

# Interview guide



## Job posting

- Carefully review each job posting, highlighting key words related to skills, knowledge and experience
- Remember: Always save or print a copy of each job posting you apply to, as you will need to review this before an interview



## Interviews

The purpose of the interview is to determine whether you are right for the job and whether the job is right for you; think of the interview as a conversation between you and the employer where you are both learning about each other. Most interviews are either held one-on-one or in a panel setting with multiple interviewers.



## Interview structure

### Introduction

- You'll want to establish a positive rapport with the interviewers within the first few minutes; be friendly, smile, make eye contact and make sure you have a professional handshake
- Interviews often begin with a few minutes of small talk to help break the ice
- Remember the PAWS acronym when answering the "Tell me about yourself" question  
**P** – Personal **A** – Academics **W** – Work experience **S** – Skills

### Overview

- Interviewers will often provide some structure for the interview process; show your interest by listening attentively

### Questions

- The length of this section of the interview can vary quite a bit and may include a variety of questions assessing your competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities), behaviours, attitude, or knowledge of the company and position

### Closing

- Interviewers will typically explain next steps in the hiring process and ask you if you have any questions for them; have some prepared



## Social media and your job search

- Review all of your social media accounts and privacy settings
- Consider creating a LinkedIn profile which allows you to upload your resume content and connect with professionals locally and around the world
- It is common for interviewers to review your social media accounts and online presence

# Checklist



## Preparing for the interview

- Can you comfortably articulate your values, knowledge, skills, experience and interests as they relate to the position and company you are interviewing with?
- Did you perform an adequate amount of research on the prospective employer?
- Have you prepared knowledgeable and insightful questions to ask at the interview?
- Did you familiarize yourself with the various interview formats?
- In order to prepare yourself for a behavioural based interview, did you familiarize yourself with the SOAR technique?
- Have you reviewed possible questions interviewers might ask and prepared responses to them?
- Is the outfit you've chosen to wear professional, clean and well pressed?
- Do you know what strategy you will use to approach inappropriate questions? Human Rights law prohibits employers from asking you about certain personal information.

## During the interview

- Did you arrive 10-15 minutes early for your interview?
- Were you friendly and courteous, even from the moment you arrived?
- Did you answer the employer's questions using the SOAR format when appropriate?
- Did you reference the job posting or the organization as it relates to your background, skills, values, knowledge or abilities?
- Did you sit up straight and speak clearly?
- Did you shake each interviewer's hand at the beginning and end of the interview?

## Following the interview

- Did you follow up with the employer to send a thank you note or email within 48 hours?
- Did you reflect on how the interview went and how you might improve? It is acceptable to ask the employer for feedback if you do not receive a job offer.

# Preparing for the interview

- **Reflect** on your personal interests, skills, qualifications and goals; this will enhance your ability to communicate how and why you would be a good fit for the position
- Do your **research** on the organization and the position so that you can better respond to questions asked of you in the interview and so that you can clarify anything that you do not understand
- **Read** and re-read your resume and be prepared to use a variety of examples
- Practice and **review** a variety of questions either on your own or with a friend; register for InterviewTalks or a mock interview at Career Services
- **Reconnect** with your references to update them on the position you are interviewing for, and ensure they each have a copy of your resume
- Dress one step above the appropriate attire for the job; pay attention to personal grooming, and ensure you do not wear heavily scented products

## What to take to an interview

- Extra copies of your resume; a list of your references; letters of recommendation (if you have them); questions that you have prepared to ask at the interview; a business folder including paper and a pen

## Prepare and polish

- Knowing how you will answer questions will help you to feel and appear more confident, but if you are stumped on a question don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to clarify or repeat the question, or ask to come back to it
- Develop a strategy to deal with inappropriate questions such as those that pertain to your nationality, age, religious affiliation, political views, gender, etc. Your options are:
  - Answer the question by addressing what you believe are the underlying concerns
  - Ask for clarification on how the information being asked relates to the position
  - Politely indicate that you are not comfortable answering the question and ask if there is an underlying concern that you may be able to address
  - Answer the question to the extent you are comfortable with
- Reconnect with your references to update them on the status of the position for which you are interviewing
- Polishing up your communication skills is essential to effectively showcasing your skills and abilities during the interview; knowing industry-specific language can be helpful

# Interview types

- **Basic/Traditional** – typically include open-ended questions designed to get to know you
- **Behavioural based** – builds upon the premise that future performance is best predicted by past behaviour; questions focus on real-life experiences and actions

One technique for formulating strong answers to behavioural questions is the **SOAR** acronym.

- SITUATION** | Provide a brief overview of the situation you experienced, and who was involved
- OBSTACLES** | Outline the specific problem or issue that you faced
- ACTION** | Explain the action(s) you took to solve the problem or issue that you faced and why
- RESULT** | Describe the positive result or outcome of your actions; your actions; if using an example with a negative outcome, discuss what you learned and/or how you would act differently

- **Case style** – is a common consulting firm interview style. It allows interviewers to see how you respond to situations that may arise, especially those that require problem solving; can be done individually or in a group setting; critical thinking, creativity and presentation are the most important skills to showcase. The types of case questions include:
  - Business problem and strategy questions
  - Brainteasers
  - Market sizing/estimate questions
- **Assessment/Testing** – this can be administered prior, during or following an interview
- **Second and subsequent interviews** – once you get to the second interview you are one step closer to receiving the job offer; the second interview can be more intense as you may meet with more people involved in the hiring decision; they may be longer and you may need to travel
- **Telephone/Teleconference** – phone interviews can be used as screening tools to narrow down a pool of applicants; the challenge is to gain rapport and show enthusiasm with the interviewer when you cannot see their non-verbal cues; speaking confidently and clearly is essential
- **Presentation** – job seeker is asked to prepare a presentation (usually in advance) which is then presented
- **Reception/Dining** – one or more job seekers and one or more interviewers; conducted over a meal or beverages
- **Group** – groups of candidates are placed together during the interview process; make sure to participate without dominating the group; showcase your interpersonal skills
- **Role play** – the job seeker participates in a fictional situation which replicates a scenario that might occur in the position sought
- **Video conference (Skype)** – online format with one interviewee and one or more interviewers; be sure to check your webcam and microphone in advance, and ensure the space around you is free of distractions
- **Recorded video interviews** – online interview format where you record responses to questions on the employer's website

# Behavioural Descriptive Interview (BDI) questions

**Are you ready for your interview?** You must be able to articulate your values, skills, abilities, experience and career goals and also identify areas for professional growth. Employers who hire USask students and alumni look for candidates who display career readiness competencies in addition to other possible competency areas. Try to use the SOAR technique to answer BDI Questions.

## NACE'S CAREER READINESS COMPETENCIES\*

### Professionalism/Work ethic

Demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, e.g., punctuality, working productively with others, and time workload management, and understand the impact of non-verbal communication on professional work image. The individual demonstrates integrity and ethical behavior, acts responsibly with the interests of the larger community in mind, and is able to learn from their mistakes.

- Tell me about a time when you questioned a colleague's integrity/honesty/ethics.
- Tell me about a time when you made a significant mistake at work. What was the outcome and how did you deal with it?
- Tell me about a time when your assumptions resulted in poor judgment.
- Give an example of an occasion when you demonstrated genuineness with a client or customer. What did you say/do, and what was the outcome?

### Teamwork/Collaboration

Build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and viewpoints. The individual is able to work within a team structure, and can negotiate and manage conflict.

- Explain a technique that you have used to effectively motivate; and organize, prioritize, and delegate work.
- How have you dealt with conflicts in the workplace (with managers/employees) in the past?
- Tell me about a time when you had to teach a co-worker something new in order to proceed with a collaborative project.
- Tell me about a time when you volunteered to take a project off someone else's hands.
- In your past work experience, how have you adapted to collaborating with someone who has a different working style than yours?

### Leadership

Leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals, and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. The individual is able to assess and manage their emotions and those of others; use empathetic skills to guide and motivate others.

- Describe an occasion when you had to take control in a team setting and get the group back on task.
- Tell me about a time when you took the initiative to complete a project.
- Give an example of a workplace setting in which you have performed your best.
- Describe how you have set an example for success in the workplace. What did you do and how did it influence your work environment?

### Critical thinking/Problem solving

Exercise sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions, and overcome problems. The individual is able to obtain, interpret, and use knowledge, facts, and data in this process, and may demonstrate originality and inventiveness.

- Give an example of a problem you have dealt with in the past that had more than one solution.
- Tell me about a time when you had to quickly adapt to unexpected events in your workplace.
- Describe a project that you completed and any difficulties you encountered along the way. Explain the difficulties you had.
- When planning a project, what initial considerations have you made before going ahead? Give examples.

Adapted from the Career Readiness Materials developed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

### Oral/Written communications

Articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively in written and oral forms to people inside and outside the organization. The individual has public speaking skills; is able to express ideas to others; and can write/edit memos, letters, and complex technical reports clearly and effectively.

- Give an example of a time when you used your communication skills effectively.
- Tell me about a time when poor communication skills resulted in an undesirable outcome. What did you learn?
- Tell me about a time when there was a conflict in the workplace and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to provide criticism of a colleague's work.
- Describe a time when your listening skills enhanced your ability to communicate.

### Digital technology

Leverage existing digital technologies ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks, and accomplish goals. The individual demonstrates effective adaptability to new and emerging technologies.

- Describe how you have used technology to enhance your work.
- Give an example of a time when technology hindered your ability to perform well on the job.
- Tell me about a time when you used technology to improve your communication skills or get your point across.
- Describe your experience with audio/visual equipment.
- Describe how you have implemented troubleshooting strategies with equipment when you did not have the appropriate support available.

### Global/Intercultural fluency

Value, respect, and learn from diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations, and religions. The individual demonstrates openness, inclusiveness, sensitivity, and the ability to interact respectfully with all people and understand individuals' differences. As a uSask graduate, demonstrating substantive knowledge of Indigenous peoples, and their history, is also crucial.

- Tell me about a time when your political, economic and/or geographic knowledge was useful to talk about world events
- Describe how you would stay globally connected to others
- Describe your cross-cultural communication skills and how you have used them to solve a problem.

### Career management

Identify and articulate one's skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences relevant to the position desired and career goals, and identify areas necessary for professional growth.

- What are your short/long term goals and how does this position connect?
- Tell us about your career plan and what has led you to this position?

### Interview question topics

- Background/Education Questions
- Previous Experience or Employment Questions
- Skills and Qualifications Questions
- Strengths and Accomplishments
- Career Goals
- Personal Traits, Character, Values
- Questions about the company or position

# 10 Essential Interview Questions

You should be prepared to answer these common and challenging questions at every interview

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your short and long term goals and how does this position fit with them?
3. What is your greatest weakness?
4. What are your three greatest strengths?
5. What interests you about this position and the work?
6. What do you know about our company?
7. Why are you leaving your current position?
8. How has your past experience prepared you for this role?
9. Why should we hire you?
10. What kind of salary are you expecting?

## Closing questions they may ask

- Do you have any questions for us?
- When would you be available to begin work if you were chosen as the candidate?
- Would you leave a list of references with us? (if they aren't already supplied)

# Potential questions to ask at the interview

It is important to come prepared with questions that you will ask at the interview to help you better understand the position and to show the interviewer(s) that you are interested and knowledgeable about their organization.

## Connect

- What do you love most about working here?
- How did you come to work here?
- Why is this a good place to work?
- How long have you been at the company and what makes you stay?

## Culture (corporate)

- Tell me about your most successful recent hire, and what qualities make them stand out?
- Tell me about the character of your employees.
- Who are the key staff that I will be working with?
- How would you describe the work environment and corporate culture?

## Challenges

- What do you see as the potential challenges or threats that will impact this work?
- How will I measure my own performance so I know I'm having a positive impact on this challenge?
- Are there succession documents in place?

## Closing

- What are the next steps in the interview process?
- When will a decision be made?
- Are there any skills or attributes that I have not addressed that would improve my candidacy?

### CAREER SERVICES

G50, Lower Marquis Hall (below the bookstore)  
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