After a successful campus interview, you will often be asked to participate in a “second interview” at the employer’s site. The employer visit is generally a full day of interviewing and related activities. Once the employer visit is conducted and an evaluation completed, an offer may be made. The employer visit is given many names: plant trip, second interview, site visit, or office visit.

Just as the employer visit has many names, it has a variety of faces. It is difficult to describe every aspect of what to expect in an employer visit because employers vary greatly in how they execute them. The length of the trip, number of people involved, levels of people interviewing, types of tests conducted, and degree of formality can differ from one employer to the next.

The second interview provides an excellent opportunity for you to get a firsthand account of what it’s like to work for the employer and for the employer to determine how you would work in that environment. In other words, the interview is a mutual one.

Purpose

• **Allows the employer an opportunity to make an in-depth assessment of you prior to extending a job offer.**
  The employer visit is time-consuming and expensive for employers, so they screen a large number of applicants down to a few who are invited to visit. The employer visit is generally the last step in the selection process before an offer is made. At this point, the employer is confident you have the technical skills and intelligence to do the job. This visit is the employer’s opportunity to confirm there is a good match between your goals, the career opportunity, and the work group.

• **Allows you an opportunity to see the employer and its people firsthand to make a more informed decision if an offer is made.** The employer visit provides you with an opportunity to learn more about the position, the long-term career opportunities, the company’s employees, the company itself, and the local community. The employer will usually be doing as much selling as evaluating because this is the information you will use in deciding whether to accept or decline an offer. You, like the employer, are trying to determine whether or not a good fit exists.

Preparation

This is the final contact before an offer is made; do not take preparation lightly. **Prior to the visit, review all resources available about the employer.**

Be knowledgeable about the employer, its products or services, and career opportunities. The more prepared you are, the more probable it is the employer will recognize enthusiasm, motivation, maturity, and thoroughness as assets you possess.

Develop insightful questions to ask at the interview. Ask about the position, work environment, and employer’s needs. Your questions demonstrate the amount of preparation you have invested in the visit, as well as your seriousness of purpose. Appropriate questions will probe topics such as typical entry-level projects. You still should NOT ask about salary or benefits but be prepared to answer any questions regarding expected salary. Research entry level averages and ranges on the ECS website.

Finally, good preparation includes paying proper attention to appearance, dress and attitude. Dress in either business or business casual clothing. Remember, it is better to err on the side of being too conservative than too casual. Be sure all pieces of your wardrobe are clean and pressed. Practice impeccable grooming habits, including clean and freshly trimmed hair and nails.
Finalizing Logistics

An invitation to an employer visit will usually come from a specific contact person. This person becomes your source of information about all aspects of the trip. Any questions prior to the trip can be addressed to the contact person.

The majority of employer visits are one full day in length, but be prepared to spend 2-3 days, including travel and an overnight stay. Travel will be either by flying or driving, depending upon your preference, the employer’s discretion, and the distance. Usually, trips of more than 200 miles will justify air travel.

Some employers will make all the arrangements for your visit. They will reserve and pre-pay the hotel room and flights. They will send you an itinerary with flight numbers and hotel reservation numbers. Be sure to request this information and to carry the details with you while traveling. If the employer is not pre-paying the flight or hotel, talk to your contact person to clarify reimbursement procedures. Call or email your contact person, confirming all plans to avoid any last-minute mix-ups or confusion.

**Key information to have with you at all times:**

- Trip itinerary with times and names of people you will be meeting
- Contact person’s name, phone number and email
- Travel and accommodation arrangements (including air, hotel and car rental confirmation numbers)
- Maps and driving instructions

Arrival

If you have a morning interview, arrive in the city the night before. Avoid very late flights or the last flight into the city. An employer representative may arrange to pick you up at the airport, so don’t dress too casually for flying. Otherwise, take a courtesy van or taxi to your hotel. Keep all receipts for ground transportation expenditures for reimbursement.

When checking into the hotel, ask for any messages (the employer may have left information for you) and provide any pre-payment documentation. Regardless of payment arrangements, most hotels will ask to imprint a credit card for charges not covered by the employer, such as personal phone calls and room service.

Schedule a morning wake-up call with the front desk, allowing plenty of time to get ready. Keep phone calls and room charges to a minimum. When checking out, review the bill to ensure its accuracy; keep the receipt for your records.

The Evening Before

Some employers arrange for an employee to have dinner with you the evening you arrive, or breakfast the morning of your interview. This is an opportunity for you to meet a recent hire while getting an informal flavor for the day’s schedule, the employer, the city and any other pertinent topics. The degree of informality and nature of conversation at dinner can vary, but keep in mind that **any dinner companion can serve as an evaluator.** So, reflect maturity and professionalism.

Dress appropriately (ask for advice on appropriate dress). Eat moderately, AVOID alcoholic beverages, and participate in the discussion of employment opportunities, community and hiring needs. Be yourself, but be your best professional self.

Before retiring for the evening, confirm your morning wake-up call at the front desk and set the clock-radio alarm. Get enough sleep and give yourself extra time to get ready in the morning. It is extremely difficult to recover from tardiness, so plan ahead. In most cases, you will need to check out of the hotel upon leaving for the employer site. Provide extra time to do so. Take your luggage if you’ll be leaving for the airport immediately from the employer site. If you’ll return to the hotel, check your baggage at the front desk for later pick-up.

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**SPOUSE OR SIGNIFICANT OTHER**

You may request that your spouse or significant other accompany you on the initial visit. It is more usual, however, for your spouse to accompany you on a subsequent trip **after an offer has been extended**, but before you make a decision.

During this later visit, you might want to meet with real-estate agents or rental agencies to evaluate housing.
Interview Day

An itinerary of the day is critical to help you plan for the day. It should include times and locations of interviews, names of employees, maps and a site map. You may have 3-5 interviews with various levels of management in a one-on-one or group setting or panel interview. In any case, understand that the employer does not wish to intimidate you; hiring staff simply want a variety of input regarding your “fit” with the company. In some cases, you may be part of a group visit, where a number of candidates participate in group interviews and activities. While the group visit is more difficult for the employer to arrange, the visit allows staff the opportunity to see each candidate among his or her peers. Conversely, it permits you to see those who might be a part of your training group.

Most employers are well prepared for your on-site visit. They conduct formal interview training for their managers and usually provide very good interview sessions. Interviewers have scanned your résumé and are familiar with your background. The interviewers will attempt to assess your motivation and drive—to see what makes you strive for success. Each interviewer will probe for strengths and weaknesses. You may be asked the same questions by many people throughout the day yet must give as fresh and thorough an answer to the fourth as to the first.

If you are interviewing at a plant-trip location it is probable that an employment manager or plant manager will conduct a tour of the plant. You should be aware that you are being “interviewed” and evaluated even during a tour. Pay attention and ask questions. Anyone you meet, from receptionist to CEO, is a potential evaluator. Considering this, remain sharp and professional at all times.

Departure

The last meeting of the day often will be with the contact person or human resources manager. They will address your final questions, explain follow-up procedures, discuss reimbursement and take care of other details. Be sure that all your questions have been answered prior to leaving.

After the Visit

Following your visit, send a letter or email of thanks to all the people who interviewed you, including the main contact person. The message should reaffirm interest in the position and highlight qualifications. This letter provides you one last opportunity to position yourself for potential hiring.

Most employers will contact you within two weeks of the actual visit with an offer or a rejection. Some, however, may make an offer at the interview, while others will take as long as a month. It is acceptable to ask when employment decisions will be made, as well as to check on delays if the estimated decision date passes with no contact.

Reimbursements

- Clarify proper reimbursement procedures with your contact person. Know what expenses are pre-paid and what will be reimbursed. A note of caution: Don’t take advantage of the employer. You should ask to be reimbursed only for legitimate expenses, not souvenirs and expensive extras.

- Reimbursement of expenses will vary among employers, but nearly all will pay for travel, lodging and food. Keep receipts and clarify what expenses will be reimbursed prior to spending your own money. Incidental expenses usually reimbursed include parking, business phone calls, cab fares and tips.

- Expenses generally not reimbursed include room service snacks, gifts, newspapers, in-room movies and personal phone calls. Meals should be reasonable and items such as alcohol should be avoided. The in-house hotel restaurant is usually a good measure of how much to spend on a meal. Enjoy the visit but don’t be extravagant.

- If cash or credit is a problem, the University of Wisconsin-Madison College of Engineering offers the Koresh Loan. This $500 loan is available to any engineering student, is interest free for three months, and is immediately available. Forms are available in Room 1150 Engineering Hall.
On-Site Interview Formats

A series of individual interviews is the most common format for the second interview. For the most part, the representatives are primarily interested in whether you can do the job and work well with them. Focus on your work-related experiences, research and academic projects, positive relationships with co-workers, and examples demonstrating your competence and compatibility. While it may be difficult to remain fresh for each representative, it is imperative that you do so.

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS
The employer will want to assess specific behaviors staff deem necessary for success. To make this assessment, employers may call upon managers, executives, new hires and human resources personnel to interview you individually. A full day of interviews might reflect a typical workday, as the employer judges your confidence and ability to work with and talk to a variety of people. Over the course of several individual interviews, the employer will determine if you would be a “good fit” with the company. The interviews, with people you would work for and with, often include a meal (an important component of the interview) and tours of the facility.

GROUP INTERVIEWS
Some employers will invite a group of candidates for second interviews on the same day or weekend. Candidates may be invited to attend from across the country, from various campuses. This approach is easiest for employers who can schedule interviews with multiple candidates in a short period of time.

The challenge to you, however, is to distinguish yourself from the other candidates. To do so, try to acquire more than a cursory knowledge of the employer. Be sharp. Network with alumni and former co-ops and interns to learn more about the employer, the work setting, and the goals of the employer. Work to show exceptional interest and enthusiasm for the opportunity.

Get along with others. Be pleasant and friendly to the other candidates. Your interactions throughout the day are typically evaluated.

PANEL INTERVIEWS
Panel interviews involve one candidate being interviewed by several employer representatives. Students who are working for an employer as a co-op or intern often experience a panel interview near the end of their work term. Success in this less-common interview style hinges on the same strategies useful in all interviews: demonstrating awareness of the employer and its goals, being able to elaborate confidently on your résumé, and maintaining a positive attitude. In panel interviews, remember to make good eye contact with all panelists, first with the panelist asking a question and then with the other panelists. Include all members of the panel in your responses, as well as questions.

BEHAVIORAL OR SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS
Behavioral and situational interviews are a popular method used to evaluate candidates. In this type of interview, you will be asked to describe how and why you would perform certain job tasks or make decisions based on a particular situation.

Examples of behavioral questions:
• What was the most difficult challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?
• Everyone has to bend or break the rules sometimes. Give me an example of when you have had to do this.
• What is the toughest decision you made while at the UW-Madison? Tell me about it. What alternatives did you consider?
• Describe projects or ideas you have conceived within the last year. How did you know they were needed or would work?
• Give me an example of when you felt the greatest sense of achievement.
• Can you give me examples of you doing more than required?

When responding to behavioral or situational questions, describe the (1) situation, or task (2) action, and (3) results. Realize that by citing behavior in past experiences, you indicate how you might perform in future situations. Be able to articulate things you learned, know what worked, and understand what you would have done differently. Be able to convey this information, and illustrate your ability to assess your behavior and build successfully from these experiences.

GOOD ADVICE TO CONSIDER:

- Be your best self
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Ask insightful questions to understand the employer’s operating environment
- Appreciate the opportunity to speak with employees at all levels
- Gain valuable information regarding the work environment in unexpected settings, such as the reception area and cafeteria
- Observe how employees interact with each other, at the same and different levels
Questions Worth Asking

Never pass up the opportunity to ask questions! Questions clearly indicate genuine interest. A lack of questions can be interpreted as lack of interest.

Ask Your Prospective Supervisor:

• What would be my primary responsibilities?
• What would I be expected to accomplish in the first six months on the job?
• What are some of the department’s ongoing and anticipated special projects?
• How much contact does the department have with management?

Ask a Prospective Co-Worker:

• What do you like best about working for this department/company?
• Can you describe a typical workday in the department?
• Do you feel free to express your ideas and concerns here?
• What are the possibilities for professional growth and promotion?
• How much interaction do you have with superiors, colleagues and customers?
• How long have you been with the company? Does your future here seem secure?
• Is there anything you would change about the company if you had the chance?

Ask the Human Resources Manager:

• What do employees seem to like best about the company?
• What is the rate of employee turnover?
• How large is the department where the opening exists?
• What are the chances of being relocated after starting the job?
• What type of orientation or training do new employees receive?
• How often are performance reviews given?
• What are the long-range possibilities for employees in similar positions who consistently perform above expectations?

Discussions of Salary

Do not be caught off guard if the employer brings up salary near the end of the interview. Conversely, do not be the one to bring up this subject! If questioned about salary expectations, however be prepared to discuss the topic. Know the “going rate” for an entry-level engineer by reviewing ECS salary statistics as well as national statistics.

We recommend that you give a salary range or indicate that you are willing to consider any reasonable offer. For example:

• Give a range: "I would hope that with my background and qualifications a salary in the $55,000 to $59,000 (or high-$50s) range would be offered." The range given should be realistic and based upon prior research of starting salaries in the industry and for the position being discussed.

• Indicate that you are willing to consider any reasonable offer: "I’m sure that if you make an offer it will be commensurate with my qualifications and the current salary structure for the industry." or "I am very interested in the challenge, responsibilities and rewards of the position you may offer me."

If a verbal offer is extended at the interview, be appreciative and graciously ask for two things: (1) the offer in writing and (2) time to consider the offer. Most employers will offer an acceptance date of between 2 and 8 weeks after the initial offer. If asked to make a decision on the spot, show your appreciation for the offer but say that you need time to consider such an important decision.
Testing

You may be tested as part of the interviewing process. This testing may consist of standard mathematical, verbal or behavioral tests conducted as part of the interview evaluation process. Although there is little or no preparation possible for these kinds of tests, it is best to get plenty of rest the evening before a test to aid clear thinking.

In addition, after the second interview, many employers will make an offer contingent on a negative test for drugs and controlled substances. This test takes the form of a urine specimen analyzed for appearance of a substance. Be aware this test may occur and be advised that failure to submit to a drug test may end further employment consideration.

The Offer

While it is unlikely that you will be hired on the spot or told that an offer will definitely be forthcoming, be prepared. If an offer should be extended then, always ask for a chance to think it over. Accepting immediately is poor policy because you lose your opportunity to give thorough consideration to all aspects of the offer. Even if you think the offer is exactly right, the employer’s enthusiasm and your own may cloud your objectivity. Show appreciation, but always ask for time to consider the offer as well as a formal offer in writing.

When the written offer arrives, read it carefully. It should specify your job title, salary, and the name of the department and supervisor to which you will be assigned. The offer may be contingent upon your passing a physical exam and/or drug test. It will usually have a deadline by which you must accept in writing, ranging from two to eight weeks, depending on the time of year and the current market. The actual starting date may be specified then or after your acceptance.

Keep in mind that you and the employer have different concerns about “time.” You most likely would like ample time to hear from other employers and consider all your alternatives. Employers, on the other hand, want to know your decision as quickly as possible. If you reject their offer, they will need to quickly contact second-tier candidates.

Offer deadlines are taken quite seriously. If you do not meet the deadline, the offer may be withdrawn; if you need more time to consider an offer, ask for an extension. Be specific as to how much time you will need to make a decision. Show appreciation, enthusiasm for the offer, and emphasize the importance of making the right decision.

While making a decision on an offer, be sure to talk to all other employers who showed interest in you. Contact them directly, explaining that you are close to making a decision regarding your job search, are very interested in their opportunities, and ask about your status with them. Hopefully, they also will be able to make an offer if interested.

DON’T accept an offer while at the same time hoping that a better one will come along.

If you accept an offer, you are morally and ethically bound to keep it. Accepting and then changing your mind brings discredit on you, your university and references. It will ruin your chances of ever working for that employer.
In Summary

- Only consider job offers after you receive them in writing. 
  (Co-ops and interns should consider verbal offers, although it is good to request a written offer.)
- It is acceptable to ask for additional time to consider the offer. 
  A minimum of 2 weeks is generally offered.
- Once you accept, honor your commitment to the employer. 
  Decline all other offers immediately to allow other candidates the opportunity. 
  Discontinue all interviewing and other job search activities.

Should You Accept? Things to Consider:

- Will you enjoy working with your future co-workers and supervisors?
- Will you have a good opportunity to express yourself on the job?
- Is the working environment satisfactory?
- Will you be fully using your primary skills?
- Is there sufficient diversity and challenge?
- Will you be able to get the kind of feedback you require to see the results of your efforts?
- Is there an opportunity to learn and expand?
- Are there open avenues of communication?
- Will you be able to get value from your work?
- Do you clearly understand what your responsibilities will be, to whom you will report, 
  and how evaluations will be conducted?
- Do you clearly understand typical work hours and overtime expectations?
- Is the company product or service something you believe in?
- Is the offer within your expected range? Check ECS resources for average salaries.
- What priority do you place on location? How long is the commute?
- Are your favorite activities or recreations readily available?

NOTES (Remember to keep notes about your interview experience):