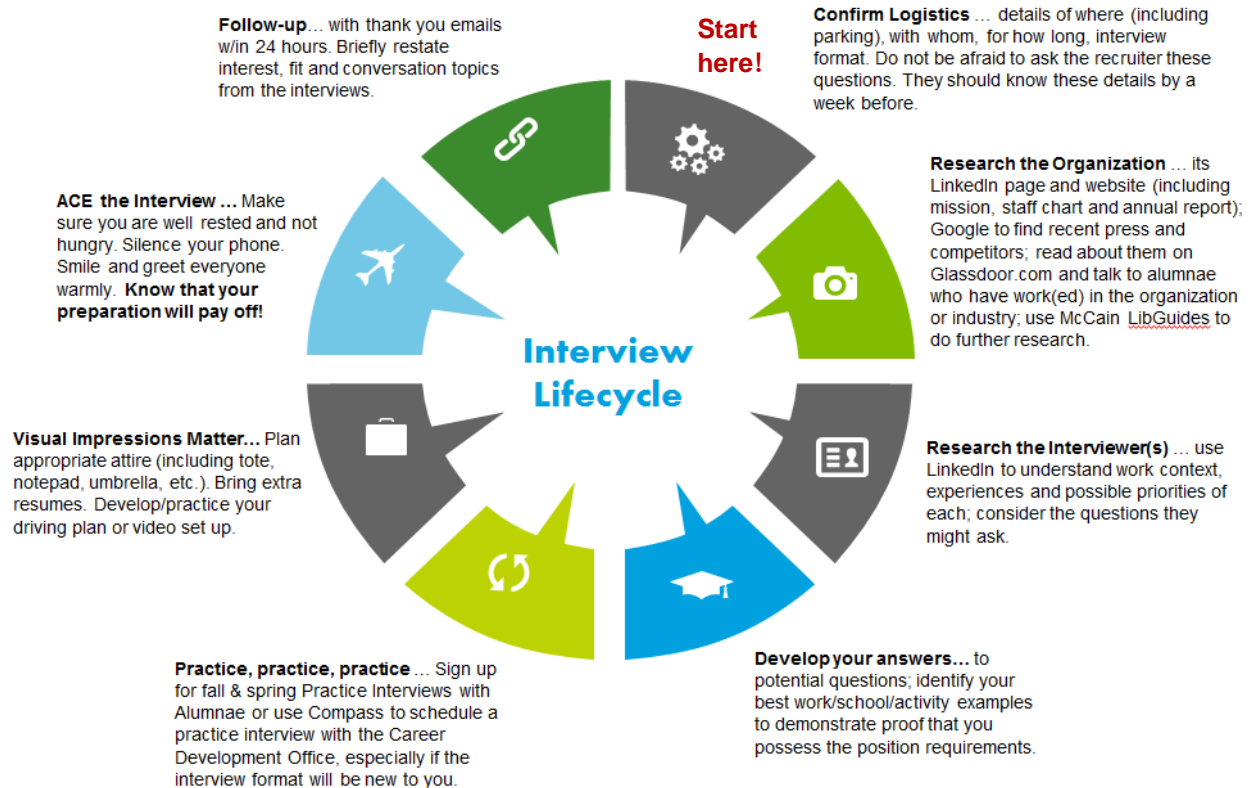


A Student Guide to *Acing the Interview* – 2018-2019

Interviews are used by employers, grad schools and volunteer sites to: verify a candidate's qualifications, evaluate their fit with the organization/team, graduate program and more. Interviews are also critical to help you determine if the position, organization or grad program fits well with your goals, interests, and preferences. **Therefore, it essential to prepare.**

Interview Lifecycle

There are eight key steps to prepare for and ace an interview.



Common Interview Formats

Most organizations use a series of interviews to get to know candidates. A screening interview (15-30 minutes) is typically conducted first to confirm that a candidate's availability, base skills, and sometimes salary range aligns with the position.

Phone Interviews are most often used for screening or initial interviews. You will probably be asked 5-8 questions.

Best practices for phone interviews:

- Eliminate background noise and sit away from distractions.
- Have your resume/CV, application materials, and any relevant notes close at hand.
- Practice interviewing with a friend or record yourself using your phone, paying attention to your tone, level of enthusiasm, length of your responses (no more than 1 minute each) and how well you answered the questions.

Video Interviews are increasingly used to evaluate a candidate's "soft" skills, such as communication and rapport building. *Automated video interviews* require a candidate to provide video responses to computer prompts. The candidate is usually given a few tries at a question. *Skype-style interviews* are two-way, face-to-face conversations with video.

Best practices for video interviews:

- Identify a quiet place with a solid digital connection. Test your connection to the video interview platform. (If you need a space to video interview, contact Irene Foran at iforan@agnesscott.edu to book a room.)
- Make sure your username and photo are professional.
- Dress as you would for an in-person interview. (See below) Remove any unprofessional items in the background.
- Create a cheat sheet of your relevant strengths, skills, and story topics and tape it to the side of your screen.

- Save application documents on your desktop to share online if needed.
- Practice (e.g. Skype with a friend). Learn where to direct eye contact. Ensure you are confident, pleasant & clear.
- Be ready and sign on 5-10 minutes early.

Face-to-Face or In-person Interviews are usually the final round of interviews. Organizations often mix one-on-one and panel (group) interviews to obtain feedback from multiple interviewers. Ask in advance about the agenda and participants.

Best practices for in-person interviews:

What to Wear

Interview attire is more conservative than typical office wear, even for nonprofit, healthcare or public service organizations.

- Wear a suit or tailored dress with close-toed, professional shoes. Cover up tattoos if possible.
- AVOID: too short, sheer, low-cut or skimpy attire; heavy makeup/perfume; loud make-up or peeling nail polish.
- If you are not sure what to wear or need professional clothing, contact Irene Foran: iforan@agnesscott.edu to book a styling appointment with Dress for Success Atlanta where you'll receive at least one free interview outfit.

What to Bring

- Dark tote bag that is well-organized (no backpacks!)
- Copies of current, proofed resume on 20 lb. paper (from office store) or ask to print up to 5 copies in Buttrick G12
- Padfolio and 2 pens in case you need to take notes
- Reference list with complete and accurate contact information (if requested)

Plan to Arrive Early and Ready

- Map it ahead of time, including parking. Be sure you know where you are going.
- Go to bed early the night before. Allow time in the morning to review your answers to common questions.
- Eat a light snack before hand – you don't want a growling stomach; no gum!
- Silence your phone and put it away before you walk in the door. Bring a non-trashy book or magazine to read!

Convey a Positive, Professional Presence

- Introduce yourself with eye contact, smile and firm handshake to everyone you meet from receptionist to CEO.
- Do not badmouth prior experiences/employers.
- Remember/write down names or ask for business cards so you can send a thank you.
- Use active posture and positive, engaging facial expressions to show you are listening.

Pre-Interview Research: An Essential Step!

Employers are put off when candidates are unfamiliar with the organization or position. Before interviewing, make sure to:

- **Review the organization:** Explore its website and LinkedIn; Google them and use McCain's Career Libguide to learn more; Read employee reviews on Glassdoor.com; reach out to alums on LinkedIn for interview advice.
- **Review the position description.** Identify the top skills, experience, knowledge, and personality traits the employer is seeking. To inform your interview answers, consider what kind of person would succeed in this role.
- **Look up your future interviewers online:** Learn about their career paths and accomplishments; consider what their priorities are to fill this position and what they might ask you.

Common Interview Questions

Organizations use a variety of interview environments, questions and assessments to evaluate candidates.

Most Common Interview Questions are straightforward, but do require preparation. Prepare for these questions:

Tell Me About Yourself:	Prepare a 1-minute response that connects your journey with the opportunity and organization. You may include relevant personal info: interest, club, etc.
Why did you choose ASC/your major?	There is no correct answer. This question is designed to understand your priorities and decision-making. Develop a logical and meaningful answer.
What are your strengths and weaknesses?	Before the interview, make a list of your positive and negative attributes. For each interview, mention a few of the most relevant positive ones and least relevant negative ones. Describe how you are working on the negative ones.

Why should I hire you?	Identify your most relevant skills/experiences <i>and</i> personality traits for the role.
What questions do you have for me/us?	Be ready to ask insightful questions you cannot answer online. Good options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Organization specifics: culture? what it takes to be successful? ○ Position specifics: % of time on each task? typical growth path? training?

Behavioral Interview Questions assume past behavior predicts future performance. Questions like “Describe a time when (fill in the blank),” ask you to share specific experience instead of how you’d handle a situation. Consider when you:

Tried to do something & failed	Showed initiative and took the lead	Missed an obvious solution
Had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done	Used persuasion to influence someone’s opinion	Used good judgement and fact-finding skills to solve a problem
Dealt with conflict	Faced a stressful team situation	Set a goal & achieved it

To answer these questions succinctly and effectively, tell stories of relevant experiences using the SAR method: Describe Situation you were in; Action you took; Result or Response you created). Identify stories from:

Internships	Work experience	Volunteering/Service
Class Projects	Travel/Study Abroad	Campus Leadership
Athletics	Awards/Accomplishments	Mentored Research

Choose and practice stories:

- That are multifaceted and can be used to convey a variety of lessons or endings
- Where you were the main person or one of the main people leading, making decisions or doing work
- Where you can quantify or explain how you specifically created a positive result or response

Computer Assessments. Many organizations use online tests (usually during screening process) to assess sales ability, customer service mindset, proofreading or grammar skills, quantitative skills or software expertise (Excel, PowerPoint).

While less common, the following three types of interviews are used in specific situations:

“**The Airport Test**” is a term for questions used to get to know a candidate on a personal, but still professional level. It refers to how a candidate would get along with a team over time, as if they were “stuck at the airport.” To questions like, “What was the last book you read?” or “What do you like to do for fun?” provide an honest, non-controversial answer!

Case/Simulation Interviews are typically used by management consulting and investment firms to assess a candidate’s analytical skills. The candidate is asked to analyze a hypothetical problem and share how they would address it. Review case interview advice on McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group and other consulting firms’ websites.

Technical Interviews are used when a position requires specific skills that are not easily learned on the job – e.g., computer programming/coding, statistical analyses, numerical problems, mastery of technical software, editing or public speaking. The candidate is given a timed “assignment” to complete while at the interview.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice is the #1 recommendation. You are encouraged to take advantage of the following resources for practice:

- ✓ Practice Interviews with Alumnae in September and February (RSVP required – watch your email!)
- ✓ Mock interview with a Career Coach (schedule via COMPASS)
- ✓ Industry-specific advice from alumnae who have agreed to conduct practice phone, Skype and case interviews

Follow-up – A Written Thank You is Crucial!

Send thank you emails to all decision makers and influencers within 24 hours. Briefly refer back to your interview conversation, including an example of how you meet one of the key qualifications. Also, thank alumnae or others who helped you prepare. Keep them posted. Every communication is a chance to strengthen and learn from your network.

Questions or need help preparing for an interview? Use compass.agnesscott.edu to schedule an appointment.

Thank you to Alumna Jasmine Adams Langevine '07 for contributing to this guide.