PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS

The initial screening interview normally lasts 30 minutes (45 minutes to 1 hour for PhD candidates). Like any presentation, the better prepared you are, the more successful you will be. Be aware of the importance of first impressions. Use a solid handshake (no limp or clammy handshakes). Make eye contact, and smile. Be friendly and relaxed, yet professional. Expect some small talk. Follow the recruiter’s lead. Focus and show interest. Listen to questions carefully. Never respond simply “yes” or “no”; provide examples and explain “why.” Display confidence, not arrogance.

One person, an engineer or a human resource manager, will usually interview you. Check with ECS business cards for the recruiter’s job title and department. This will typically help you be prepared for what type of interview you might have. It is less common, but sometimes two recruiters will interview you at the same time. This can be more stressful. Try to relax. Maintain eye contact with each recruiter as you answer their questions.

Remember that the interview is an opportunity for you to learn more about the employer as well as for the employer to evaluate you as a potential employee. Keep in mind that you are not an ideal match for every employer’s needs, so it is important to understand early that a “match” between employer and candidate is imperative, not only for the employer, but also for you. Individuals on “both sides of the table” should evaluate each other, discuss needs and interests, and honestly determine the “fit.”

Provide specific examples with all answers. Ask questions (see previous pages for suggested questions) either during the interview or at the end. Be prepared to supply a 2- to 3-minute summary of your qualifications and interests. Prepare a confident closing statement reiterating your interest in the position and be ready to highlight any important information that was not discussed in the interview.

Ask if you can supply other materials (transcripts, letters of reference, project summaries). Also ask about the employer’s “timeline” for making hiring decisions. Obtain a business card for your records so you may accurately address a thank you letter. ECS also collects business cards for your use. Shake hands, continue making good eye contact, and thank the recruiter for her/his time, mentioning your strong interest and enthusiasm to work with the employer.

Interviewing from the Recruiter’s Viewpoint

Before you prepare for the interview, stop and take a step back to review the interview from the recruiter’s viewpoint. Think about why each question is asked—some say to analyze the question behind the question—and try to understand what skills or attributes are actually being evaluated in your response. If you can understand this process and prepare accordingly, you will not only survive, but also succeed in interviews.

Interviews are business meetings. Prepare accordingly. Know what you want to talk about; know your résumé thoroughly; be able to cite examples of skills, lessons learned or goals met all across the résumé page. Dress like you care. Give the impression that this is an important meeting for you.

Recruiters will not try to embarrass you or cause you stress. They have a difficult task in conducting 10 to 15 interviews daily. Help them select you by being prepared. Ultimately, recruiters must find from 1–5 candidates who “fit” their needs. The quality of candidates referred for second, on-site interviews is a direct reflection on the recruiter’s ability to know and choose talent. His or her job is a difficult one.
Preparing for an Interview

This is where all your work ultimately pays off—skills assessment, résumé development, and communication with targeted employers.

Preparation and practice are key to successful interviewing. A lack of thorough employer research is often interpreted as poor preparation and a lack of interest in the employer.

1. **Know your résumé “inside and out.”** Be able to thoroughly and comfortably discuss any item on the résumé thoroughly by citing specific examples.

2. Understand that the résumé emphasizes your skills and accomplishments; it will serve first as a deciding factor leading to an interview. Once an interview is scheduled, the recruiter will often direct the interview using the résumé as an outline.

3. Verbally practice answering questions (Yes! Out loud!) and talking about your skills and accomplishments. Recall how in Skills Assessment, we emphasized the importance of spending time writing descriptions for skills, strengths and accomplishments. Now is the time to practice again!

4. Review and organize facts found in employer research. Demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's products or services. Take it a step further by clearly drawing the link—the match—between your skills and the employer's needs. Do not leave this important step open for employer interpretation. Show them the match!

5. Attend employer information sessions on campus. Introduce yourself to the recruiter(s) and mention that you are looking forward to your interview the next day. Ask intelligent questions and show enthusiasm.

6. Prepare your portfolio, clothing, and transportation the night prior to the interview. Check the weather forecast for any contingencies you will need to make. Get plenty of rest. Set dozens of alarm clocks, if necessary. You will not be able to recover if you are late.

7. **Dress with respect for the importance of the interview. Show you care!**

8. Every answer requires a specific example to support your claim; never provide a simple one- or two-word answer.

9. At the end of the interview, it is extremely important for you to ask questions. Lack of questions indicates lack of interest. Finally, summarize your interests and qualifications for the position.

What to Wear

Business attire is appropriate for interviews.

**WOMEN—Business Attire**

**Suits:** Dark colors, grays, blues, blacks. Solids or muted pinstripes. Conservative jacket and slacks or skirt are same color and fabric. Skirt length: AT KNEE OR BELOW. No tight skirts or pants.

**Shirts:** Conservative color. Shirt collar or jewel (rounded) neckline. Pressed, straight collar. Short or long sleeved. Blouse or shell. Not even a hint of cleavage visible. Long or three-quarter sleeve lengths preferred.

**Shoes:** NO BARE TOES. Flats or pumps (no higher than 2“ heels—no spikes). Polish and clean shoes.

**Hose/Jewelry:** Neutral or skin tone hose. Bring an extra pair for emergencies. Tights are not as dressy as sheer weight hose. Keep jewelry to a minimum.
What to Wear

**MEN—Business Attire**

**Suits:** Dark colors, grays, blues, blacks. Solids or muted pinstripes. Jacket and pants should be same color. Button jacket when standing; unbutton when seated.

**Shirts:** Cotton is best. White or conservative color. Press shirt carefully, particularly the collar or have the shirt laundered at a drycleaner. Wear plain white crewneck T-shirt under shirt.

**Ties:** Silk. Same width as lapels (2¾" - 3½"). Complementary color. No logo/cartoon ties.

**Shoes/Belt:** Polish and clean shoes. Matching belt color.

**Socks:** No white socks. Dark color to complement suit.

Business casual is appropriate for career fairs, employer information sessions and for more informal segments on an on-site interview.

**WOMEN—Business Casual**

**Jackets & Pants or Skirt:** Jacket is not necessary. Darker colors best; soft colors-business patterns. Wool blend or professional weight fabric. Jacket and pants do not need to be same color. Stay professional—no trendy or campus attire.

**Skirt Length:** No short skirts—at the knee or longer. No tight skirts or pants.

**Woven Shirts:** Any muted, conservative solid, stripe, or plaid. Button-down or straight collar. Long sleeves are best. Not even a hint of cleavage. Check button closures across chest; not too tight. Sweater sets. Not even a hint of cleavage.

**Shoes:** No bare toes. Pumps or flats with 1-2” heel; no spikes. Polish and clean shoes.

**Hose:** Tights or socks are appropriate.

**MEN—Business Casual**

**Jackets & Pants:** Jacket is not necessary. Nice wool blend. Pressed cotton pants are OK. Jacket and pants do not need to be same color.

**Shirts:** Any muted, conservative solid, stripe, or plaid. Button-down/straight collar. Long sleeves. Natural fibers and blends. Must have collar. No crew neck (T-shirt) collars. Sweater vest or sweater over collared shirt.

**Ties:** Unnecessary, but acceptable.

**Shoes/Belt:** Dark leather slip on or lace-up. Polished and clean. Belt should match shoe color.

**Socks:** NO WHITE SOCKS. Dark color should complement pants/shoes.
What to Bring

Résumés: Include several copies of your current résumé. Provide one to the recruiter as you are sitting down to the interview. ECS provides employers with a current copy of your Resume Profile (not a résumé) and list of courses/grades to the employer. Your complete résumé will provide more detailed information for the recruiter and indicate a sense of preparedness.

Transcripts: Today, this very minute, go to your My UW account and print several unofficial copies of your transcripts. Employers will want them! Do not be scrambling to print them at the last minute. Or, go to the Registrar’s Office to obtain copies.

References: Bring your reference list and any evaluations of work performance.

Other: Not required but may be helpful: reference letters, evaluation forms, photos/illustrations of projects (Future Truck, Concrete Canoe, Bridge Building, Engineering EXPO, Schoofs Prize for Creativity or any of the other COE student competitions), articles, abstracts, publications.

PRACTICE OUT LOUD:
It’s Not Easy Talking About Yourself

Now is your time to talk about yourself. After all this preparation, you should know what to say! If you are thoroughly prepared, you know skills employers are seeking, what strengths and accomplishments you have developed, and what this particular employer needs in new engineering hires! You know your résumé and do not need to refer to it throughout the interview. You have practiced talking about your skills and have reviewed lists of potential questions. You are ready and able to talk.

Before you go through an actual interview, you should first go through at least one mock interview, offered through ECS and other resources. Practicing interview responses is key to understanding how to improve your interviewing skills.

The mock interview is more than an opportunity to work out interview jitters; it is an opportunity to practice and improve your interviewing technique and answers. It is also a chance to hear constructive feedback from someone with experience in the field. It is not enough to look at an interview question and say, “Yeah, I know the answer to that one.”
Interviewing

Attitude: The Most Important Aspect of Interviewing

The key element to successful interviewing is not your experience, your grades, what classes you took, your extracurricular activities, or any of the other basic necessities. Those skills are what got you the interview. The key element to successful interviewing can be summed up in one word: attitude. If you want to rise above others with better experience, better grades, or better anything, you will need to work on developing a highly positive work attitude.

Your attitude determines whether you will "make the cut" or be discarded. Remember, there are plenty of competitors with the ability to do almost any given job—especially at the entry level. The way most employers differentiate at the entry level is by candidates’ attitudes toward the job. Your attitude is often what recruiters will remember when the dust has settled after reviewing 10, 20, or even 100 candidates—the one who was sincerely willing to put forth [his or her] very best effort. If you have the attitude of wanting to do your very best for the company, of being focused on the company’s needs, of putting yourself forth as the person who will be committed and dedicated to fulfilling their needs, you will likely be the one chosen.

Why is attitude so important? Because most companies already have their full share of multi-talented superstars who care about no one but themselves. Ask any manager who the most valuable member of his team is, and he will point not to the overrated superstar, but to the person who has the “can do” attitude, the person who can be counted on in any situation, the person who truly strives for excellence. Give me a team player who is achieving at 99% and I will take her over a flashy superstar who is running at 50% efficiency any day of the week. And so will 99% of all hiring managers. So don’t worry if you are not “superstar” quality. If you can show me, in your words and actions, that you are ready to put forth your very best effort toward achieving excellence, you will be chosen over the superstar.

You can show your winning attitude in the way you present yourself. Incorporate the actual words “positive attitude,” “excellence,” and “striving to be my best” into your interview language. Then show by your stories and examples how these words positively affect your life. Show me when and where and how you have put forth extra effort above and beyond the call of duty. Show me how you beat a deadline, how you excelled in a project, or how you made a difference by going the extra mile. If you can show me, by words and examples, your “can do” attitude, it is you I will hire, while all of the superstars will receive polite rejection letters to add to their growing collections.

24 Worst Job Interview Mistakes

1. Arriving Late
2. Arriving Too Early
   10-15 minutes is appropriate.
3. Dressing Wrong
   The safest choice for any interview is a tailored suit in a conservative color like black, navy, gray or tan. The employer will let you know if something other than full professional dress is expected.
4. Dressing in a Rush
   Try on your entire interview attire several days before the appointment to confirm everything fits and is in good condition.
5. Smoking
6. **Drinking**
   Even if this is a lunch or dinner interview and others are ordering cocktails, it is always best to order mineral water or soda. Only if your host insists on buying a bottle of wine should you have a few sips from the glass to be social. Don’t finish the glass, or they will pour you a new one.

7. **Chewing Gum**

8. **Bringing Along a Friend or Relative**
   Don’t laugh … this happens!

9. **Not Doing All Your Homework**
   It is not necessary to memorize the company’s annual sales and profit figures, but you should know something about their products or services.

10. **Skipping a Dress Rehearsal**
    Make a list of the questions you would ask if you were interviewing someone for this job, then rehearse the best answers using a tape recorder and/or a friend for feedback.

11. **Not Admitting a Flaw**
    To the question, “What is your greatest weakness?,” illustrate a weakness that you’ve tackled successfully. Respond by identifying the weakness, describing specific steps you have taken to improve, and communicating the results. Be honest: Nobody believes you when you say your flaw is working too hard.

12. **Not Knowing Your Own Strengths**

13. **Asking Too Many Questions**

14. **Not Asking Any Questions**

15. **Inquiring About Benefits Too Soon**
    Ask not what the company can do for you but what you can do for the company—at least at this point in the selection process. If you seem more interested in the three-week vacation policy or the new dental plan than in actual job duties, the prospective boss may develop serious concerns about your priorities. Naturally, you have a right to know about the benefits package, but chances are the personnel representative or hiring manager will bring it up on his/her own. If this doesn’t happen, you can broach the subject after an offer has been made in writing. Explain that the offer you will accept depends on the value of the whole compensation package.

16. **Revealing Your Price Tag (Never Bring up $$)**
    Research what is appropriate in case they ask you, but you don’t bring it up.

17. **Crying Discrimination**

18. **Bad-Mouthing Your Boss**

19. **Name Dropping**

20. **Energy Failure**
    It doesn’t matter if you only slept four hours last night and are coming down with a cold. When you get to the interview, you have to appear bright-eyed and eager.

21. **Handshake Failure**

22. **Glancing At Your Watch**

23. **Playing The Hero/Heroine**
    In 999 of 1,000 jobs, you will work as part of a team. Stress how well your talents and experience would mesh with those of others in the department.

24. **Losing Your Cool**