

Lesson 1: Career Readiness

Guide for navigating the interview process

Nov 19, 2025



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Interview Basics

Interviews come in many forms—phone, virtual, or in-person. Each requires different preparation and communication skills. In this lesson, we'll explore common interview types, what employers look for, and how to present yourself professionally at every stage.



Types of Interviews

IN PERSON

Face-to-face meeting at a company or event

TIP: Arrive 10–15 minutes early, bring printed materials, maintain eye contact, and posture



VIRTUAL

Video call via Zoom, Teams, etc.

TIP: Test tech beforehand, dress professionally, choose a clean background, and maintain eye contact with the camera



PHONE CALL

Audio-only, often used for screening

TIP: Find a quiet space, speak clearly, smile while talking to sound confident

Common Interview Questions

1. "Tell me about yourself."

- Focus on your background, interests, and what led you to apply.
- Example: "I'm a marketing specialist with five years of experience in brand strategy. I love combining creativity with data and recently led a campaign that boosted engagement by 40%. I'm excited to bring that energy to new challenges."

2. "Why do you want this job?"

- Show you have researched the company and connect your goals to their mission.
- Example: "I admire your focus on community impact, and I want to grow in a role that blends creativity with purpose."

3. "Describe a challenge you faced and how you overcame it."

- Use the STAR Method (see next page).

4. "What are your strengths and weaknesses?"

- Strengths: Be specific and give examples.
- Weaknesses: Choose something you are improving.
- Example: "I used to struggle with time management, but I now use planning tools to stay organized."

5. "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

- Show ambition and alignment with the field.
- Example: "I hope to be leading creative campaigns that make a global impact."

IMPORTANCE OF ASKING QUESTIONS

When asked if you have a question...it is important to use it strategically!

Asking thoughtful questions during an interview shows that you are engaged, curious, and serious about the opportunity. It helps you learn more about the role, the company culture, and whether the position is a good fit for you. Interviewers also see it as a sign of preparation and professionalism.

Examples:

"What were some things the previous person in this position did well that you would like to see continued?"

"Can you tell me more about the team I would be working with?"

STAR Method

The STAR Method is a common format used to answer interview questions by organizing your response into four parts: Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

It helps you clearly explain a past experience by describing what happened, what you needed to do, how you handled it, and what the outcome was. This method is useful because it keeps your answers focused and shows employers how you've used your skills in real-life situations.

Use this method to structure answers to questions like "Tell me about a time you solved a problem."



S

Situation (20% of your answer)

Explain the situation so that your interviewer understands the context of your example. They do not need to know every detail!

Ex. "During my internship at a nonprofit..."



T

Task (10% of your answer)

Next, talk about the task, the problem, or the challenge that you took responsibility for completing, or the goal of your efforts.

Ex. "I was asked to improve donor engagement."



A

Action (60% of your answer)

Describe the actions that you personally took to complete the task or reach the end goal. Highlight skills or character traits addressed in the question.

Ex. "I created a new email campaign and redesigned the donation page."



R

Result (10% of your answer)

Explain the positive outcomes or results of your actions or efforts. Here, it is important to highlight quantifiable results.

Ex. "Donations increased by 25% in one month."

Virtual Interviews

What is it?

A virtual interview is a job interview conducted over video platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. It allows employers to meet candidates remotely and is commonly used for internships, jobs, and college admissions.

Do's & Don'ts

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Log in 10 minutes early• Keep your phone silent• Smile and Stay engaged• Use notes subtly, if needed• Find a quite room and clean background	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be late or unprepared• Multitask during the interview• Interrupt or talk over the interviewer• Read answers word-for-word



Virtual Tips:

- **Lighting:** Face a window or use soft lighting.
- **Background:** Clean, neutral, and distraction-free.
- **Camera Angle:** Eye-level and steady.
- **Attire:** Dress professionally, head-to-toe.
- **Tech Check:** Test mic, camera, and internet early.

WHAT ALL TO BRING TO INTERVIEWS?

- **Printed Resume:** 2-3 copies in a folder.
- **Portfolio or Work Samples:** If applicable, include visuals or links.
- **Pen and Notepad:** For notes and questions.
- **Prepared Questions for the Employer:**
 - "What does success look like in this role?"
 - "What are the team's biggest priorities this quarter?"



Before the Interview

- **Preparation**
 - Research the company, review the job description, and prepare questions to ask the interviewer.
 - Research the company: understand its mission, values, and culture to show that you align with those values.
 - **KNOW THE ROLE!**: understand their expectations and required skills & responsibilities
- **Technology Setup (Virtual)**
 - Test your internet, webcam, and microphone before the interview. Use a quiet, well-lit space.
- **Professional Appearance (All types of interviews)**
 - Dress as you would for an in-person interview. Avoid distracting backgrounds or clothing.
- **Practice common questions**
 - Prepare answers for "Tell me about yourself," "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" and "Why do you want this job?"
- **STAR Method (All types of interviews)**
 - Use the STAR method to answer behavioral questions: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

During the Interview

- **Communication (All types of interviews)**
 - Speak clearly, maintain eye contact by looking at the camera or interviewer, and listen actively.
- **Be on time**
 - Arrive 10–15 minutes early or log in a few minutes before the scheduled time.
- **Stay positive and confident**
 - Smile, be engaged, and show enthusiasm for the role.
- **Listen carefully**
 - Don't interrupt. Take a moment to think before answering.
- **Be honest**
 - If you don't know something, explain how you would find the answer.

After the Interview

- **Follow-Up**
 - Send a thank-you email within 24 hours to show appreciation and reinforce interest.
 - If you have not heard back after the expected timeline, send a polite follow-up email. (Optional)
- **Reflect on your performance**
 - Note what went well and what you could improve.

Appearance

Tip: When unsure, dress one level above the expected.

Professional

Traditional and conservative

Blazer with tailored pants or skirt, blouse, closed-toe heels or flats



Business Casual

Professional but relaxed

Blouse or sweater with slacks or midi skirt, flats or low heels



Startup Casual

Trendy, expressive, neat

Dark jeans or trousers, stylish top, clean sneakers or ankle boots



Grooming & Accessories

Hair: Neatly styled: pulled back, braided, or tidy.

Makeup: Optional; if worn, keep it natural and professional.

Nails: Clean and trimmed; neutral polish if desired.

Jewelry: Minimal, Ex.: stud earrings, simple necklace, watch.

Scents: Light or no perfume; avoid strong fragrances

Resume Tips

Your resume is often your first chance to show employers who you are. Make it clear, compelling, and tailored to the job you want.



What to Include:

- **Contact Information**
 - **Full name, phone number, professional email, LinkedIn profile (optional)**
- **Professional Summary**
 - **2–3 sentence overview of your experience, strengths, and career goals**
- **Skills**
 - **List 5–10 relevant hard and soft skills (e.g., Excel, project management, communication)**
- **Work Experience**
 - **Job title, company name, location, dates**
 - **Use bullet points to highlight achievements and responsibilities**
 - **Start each bullet with a strong action verb (e.g., led, created, improved)**
- **Education**
 - **Degree, school name, graduation date**
 - **Include honors, relevant coursework, or certifications**
- **Optional Sections**
 - **Certifications, volunteer work, languages, awards, or projects**

Formatting:

- Keep it to one page (two max if you have extensive experience)
- Use a clean, professional font (e.g., Arial, Calibri, Times New Roman)
- Stick to consistent formatting for headings, dates, and bullet points
- Save and send as a PDF to preserve formatting

To Avoid:

- Typos or grammar errors: proofread carefully
- Using vague phrases like "responsible for" instead of action verbs
- Including outdated or irrelevant jobs
- Overloading with buzzwords or clichés

- Quantify your impact: "Increased sales by 20%" is stronger than "helped boost sales."
- Use reverse chronological order (most recent job first)
- Don't include personal details like age, marital status, or photos
- Use keywords from the job description
- Highlight experience that matches the role
- Customize your summary and skills for each application

Quick Tips



Riley Sierra, Employee

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PROFILE

Dynamic sales associate with two years of experience at CCH Corporation, specializing in customer engagement and collaboration. Demonstrated ability to enhance customer experiences through personalized service and effective product displays, leading to notable sales improvements. Proven skills in managing time efficiently and solving problems creatively, ensuring seamless transaction processing and inventory support. Committed to fostering positive customer relationships and driving team success in a fast-paced environment.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Apr 2024 — Jun 2024

Volunteer, Empower Food Bank

Volunteering at Empower Food Bank provided an opportunity to support the community by assisting in various operational tasks. Responsibilities included organizing food donations, preparing packages for distribution, and engaging with community members to ensure their needs were met. This experience fostered a greater understanding of food insecurity issues and the importance of community support.

- Assisted in the organization of food drives, increasing community involvement.
- Helped distribute food packages to families in need, demonstrating compassion and commitment.
- Collaborated with fellow volunteers to streamline operations and improve efficiency.
- Participated in awareness campaigns to educate the community about food security.

Jan 2022 — Jan 2024

Sales Associate, CCH Corporation

Serving as a Sales Associate at CCH Corporation involved engaging with customers to provide exceptional service and tailored solutions. The role necessitated a deep understanding of product offerings and the ability to recommend items that best suited customer needs. Maintaining organized displays and ensuring inventory was well-stocked were critical components of the job. Collaboration with team members enhanced the overall efficiency of sales operations.

- Consistently exceeded sales targets by providing personalized customer experiences.
- Recognized as 'Employee of the Month' for outstanding service and dedication.
- Played a vital role in attracting new customers through effective communication.
- Streamlined inventory processes, contributing to better stock management.

EDUCATION

Aug 2018 — May 2022

Sales , Carol University

Aug 2013

Marketing & Sales, Southern Hunt University

Omaha

SKILLS

Customer Engagement

Expert

Sales Improvement

Expert

Team Collaboration

Expert

Problem Solving

Expert

Time Management

Expert

Inventory Management

Expert

REFERENCES

Mary Thompson from CCH Corporation

mary.thompson@gmail.com · 587-698-7045

Resume Template

Portfolios

What is it?

A portfolio is a collection of materials that highlight your qualifications, achievements, and work samples. It is used to show potential employers, schools, or clients what you've done and what you're capable of. Portfolios can be physical or digital and are especially useful in creative fields, technical roles, and career development.

How to make it:

Choose a format

- Physical binder or folder
- Digital file (PDF, Google Drive, etc.)
- Online portfolio website (e.g., Wix, WordPress, Behance)

Organize your content

- Use clear sections and labels
- Keep it neat, professional, and easy to navigate

Update regularly

- Add new projects, certifications, or experiences as you grow

What to include:

Section	Content
Cover page	Your name, contact info, and professional title or objective
Resume	Updated resume with education, experience, and skills
Work Samples	Projects, writing, designs, presentations, or code you have created
Certifications & Awards	Copies of certificates, honors, or recognitions
Letters of Recommendation	Optional: from teachers, employers, or mentors
Reflection or Personal Statement	A short piece about your goals, values, or growth
References	A list of professional contacts (if requested)

Resources



Glassdoor

Why Use It: Offers insider info on companies, salaries, and interview experiences.

How It Helps:

- Prepare for interviews with real questions shared by past applicants.
- Compare salaries and benefits.
- Read honest reviews from employees.

Getting Started:

- Go to [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) and create an account.
- Search for companies or roles you are interested in.
- Read reviews and salary data before applying or interviewing.

ChatGPT

Why Use It:

An AI-powered assistant that helps you brainstorm, write, and refine career materials.

Available 24/7 to answer questions, rephrase content, and offer strategic advice.



How It Helps:

- Get help writing or improving your resume and cover letter
- Practice interview questions and get feedback on your answers
- Rephrase professional emails or LinkedIn bios
- Explore career paths, job descriptions, and industry trends
- Ask for tips on networking, applications, and workplace communication

Getting Started:

Visit chat.openai.com

Start by asking a question like:

- "Can you help me write a resume for a marketing internship?"
- "What are good answers to 'Tell me about yourself'?"
- "Rephrase this email to sound more professional..."

Pro Tip:

Be specific with your requests. The more details you give, the better the response!

Try uploading your resume or past cover letter for personalized feedback.



FlexJobs

Why Use It:

A trusted job search site focused on remote, flexible, and freelance opportunities. Great for finding legitimate work-from-home jobs without the distractions of social media.

How It Helps:

- Browse hand-screened job listings across 50+ career categories
- Find remote, part-time, freelance, and flexible schedule roles
- Access career resources like resume help and skills tests
- Avoid scams and low-quality postings

Getting Started:

Go to [flexjobs.com](https://www.flexjobs.com) and create an account.

(Optional: Paid membership unlocks full job listings and career tools)

Fill out your profile with:

- Career interests and preferred work style (remote, freelance, etc.)
- Skills and experience
- Resume and cover letter
- Job alerts based on your goals

Pro Tip:

Use the "Advanced Search" to filter by job type, schedule, and career level.

FlexJobs is ideal if you want a safer, more private job search experience.

Snagajob

• Why Use It:

- A popular job search site focused on hourly, part-time, and entry-level positions. Great for finding local jobs quickly without needing a public profile or social media presence.

• How It Helps:

- Search thousands of jobs in retail, food service, customer service, and more
- Apply directly to employers with a simple, fast process
- Set availability and preferences to match with jobs that fit your schedule
- Get alerts for new openings near you

• Getting Started:

- Go to [snagajob.com](https://www.snagajob.com) and create a free account
- Fill out your profile with:
- Work availability and preferred job types
- Skills and past experience
- Location and distance you're willing to travel
- Resume (optional but recommended)

