purpose:

1. The employer gains information about your background, strengths/skills, and how you can add value to the organization. The employer is also attempting to discover if you are a "star performer". Most interview candidates can perform the functions of the job, so an employer must gauge how well you will do the job if hired.
2. You, the candidate, gain a better understanding of both the position and the organization in determining if there's a match with your professional and personal needs and goals.

If you are selected as an interview candidate, the next step will be scheduling your interview. Keep the following tips in mind when scheduling your interview:

- Try to schedule the interview between Tuesday and Thursday. If you schedule your interview on a Monday or Friday, the interviewer might still have their mind on the weekend, so steer clear of these days.
- Try to schedule between 10-11AM or 2-4PM. If you schedule the interview any earlier than 10AM, you risk facing a grumpy interviewer who hasn't had time to adjust to the work day yet. Between 11AM and 2PM the interviewer may either be hungry or too full to give you their undivided attention during the interview. After 4PM the interviewer could rush through the interview (after all, no one likes to work late).
- **HOWEVER**, if the interviewer gives you a day and time to meet with them, that is the perfect time to meet with them. Since the interviewer requested that you meet with them during this time, it is the best time for them to meet, and you should attempt to interview during that time. Even if they ask to meet at 4:49PM on a Friday, do everything in your power to interview at that time.

PRE-INTERVIEW REQUIREMENTS AND EVENTS

There are several types of activities that companies may offer for you to engage in before the interview. Although in most cases these aren't required, in some cases, like the pre-interview examination, an employer will not allow you to interview if you haven't completed the pre-interview process. To get a better understanding of each of the possible pre-interview activities, check out the list below.

PRE-INTERVIEW EXAMINATION

Some employers might request that you complete an assessment before the interview can be scheduled. The assessments will usually be one of two kinds. The first, the knowledge, skills, and abilities exam will ask questions that gauge the knowledge skills and general cognitive ability you have in order to assess whether you are able to perform the job. The second examination, will ask questions about your general personality/attitudes, interest and motivations, and psychographic profile. This exam will determine whether you are a fit for the organizations culture, and can even help to predict job performance based upon your interest in furthering your current skills.

PRE-INTERVIEW INFORMATION SESSION

Another pre-interview event that employers might offer to potential candidates is an interview session, held either several nights or the night prior to the interview. This session can cover a variety of topics, but will mostly include basic company information, e.g. demographics, culture, future organizational plans, more detailed job information, benefits, company history, etc. Attendance at the information session is strongly encouraged by the employer, but not mandatory, and allows the candidates to ask questions in addition to learning a little bit more about your potential employer. These sessions are also a great way for you to network with your potential interviewers in a more informal setting before the interview takes place.

PRE-INTERVIEW DINNER

A pre-interview dinner is an attempt for the interviewer(s) to discover how you will behave in a social, more relaxed context. Typically you will be asked to attend a dinner with all of the other applicants present as well. It is important to remember your business etiquette in these situations, as employers will look negatively on rude table manners. Additionally, keep in mind that even if alcoholic beverages are offered at the dinner, it is inappropriate and inadvisable to accept. It is best *not* to drink at these functions, but if you decide to go against our advice, only drink one drink at the most. Also, because you may be interacting with other candidates it is important to be polite and try to circulate conversation around the table. Making a good impression does not mean dominating the conversation, in fact; most interviewers will be put off by this behavior.

PRE-INTERVIEW SOCIAL EVENT

Similar to the pre-interview dinner, a pre-interview social event is the interviewer's way of understanding your interpersonal skills. Pre-interview social events can range from cocktail parties to bowling or golf outings, but you should ultimately approach them in a similar way to the pre-interview dinner, so please read the information above.

PRE-INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Researching the organization before the interview is a must—and it results in a more productive discussion between you and the interviewer. You should *never* go into an interview without conducting thorough research – it will be very clear to the interviewer that you haven't done your homework, and will signal to the interviewer that you aren't that interested in the job. Before you begin your research, it is important to have a clear understanding of the job. Always obtain a position description as well as web or print information on the employer, as this will guide your research.

The employer's website will help you gain an understanding of other posted positions, special programs, services, processes and characteristics of the organization which contribute to their unique culture. BUT, your research should not stop there! Researching beyond the website through industry reports, competitive analyses, and business and professional journals/websites will give you a deeper level of information. On the following page, we will provide you with a list of common questions that you should be able to answer after your research.

RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYER INFORMATION INCLUDE:

- **Hoover's** (<http://www.hoovers.com/free>) Provides comprehensive company data including information on the company's history and recent trends in the industry.
- **US Securities and Exchange Commission** (<http://www.sec.gov>) - Government website that houses all of the required filings for publicly traded companies.
- **PittCat** and **PittCat+** (pittcat.pitt.edu and pittcatplus.pitt.edu) – Access articles and other publications about your company or field of interest.
- **WetFeet** (<http://www.wetfeet.com/asp/home.asp>) provides *insider* profiles on major corporations and emphasize information, ideas and intelligence, which make the organization unique. Their website is also available through CBA Connect.
- **The Wall Street Journal** – (wsj.com) A well-known business news publication where you can search for the latest news on your company
- **Glassdoor** – (glassdoor.com) Provides a free inside look at company reviews and salaries posted anonymously by employees.
- **Yahoo Finance** – (finance.yahoo.com) Provides information on the company's financial information, including free stock quotes, international market data, etc.
- **Bloomberg** – (bloomberg.com) a website that provides financial and other news.
- **Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Twellow, LinkedIn** – (facebook.com, youtube.com, twitter.com, twellow.com, linkedin.com) review the company's social media strategy by checking out popular social media websites.

COMMON QUESTIONS TO KNOW

What to know about the company:

- What is the mission statement? Values? Vision? Etc.
- Know the company's product and/or service. New products in the future?
- Who are the key people in the organization: owners, executive, board members, etc.?
- How has it been growing in the last three years?
- Size of the corporation (employees, sales, assets, earnings, profit margin.)
- What are typical career paths for those entering into a professional track?
- What is the latest news of this corporation this week?
- Know why this corporation is of interest to you personally.
- How does your department for which you are interviewing relate to the whole company?
- Do you know its history? How old are they, how did they start, etc.
- What have the last few years been like?
- Who are the industry leaders? Industry trends?
- What is the size (number of employees) of the organization?
- What is the organizational structure?
- Are there any subsidiaries or parent companies?
- What is the company's financial status and growth outlook?
- What are recent accomplishments that may be significant? Have there been recent changes?
- What is the company's reputation or public image?
- What is the turnover rate in the industry?
- In what type of industry is this company?
- In what part of the market does it compete?
- Who are the major competitors?
- How does the company rank with the major competitors?
- What makes this company distinct from other players in the field?
- What is the latest news about this industry in the stock market/news this week?

ADDITIONAL PREPARATION

In addition to researching the company, you should also take several measures before you walk into the door for your interview. Below are some suggestions on how you can make sure you are fully prepared before the day of the interview.

- **ACTIVATE YOUR NETWORK.** Find out who you know that knows something about the company, job, or person with whom you're interviewing.
 - Don't know anyone? Utilize the Pitt Career Network (a database of University of Pittsburgh alumni and their contact preferences and previous professional experiences) at alumni.pitt.edu/networking.
- **KNOW YOUR INTERVIEW DAY SCHEDULE.** Be sure you know exactly whom you are to see, the location, date, and time. If you don't have this information it's permissible to contact the office to get the exact name and title of the interviewer.
- **DETERMINE HOW YOU WILL GET THERE AND HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE.** **Google Maps** is great for this—but double-checking with someone who knows the location to discover typical traffic times is also advisable. It is also a good idea to take a dry-run to the interview location the week before the interview. Leave at the same time on the same day to ensure you have a rough idea of how long it will take you at that time.
- **DECIDE WHAT TO WEAR.** Look like you're ready to step into the job. Look at what current employees wear to determine how you should dress. Is the culture casual (e.g. Do employees wear jeans to work)? If so, it might be more appropriate to wear a dressed-up business casual outfit. As a general rule however, most employers will be expecting you to wear business professional (yes that means a suit). If you are still unsure of what to wear stop in to see one of the PDCs, and we can give you additional guidance. For women, minimal makeup is the rule. Men and women should also try to keep perfume, cologne, jewelry, and other accessories to a minimum.
- **PREPARE YOUR QUESTIONS.** Always have 2-3 well-researched and thoughtful questions prepared to ask at the interview. Never ask about salary, benefits or anything easily answered on their website. We will discuss how to craft the perfect questions later in the "Closing the Interview" section.
- **REVIEW YOUR RESUME AS PART OF PREPARATION.** You don't want to be asked to elaborate on an experience and not be able to do so. Examples, evidence and anecdotes are always required when you respond to a question about your skills or accomplishments. Later in this packet we will walk you through several common skills employers will want to identify and help you to develop responses.
- **DON'T GO EMPTY-HANDED!** Take along extra resume copies, a list of references, plus the name, address, and telephone number of the interviewer. Never be late—but if something should cause you to be late, always call, apologize, explain your circumstances, and let the interviewer know you will be late.

ARRIVING AND MEETING THE INTERVIEWER

Although cliché, it really is the truth, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. How you are perceived in the first few minutes can affect the start and outcome of the interview. If the employer's first impression is very positive, then you have to make serious errors throughout the interview to wind up with a poor performance. Conversely, if you start poorly, you have to work extra hard to make it up throughout the interview.

Here are some other tips:

- **BE ON TIME!** Or, even better, be early. Getting there 10-15 minutes early allows you to review your notes, collect your thoughts, and most importantly calm down before you actually go into the interviewing room.
- If you need to check your appearance before the interview begins, do so in the restroom, not in the waiting room – this will look rude and unprofessional.
- Take a breath mint, but do not chew gum as this will be both distracting and rude.
- Find the receptionist, be friendly, and present yourself with confidence. These individuals are typically asked how you are able to interact, so be prepared for some small talk, but don't monopolize their time. After you are checked in and have a small conversation with them quietly take your seat in the waiting room.
- When meeting the interviewer, remember your body language – eye contact, smile, firm (not bone-crushing or limp) handshake, maintain relaxed but alert posture. At this point, expect some small talk. The interviewer will be assessing your interpersonal skills and how you interact in general from the moment they meet you.
- Observe the interviewer. Is he or she relaxed, nervous, friendly, hurried, and disorganized? If hurried or disorganized, you may have to take extra measures to be calm, confident, and to make sure that your strengths and accomplishments are well communicated to the interviewer.

WHEN THE INTERVIEW BEGINS...

- The interviewer will introduce who they are and most likely give you a quick reminder of some of the highlights of the position. While you are expected to know this information, use this time to calm your nerves and adjust to your surroundings.
- After the initial chit-chat, the employer will most likely ask you to "Tell me about yourself." Keep your answer short and career/school related. Introduce yourself, your major, minor, activity involvement on campus, and your ultimate career goals. You can also mention 1 or 2 activities that you enjoy in your spare time (e.g. reading, playing a musical instrument, travel, sports, etc.). DON'T mention "hanging out with friends" or "partying" as an activity. You can also state why you are interested in the position.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

After the initial introduction stage of the interview, the employer will begin to follow some sort of pre-determined format, which determines what time of interview you will be having. Most interviews, particularly for internships and full-time entry-level employment will be classified as the “Behavioral Interview.” We have provided an extensive list of all of the possible types of interviews below, but will spend most of our time evaluating the Behavioral Interview as it is the most commonly used. If you believe you have a different type of interview scheduled, and would like to go over it in further detail, please contact CBA Career Services to set up an appointment. To review the ins and outs of the Behavioral Interview, please flip to the end of this section.

SCREENING INTERVIEW

Your first interview with a particular employer will often be the screening interview. This is usually an interview with someone in human resources, and will typically take place on Pitt’s campus. It also may occur over the telephone. He or she will have a copy of your resume in hand and will try to verify the information on it. The human resources representative will want to find out if you meet the minimum qualifications for the job and, if you do, you will be passed on to the next step.

CASE INTERVIEW

A case interview is an analysis of a business issue that is ultimately designed to test your problem-solving abilities. The interviewer will present you with a business situation that causes a problem and ask you for your perspective and recommendation on solving the problem. Employers use these interviews as a way of assessing your analytical and creative thinking as well as your demeanor under pressure. A successful response to a “case question” is more about how you approach the issue or problem and less about a specific answer.

STRESS INTERVIEW

In jobs where you are required to work through adverse conditions or under pressure frequently, the employer might choose a stress interviewer. In a stress interview, the interviewer will try to artificially introduce stress into the interview. One way this can be done is if the interviewer asks questions so quickly that the candidate doesn't have time to answer each one. Another interviewer trying to introduce stress may respond to a candidate's answers with silence. The interviewer may also ask weird questions, not to determine what the job candidate answers, but how he or she answers. Once you realize what's happening, try to stay calm and you can mentally re-frame the situation.

GROUP OR PANEL INTERVIEW

As part of a second round or final day of interviewing, some organizations will build in a group or panel interview. This is an opportunity for the organization to pair you directly against your competition and evaluate your ability to think “on your feet” and interact in a group situation. Preparation for this type of interview is the same as for any interview in that you still need to prepare your STARS (See Behavioral Interview below)—and for the questions you will ask—prepared beforehand (we will discuss how to do this in later on in this packet).

MULTIPLE INTERVIEWERS INTERVIEW

In this type of interview, the company will select several individuals to interview you at one time. Your challenge is to make eye contact with each member of the group as you’re speaking.

This needs to be accomplished in a relaxed and confident manner— which can be challenging for some. Additionally, you need to be sure you’re not excluding anyone—and look at everyone approximately the same amount of time. Also, keep in mind that this interview can be combined with the Group or Panel Interview and the Behavioral Interview; so be sure to review those sections as well.

The Multiple Interviewers Interview is also an opportunity for you to demonstrate how you can “build” conversation and discussion based on what group members are saying.

For Example:

Interviewer A - Ms. McCall: “In your role as event manager for your business organization’s recruitment season, it must have been stressful to know it was your job to increase membership when no one had RSVPed for one of the events one week before it was to take place - how did you handle that?”

Your response: “I did feel the pressure, but also knew I had a good team around me. We met several times and developed an outstanding strategy for publicizing the event through a variety of print and web resources - including creating a Facebook group that generated 40 attendees.”

Interviewer B - Ms. Smith: “It would be helpful if you could talk about the process you used to plan and coordinate all three events as the recruitment event manager for your business organization.”

****Your discussion building response:** “I’d be glad to-one additional comment however to Mr. McCall’s question-which also relates to your question. Managing pressure was the key challenge for this position-not just in terms of marketing events in a short timeframe-but other responsibilities including dealing with daily scheduling problems, logistics such as room reservations, several budget concerns...”

RESUME WALK-THROUGH

Employers ask questions about your academic and career experiences—they make connections between them and the requirements for the position. Employers will ask you to elaborate on experiences from your resume. They will also ask you how you see your skills/background meeting the position requirements. They will evaluate your answers on both content and presentation.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

Most managers, recruiters and human resource professionals have been trained to conduct a behavioral interview. The basic premise of the behavioral interview is that *past and present behavior is the best predictor of future behavior*. Therefore, the interviewer structures their discussion with you in order to obtain specific, behavioral examples from your previous experience. As we mentioned before, this type of interview the most commonly used and is the well-known industry standard among business professionals. When answering behavioral interview questions, use the STAR method. See the next page for more detailed information on the STAR method and answering questions.

THE S.T.A.R. METHOD

As we mentioned before, the Behavioral Interview is the most widely used type of interview by business professionals. In this type of interview, after the initial introduction stage of the interview, which we discussed in “Arriving and Meeting the Interviewer,” the interviewer will proceed to ask you questions aimed at understanding how you behaved in certain situations in the past. We will walk you through the appropriate way to answer one of these questions.

S.T.A.R. stands for situation, task, action, and result. This acronym can be used as a guide when answering the interviewer’s behavioral questions. After you think of a specific example that answers the interviewer’s questions, walk them through your S.T.A.R.

Situation or Task	Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
Action you took	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did – not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might have done if you had to redo the event, tell what you actually did when the event occurred.
Results you achieved	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

For negatively-tilted questions (e.g. Tell me about a time you were on a team that didn’t work well together), walk the recruiter through your S.T.A.R. including an alternative action that you would take in a similar situation knowing what you know now, and specific result of what you learned as a result of the project’s poor performance.

*As a general rule, if your answer is a total of 2 minutes long, you should spend 30 seconds discussing the Situation or Task, 1 minute discussing the Action you took, and 30 seconds describing the results you achieved.

On the following page, a specific example of an interview question is answered using the S.T.A.R. method.

POSITIVELY-TILTED QUESTION EXAMPLE

Interviewer: Describe a time when you applied your leadership abilities to manage a recent challenge.

SITUATION/TASK

During my junior year, I was elected Vice President for Internal Professional Development for my student organization. The primary duty of this position was to secure professional speakers for monthly workshops. Our goal was to implement programs that focused on professional development and increase attendance by 25% compared to the prior year.

ACTION

I assembled a team to help with the program design and speaker selection. I also developed a survey to determine the members' professional interests and ideas for possible speakers and topics. My team and I had each member complete the survey at one of our General Body Meetings. Then we randomly selected members from this pool for a focus group interview. I had learned about this research technique in my marketing class and thought by applying it we could better understand why attendance had dropped. Because of the information my team gathered from the surveys and interviews, we selected speakers for the entire year, produced a brochure describing each program and the featured speaker.

RESULT

Under my leadership, attendance increased 130% over the previous year.

NEGATIVELY-TILTED QUESTION EXAMPLE

Interviewer: Describe a time that your leadership abilities failed to solve a recent problem.

SITUATION/TASK

During my junior year, I was elected Vice President for Internal Professional Development for my student organization. The primary duty of this position was to secure professional speakers for monthly workshops. During planning of the first workshop of the semester, the team I assembled began to complain that one of the members was not pulling his weight.

ACTION

At the time, I decided that the most appropriate course of action was to talk with the team member about his performance. It didn't start out smoothly – he was defensive at first and resented my speaking to him about his work behavior – especially since he was a senior and I was a junior. Since he was hesitant to talk, I decided to wait to see his performance during the first workshop before proceeding.

RESULT

The first workshop unfortunately had the lowest attendance yet. I knew since the troubled team member's performance was affecting the morale of the team. Eventually, after I continually approached him and encouraged him to talk, he confided in me that he had some family problems at home that were affecting his energy level and patience. After I was able to empathize with him about his current situation, he exceeded my expectations when planning the next workshop. Although I did not immediately solve the problem, I learned that patience and empathy are crucial components necessary for any leader to succeed.

PREPARING YOUR S.T.A.R.s

Although it is difficult to predict the exact questions the interviewer will ask, by recalling previous examples of times you have demonstrated the following skill set, you will be more prepared for the most common questions. Also, review the job description to get a good idea of what skill set the employer will be asking about in the interview. If it says “looking for candidates with leadership and problem solving skills,” try to think of at least one example of when you demonstrated leadership abilities and one example of your problem solving skills.

Below are some common skill sets, along with positively-tilted and negatively-tilted questions recruiters may ask:

TEAMWORK

- Please give your best example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal.
- Tell us about a time that you had to work on a team that did not get along. What happened? What role did you take? What was the result?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- How do you define going the extra mile for your customer, give me an example of when you have done this.
- Describe a recent situation when you had to handle a dissatisfied and angry customer.

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Tell me about a time when a member on a team you led did not agree with your opinion.

DECISION-MAKING/PROBLEM SOLVING

- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem
- Give an example of a time in which you were hasty to make a decision. Discuss how this affected your team project.

ADAPTABILITY

- Give an example of a time you are faced with and overcame an obstacle to an important project?
- Tell me about a time when your style was not meeting the objectives and/or people were not responding correctly.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

- Tell me about a time you reacted well when faced with constant time pressure.
- Tell me about a time when you poorly handled a stressful situation.

GOAL-SETTING/ACHIEVING

- Give an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Please give an example of a time when you set a goal and did not achieve it. What could you have done differently to reach your goal?

PRIORITIZATION

- Give me an example of a project that best describes your organizational skills.
- Talk about a time when you underestimated how long you would need to schedule a project.

INITIATIVE

- Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Give some instances in which you weren't able to anticipated problems on a recent project.

ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

- Give examples of how you have acted with integrity in your job/work relationship.
- If you can, tell about a time when your trustworthiness was challenged. How did you react/respond?

THE CHALLENGE OF COMMUNICATING WITH EMPLOYERS

After preparing your S.T.A.R.s by thinking of specific situations, be sure you use your own words and language. If you simply memorize and mimic your answers, you will come across as insincere—even robotic. Not the impression you want to make.

OTHER TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CREDENTIAL VERIFICATION QUESTIONS

These types of questions are typically asked during a screening interview, or at the beginning phase of the interview. The purpose of these questions is to ensure you did not falsify information on your resume. A type of credential verification question could be, "How long were you at XYZ company."

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

Technical questions are common when interviewing for accounting or finance positions, and will ask the candidate to recall information specific to their field of interest. For example, a recruiter might ask, "Tell me how the balance sheet relates to the income statement." Brush over your basic technical knowledge before the interview so you can answer these questions with ease.

CASE QUESTIONS

This type of question includes problem-solving questions designed to understand how you analyze potential situations and problems. Questions can range from: "How many gas stations are there in Europe?" to "How many ping pong balls could fit in a Volkswagen?" Its purpose is to evaluate not only your mental math calculation skills, but also your creative ability in formulating the mathematical formula for providing an estimate.

PERSONAL INTEREST QUESTIONS

These questions can be either formal or informal type and are geared towards determining if you are a good personality fit for the position. Sample interview questions could include: "Did you catch the score of the Steelers game last night?" or "What did you think of the last episode of American Idol?" The purpose of these questions is to see if you are well rounded and to gauge your personal interests to see if you are passionate about the job. For example, American Eagle may want to know if you are really interested in fashion and Dicks Sporting Goods might want to ensure you are interested in sports.

ILLEGAL/INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Although every trained interviewer knows that questions about your age, sex, marital status, religion, national origin, and disability are off limits in an interview setting, employers who are new to the interviewing process may cross the line by asking you about one of these areas. These types of questions are referred to as illegal questions, because the employer has no legal right to ask you them. If asked, do not answer the question, but politely decline and state that you do not feel comfortable with the question. Similarly, inappropriate questions, although legally allowed, are ones that make you feel uncomfortable, such as, "Is your girlfriend white?" or "If you were in a meeting and a coworker put his hand on your thigh what would you do?" Again, if at any time you feel uncomfortable with a question the recruiter is asking, politely decline to answer.

Market Yourself: How to sell your study abroad experience in an interview

The interview is your time to articulate how your skills, experiences, and personality fit the needs of the organization. During the interview, you may be asked about your study abroad experience and you should be ready to answer these questions in a way that highlights how the skills obtained overseas will “add value” to the employer and will enhance your job performance.

Here are some examples of questions you might be asked:

1. **“You studied in Sydney. Why did you decide to go there? How was your experience the same or different from your expectations?”**

Answer Strategy: Think back to why you decided to go. It may help to refer back to the personal statement you wrote with your study abroad application. Think about the things that surprised you while you were overseas. For example, you may have realized that Australia is more diverse than you believed it to be.

2. **“What have you accomplished at school or during your study abroad experience that you are most proud of?”**

Answer Strategy: Think about the goals you had for going overseas. Which goals did you meet? Which ones were you most proud of? As you relate this to the interviewer, you might express it by...

- a. Explaining the goal you had for traveling abroad.
- b. Describing how this goal was accomplished.
- c. Sharing what you learned along the way.

3. **“What did you learn overseas that will help you do this job successfully?”**

Answer Strategy: Think about the ways in which you have changed. You might have learned to be more flexible, adaptable, tolerant, open-minded, patient, etc. You may have gained specialized skills or knowledge from your classes, an internship or volunteer opportunities. Think about how some of these changes and skills might be useful on the job.

Often times when students are asked about their international experience, their answers are a short. They answer something like “It was great!” Employers are looking for you to be able to sell the experience in terms of what you gained professionally. So instead of having very limited answers like, “It was the first time I was away from my parents,” or “I got to experience the culture of country x,” rephrase to address the skills and perspective that you gained-“Being on my own I learned how take responsible for myself and to prioritize what I wanted to gain from the experience.” “While in country x I gained a useful perspective on the culture and how they approach business. I understand that they put an emphasis on building relationships with their clients and aren’t just interested in making the sale.”

Phone and Web Conference Interviews

It is becoming more and more common for employers to do first round interviews via phone or through a web conference. They are often used as screening interviews because they are cost-effective ways for employers to identify candidates for advancement in the hiring process. And while you will probably be asked similar questions as you would in a face to face interview, there are other things you need to prepare for in this interview mode.

- Phone interviews are usually shorter than in person interviews. You want to make sure you have practiced your STAR technique to provide concise answers. Try to keep your answers to a minute or two.
- You won't be able to see the interviewer and they won't be able to see you. You need to make sure your tone carries your enthusiasm for the position and employer since they won't see your nonverbal. Remember to smile!
- Be sure to take the call in a place that is free of distractions and noise. If you are using a cell phone, it is important that you are someplace where you won't lose the call. And make sure your battery is fully charged.
- Remember to sit when you take the call rather than stand. It will help keep your tone professional. By standing, you may be tempted to take on a more casual tone. It will also keep you from pacing and fidgeting with distractions in the room.
- To avoid an awkward start to the call, answer the phone by stating your name. This lets the person on the other end know exactly who you are and save them trouble of asking for you.
- If a major distraction happens during your interview, mention it. Your honesty will likely be appreciated. The worst thing you can do is attempt to cover up something that takes you out of the moment because it could make you look like you aren't paying attention.
- Prepare all the materials you will need for the interview and be at the location of the call at least five minutes early. This includes having a physical copy of your resume in front of you. The interview can call early; in fact some employers use this as a tactic to test candidates.
- You must convince the interviewer that they need to bring you into the office for a face to face interview.

Treat a phone interview the same way you would an in person interview-refrain from smoking, chewing gum or eating while you talk with the employer. Be sure to have a copy of your resume in front of you to reference throughout your interview. It can also be helpful to have paper and something to write with the event the interviewer shares information with you that you want to record. Some students have gone so far as to dress in a suit to help them project a professional focused frame of mind.

When preparing for a web conference interview, remember that it is the same as a face to face interview, just not in the same physical space. You will want to dress professionally and refrain from smoking, chewing gum, eating, all the things you would avoid during an in person interview. Another important thing to consider is the location of the interview. How much of your room or apartment will the employer see? You might want to practice a web broadcast with a friend-what are the things in the background that an interviewer will see? Are they distracting? What does it say about you? Consider other spaces on campus that might be

available for you to use. If you are using your room or apartment, be sure to turn off all radios, TVs, cell phones that could potentially interfere with your conversation.

Since the interview might be in a different time zone, verify what time 1pm might be—is that 1pm your time or 1pm their time? You wouldn't want to miss a call because you didn't clarify the time.

As in a face to face interview, it is important to ask well thought out questions at the end of the interview and clarify what their timeline is for making a decision about the position. Be sure to confirm the interviewer's contact information for you to send your thank you.

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

After you have answered the bulk of the interview questions, the interviewer will typically close by asking if you have any questions about the position or company. NEVER SAY NO! You should always have a list of questions prepared for the interviewer to demonstrate your interest in their company. Using knowledge appropriately in the interview (without coming across as cocky or a know-it-all), you'll be translating the knowledge to *intelligence* in the interview. Below are several examples of both poor and good questions to ask.

EXAMPLES OF POOR QUESTIONS:

1. "Tell me about your training program." (Too general—shows you didn't do your homework.)
2. "At what salary level would I be if I progress to Step 3 in my second year with the company?" (Shows your concern is money and not contribution you can make.)
3. "I noticed that on the second half of last year, your dividends dropped 2 points—was that due to the 5 retail stores you closed in Allegheny County or just the general economy?" (Sounds critical and like you're showing off. The question is a bit technical for most interviewers – especially the Human Resource interviewers. A better question would be... "Could you discuss a few of the business and political issues regarding the five retail stores that closed this past year?")

GOOD QUESTIONS DERIVED FROM RESEARCH:

Upon researching the company, you discover this statement: "After about 12-18 months from the time you begin your career with us, if you've demonstrated your ability, you'll be ready for promotion to Merchandising Manager."

"I understand that after 12-18 months of training, promotion to Merchandising Manager is a possibility..."

- ...could you talk about the criteria and methods by which trainees are evaluated?"
- ...what kinds of communication channels are used between the trainees and the supervisors during the evaluation period?"
- ...what is the major quality or accomplishment that distinguishes those who are promoted from those who are not?"

FINAL SELLING OF YOURSELF

After the interviewer answers your questions, you may be asked.... “Would you like to add anything else about yourself which will help me better understand your qualifications?” Even if the interview does not ask this question, be prepared to sell yourself in the final moments of the interview by providing a response like the one below:

“Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you; after learning more about the rotation and extensive rotation in five departments, I believe that Dick’s Sporting Goods is the perfect company for me to start my career. I am confident that my oral and written communication skills that I developed at my last internship will allow me to succeed in all of the departments we discussed today, as writing published reports is a primary responsibility of the position. I look forward to a possible follow-up interview--could you tell me what the process looks like beyond today?”

After the final sell, be sure to gather business cards of everyone so you can follow-up.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

So the interview is over, right? Wrong! Don’t relax just yet, one of the most important stages of the interview is the after the interview follow-up. Be sure to send a thank you note to each and every interviewer. We recommend sending two kinds of thank you notes. First, immediately following the interview be sure to send an email thanking each interviewer for their time that day. However, sending a thank you email will not distinguish you from any of your competitors. To make yourself stand out, send a hand-written "Thank You" note on nice stationary or on a very simple card (no butterflies, poems, or flowers – keep it simple). In this note, again thank them for the opportunity and their time. Keep it short and sweet. If there is something more personal you discussed in the interview, like a shared hobby or a future trip they are taking, this is a good place to reflect upon that.

For more specific information on how to write a thank you letter, check out the CBA Career Service guide “How to write a thank you note” or stop into the office to talk with a PDC.

SECOND ROUND/OTHER ROUND INTERVIEWS

Some interview processes, especially at larger companies will have more than one round. In order to prepare for each interview round, review this guide, or talk about your final round interviews with a PDC. This process is normal and simply allows the company to fully assess the candidate pool in a variety of different situations before making their final decision. Some potential second round and other round interview settings are listed below.

- **OFFICE VISIT:** Office visits are possibly the most common form of second round interview. During an office visit, the company will provide you with a tour of the facilities where you will be working (or the headquarters of the company), and allow you to meet the staff that you could potentially be working with if you are extended an offer. Remain professional, but relaxed throughout the visit, and ask any questions you might have about the team environment or position at this time.
- **TEAM PROJECT:** Another type of second round interview that is becoming increasingly more popular is the team project. In this type of final interview, high caliber potential candidates are put on a team, and asked to complete some task. The point of the team project is NOT for one person to dominate the project and shine above the other candidates. Instead, employers want to test how well you work together on a team, so be sure to include everyone and listen to their opinion.
- **DINNER/OTHER SOCIAL OUTING:** is an attempt for the interviewer(s) to discover how you will behave in a social, more relaxed context. It is important to remember your business etiquette in these situations, as employers will look negatively on rude table manners. **BE NICE TO THE WAIT STAFF!** Additionally, keep in mind that even if alcoholic beverages are offered at the dinner, it is inappropriate and inadvisable to accept. It is best *not* to drink at these functions, but if you decide to go against our advice, only drink one drink at the most.