



# Interview and Professional Attire Tips for Success

The Center for Career & Leadership Development offers in-person mock interviews by appointment. Students should wear professional attire to in-person mock interviews. Need a professional outfit? Shop our Professional Clothing Closet!

## WHAT ARE ORGANIZATIONS LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY INTERVIEW YOU?

- When answering interview questions, remember that organizations want to know two things:
- Are you a good fit for the program/organization?
- Do you have the skills, abilities, and experience to do the job/complete the program?

## WHAT TO EXPECT

### WHEN YOU GET THE CALL FOR AN INTERVIEW, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:

- How long will the interview be? Will there be multiple interviews with different people?
- How many people will I meet with that day?
- Will other candidates be interviewing that day as well?
- Will the interview be in-person or over the phone or via Skype?
- What is the dress code? (for in-person interviews)

### SCHOLARSHIP, LEADERSHIP, GRAD SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

- Treat these just as you would a professional job interview. Even if you're not going into a business field, professional attire is expected of those entering a leadership role or a professional career, so that means you! And just like in a job interview, you would prepare to talk about your interest in the program and how your skills and experiences align with the program.

### TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- **SCREENING INTERVIEWS:** Initial interview to see if you would go to the next round of interviews.
- **PHONE/VIDEO INTERVIEWS:** Interview conducted over the phone or computer. Sometimes used as a screening tool but more organizations use this method for final interviews, particularly for internships, to save on travel costs.
- **PANEL INTERVIEWS:** In this situation, several people interview you at once.
- **GROUP INTERVIEW:** You and the other candidates are interviewed at the same time. In this situation, you want to find a good balance between speaking up and also allowing others to talk and share their ideas as well.
- **BEHAVIOR/SITUATIONAL/CASE INTERVIEWS:** In a second interview, the interviewer will use these types of questions to determine whether or not you are the right fit for the job. Thorough answers will tell the interviewer about your past behavior and will be used to predict future behavior. The interviewer will ask you to consider situations or specific cases in order to see how you would behave in a real or hypothetical situation.

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Always research the company/organization and opportunity before the interview. Be able to describe how your skills and experiences match the organization and opportunity. Use the organization's website, Handshake description, LinkedIn, news articles, and other resources to conduct your research.

Be able to answer this question: Why do you want to work in this field/complete this program?

Create a list of questions you want to ask during the interview. Ask about company culture, job duties, expectations, projects, and any other aspect that will help you make a better decision about accepting or not accepting the job.

## KNOW YOURSELF...SO YOU CAN ANSWER ANY INTERVIEW QUESTION

Can you speak to each bullet point and experienced listed on your resume? Anything on your resume could become an interview question. What have been your most significant accomplishments? Challenges? Conflicts? Failures? Successes? Know them and be able to talk about what you have learned from them. These situations can help you answer a variety of behavior based questions.

**Technique for Success – The STAR Method.** Use the STAR method for answering behavioral or other questions that require you to draw from past experiences. State the **(S)ituation** and the **(T)ask** you needed to complete. Describe the **(A)ction** and the **(R)esult**.

Be brief in your description. Emphasize the results or what you learned and how it connects to the opportunity you want.

**Prepare to answer these questions** (Be specific – always back up your answer with an example from experience).

Tell me about yourself

Why should we choose you?

What is your biggest strength?

Tell me about a time you failed.

What is your biggest weakness?

Why do you want to go into this field?

## PREPARE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH/INTRODUCTION

- Be ready for the “Tell me about yourself” question. The organization wants to know about your experiences and how they fit with the opportunity. It’s more than an autobiography. Tell them what you value and why the opportunity matters to you.
- Focus more on the professional than the personal. Do not spend time repeating information that is on your resume.
- Smile, show your personality. Rather than memorize a speech, know the key items you want to discuss in your introduction. You want to sound natural and relaxed.

## PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK

At job interviews you are evaluated partly on your answers to the interviewer’s questions, and partly by the questions you ask and don’t ask. Asking about salary and benefits sends one message; asking about the guts of the job, its challenges and performance expectations, sends another. **“The more performance-related your questions, the better.”**

**By asking questions, you show that you are interested. Use the 4 C’s to Create your list of questions.**

1. **Connect:** You want to connect with the interviewer by asking a question like; “What do you like about working at this company?”
2. **Culture:** You want to find out what it is really like to be a part of the organization and what the expectations are. You would ask a questions like; “What makes someone successful or unsuccessful in this position?”
3. **Challenges:** Ask them a question like; “What are some challenges that a new hire might expect?” This will give you a chance to resale your qualifications and experience.
4. **Close:** All ways tell them how excited you are about the opportunity. Always ask what the next step in the process is. You should ask when and if it is okay to contact them after that time has elapsed.

## WHAT NOT TO TALK ABOUT DURING AN INTERVIEW

Did you know that there are questions an employer should never ask during an interview? An employer should not ask you about your marital status/family status, citizenship status, disabilities, age, and religion. So that means, you shouldn’t bring it up either because you never know how the interviewer might let it play into their decision. For instance, that you are planning to start a family soon, the employer’s bias could impact their decision to hire you even when you are the most qualified. In addition, getting too personal in an interview takes away from the professional purpose of the conversation.

## MAKING THE BEST IMPRESSION

- **Turn your cell phone off before the interview and put it away so that you are not distracted.**
- Dress professionally for full-time, internship, campus opportunity, and grad school interviews. Even for casual work environments, you want to show that you can be professional. For part-time jobs, it is still important to look your best during the interview.
- Know where you are interviewing so that you arrive on time. Show up at least 15 minutes early.
- When you meet someone, smile and offer a firm handshake.
- Use good eye contact.
- Maintain good posture, but lean in slightly to show interest in what your interviewer is saying.
- Focus on the professional. It’s ok to share some personal information such as a hobby (if it is relevant to the conversation), but be careful about disclosing too much personal information during your interview.
- Avoid filler words such as “like,” “um/uh,” “stuff,” “kind of,” “I mean,” etc. If you are prepared with what you want to say, you are less likely to look for these placeholders in your conversation.
- Do **not** ask about salary during the interview. You should ask salary questions during the application process or once you receive an offer. By doing your research ahead of time, you should have an idea of what the salary is so that you can use the interview to discuss your true interest in the position.
  - Some employers will ask you about your salary requirements. Use resources such as **salary.com** to look up salary information for the job you want within your zip code. When asked, offer a range rather than an exact number so that you seem flexible.

## WHAT TO BRING

- Padfolio. Use the legal pad to have a list of questions. Bring extra copies of your resume.
- If interviewing off campus, have directions to the location and the phone number of the person who is interviewing you.
- If interviewing for several hours, bring a professional bag and stock it with water and other items you might need that day.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Send a thank you email or note to the interviewer. This is your first chance to follow-up. An additional follow-up via phone or email would be appropriate 1 or 2 weeks later, depending on when they told you they would contact you.

# DRESS FOR SUCCESS: WHAT TO WEAR IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

You never have a second chance to make a first impression. For career fairs and professional interviews, you want to wear professional attire. On a basic level, professional attire is much different than what we might wear to class or even to work every day. It's a step up from khakis and a polo but not as formal as a tuxedo. Once hired, you might find that business casual is appropriate for most days but in an interview setting, you want to show that you are ready for leadership roles and greater responsibility in the future. Check out The Professional Closet in the CCLD on the Macon and Cochran campuses for inexpensive professional options. Our staff can also help you identify appropriate items for your interview.

- **When choosing an interview outfit, ask yourself:** Is it appropriate for working in a professional environment?

- **Items that WORK:**

- Pants (not jeans - khakis are ok but something in a more professional fabric and color works best)
- Button-down shirt with a tie, blazer, and slacks. White or light blue are popular colors.
- Blazer or tailored cardigan (these are a must if wearing a sleeveless shirt)
- Dark, conservative colors for blazers, sweaters, slacks, skirts, and dresses.
- Avoid more casual, fun colors and busy patterns.
- Modestly cut blouses or button-down shirts with sleeves (if not wearing a jacket or cardigan). Avoid sheer blouses! Choose a solid color or small pattern that isn't distracting.
- Knee-length skirt or dress. Pair it with a blazer for a more professional look. Hosiery is still acceptable but not always required – when hired, check the dress code of your company.
- Dress shoes (avoid open-toed shoes). Heels or flats are appropriate.
- Trouser socks or hosiery with pants – never wear white or black athletic socks. If you like to show your personality with your socks, just keep your audience in mind before going too far.
- Be neatly groomed. Always shower, trim hair and nails.

- **What to avoid:**

- Low-cut blouses, t-shirts, or other casual tops.
- Sleeveless shirts without a blazer or cardigan.
- Faded, ratty khakis that have seen better days. Fresh khakis are ok but not the best professional option.
- Skirts that are shorter than knee-length.
- Boat shoes, tennis shoes, duck boots, or sandals.
- Super high heels. 2 – 3 inches is the maximum. Flats are ok! It's important to be comfortable.
- Too much jewelry or makeup. A little goes a long way!

- **The Deal on Business Casual.** Once we get the job, business casual may be our normal attire. Typically, this means, conservative dresses, skirts, nice pants (khakis are ok, jeans typically are not), sweater, blouse or button-down shirt (no t-shirts). Sport coats and blazers can pull an outfit together but a tie is optional.

- **What about Casual Fridays?** This isn't a given at every organization. Clarify before you wear jeans and your favorite MGA t-shirt, which paired with a blazer could make a great casual Friday look for the office.



## EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE



## EXAMPLES OF BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE

