



Interview Guide

Congratulations! You have completed an excellent cover letter and résumé, and you have an interview... what should you do now?

Step 1 Before the Interview

Know Yourself

It's not easy to convey your strengths to a potential employer if you don't know them. Think about your skills/abilities, education, and career goals. Review your professional experience including dates, positions, duties/responsibilities, and accomplishments. Be prepared to include diverse examples of accomplishments that illustrate your strengths. Know your weaknesses. Most interviewers begin with "Tell me about yourself." What will you say? Practice an "elevator pitch" or 90-second introduction about your past experience, where you are now and your target experience/career. Ask yourself: "What do I want them to remember about me when I leave?" For example: *Hello, my name is Jacquie Haley and I am a senior psychology major at Kalamazoo College. I am very interested in looking at how sustainable practices positively impact residents in various communities and the implications that they may have on residents' health issues. I am interested in looking at data that may relate to schools, hospitals and potentially small business owners. I am looking for a senior thesis topic near my hometown near Boston, MA, that may be examining some of these issues.*

Research the Industry, Company, and Position

Know what you are applying for! Don't rely on your prior knowledge of a company. Truly research their history, know their current situation, and read where they are headed. View the company's website focusing on the "About Us" and "History" sections to see how

the company describes itself. Utilize sources such as Hoovers (accessible through the Kalamazoo College library), glassdoor.com, and LinkedIn.com to learn more about the organization including: current financial status, company leadership, services offered, biggest competitors, etc. GuideStar offers financial information and organization overviews for non-profit organizations. InfoTrac Newstand (Kalamazoo College library) will help you find recent news articles. These are just a few suggestions for research sources. Check the CCPD website www.kzoo.edu/career or the library for additional sources.

Learn about the character and organizational culture to ensure it aligns with your values. Use LinkedIn to find connections to people who currently work, or have worked at the company. Reach out to contacts before the interview to ask questions about the company culture. Check out professional organizations related to the field to see current trends. Find out who will be interviewing you. Make sure you have a deep understanding of the responsibilities and duties associated with the opportunity. Write down questions that you would like to ask related to the position.

Dress Professionally

Regardless of position or industry, it is best to dress conservatively for any interview. Stand out by presenting your skills, not by your choice of outfit.

What does it mean to dress professionally?

- A business suit in dark colors – suits include jacket and pants/skirt made together (not a blazer and pants)
- Shirts/ties kept modest
- Dark, freshly-shined shoes, heel height moderate and comfortable
- If wearing a skirt, hemline close to knee
- Nylons (without patterns) with a skirt, or dark socks that cover calves with pants
- Minimal jewelry
- Well-manicured nails, polish limited to none or clear
- If make-up is worn, apply lightly
- Hair out of eyes or pulled back, facial hair clean shaven (or very neatly kempt)
- Perfumes/colognes used sparingly

Checklist of materials:

- ✓ Extra copies of your résumé
- ✓ A copy of your cover letter/application
- ✓ A writing pad and pen
- ✓ Contact information for 3-5 references

PRACTICE!

Regardless of the type of interview, it is incredibly important to be prepared. Practice the questions found in this guide in front of the mirror, with your friends, or even record yourself so you can hear your tics (um, like, rrr, etc.). Additionally, you can schedule a mock interview with a CCPD staff member or attend our Mock Interview events to practice your skills.

Step 2 During the Interview

- **Be on time.** Arrive 10-15 minutes early. If you are going to be late, call and explain why.
- **Turn off all electronic devices.** This should occur before you enter the interview site.
- **Have fresh breath.** Use a breath mint (not gum) a few minutes before an interview.
- **Be courteous to everyone you meet.** You are making impressions on all those you encounter. Always portray yourself truthfully.
- **Fill out all applications neatly, completely, and be honest.** Write “negotiable” in the salary section.
- **Greet your interviewer(s) professionally.** This should include a smile, a firm handshake, and calling them by their surname. Also thank them for meeting with you when you are first introduced.
- **Be aware of your body language.** Watch yourself in a mirror or videotape to see your nonverbal expressions (slouching, excessive hand movement, eye contact, facial expression, etc.).
- **Be positive about past experiences – even if they were negative.** It does not reflect well on you if you tell stories about experiences or bosses you did not like, or boring tasks you were assigned.
- **Focus on them, not on you.** Explain what you can do for the employer or organization rather than what they can do for you.
- **Give yourself permission to be who you really are – let them see your real character.** Candidates who are offered positions usually are those who exhibited enthusiasm, who did their homework, are confident in their abilities, and who were interested in trying to understand the character of the interviewer and the organization. In short, they were engaging – and they were engaged.

When the interviewer is finished asking you questions, you will likely be offered the opportunity to ask questions of your own. Questions about salary or benefits are not advised until you have moved farther through the process. Determine if you could find the answers somewhere else (website, newspaper, etc.), and if you can, the question is not worth asking. Sample questions are listed below:

- What is a typical day like in the office?
- What characteristics are you most likely to find in people in this position?
- What is your highest priority in the next six months and how could someone like me help?
- Where do you see your company going in the next five/ten years?
- What do you like most about working here?
- What is the largest single challenge facing the staff now?
- How much travel is involved with the job? How often and in what cities?
- How are employees evaluated? How often?
- When do you expect to make a decision regarding the next step in the interview process?

Step 3 Following Up

Following up with a note after your interview leaves a positive impression of the kind of employee you would be and serves as an example of your work habits and writing abilities. The body of the note should include: thanking them for their time, expressing interest in and enthusiasm toward the organization and position, highlighting experiences or accomplishments that exhibit your qualifications, and asking for another meeting to be scheduled. Write the note within 24 hours, so there is no time to forget you. It has become more common place

to write this note in an email form since hand-written notes typically take more time to arrive. However, both forms of communication are acceptable and some employers mention that receiving hand-written notes are still a nice touch.

The next step in learning the art of interviewing is to practice your skills by taking advantage of CCPD programs and services. We would love to see you in the office or at an event! Check our homepage for dates, times, and locations: www.kzoo.edu/career.

PHONE INTERVIEW TIPS

Often a phone interview is the first step in the hiring process. Aside from your résumé, this will be your first contact with the company and a great time to sell yourself for the position.

- Work with the recruiter or hiring manager to set up a specific time for the call.
- Determine who will be calling who and take time zones into account. “K” is in the Eastern Time Zone.
- Dress professionally to remind yourself you are in a professional mode.
- Make sure your answering machine/voicemail is courteous and professional.
- Make sure your housemates know you are interviewing so they do not disrupt your call. Eliminate distractions around you, such as television, music, etc.
- Do not interrupt your conversation to answer call waiting.
- Speak up if there is a bad connection or you have difficulty hearing the other person.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by saying things like “I understand” or “yes.”
- Have your notes about the company, the position, and yourself in front of you so that you come across as organized and articulate.
- Have a glass of water next to you in case your mouth becomes dry.

VIDEO INTERVIEW TIPS

Many employers use video-conferencing software such as Skype to conduct interviews to save money and time.

- Create a designated space for your interview. Avoid an unappealing background.
- Find a quiet place for the interview. Your microphone could pick up noise from roommates knocking on your door, talking, or music that would distract the interviewer.
- Check your technology at least one day before the interview.
- Wear a full suit. The interviewer may not see your full outfit, but you avoid any chance of embarrassment by maintaining a professional presence.
- Smile! Look straight into the camera to maintain “eye contact” as if it were a face-to-face setting.
- Speak confidently with a clear voice that is loud (but not shouting).

MEAL INTERVIEW TIPS

Meal interviews are used when an employer wants a chance to get to know you outside of the office setting. It may occur later in the hiring process and, quite possibly, with multiple candidates.

- Even if the group seems casual, stay alert. Do not forget that you are being interviewed all of the time and table manners reveal a great deal about you.
- Order a reasonable amount of food that is easy to eat and not too messy.
- Do not change your order once you have made it and try not to send food back.
- Order non-alcoholic beverages. If alcohol is served, consider declining.
- Wait until all have been served to begin eating. Always be polite to your server.
- Keep the conversation lively and pleasant and do not talk with your mouth full.
- When presented with many forks/spoons, start from the outside in, using only one per course.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To prepare for any interview, think of specific examples from your accomplishments, skills, and education, and link these to the job for which you are applying. Do your homework about the organization and be yourself. This is an opportunity for both you and the interviewer to see if this is a good fit.

“Tell me about yourself.”

This question allows you to give examples of your accomplishments through past experiences. Frame your answers in a way that relates them to the job for which you are applying.

Example answer:

“I am a senior seeking an opportunity to work for an organization that shares my values. I have served as the co-president of an environmental organization at Kalamazoo College, where I lead meetings, hosted guest speakers, and increased club membership by 20% over the past two years. Throughout much of my education, I have prepared presentations, conducted research, and worked collaboratively with various departments on campus to implement sustainable practices. In my free time I also enjoy reading and horseback riding, which allow me to tap into my creative side.”

“Tell me about a time when you had to juggle priorities to meet a deadline.”

Example answer:

“During my work as a career associate, we decided to offer a mock telephone interview program. I was involved in the promotion of the program as well as scheduling appointments for my coworkers. At the same time, I was responsible to cover drop-in hours at the office and there were many student guests visiting during the day. To ensure that I met my work deadlines while maintaining my student class load, I drafted an alternate work schedule and priority list and met with my supervisor to briefly discuss it. We arranged a plan that was mutually beneficial, and she appreciated my initiative. Setting this schedule and priority list resulted in my focused attention both at work and at home, and allowed ample time for the success of the mock telephone interview program.”

“Why do you want to work here?”

This is your opportunity to discuss what you have learned from research about the company/position.

Example answer:

“I am attracted to Google because of your expressed dedication to your users. Google’s ‘Ten Things We Know To Be True’ were relevant when they were written and are just as relevant today. I especially enjoy the idea of ‘making money without doing evil’ and ‘great just isn’t good enough’ and feel that your company philosophy fits well with my own. I’ve been beta testing Google+ and I’m eager to get more involved with the product.”

“What is one of your greatest strengths?”

Example answer:

“One of my greatest strengths is detailed organization. I’m often called upon by my peers to take care of logistical details because I am very accurate. I manage my time well and keep things organized; it is just part of my nature. For example, this winter I organized a campus-wide event that brought over 400 guests in attendance for the program. To begin with, I lead a planning meeting with the student organization leaders sponsoring the event to distribute responsibilities. I was responsible for marketing, utilizing both print and social media. I corresponded with various group members throughout the planning prior to the event and arranged all of the event logistics, including catering, room reservations and media. Because logistics were all pre-arranged, the event was well-managed and this allowed guests and event planners to enthusiastically participate and enjoy the program. I found that I enjoyed collaborating with various college departments as well as serving in a leadership role worked very well. In fact, this model has been replicated by other student organizations for event planning.”

“What is one of your greatest weaknesses?”

Example answer:

“In the past, I’ve taken on too many extra-curricular commitments on top of school. I’ve learned that volunteering for more and more is a weakness of mine, and have started carrying a calendar and ‘to-do’ list with me to every meeting. This has helped me to remember commitments that I’ve already made, and has cut down on my tendency to over-extend myself.”

PANEL INTERVIEWS

- Shake hands with each panel member. Repeat names and/or take notes to remember them.
- Bring a copy of your résumé for each member. Find out the number of panelists ahead of time.
- Begin your answer by looking at the person who asked the question. Then make eye contact with the rest of the panel and end your answer by looking again at the person who asked it.
- Try to connect topics from different panelists to create a sense of cohesiveness.
- When you ask a question, direct it to one person in the panel.
- Shake the panelists' hands again at the end of the interview and thank them for their time.
- Send at least one thank-you note to the head of the panel, but preferably one to each member.

OTHER COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Why are you motivated to study _____?
- What is your biggest motivation to work in this industry?
- What do you like best about your current position?
- Talk about a group situation in which there were problems. How did you handle the situation and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time where you accomplished something that you were particularly proud of.
- Tell me about a time when you had to quickly adapt to a new environment
- How do you see this position in relation to your overall career plan?
- We are looking at several candidates for this position. What makes you stand out?

Your K-Plan Makes You Distinctive

Not every undergraduate will benefit from the tremendous learning opportunities inherent in the *K-Plan*. You will want to communicate clearly how the specific opportunities you have had at K make you stand out as a candidate. Since some interviewers may not know about the *K-Plan*, you might briefly explain its four components.

Distinguish yourself with specific examples of how elements of your own unique *K-Plan* have helped you to: know at least one **field of inquiry** in depth; study a **variety** of fields of inquiry; explore the **cultures** of different regions of the world; be able to **learn effectively** in a variety of settings; be able to **integrate** theory and experiences through reflection; **respect** personal and cultural differences; be able to **communicate** effectively in both written and oral forms; be proficient in at least one **second language**; and be able to **think critically, reason analytically, and solve problems skillfully**.

You might emphasize how your participation in rigorous courses, externships, internships, study away, study abroad, service-learning and independent research have developed your skills in:

- Intercultural Understanding
- Interdisciplinary Connections
- Oral and Written Expression
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Second Language Proficiency
- Information Literacy
- Lifelong Learning

Remember to gear your answers and examples to what will be most useful and/or important for your future employer to know.

ROCKING your Job Interview with PERSONAL CLIFF NOTES

Recruiters want to hear stories and examples of why you would be a good fit for their openings. Don't just state positive adjectives describing yourself – prove why you'd be such a ROCKSTAR!

<p>REMEMBER ME: What are the top 3-5 things I want the interviewer to remember about me?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>MY TOP STORIES: Stories/examples that show I am uniquely suited for this position!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>(MORE) MY TOP STORIES: Stories/examples that show I am uniquely suited for this position!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
<p>MY BRILLIANT IDEAS: Talking points from organizational research (future direction, etc.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>MY OVERALL WORK PHILOSOPHY: How I generally approach challenges and opportunities, and what excites me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>MY GOALS: Why do I want THIS position? What makes me a good fit?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •
<p>WHEN I FACE CHALLENGES: What are some specific challenges I have faced (in teams, personally, etc.) and how did I overcome them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>MY AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT: How I'll answer the "weaknesses" question. I know I can improve on...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • 	<p>QUESTIONS I HAVE: About the role, company, etc. (Remember, an interview is not a time to discuss salary or benefits!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • •

In support of the Kalamazoo College mission to “prepare its graduates to better understand, live successfully within, and provide enlightened leadership to a richly diverse and increasingly complex world,” the Center for Career and Professional Development creates meaningful connections to the world of work, empowering Kalamazoo College students to explore, identify and pursue their diverse interests, values and passions, and to develop a framework of skills, networks and knowledge for successful lifelong career planning and professional development.

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