



Rowan University

Ric Edelman College Communication, Humanities & Social Sciences

[Center for Professional Success](#)

Interviewing Best Practices & Resources Toolkit

Please schedule a mock interview appointment with the Center for Professional Success by searching “Center for Professional Success” through the [Rowan Success Network](#) (RSN).

Professional Dress Attire

The concept of a professional dress code is a flexible standard. Specifically, dress codes can vary based on specific positions, organizations, and hiring industries. It is essential to understand the dress expectations for each potential role, as well as each organization's standard of dress. It is also crucial to keep in mind that it typically takes seven seconds to make a judgment about another person based on their external appearance. With this concept in mind, the professional dress attire being worn can set the foundation for an applicant's entire professional brand.

Moreover, it is also vital never to dress in a casual manner when attending an interview. What a student wears to their academic classes, hanging out with friends on a Saturday night, or going for a run in is inappropriate for the professional work setting. As such, it is more effective to be overdressed for an interview than to be underdressed.

Dress Code Tips:

- Two-piece suit (solid colors vs. print or patterns). Stick to conservative colors such as black, navy blue, dark brown, and dark gray.
- Wear a white shirt or a light color shirt.
- Tie pattern should be simple.
- Applicants can wear a belt or suspenders but never wear both.
- Wear polished and well-preserved shoes with knee-length socks that avoid exposing skin.
- Suit with blazer/pants/skirt combo knee-length skirt and blouse.
- Footwear - Refrain from wearing open-toe shoes. Shoes should also be shined and well preserved.
- Jewelry should be subtle and minimal.
- Hair should be out of the applicant's face.
- Nails should be in a conservative color of polish - if wearing polish.
- Transgender candidates should dress consistently by following their full-time gender expression.
- Applicants must wear clothing that fits properly.

Expectations for Interviewing

Interviewing provides the opportunity to create a professional relationship and understanding between an applicant and an employer. While this objective can be accomplished through a wide variety of approaches, the main focus is to convey how the applicant can assist the organization's business needs. Due to these differing forces, it is the responsibility of both the applicant and employer to be prepared for each interview.

Types of Interviews

1. Online & Telephone: It is common practice for employers to conduct an online (Zoom, WebEx, etc.) or telephone interview before a traditional face-to-face meeting. These interviews are primarily used as a screener to narrow down the applicant pool. Tips for this type of interview include:

Online

- **Connection Capabilities:** Ensure that an applicant's phone or computer is fully charged and that each device has a stable internet connection.
- **Secure the Space:** Secure a location that is free from disturbance, has bright lighting, and has an appropriate background.
- **Concentrate on the Task at Hand:** Close all external programs and/or windows and maintain strict eye contact with the webcam.
- **Install & Test:** Proactively install the necessary software (Zoom, WebEx, etc.), and conduct a dry run before the actual interview.

Telephone

- **Dress in a Professional Manner:** Dress accordingly to create a proper state of mind.
- **Be Prepared:** Applicants must proactively equip themselves with their resume, cover letter, a copy of the job description, and other necessary documents within an easy reach.
- **Concentrate on the Conversation:** Attempt not to interrupt the employer by being patient, and letting them guide the conversation.

2. Group Interviews: This type of interview encompasses multiple candidates being interviewed at the same time by one or two interviewers. With this approach, employers evaluate how applicants and their personalities interact with each other.

3. Traditional Interviews: This format includes an applicant being interviewed by one interviewer, or a panel that consists of 3 to 4 interviewers. In this setup, each interviewer will ask the applicant the same amount of questions, and each representative of the committee has equal input to who is hired.

Interview Success Strategies

At each stage of the interview process, there are specific actions that students can complete to increase their chances of becoming employed. Listed below is an outline that can be completed before, during, and after an interview is finalized.

1. Prior to an Interview:

- It is helpful for applicants to review the essential job duties sheet of the position they're interviewing for, compare, and contrast their own experience to their potential role, and identify the top three main functions of their prospective job.
- Applicants must also research their potential employer and record all relevant information on a separate piece of paper. The main purpose of this activity is to record any trends, themes, or critical data that would be relevant to their future role in the company. After all of the information is recorded, it is important to review and comprehend this data.
- Create one or two-word bullet answers for questions that applicants can potentially encounter in an interview. For example, these questions can include: "What can you tell me about yourself?", "What is your greatest strength and weakness?", "Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills?", "Can you help me understand how you deal with stress?", "Can you help me understand your communication style?", and "Why should we hire you?".

2. During an interview:

- Record the names and positions of each interviewer to write a thank you note/email after the interview.
- Provide detailed examples of an applicant's current experience relevant to the position you're applying to, and how this experience will allow you to contribute from day one.
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer who asks you each question.
- Refrain from asking or speaking about salary or benefits during the interview process. Employers must begin this conversation. However, when they do, it is imperative for applicants to proactively outline their salary requirements based on their specific job title and geographic location.
- Never have anything bad to say regarding a previous colleague, teacher, supervisor, or employer.
- Be mindful that the questions an applicant asks at the end of an interview reflect their values as an applicant.

3. After an interview:

- Immediately following an interview, applicants must always take time to reflect on their performance. This can include identifying questions they had difficulty answering, examining their strengths and weaknesses, and brainstorming on how they can improve for future interviews.
- Follow up immediately after the interview is completed with a thank you email or card. This includes thanking the interviewer for their time, reiterating how much the applicant enjoyed the conversation, and how excited the interviewee is about the prospects of working for their company.

Interview Best Practices

- Not saying “I believe” or “I think” statements. Take the time to consider your response to the question asked and then answer with confidence. Remember that you are also conducting an interview of the employer in an interview. You want to make sure that all of your answers come across as genuine to the interviewer.
- Reviewing the job description and highlighting the main responsibilities and qualifications. Also, make sure to tie in any relevant experience you might have. All of your answers should connect back to the requirements and responsibilities of the position you are applying to.
- The importance of storytelling. When answering a question, it is important to remember to give the interviewer all of the information you want them to have. It is an unreliable practice to expect them to ask follow up questions which allow you to better expand on the answers you give. When you respond to a question it should be in story form with real examples from your experience that connect to the job’s responsibilities and illustrate your aptitudes.
- Arrive early and be prepared for the interview to begin at least fifteen minutes before the interview time is scheduled to begin. This shows the interviewer that you are punctual and prepared to begin before a scheduled shift might start. It also serves to give a positive first impression for the interviewer.
- First impressions are important. Make sure to smile and be kind and respectful to everyone you meet. Even people outside of the interview experience. You may end up working with the people you meet, and so it is worthwhile to make a good impression on everyone.
- Be mindful of posture. Have a relaxed yet confident body posture. You do not want to sit ramrod straight and seem too stiff, but it is also not good to slouch and impress a lazy attitude on the interviewers.
- Turn off/silence your phone before going into the interview. It is unprofessional to have a phone ring during the interview process.
- Do not speak ill of others. It does not reflect well on an applicant to bad mouth or speak ill of previous employers, peers, coworkers, bosses, or others. Not only does it come across as unprofessional, but it also serves to leave a negative impression on the interviewer who may end up being a future employer. They may assume that if you leave the company, you will bad mouth or speak ill of them as well.
- Make sure to be mindful of your manners. Always thank everyone involved for their time, and make sure to be appreciative of the opportunity they have given you.

Commonly Asked Interview Questions From Employers

Each interview will be composed of both commonly asked interview questions and specific questions that reflect both job and industry requirements. As such, practice responding to the questions below through creating a one to two-word bullet answer that was discussed on the previous page.

General Interview Questions:

- What can you tell me about yourself?
- Can you help me understand one of your strengths and weaknesses?
- Can you help me understand how you deal with stress?
- Can you help me understand your communication style?
- Can you tell me about a time where you dealt with a challenging situation or client before?
- What are the top three skills/attributes you believe are necessary to succeed in the position you're applying to?
- Why do you want to work here?
- Can you help me understand how you juggle multiple priorities at the same time?
- What would you find most rewarding about the position you're applying to?
- Can you tell me about a time where you had to solve a difficult problem?
- What is your greatest professional achievement?
- Can you tell me about a time where you led by example?
- Why should we hire you for this position?

Work Environment Interview Questions:

- Do you prefer to work for small or larger employers? Why?
- Do you prefer to work in an independent or team environment?
- Can you help me understand how your college education and employment experience relate to this job?

The Position & Organization:

- Can you help me understand what you know about this opening and our organization?
- What can you tell me about our organization's products and services?
- What type of organizational culture do you prefer working in?

Questions the Applicant can ask the Employer:

- Can you help me understand what I might expect in the first three, six, and nine months into this position?
- Can you help me comprehend the independent or team projects that I will be working on?
- Can you please help me understand the training period or orientation period to this position?
- What type of professional development opportunities are available to our employees?
- Can you please help me understand the next step to this process?

Questions to ask when an Offer is Made:

- Does this company have a standard or optional benefits package?
- What does your performance review process look like?
- Can you please help me understand your vacation policy?

Example Questions & Answers:

1. Tell me about yourself.

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The applicant introduced themselves and shared a brief explainer of their academic journey through higher education.
- The applicant related personal or professional interest to the job description and/or company.
- The applicant was able to successfully end their answer by expressing their gratitude for this opportunity.

Answer Template: Hello, my name is ____ and I am a student at Rowan University. I am currently majoring in _____. I am passionate about _____ and would love to work for a company, like yours, that does _____. Thank you for the opportunity to interview for this position, and I am excited to get the chance to work for you.

Example Answer: Hello, my name is Clifford Phillips and I am a Junior at Rowan University. I am currently majoring in Philosophy. I am extremely passionate about working with younger people and teaching them the subject I love most. I would love to work at a university, like yours, that has such a good classroom setting and that allows for individual focus for each student in the classroom. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to interview for this position (philosophy professor), and I am excited to work alongside all of the faculty here.

2. What are your strengths?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The applicant selected a strength listed as one of the main competencies in the job description of their potential role.
- The applicant described their strength as well as provided an example of when this strength was utilized in one of their classes, extracurricular activities, or jobs.

Answer Template: My biggest strength is _____ (related to role). (Explain about what this strength is). One way I feel that I was able to utilize this strength is when _____.

Answer Example: My biggest strength is communication (related to being a philosophy professor). What I mean by this is that I believe I am adept at taking very confusing or complicated philosophical ideas and explaining them in more understandable terms for others who might be struggling to understand. One way I was able to utilize this strength is when I would work as a peer tutor and have to explain multiple weeks' worth of philosophy material over the course of an hour-long tutoring session. I always found that I had very high satisfaction ratings and return rates for the students that I would tutor.

3. What is your greatest weakness?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The applicant selected a weakness that does not reflect the main competencies for what is listed in their potential job description.
- The applicant was able to provide an example of how they improved upon this weakness.

Answer Template: My greatest weakness is ____ (should be unrelated to the role you are interviewing for). The main way that I have improved on/am improving on this strength is by ____.

Example Answer: My biggest weakness would be my drawing ability (unrelated to being a philosophy professor). For background, I have a degree in graphic design. I always found that when I wanted to sketch out ideas for the artwork I wished to create, I never seemed to be satisfied with what I drew because I was unable to draw as well as I would have liked to. I have always found it easy to develop new skills to a decent, if not good, capability, but with drawing I seemed to always struggle with being able to properly depict the image that I had envisioned on paper with pencil.

4. Give me an example of how you handled a difficult situation.

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The context to the problem, and why this issue needed to be addressed.
- Explained what actions they took to solve this issue.
- Described the outcomes from their interventions, and explained what they learned from this experience.

Template: One way that I had to handle a difficult situation is when _____. It needed to be addressed because of _____. The way that I went about handling this situation was by doing _____. The way that my intervention impacted the situation was _____. This resulted in _____. This allowed me to learn _____.

Example: One example of how I dealt with a difficult situation would be when I was working multiple jobs while also attending school. It needed to be addressed because I found that my week was entirely devoted to working and classwork, leaving no time for respite. The way that I went about handling the situation was to speak to my supervisors in both of my jobs to get organized properly and to establish hard and soft deadlines for all of my work. This intervention allowed not only me, but also my superiors to better organize their work so that I could complete each and every project to my full capability. This allowed me to learn the benefits of communication with superiors and the importance of overall communication and organization in any work environment.

5. How well do you work under pressure?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- Talk about your go-to strategies for dealing with stress and how you communicate and otherwise proactively try to mitigate pressure.
- If you can give a real example of a stressful situation you navigated successfully, all the better.

Template: My main strategies for dealing with pressure are _____. I also try to actively mitigate pressure proactively by doing _____. One example of this is when _____ and I was able to handle it by doing _____. This resulted in _____.

Example: My main strategies for dealing with pressure are to stay organized and to properly manage my deadlines for projects. I also actively try to mitigate pressure by not procrastinating. One example of dealing with pressure is during any particularly busy time during school while also having multiple jobs, I often make spreadsheets and set numerous reminders to make sure that I meet all of my deadlines properly and manage my stress. This results in the continued academic success I have had alongside performing any job duties to the best of my ability simultaneously.

6. What do you like to do outside of work? Or What are you passionate about?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- Be honest, but professional and be mindful of answers that might make it sound like you're going to spend all your time focusing on something other than the job you're applying to.
- Talk about a hobby, which may be different from day-to-day work. Take it one step further and connect how your passion would make you an excellent candidate for the role you are applying to.

Template: What I tend to enjoy doing aside from work is _____ (something that is professional and that does not take up tremendous amounts of time). I feel that this has taught me _____ which makes me a better candidate for this position.

Example: What I enjoy most outside of work is to read fantasy and philosophy. I feel that it has helped me with my ability to focus on tasks for a long time without getting distracted, and it also helps me manage my stress. This makes me a better candidate for this position.

7. Can you tell me about a time where you received orders or directives that you did not agree with, and how you handled that situation?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The situation and why the conflict was occurring.
- Explained how the applicant addressed this conflict (communicated with peers, received feedback on how to respond, etc.).
- Described the outcomes from their interventions, and explained what they could do to prevent future conflict.

Template: What happened was ____ and it occurred because of ____ . I addressed this situation by doing ____ . This resulted in ____ . In the future I will do ____ to prevent future conflict.

Example: One time where I received orders I did not agree with would be when I worked as a graphic designer. I would often get critiques from clients which I knew to be wrong from a design perspective and from a marketing perspective. I addressed this situation by first voicing my concerns professionally and attempting to educate the client about why I made the particular design choices that I did. This would often result in their understanding and appreciation of the choices I had made, but sometimes they would still want me to make the recommended changes. I dealt with this by understanding that customer satisfaction is more important than being correct or getting my way. This led to a good return of customers for future work.

8. Do you have any questions for me?

Main Components to Include in Answer:

- The individual asks two to three questions that directly reflect their values as an applicant. This can include questions about their potential job duties, professional development opportunities, the culture of their office, etc.
- The applicant refrains from asking questions about their potential salary, benefits, work schedule, etc.

Template: What are the three things you most enjoy about working for ____? What is the work culture like at ____? What do you think the most important skills are for working at ____? (No questions about salary, benefits, or schedule).

Example: What do you like most about working at Rowan University? What do you think the most important skills are for a professor? What is the culture among the faculty like here?

Writing a Thank You Message

After each interview, it is essential to send a thank you note or email to the potential employer. Sending a thank you message is an excellent way to illustrate gratitude, but also reaffirm why the applicant would be an excellent employee for the current opening. In this regard, hiring managers pay special attention to how applicants thank you message is articulated, as well as how fast it is sent out after an interview. As such, each thank you message should contain:

- Thanking the employer for the interview, and for having the opportunity to learn more about their current opening, team, and organization.
- An illustration of how and why the applicant's present experience directly reflects the essential job duties of the interviewed position.
- Helping the hiring manager understand the applicant's gratitude for this opportunity.
- The tone, language, and vocabulary of the thank you message sets the standard for the second round of interviews.
- Each thank you message should be unique and based on the specific factors of the role, team, and organization the applicant is interested in pursuing.

Please review the thank you message templates and examples below. However, all templates and examples should be used as a guide, and should not be explicitly copied and pasted.

Thank You Message Format 1:

Dear (insert name of interviewer),

I sincerely enjoyed meeting with you and learning more about the (insert name of position) opportunity.

Our conversation confirmed my interest in becoming part of (insert name of organization), and I was particularly pleased with having the opportunity to be able to (insert one essential job duty that this position entails). I feel confident that my experiences will allow me to seamlessly transition into your team and complete the essential responsibilities of this role.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide you with any further information. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you again for the courtesy you extended to me.

Sincerely,

(Insert your name)

Thank You Message Format 2:

Hi (insert name of interviewer),

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. It was such a pleasure to speak with you and learn more about the team and position. I am very excited about the opportunity to join (insert name of company) and assist (insert one essential job duty that this position entails) with your team.

I look forward to hearing from you about the next steps in the hiring process, and please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide additional information.

Best regards,

(Insert your name)

Thank You Message Example:

Dear Dr. Coach,

I wanted to personally thank you for taking the time to speak with me about the EOF Academic Coach position at Gotham University. It was a pleasure to meet you, and I am very grateful to learn more about this role.

Following our conversation, I am confident that my experience and knowledge is an excellent match for this position. I am very passionate about having the opportunity to assist in the development of our EOF students, and I am very thankful for being able to interview for this role.

Thank you for your time, and have a great day.

Best regards,

Roberto Rodriguez

Thank you, Message Standards, More Than 4 Interviewers:

Furthermore, there are specific standards in terms of the number of interviewers per session. For example, if an interview hosts 1-3 interviewers, it is recommended to create a unique thank you message for each individual. However, if an interview hosts more than 4 interviewers, it is recommended to send an email to one individual on the hiring committee, and then ask if this email can be distributed to the remaining committee members. This strategy helps streamline the overall thank you message process, but also provides a centralized message to all committee members. Please review the thank you message templates and examples below.

Dear (insert name of individual interviewer),

Thank you for the great conversation regarding the (insert job title) opportunity. Moving forward, I would greatly appreciate it if you can please forward the message below to your fellow search committee members.

Thank you for your time, and I greatly appreciate your assistance.

(Insert your name)

Thank You Message Example:

Dear Search Committee,

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to speak with me about the (insert job title) position, and for providing an increased understanding of the day-to-day responsibilities of this role. Today's conversation only increased my interest in this opportunity. I am excited to utilize my (insert skills/attributes/experiences that reflect the primary responsibilities of the job you're interviewing for) to benefit the objectives of (insert name of company) and (insert any specific project or responsibility that you would be working on).

Thank you for your time, and I am looking forward to hearing from you in the near future.

(Insert your name)