

INTERVIEWING

Call Career Services at 610.328.8352 to schedule a mock interview. Join our new LinkedIn *Swatties Helping Swatties* Mock Interview subgroup to connect with alumni willing to help you prepare for your interviews.

I've found the Career Services mock interviews to be incredibly helpful. During the one I did in preparation for an internship interview, the mock interviewer not only helped me refine my answers but also helped me come up with better answers to several questions. She also talked through why an interviewer asks certain questions and what they are looking for in an answer, which helped me think critically about potential questions the mock interview had not covered. In general, it was nice being able to get a more experienced person's opinion and feedback on my interview skills. The mock interview provided me with a much needed confidence boost (my previous internship interviews had not gone well). I was able to nail my actual interview, and I got the internship I interviewed for! Sophomore, Class of 2016

Top 10 Interview Tips

1. **Know the position and organization.** Take the time to learn about the position and how you fit into the organization. Come to the interview with a mental list of 2-3 specific aspects of the position or organization you personally find exciting and can talk about. You should know current trends in the field or industry, the products and/or services of the organization, and its competitors.
2. **Know yourself.** Be prepared to answer the opening question: *Tell me about yourself.* This question asks for you to discuss yourself in the context of the position you are applying for. Tell the employer specific aspects of your experience and interests that make you a strong candidate for the position. Employers want to know that your skills, interests, and career goals mesh with the position.
3. **Think about your strengths and weaknesses.** You should be prepared to discuss both. When it comes to your weaknesses, explain what you are doing to address said weakness. No one is perfect. Identifying your strengths and weaknesses shows the interviewer that you are mature, reflective and know yourself; these are attributes many programs, fellowships, and employers look for.
4. **Ask thoughtful questions.** Asking questions shows your interest in the position and the research you've done to demonstrate your fit. The questions you ask give the interviewer insight into how you see the position.
5. **Be honest but thoughtful about your responses.** Do you think the interviewers will appreciate that you always need extensions on papers or that you tend to be late to meetings? You do not want to lie during an interview, but there is some information that should be kept to yourself. It's true that you should discuss your weaknesses, but think of a way to present them in the most positive way possible.
6. **Dress appropriately and conservatively.** For most interviews you will need to wear a professional suit. If you're uncertain about attire, it's best to dress conservatively for the interview. Dressing professionally shows your interviewer that you realize you are at an interview and that you take the position seriously. Career Services can lend a suit, if needed.
7. **Know your audience.** You will interview with a range of people within the organization, including human resources staff, administrative staff, managers and recent grads. Remember that in each interaction – including informal lunches or formal dinners – your interviewers are evaluating your fit for the position and organization.
8. **Follow their application guidelines.** Submitting application materials late, asking inappropriate questions (what's the salary?), or requesting to switch your interview date may give a negative first impression. Read their directions and follow.
9. **Proofread your application materials.** Make sure there are no typos or careless errors. Such errors send an impression that you didn't spend time on your application.
10. **Be prepared.** Career Services offers mock interviews for both on and off-campus positions. Get some practice and feedback before you are in the stressful situation of an interview. A mock interview can be helpful in identifying and eliminating unconscious nervous habits that could significantly distract interviewers and detract from their impression of you. Dedicate time to think about possible questions you might be asked and to visualize how you will respond to them.

Thank you to Jill Gladstein for sharing these tips!

Types of Interviews

Screening Interviews (possibly via phone or Skype)

The interviewer will typically begin by verifying information on a candidate's resume. Screening interviews are typically 30 minutes in duration and some interviewers will literally follow the structure of your resume, asking questions first about your education, then experience and activities. Know your resume! Phone or video interviews are often scheduled if time or distance limits the opportunity for an in-person interview. While many internship employers use phone interviews as their only interview method, most employers hiring full-time professionals will follow the phone or video interview with an in-person or on-site interview at the organization.

To prepare for a phone interview, have your resume/cover letter handy and the job/internship description. Because you will be on the phone, you can have in front of you previously prepared answers to basic interview questions and refer to them. You don't want to leave much dead air during the conversation, but if you need a moment to think, let the interviewer know that's what you're doing. Also, have in front of you questions you intend to ask and highlights from your resume that you want to be sure to mention. Take notes during the interview. Remember to smile as you answer their questions to allay some of the inherent nervousness that may come across in your voice since you can't visualize your interviewer's responses to your answers. Use a self-confident and enthusiastic voice. A phone interview may have the tendency to become too casual because you can't see each other. Be sure to remain professional. On the phone it is especially important to be clear, concise and direct in your answers. It is also extremely important to enunciate your words clearly. Cell phones are not ideal for phone interviews – if you need a quiet space with a landline, ask to reserve an interview room in Career Services.

Skype or other video chat software may be used for screening interviews and possibly for more advanced interviews. Like a phone interview, you'll need to prepare your interview space. You may have some cue cards placed near your webcam. Look at the webcam when speaking in order to maintain "eye contact," although you may look at your screen while the interviewer is speaking. You will need to dress professionally as if you were going to the organization and you'll need to think about how your attire looks on camera. Avoid patterns like small dots or small stripes. Some colors may wash out your face or are so bright they'll distract from your face. Also, think about what is visible behind you on the camera. Clear out clutter and be attuned to whether or not the décor in your room could be distracting. Also, don't have a bright light or window behind you. Do a practice run on camera to check these details. As with phone interviews, find a quiet place, turn off cell phones and other noisemaking devices, ask friends and neighbors to refrain from knocking on your door, put pets in another room and close your windows. Also, be sure to have a professional username if using Skype or Google Chat. If you're offered an interview with an employer who is in another country or state, but neither you nor the employer can pay travel expenses, you might suggest an interview via Skype.

Pre-call/video chat checklist:

- Prepare the room or office where you will conduct the interview – create a calm atmosphere with no interruptions or distractions.
- Disable call waiting if on the phone or close any other distracting websites if using a video conference site.
- Check that all equipment and software is working properly.
- Be sure not to make distracting noises such as pen tapping, eating, chewing gum, smoking or excessive paper shuffling.
- Have in front of you: resume, job description, notes you've prepared regarding common questions, blank paper, list of questions to ask interviewer, pen, calculator, calendar, clock, alternate phone number of interviewer.

First-Round and Advanced Interviews

Employers who interview on campus will conduct their first-rounds at Swarthmore, but the bulk of first-round interviews will either take place via phone, video or at the organization's location (on-site). On campus interviews are typically 30 minutes in duration. If on-site, the interview can range in length from 30 minutes to all day and may include lunch or dinner. While the first-round interview may include many of the "screening" types of questions mentioned above, it may be quite different and instead feature behavioral, case or technical interview questions, depending on your field.

This interview may be your sole interview before a hiring decision is made, or it may be followed by second, third and even fourth rounds of interviews. Each subsequent interview round tends to be longer in duration and allows you the opportunity to interview with more individuals at the organization, including decision-makers at higher levels within the organization. Advanced rounds of interviews often include a group component, sometimes a role play where you function as part of a team with fellow applicants (e.g. Teach for America) or where you are interviewed by a group of individuals (a panel interview). Advanced interviews usually include a lunch/dinner to see how you interact socially with your potential colleagues. In many industries (e.g. Wall Street) this is critical – you will spend so much time working together, they want to be sure they’ll actually like working with you! In other fields, especially with nonprofit organizations, they may not take you to lunch or dinner but in interviews they will definitely be evaluating your passion and commitment to their issues and their work.

Types of Interview Questions

STANDARD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **Questions that explore your goals and motivation.** Your answers should offer evidence of how this position will fit into your longer-term goals; the level of your interest in the field; your level of maturity and initiative. Project confidence and your level of interest and commitment to this field.
2. **Questions about your education.** Describe the skills and knowledge you’ve developed through your studies and relate these to the position; demonstrate your ability to plan, organize and manage your work load.
3. **Questions about your skills and experience.** Demonstrate you have the skills necessary for the position and provide examples; discuss your work values (what’s important to you in a workplace); discuss relevant transferable skills (skills you gained from an experience that the employer may not immediately see as related to their industry) and your ability or potential to perform.

Sample Standard Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why should I hire you?
3. What is your leadership style?
4. Discuss two or three factors that are most important to you in a job.
5. What are your short-term goals?
6. What are your long-term goals?
7. Describe your ideal job.
8. What are two or three of your strengths?
9. What are two or three of your weaknesses?
10. In your opinion, what is success?
11. What is your greatest accomplishment?
12. What have you learned from your failures or mistakes?
13. How are you better qualified than the other candidates I interviewed today?
14. What interests you most about this job?
15. How do you handle yourself in stressful situations?
16. What have you learned from your college experience?
17. What are your favorite subjects? Least favorite? Why?
18. Have you had any courses in _____?
19. Tell me about your work experience.
20. How can you contribute to our organization?
21. Why do you feel that you have leadership potential?
22. How do you feel about your academic background?
23. What motivates you?
24. What is the biggest mistake you ever made?
25. Why are you interested in working for our company?
26. Describe your leadership positions and style.
27. Why did you choose a major in _____?
28. How would you rate your last supervisor/professor?
29. Are you willing to consider relocating?
30. Why did you decide to attend Swarthmore?

31. What did you dislike about your previous employer?
32. Do you consider yourself a creative person?
33. What other organizations are you considering?
34. What makes you think you can effectively supervise others?
35. How would you describe your study habits?
36. Why are you interested in this position?
37. Do you like to work independently?
38. What is your geographic preference?
39. To what extent have you been involved in extracurricular activities?
40. Do you have any hobbies or special interests?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Most employers will supplement standard questions with behavioral interview questions. These questions attempt to assess your past experiences as predictors of your future behaviors and potential for success in a position.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall fairly recent situations (typically no further back than 2 years) that show behaviors or actions relevant to the job or field. Think of situations where you demonstrated many relevant skills – it’s easy to determine the skills the employer will ask you about, because they are typically included in the job description. Situations can come from academics, work experience, activities, sports, community service, leadership roles, internships, summer jobs, etc.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation focusing on your role in the situation. The employer is not interested in what your team members did. Be ready to give explicit details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result (see the STAR format below).
- Remember that the outcome or result should reflect positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. A skilled interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

Using the STAR Format to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

In telling stories or giving examples of what you have done and specific skills and qualifications you have used or developed, divide stories into four parts. This will keep you focused and will allow you to be more concise. The four parts can be described by the acronym, STAR:

SITUATION:	What was the situation? What problems or challenges was I facing? When did this situation occur? Where did this situation occur?
TASK:	What needed to be done? How did I need to be involved?
ACTION:	What did I do specifically? When part of a team, what was my role? What did I put my energy into?
RESULTS:	What were the outcomes? What were the unintended outcomes? What did I learn? What would I do differently next time?

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Tell me about a time when you had to persuade others to understand and appreciate your point of view.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- By providing examples, convince me you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.
- Describe a major accomplishment.
- Tell me about a challenge you've faced in one of your leadership roles and how you overcame that challenge.
- Describe a time when you failed to live up to your expectations for yourself.
- Tell me about a time when you were unsuccessful in juggling multiple projects and priorities.

ROLE PLAY QUESTIONS

These are rare, but in some cases the interviewer may present a specific situation and give you a few minutes to prepare for your role as the person holding the position for which you are interviewing. In a typical scenario, the interviewer will play a client, customer or fellow employee. (For example, Teach for America always has a role play that often involves dealing with an irate parent, a difficult principal, challenging student, etc.) These role plays expect you to get “in character” and demonstrate how you would act in a given situation.

CASE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Case interviews are used almost exclusively by management consulting firms. They are active problem-solving exercises, where typically the interviewer will ask the candidate to solve an actual business problem faced by the organization. Some case interviews are known as “brain teasers” where the problem or question is one that has no easy answer:

- How many disposable diapers were used in the US last year?
- How many manhole covers are there in Manhattan?
- How many jelly beans does it take to fill a 747?
- How many passengers fly out of the Philadelphia International Airport each day?

Case interviews allow you to demonstrate key analytical skills, critical thinking and your approach to a complex problem. Although there are typically no “right” answers, the interviewer will be assessing your problem-solving skills, creativity, quantitative analysis, conceptual analysis, industry knowledge, results orientation, and interpersonal skills.

General Tips for Acing the Case

- Remain calm. Don't get flustered or give up.
- Expect a specific brain-teaser or business problem with a minimal amount of data.
- Ask probing questions to gain more information. Ask for help if you get stuck.
- Think out loud.... your thought pattern is almost as important as your answer.
- Brush up on basic math and economics (doing analysis without a calculator gets you bonus points for some organizations; other organizations require that you do all calculations without a calculator).
- Take notes; feel free to create visual aids like graphs and charts.
- Realize that you will have to make some assumptions and that you should state these assumptions in explaining your answer.
- Concentrate on demonstrating a logical thought process rather than trying to get a “right answer.”
- Reach a conclusion. Synthesize your thoughts concisely and develop a recommendation.
- Practice case interviews in advance. Contact Career Services for recommended resources (we have several case interview practice texts in the Career Library as well as online resources) and to schedule a mock case interview.

TECHNICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are common in applied fields like engineering, science, economics and computer science. They attempt to assess your skill level and knowledge in a specific area. Skill sets can include those you have developed through your coursework, work experience or activities. Examples include language skills and technical skills like computer programming. In some cases you may be provided with a whiteboard and markers to work through a problem set as part of your interview. Don't try to "fake" a response – similar to a case, feel free to ask the interviewer for more data and make the process of solving the problem an interactive one, if the interviewer allows. If you're presented with a problem with subject matter outside your knowledge base, ask questions and feel free to admit you're not familiar with the topic. Sometimes interviewers use this type of interview to test the extent and depth of your knowledge.

Communication Tips

Non-verbal Communication:

We communicate a great deal about ourselves through nonverbal expression. It is important to be aware of what your non-verbal behavior (eye contact, posture, facial expressions, gestures, and handshake) communicates to the interviewer. Take advantage of Career Services' digitally recorded mock interviews to assess your non-verbal communication.

Verbal Communication:

- Be articulate and specific in your answers. Don't just claim you have "excellent interpersonal skills" – provide specific examples of how you have used these skills in your academics, experience, activities or community service.
- Make sure that you answer the question that is asked! Nervous candidates often begin preparing an answer before completely understanding the question. Listen carefully and ask the interviewer to repeat the question if necessary.
- Relate your answers to the position you are interviewing for and the skills the employer is seeking.
- Be organized about what you want to say; avoid rambling. A key signal that you've started rambling is when the interviewer drops eye contact or starts looking for their next question. If you find yourself rambling or off-topic, try to quickly conclude and feel free to ask, "Did I fully answer your question?"
- Avoid saying anything negative about anyone (especially past employers). Employers see this as a warning sign that candidates can't take responsibility for their own actions and outcomes.
- Be honest and be yourself. If you have to pretend you're someone you're not to get the job, you're searching in the wrong field or with the wrong employer.

Helpful Interview Tips

- Map out travel beforehand and plan to arrive early. There is no excuse that sounds good for being late.
- Be well-groomed and dressed appropriately for the profession. Smile and have a firm handshake.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, paper, pen, interviewer's name, a list of references, and a portfolio (Career Services has portfolios you can borrow and the Bookstore sells them).
- Speak clearly. Don't ramble with your responses. Be concise yet thorough in your answers.
- Be honest in responding to questions. If you have a special situation or areas that you find difficult to discuss, seek the advice of the staff in Career Services. We can guide you in ways to handle difficult questions.

- Think of questions to ask the interviewer and follow up with questions as the interview progresses. This allows you to learn more about the organization and conveys your interest.
- At the end of the interview, you may want to provide a summary statement by restating your interest, skills, and whatever seems appropriate. Also ask about the next step in the process and the timeline.
- **Send a thank you letter or email** to each person you interviewed with, reiterating your interest in the position and strengths. Learn from each of your interviews. Take a few minutes to write down everything that you wish to remember about the interview, from general impressions to specific questions, while it's fresh in your mind.

What to Find Out in an Interview

Remember that an interview is a two-way interaction – you are evaluating them as much as they are evaluating you. Be sure to ask questions about the position and/or organization so that you can make the most informed decision. Sources of information include: the job description, the company's website, Vault.com, recruitment literature, annual reports, industry journals, professional organizations, alumni and other networking contacts, and informational interviews.

- What exactly the job is (its title, responsibilities, the department supervisor).
- What type of formal or informal training you would receive.
- How the skills you learn on this job will prepare you for future advancement.
- How much travel, if any, is involved.
- Whether there have been any recent organizational changes.
- What your predecessors in the job have moved on to do.
- How long the position has been open.
- How job performance is measured.

Questions you can ask the interviewer(s)

Generally, at the end of an interview you will be asked if you have any questions for the interviewer. You should have prepared about three questions based on your research about the organization/industry. You will want to ask questions showing you know what the organization does, who are its competitors and peers, and what new trends are happening in that field. You may have studied some of this information in class or you may have to do some research.

According to Vault.com, you should also ask “Have I answered all of your questions, or is there something else I can share that would help you evaluate my candidacy?” and “What is your timetable for making a decision, and who is on the decision team?” If there is something still outstanding, you may be able to address it in the interview or you may be able to address it in your thank you note.

What not to ask: what is the salary, how much vacation will I receive, what are the benefits, is graduate school tuition reimbursed, etc. These are questions to ask after you've received a job offer.

Guidelines for Ethical Conduct

It is important that you conduct your job search in an ethical manner as you are representing not only yourself, but also the opinion the employer will form about all Swarthmore students. This statement from the National Association of Colleges and Employers sends a clear message to job seekers as to what is appropriate behavior:

*Students' obligations include providing accurate information; adhering to schedules; accepting an offer of employment in good faith; notifying employers on a timely basis of an acceptance or nonacceptance and **withdrawing from the recruitment process after accepting an offer of employment**; interviewing only with employers for whom they are interested in working and whose eligibility requirements they meet; and requesting reimbursement of only reasonable and legitimate expenses incurred in the recruitment process.*

A major concern of employers is the student who accepts an offer, only to continue interviewing and then later reneges on the initial offer. While there are few penalties the employer can exact from the candidate, they almost certainly contact Career Services to voice their concern and often they discontinue their recruitment at Swarthmore. Please think about how your actions impact yourself and others as you navigate the job search process and bring any concerns or questions to Career Services.

Learn about fraudulent opportunities and safety in your job search at:
<http://www.swarthmore.edu/career-services/protecting-yourself-job-process>

Additional Interview Resources

- Make an appointment for a mock interview with a career counselor by visiting us in 135 Parrish
- Review our website: <http://www.swarthmore.edu/career-services/interviews>
- Request a password to access our subscription to *Case Questions Interactive*:
<http://www.casequestions.com/faq/>
- Access interview guides, including guides to finance and consulting interviews, through our subscription to *Vault Career Insider*: <https://careerinsider.vault.com/career-insider-login.aspx?parrefer=7473>
- Join the *Mock Interviewing – Swatties Helping Swatties* LinkedIn group:
https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=8143917&trk=anet_ug_hm
- Visit our Career Library to borrow interview guides and resources

Importance of Professional Attire

If you want to be seen as a professional you need to dress as one. Although your skills and abilities will get you the job, what you wear on the interview is often considered a reflection of how important you consider the interview, how well you know your chosen field, and an indication of respect for your interviewer. Dressed professionally, you may feel more confident in communicating your skills and abilities during the interview. Below are some suggestions on how to dress professionally, but keep in mind that interview attire is often more formal than what you will wear on the job. Know the organization you're interviewing with; are they business casual or professional every day? When in doubt, wear a suit!

What to Wear

Suit: Well-fitted, conservative wool or wool blend suit; gray, dark gray, navy blue, black are acceptable. For women, pant suits and knee-length skirts are both acceptable.

Shirt: White or pale colors are best, but avoid anything sheer (solid or thin stripes also work). Men should be sure your shirt is a long sleeved button-up dress shirt. Keep it simple!

Shoes: Dark leather, slip on or lace up shoes with dark socks for men. Conservative leather dress shoes for women. Avoid open-toed shoes or sandals, and no super high heels.

Accessories: Leather notebook, portfolio or briefcase. A basic purse is also acceptable.

Tie: Again, keep it simple and coordinate with the rest of your outfit. No bow ties!

Jewelry: Minimal. No visible piercings (nose rings, eyebrow rings, etc.) except conservative earrings for women.

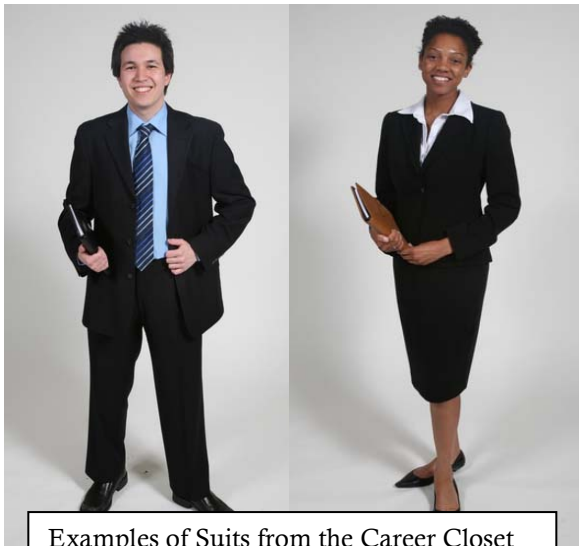
Additional Tips

- Be sure your hair is well-groomed and not a distraction to the interviewer.
- Remember to clean and trim your fingernails. Nail polish is fine as long as it is subdued and not chipped.
- Avoid or keep cologne and perfume to a minimum.
- Remember to freshen your breath. Avoid gum, candy or cigarettes during the interview.
- Shower before your interview, and wear extra deodorant!
- Visible tattoos should be covered to avoid distraction.
- Apparel should be clean and **neatly pressed**.

Career Closet

Need a suit to your interview or career fair but don't want to make the investment of buying one yet? Borrow a ready-to-wear suit from our Career Closet. All suits were newly purchased through the generosity of a Swarthmore alumnus. We offer a range of sizes and styles for men and women that are all "interview appropriate," taking the guesswork out of your attire selection. Best of all, we clean and press the suits for you. Stop by anytime between 1:00 and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, and make your selection from our closet.

Dressing on a Budget



Try Not to Wait Until the Week of your Interview to Purchase a Suit. If you wait until the week of the interview, chances are that you will pay more. Check local newspapers and stores for coupons and end of season sales. Good local choices are **K&G, Ann Taylor, Men's Wearhouse, Marshall's, New York & Company, Jos. A. Bank Clothiers** and **DSW Shoe Warehouse** for shoes.

- *Buy "Seasonless" Clothing.* Purchase a suit that could be worn year round. Avoid heavy wools; look for lightweight wool or wool blends advertised as "seasonless" or "three season."
- *Invest in the Right Attire.* Invest in a high quality wool blended suit. You can purchase discount high quality suits at local department stores and you'll get a lot more wear (with lower cleaning costs) from wool blends than rayon/polyester. Try the "wrinkle test": crush the fabric in your hand and make sure wrinkles fall out easily.

Examples of Suits from the Career Closet

A Great Gift to Ask For: Holidays, Birthdays, Graduation... Browse stores ahead of time to decide where you would like to purchase a suit and request a gift card for that store. This is a great way to purchase a suit without dipping into your bank account.

- *Save money on dry cleaning.* Invest in a suit you don't have to dry clean each time you wear. It will save you money in the long term, since charges range from \$8 - \$12.



Swarthmore College
CAREER SERVICES

www.swarthmore.edu/careerservices.xml