



**LAKE WASHINGTON  
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# **Interviewing Skills**

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**Preparing Students for Today's Careers and Tomorrow's Opportunities**

# Pre-Interview

*“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.” Alexander Graham Bell*

You got the interview! Now what? Follow these steps before your interview to build confidence, learn more about the employer, and increase your ability to answer interview questions effectively.

## Research

- Read about the employer on their webpage, especially their mission, vision, and values statements. You can usually find this in the “About Us” section of their website.
- Follow the employer on social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram)
- Pay attention to recent articles and posts the employer references and look for industry trends.
- Reach out to anyone you know who already works for the same employer. Ask them for any advice or tips about what to say or do during the interview to make you the best candidate.
- Go to [Glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com) and research the employer. Read the “interviews” section to see what past candidates posted about their interview experience, the “salary” section, and the “reviews” posts to learn more about the company’s culture. Connect how your values match theirs.
- Go to [Salary.com](https://www.salary.com) to input the job title, your education, and location to get a pay range for the job you are seeking in case the employer brings up pay. Print two copies for interview.

**Tip:** Take notes on your findings and bring it to your interview for your own reference.

## Practice answering questions the employer might ask

Read the job description to anticipate what the interviewer might ask. Ask a friend to ask you questions so you get comfortable talking about your strengths and how you’d be a good match for the job. Make sure you think about what you can contribute to the employer and how you can help them solve their challenges.

Make a “Mock Interview” appointment with LWTech Career Services to simulate an interview. During this one-hour appointment, you will get feedback on what you did well and what you can practice more before you have the “real” interview. The more practice you get, the better prepared you will feel! Email [Career.Services@LWTech.edu](mailto:Career.Services@LWTech.edu) to schedule a virtual or in-person appointment.

## Get Your interview outfit ready in advance

What you wear depends on the company and the position for which you’re applying. When the employer schedules the interview, you can ask about the interview dress code, especially because this changes often in industries. *Being properly attired builds confidence!* Contact LWTech Career Services at [Career.Services@LWTech.edu](mailto:Career.Services@LWTech.edu) if you need to access free professional interview clothing.

- Examine your interview clothes several days before the interview. Plan ahead in case you need to go shopping because your outfit no longer works (it no longer fits, or is too worn). Shine shoes, iron clothing, and do a try-on in front of the mirror.
- Be NEAT and CLEAN from your hair to your shoes.
- If your interview is at a company site and you are unsure what to wear, visit the company in advance when they are leaving for the day. Watch from the parking lot and note what employees are wearing. (It also ensures you won't get lost going to the real interview.)
- Dress "one step" better than the daily wear of regular employees in a given workplace. Another way to look at this: you need to dress more like the supervisor/manager than an employee. Remember, you are dressing to impress. Only after you get the job, can you dress to fit in.
- Dress for your profession. Pay attention to color and style. Think about your personal branding. How do others perceive you? Safe choices are blue, gray, black, and neutral colors.
- No perfume, essential oils, cologne, or after-shave lotion. People can be allergic to scents.
- Don't wear inappropriate attire or items that are too casual or revealing such as jeans, stretch pants, shorts, toe-showing sandals, sweatshirts, or crop-tops. If you are wondering if your outfit is too casual, it probably is. It's better to look more professional than to look too casual in this situation.

**Tip:** You can bring a more formal suit jacket and a tie in case you notice (once you arrive) that people are in formal attire. You can easily put the jacket – on or take it off – before you go into the interview room. This way you're covered either way!

## **Assemble your interview "tool kit"**

You will need to bring a few things to be fully prepared:

- Extra copies of your resume and cover letter. Questions you want to ask the employer and the original job description. Mints, bottled water, pen, and paper for notes.
- Your portfolio for "show and tell." This can be pictures/examples of your projects or accomplishments so the employer has a visual understanding of your work.

## **Types of Interviews**

**Interviews can be onsite, on video/virtual, by phone, or in-person.**

1. **Screening Interview.** Usually with Human Resources, on the phone, short, you answer a few questions. If it goes well, you get invited to an onsite interview or virtual interview.
2. **Skills Test Interview.** You are given a "test" as part of the interview.

3. **One-on-one Interview.** You meet with one person and ask/answer questions.
4. **Panel Interview.** You meet with a group of people at different levels in the company (manager/team members/human resources)
5. **Progressive Interview.** You meet with a series of people, but one at a time. If it goes well, you continue to meet with people of various levels until the interview is over. These interviews can take several hours, can include lunch.
6. **Second Interview.** You return to meet people higher up at the company, or to continue the interview process. Different questions might be asked to confirm you are the best candidate for a job. Can be a “tie-breaker” interview.

TIP: The best way to find out is to ask them when they call or email to schedule the interview. You can ask, ***“Can you give me some information about what the interview process will look like? How many people will I be meeting with? Can you provide me with their names ahead of time? Thanks!”***

# Interview Process

The interview experience happens from the minute you enter the employer's place of work until the time you leave. While some employers conduct interviews differently, these are the most common interview steps and the best ways to respond/react:

## Introductions – small talk

- Say your name, make eye contact and smile. Some people may want to offer a firm handshake, which for many years was customary when meeting new people during an interview. If you have concerns about spreading germs through contact, verbalize you want to keep everyone healthy so you aren't shaking hands right now. Offer a friendly wave, a bow, or a hand to heart gesture to convey respect. Tell them, "I'm so pleased to meet you!" to make up for not shaking hands as well. (It's up to you if you feel comfortable shaking hands or not, but if you decide not to, you need to explain why you aren't.)
- Introductory small talk; topics frequently include the weather, the drive, sports teams etc. Give a positive answer in order to set an upbeat tone for the interview, even if the weather was bad, or the drive to the interview was a hassle. (This may happen at the front desk, it's important to make a good first impression from the minute you enter the workplace.)
- Would you like a glass of water? Meant to help you and the interviewer feel more comfortable. This interview stage is intended to give you a chance to relax before interviewing.

## Opening questions

- Tell me about yourself? Why are you interested in this position?
- These are overview questions. Give a general summary and limit answer to less than 3 minutes.

## Specific Questions

- Listen CAREFULLY to the questions and answer the question that is being asked.
- This stage of the interview will take the most time during the interview – and the most preparation on your part.
- If you don't understand what the interviewer is asking, request clarification. "Can you repeat that question?" or "I want to make sure I understand the question. Can you rephrase it?" You can also give them a brief answer and then ask, "Would you like to hear more about that?"

## Questions for the Interviewer

- Your opportunity to show that you are interested in their business, operations, and you are curious about the job.
- Demonstrate that you have done your homework and researched the company. (Find them on LinkedIn, find their website and review their mission statement.) You can also research the employer's competitors.

## Closing

- If there is an opportunity, you can close with a summary of your BEST qualifications.
- Ask about the next step in the selection process; when can you expect to hear from them.
- Thank you (use their name), shake hands. Get a business card so you can correctly spell their name when you send a thank you note or thank you email.

# Non-verbal Messages

## Eye Contact

Looking a person in the eye indicates confidence, openness and honesty. Make appropriate eye contact with the interviewer. Keep your head up and reconnect via eye contact throughout the interview.

## Voice

Your voice should be clear and loud enough to hear across a room. Practice speaking clearly, pronouncing words correctly, and using proper grammar. Breathing deeply can add a stable quality to your voice.

## Facial Expressions

A slight smile and open eyes convey the impression of intelligence, alertness, and friendliness. Practice the look in front of the mirror.

## Posture

Walk tall, sit forward in your chair, hold your head up, keep your back and shoulders straight. Be aware of how you are sitting and standing, without being rigid.

## Mannerisms

Be aware of nervous behavior you may fall into. Avoid tapping your fingers, playing with your hair, wriggling your feet, wringing your hands, etc. Use your hands to emphasize what you are saying, but don't be too wild with your gestures.

# What NOT to Say in an Interview

What you say in the interview is important, and just as important is what you shouldn't say. These are common mistakes people make when interviewing.

1. Don't say you want to work for the employer because you "live nearby." Find compelling reasons tied to the company's values, mission statement, culture, or product that make you want to work there – not just for mere convenience.
2. Don't use acronyms when describing past work experiences because the interviewer might not know what it means. For example, don't say, "I pulled together yearly STF reports under tight deadlines so my supervisor had everything she needed before her leaderships meetings well in advance." Say, "...Studio Tracking Funding reports..." so the employer can easily understand.
3. Don't ask about pay or vacations during the interview. Let the employer bring it up or wait until you get the job offer. The interview itself is just getting to know each other to see if it's a match.
4. Don't talk negatively about past employers or co-workers. Keep it positive.
5. Don't talk about personal things that have nothing to do with the job description – your age, your family, divorce, medical issues, kids, religious beliefs, etc. Employers shouldn't be asking you questions of this nature. If they do, you can report it to the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) (EEOC) by submitting an inquiry online or calling 1-800-669-4000. During your job interview, remember to stay focused on professional topics, your strengths, and how you can help the employer.

## Post-Interview

- Make sure you send a "thank you" email to the employer (or to the recruiter to give to the employer) to express that you enjoyed meeting them. Give a sentence or two describing something that stood out positively in the interview in regard to how you can contribute your strengths to the employer. Close by letting them know they can email or call you if they have any other questions.
- If they call to offer the job, it's time to talk about pay! Let the employer bring it up first. They may ask, "What are your salary requirements?" You can answer, "What does this position generally pay?" If they don't answer directly or you prefer to be more direct, you can give the range you found on [Payscale.com](#). You can also say you are flexible about salary requirements because some companies may offer a lower salary, but do offer perks such as free meals, extra vacation time, paid conferences, use of a company vehicle, etc.
- Realize you can negotiate the offer package and most employers expect you to do this. You can negotiate pay within the normal range you researched and explain how your education/skills fit into that. You can also

negotiate things like flexible schedules, trainings/conferences you'd like to attend, tuition reimbursement, and extra vacation time in addition to salary.

Tip: [Glassdoor](#) recommends counteroffering between 10 and 20 percent above the initial offer.

## More Resources

- LWTech Career Services: [Watch CareerSpots videos](#) on the interview process from start to finish.
- [CareerOneStop](#) offers career advice, including topics such as how to talk about former incarceration history during an interview, military and veteran interview tips, and preparing for interviews by knowing how to handle questions related to a disability.



# Interview Questions – Behind the Scenes

When employers interview candidates, they are asking questions to find out if the person has the right skills and abilities to do the job they need to fill. They also want a “good fit for the team” meaning the person will get along with people, be reliable, and bring skills to the team that they don’t already have.

Here are some questions employers ask and the reason behind why they are asking. If you understand the reason for asking the questions, you can answer more appropriately.

## Screening Questions

Do you have the ability to work in the United States? Are you available to work 3<sup>rd</sup> shift? Do you have a 2-year college degree?

### Purpose

To eliminate candidates that don’t meet the minimum requirements.

### How to Respond

Be as flexible as possible with your requirements. Most of these are “yes” or “no” answers. Don’t say, “As you see on my resume,” just assume they haven’t seen your resume and respond. This could be a test to see how you present yourself. This might be their first impression of you.

## Opening Questions:

Tell me about yourself? Why are you interested in this company/organization? What do you know about our company?

### Purpose

This gets the conversation started, similar to an ice breaker. It also lets them know if you’ve researched their company ahead of time (of course you have!) It also helps them get an understand your motivation for going into the profession or your motivation for applying their company.

### How to Respond

Summarize your qualifications for the job (this is your elevator pitch).

1. Give the big-picture view of your career story.
2. Share an accomplishment you're proud of that speaks to the employer's needs.
3. Explain your interest in the opportunity and how it relates to your future career goals.

### How Not to Respond

When they say, “Tell me about yourself” you don’t want to tell them where you were born, where you live, or how many kids you have. Those have nothing to do with your ability to do the job! And it can cause discrimination. “Tell me about yourself” really means, “Tell me how you are qualified for this position and what skills have you have to help our team get the work done.” Stick to the content on your resume and professional strengths when answering this question.

## Work History Questions

*“Tell me about your work history.”*

## **Purpose**

To see if you've performed work similar to what their company does. Past behavior can be a predictor of future behavior.

## **How to Respond**

Share only positive work history information. Walk them through your resume "Experience" starting with your most recent job and give them names of the employer and highlights of what you did there. Spend your interview time talking more about jobs and duties that are like the open position.

Don't mention why you left a job, unless asked. If they ask, have an acceptable, short answer ready. Good reasons for leaving a job are: I had a job offer that would allow me to build my skills, I moved and I needed a job closer to my home, The company closed, There was a large lay off and unfortunately, my department was eliminated, I went back to school full-time to get my degree and my classes/work schedule weren't compatible so I chose to invest in my education during that time.

## **How Not to Respond**

I didn't like my supervisor, so I quit. I had a difference of opinion with my co-worker, so I decided not to work there anymore. It was horrible and the company was doing illegal practices. (You don't have to give that detailed of information and it can raise red flags for the employer interviewing you. Even if those things are true, a better way of saying it could be, "I had an opportunity at ABC Company to expand my skillset, so I accepted the job. I got to work with Fortune500 company and got to use my advanced Excel skills. It was a much better fit. What interests me in your company is that the job description mentioned Excel skills, so I can bring my expertise to your team..."

## **Behavioral Questions**

*"Tell me about a time when you..."*

- Demonstrated Teamwork.
- Prioritized conflicting projects.
- Handled a difficult patient/client/customer

## **Purpose**

To learn more about how you handle situations and to see if you have the skills necessary to do the job.

## **How to Respond**

Study the job announcement to anticipate what they might ask you. Respond in the CAR format: Challenge, Action, Result. My Challenge was...The Action I took was...This resulted in...And the result should be good! Have at least 6 CAR stories ready to be prepared to respond at the interview.

## **Personal Characteristics Questions**

*"How would people (supervisors, co-workers) describe you?"*

*"Give an example of a time you were on a team project, what role did you play?"*

*"If you could choose between working alone or with others, which would you choose?"*

The job description might give you clues as to what they are seeking: Self-starter, enthusiastic, independent worker, team player, ability to work with ambiguous subject matter, quick learner, etc.

## **Purpose**

To determine if you have the right characteristics for the team. To find out if you will be a good fit for the company. Often, an employer wants the team to be diverse – everyone contributes their special, unique skills. If everyone has different skills – that’s good. It can balance out the team and as challenges come up, different people step in to fix them based on their strengths.

## **How to Respond**

Talk about positive attributes about yourself that match the job description, that you find in past performance evaluations, that people complimented you on during volunteer activities or school projects. Be honest – you want a good job match so don’t pretend to be something you’re not just to get the job. For example, if they are asking for an “independent, detail-oriented, self-starter” and you are someone who is a more “big picture” thinker (not detail-oriented) and you prefer to have your supervisor explain how to start projects with specific details/instructions, monitor your progress daily, and work with a group of people who support you and help you with tasks (not a self-starter) be honest about who you are so you get a good job match. Some positions are better for a big picture thinker who can follow specific instructions without being closely managed.

TIP: Remember, you are not just telling them what they want to hear, you are describing your work values, skills, and characteristics in a truthful, authentic way so you get the best job match possible!

## **Job/Company Match Questions**

***“What did you enjoy most about your past work, and what did you enjoy the least? Why are you interested in working here?”***

### **Purpose**

To ensure you have realistic expectations of the position and the company.

### **How to Respond**

To make sure your answers take into account the type of work for which you are applying. Check your assumptions about the company/job before being too opinionated. Ask questions to learn more about their culture and atmosphere! That will help you respond with something that is in line with what they have to offer. You researched the company before the interview (yes, you did!) so you should have some good reasons why you’d like to work for them. What you enjoyed “least” at your past job should not be a major task you’d be asked to do in the current job you’re interviewing for. Give safe answers for what you least enjoyed that would not be an issue with the prospective employer. (“I worked with a small team of three people and I enjoy working for larger organizations because a variety of people means more diversity and quality in the final product. That’s what I like about your company, you mentioned there are 20 people on the team. That sounds great!”)

## **Negative Questions**

***“Tell me about a time when you made a mistake. Tell me your biggest weakness.”***

### **Purpose**

To find out how you deal with mistakes – we all make them! Do you cover it up? Do you ignore it and pretend it didn’t happen? Or do you proactively fix the mistake, as quickly as possible, and learn from it?

## **How to Respond**

Tell about a mistake – we all make them – but don't pick "the worst ever." Emphasize how you recovered, what you learned, and how you improved as a result. Don't pick something that could directly relate to the job you are applying for and cause them to doubt your performance in that profession. For example, if you are an accounting assistant, don't tell about a time that you made an error on an audit, tell about a time that you made an error (and fixed it) that wasn't specifically accounting-related. Explain how what you learned from making the mistake will be an asset to the employer because you know more now that you did before.

## **Technical Skills Questions**

***"Tell me about your skills in ABC software."*** (Excel, Python, QuickBooks, etc.)

### **Purpose**

To find out if you can use the software they have, if you need additional training, and if you are a beginner or an expert regarding a specific program.

### **How to Respond**

Tell them the software classes you've taken in college and/or software you've used at work or during volunteer projects or research projects. (Be honest if you've never used the software, but tell them you can watch tutorials, take a class, you are open to training, and you are a quick learner. Give an example of a time you had to learn a new software – how did you do it? Share that story with them so they understand you are open to learning and you've learned quickly before.)

## **Pay Questions**

***"What are your salary expectations?"***

### **Purpose**

The company wants to know if your range matches what they can offer.

### **How to Respond**

Option #1 Direct Approach: Give a range of allowable salary based on your research on Payscale.com or Glassdoor.com, "My research shows this kind of job generally pays in the range of \$21-\$23/hr."

Option #2 Respond with a question: Ask about the company's pay range for the position. Indicate you're flexible and would like to know more about the position details and the benefits package before providing your initial range.

# Practicing Two Common Interview Questions

**The first most common (and often hardest) question an employer will ask at an interview is...  
“Tell me about yourself.”**

Use these three steps to answer this question:

- Give the big-picture view of your career story and how it relates to the position.
- Share an accomplishment you're proud of that speaks to the employer's needs.
- Explain your interest in the opportunity and how it relates to your future career goals.

Practice this before the interview so it sounds concise (yet not totally scripted). Your answer should be only 2-3 minutes long.

Example:

*My experience and education include a combination of marketing and human resources. I enjoy helping people and connecting them to resources that help them optimize their careers. When I worked at LWTech as a Career Specialist, I used my marketing skills to teach job seekers how to market themselves to potential employers by creating short, online videos students could watch using their mobile devices. I researched accessibility guidelines to ensure these videos were easy to access and worked with adaptive, assistive technology. In addition, I shared my “best practices” with students from an HR Hiring Manager’s perspective since I was in that industry for 3 years prior to accepting a position at LWTech. When I saw your company’s job posting for an online Job Coach, it seemed like a great match to contribute my experience working with job seekers to your department and your clients.*

**The second most common type of interview question starts with...**

**“Tell me about a time when... you had conflicting priorities at work and how you handled it.”**

Use the C.A.R. Method – Challenge, Action, Result – to answer this question. Also called the S.T.A.R. Method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) or the P.A.R. Method (Problem, Action, Result)

**CHALLENGE** - Describe a **specific situation/task/challenge** that you needed to accomplish.

**ACTION** - Describe the action **you** took and keep the focus on **YOU**. Even if you were part of a group, describe what **YOU** did.

**RESULT** - What happened? How did the event or situation end? What did you accomplish or learn? You can use numbers for results if available.

Example:

*When I worked at LWTech, I was tasked with providing workshops to students to help them find jobs when they graduated from college. We had 5,000 students in 40 different programs, so meeting with all of them one-on-one was a challenge due to time constraints. Plus, a small number of students took “fully online” classes so they couldn’t come to the college in-person. The action I took was to approach the professors and collaborate. I asked if I could take an hour of their class time to reach as many students as possible and give a “job readiness workshop.” They professors agreed and wrote it into their curriculum. This also helped them with their learning outcomes. I researched, created, and delivered fun workshops to teach people how to find jobs. The result was I was able to help more people, quickly, and support the professors at the same time. In 2018, 4,020 students attended one of my in-person workshops and 50 students attended my “fully online” workshops using a video conferencing platform.*

# Sample Interview Questions

Practice answering questions before the interview.

## SCREENING QUESTIONS

- Are you available to work nights and weekends?
- This job requires the ability to lift 50 lbs. Are you able to do this?
- This job requires a state license/certification. Do you have this license/certification?
- What are your salary expectations?

## OPENING QUESTIONS / QUESTIONS ABOUT QUALIFICATIONS

- Tell me about yourself?
- How did you hear about this opening?
- Do you know anyone who already works for this organization? Who do you know?
- Why do you feel you are qualified for this position?

## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about process improvements that were implemented in your office, what was your role?
- Tell me about a time on the job that you didn't understand what to do, how did you handle it?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond to get a job done?
- Tell me about a time when you had spare time on the job, what did you do?

## PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why did you pick Computer Science (or whatever your major is) as your area of study?
- How would you describe yourself?
- List three adjectives that describe you?
- Who was your favorite manager/instructor and why?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- Tell me about a time when your workload/schedule suddenly changed, what did you do?

## **JOB/COMPANY MATCH**

- What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
- In your previous job what kind of pressures did you encounter? How did you handle this?
- What are some things you particularly liked/disliked about your last job?
- What kind of job do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- What does it mean to you to value and promote inclusion in the workplace?
- Tell us how you work with people to create, foster, or support diversity in the workplace.
- How has your background and experience prepared you to be effective in an environment that holds diversity as core to our mission and values?

## **NEGATIVE QUESTIONING**

- Tell me about the worst customer you have ever encountered?
- What was the worst job you ever had?

## **CLOSING QUESTIONS**

- What are your salary expectations? (Beginning January 1, 2023, Washington state employers must include a “wage scale or salary range” along with general information about benefits and other compensation in each posted job listing by law to increase transparency and pay equity.)
- Why should I hire you?
- What questions do you have for me about the job or the company?

# Questions to Ask the Employer

At some point in the interview, typically after the employer asks the candidate the interview questions, the interviewer invites the job seeker to ask questions about the job and the company.

Be prepared to ask at least 2-3 questions about the position or the organization. The employer wants to know that you are curious, able to ask questions, and interested in their business.

*Wait to ask controversial questions, or specific questions about pay, until after the offer of employment has been made.* Once you have an offer in hand, make sure you ask your questions and get the necessary information before you **negotiate** and accept the offer.

- What results are expected in this position? How do you measure success?
  - What qualities characterize a successful person in this type of position?
  - Can you tell me about a time that you had to alter your work style to meet a diversity need?
  - What challenges face a person in this position?
  - Why has this position become available at this time? Is it a new position?
  - What strategies have you used to promote diversity and inclusion on the team?
  - What are the main goals for the department and how does this role contribute?
  - What is one thing you would change about your work environment if you could?
  - What challenges does the company or the department face?
  - The job description mentioned measuring specific results around performance. Can you tell me more about that and what led to it being in the job description?
  - Who are the key (internal/external) customers? What expectations do they have?
  - What is your philosophy regarding employee development?
  - What kind of support and tools are provided in this role? Do you offer professional development?
  - How is a person in this type of position evaluated?
  - How would you describe your management style? What's the best thing about working for this company?
  - How did you get started with the organization, and how has your experience been so far?
  - How would you describe your company's culture?
  - Does your company volunteer in the community in any capacity? Please give me an example.
  - How does the company celebrate diversity and inclusion?
  - What is the company doing to remain competitive?
  - Can you tell me what a typical day would look like in this position?
  - Can you tell me what the next steps will be in the interview process? When will you be making a decision?
- (This is the last question you should ask during an interview so you know what to expect.)