

# Career Design Center

A close-up photograph of a person's hands, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, resting on a light-colored wooden desk. The person is holding a white document, possibly a resume or application form, and looking at it intently. The background is slightly blurred, showing the person's arms and the desk surface.

## Acing the Interview

UtahStateUniversity®

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### Getting Started

- Research the company’s website thoroughly—use the Employer Research Checklist below to prepare.
- Visit your Career Coach to identify alumni and employers who work inside the organization.
- Search publications online and in print.
- Join professional organizations in your field to access member directories.
- Speak with recruiters at career fairs to gain knowledge of the company.
- Use LinkedIn to view company profiles
- Use <http://libguides.usu.edu/c.php?g=332838> through the USU library to research companies and learn about different industries

Employers consistently remark that the best candidates have effectively researched their organizations. Thoroughly researching the organization can help you:

- Articulate why you have an interest in working for that organization.
- Quantify your experience with success statements identifying what you accomplished, the tools and processes you used, and your results.
- Describe in more relevant detail how you could work within that environment.
- Explain how your skills can help fill a need or solve a problem.
- Understand how your personality will “fit” in the environment and how your career goals align with the company’s goals.

### Employer Research Checklist

As you research the employer, pay particular attention to the following:

#### Basic Facts

- Age/size of organization
- Complete products & services
- Geographical locations of divisions/subsidiaries

#### Employer History/Image

- Corporate culture
- Industry outlook
- CEO’s background
- Local and national reputation
- Competitors
- Awards (if relevant) and other recognitions

#### Financial Information

- Stock prices (if relevant)
- Sales, assets, earnings, growth potential
- Mergers/acquisitions

### Advice From Employers Interviewing at the Career Design Center

So much information is available on-line. Reviewing our website before the interview would be advantageous. ~*Canyons School District*

Build on/use all life experiences, not just academic ones. ~*Cook Martin Poulson*

Show enthusiasm. Be excited. Show us you want to work for us. ~*IM Flash Technologies*

The group project work provides the best examples for interview questions. The more difficult the team project, the more challenges they overcome. ~*NAVAIR Weapons Division*

Come prepared with questions. ~*Select Portfolio Servicing*

To succeed in interviews, you must sell a very important product – **yourself** – to an organization. Expect the interviewer to discuss your specific qualifications as they relate to the job opening. Be ready with examples of your skills/successes as they match the job. People who interview well are often better employees because they have learned how to sell themselves and their ideas to others.

- **Research** the company you are pursuing.
- Whenever possible, **identify a contact** inside the organization who can provide you with valuable information about your ability to solve the employer’s needs/problems. Frame your answers using this information.
- **Confirm** time, place, name of company, and interviewer(s). Arrive 10 minutes early and **DO NOT** use any electronic devices while waiting.
- **Dress appropriately** and be sure you have several copies of your resume and references (on resume quality paper).
- Maintain a **positive** attitude, eye contact, and smile.
- Take relevant **samples** of your work (hard and soft copy) that illustrate your skills in key areas.
- **Practice** responding to sample questions. Be sure to link your qualifications to the job by using examples.
- Have a list of questions to ask the interviewer. Gather valuable information regarding the position or organization. This also illustrates your research.



Source: University of Buffalo Career Services, 2016.

**Dress for the job you want, not the job you have.**

**Documents to Bring:**

- |                             |                           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Two forms of identification | Note pad and pen          |
| Social Security Number      | Resume copies             |
| Work permits/Visas          | Other requested documents |
| Samples/Portfolio           |                           |

**Dress for Success**

**Formal Dress** – for MORE traditional/conservative fields

*For Women:* A suit with a knee-length skirt or pants and blouse. A skirt or pants with a blouse and no jacket or a day dress that is structured and not too dressy is also acceptable. Shoes should be appropriate to the outfit and heels should not be too high.

*For Men:* A suit and tie is best with dress shoes. A long-sleeved dress shirt with a tie and no jacket is also acceptable.

**Business Casual** – for LESS traditional/conservative fields

*For Women:* A skirt (about knee length) or nice pants with a blouse or sweater is appropriate. Avoid shorts, sneakers, t-shirts, and too much jewelry, and remember good grooming.

*For Men:* A shirt with a collar that buttons is best though a nice polo shirt is acceptable with slacks, not jeans. Avoid shorts, t-shirts, sneakers, and remember good grooming.

**Tip: If you are not sure if you should dress more casual or formal, dress formal to be safe.**

## Behavioral Interviews & the STAR Method

Behavior based questions are common in interviews. These questions ask you to use an example of how you used a skill from one of your experiences. The theory behind behavioral interviewing assumes that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the potential for success. To answer questions well, you should give detailed descriptions of actual situations and how you handled those situations. Here is a formula to help you be thorough in your answers:

**STAR:**  
*Situation + Task + Action + Result = Strong Response*

Questions are typically not structured as questions, but are intended to elicit a specific example. Questions typically start out: "Tell me about a time..." or "Describe a situation..." or "Give me an example of..." To demonstrate the desired behavior, be ready with **STAR** examples that include past internships or work experiences, related classes or projects, extra-curricular activities, leadership, team involvement, athletics, and community service.

**Soft skills** are employment traits rather than technical skills that help an employer decide if your temperament suits a particular job. They are clues to how well you might adapt and problem solve. Think of examples for different soft skills so you can be prepared for any of their questions. Soft skills can include:

- \*Good communication (4.63)
- Teamwork (4.62)
- Problem-solving (4.49)
- Prioritize (4.41)
- Process Information (4.34)
- Analyze data (4.21)
- Influence others (3.55)

- Strong work ethic
- Positive attitude
- Time management
- Self-confident
- Flexible and adaptable
- Ambitious
- Efficient
- Enthusiastic
- Creative
- Persistent
- Friendly
- Optimistic
- Helpful
- Trustworthy
- Open-minded
- Tolerant
- Methodical
- Patient
- Discreet
- Punctual
- Practical
- Energetic
- Reliable
- Resourceful
- Results-oriented
- Sincere
- Humorous
- Thrifty
- Decisive
- Hard-working
- Good attendance
- Works well under pressure
- Motivated
- Honest
- Eager
- Tenacious
- Modest

\*These top 7 skills are identified on a scale of 5 as being the most important skills for a candidate to have. Source: Job Outlook 2016. National Association of Colleges & Employers

**Brainstorm a few ideas:**

Skill	Example
Teamwork	<b>S:</b> Class project in group of 5 to research social media effects on job search <b>T:</b> in charge of compiling team research into cohesive 10 page paper <b>A:</b> Set deadlines for team to send me research summarizing findings <b>R:</b> Met assignment deadline and received A after engaging presentation



Use the following questions to prepare for interviews by reviewing interviewers' favorite questions with recommended content and sample answers. Keep the **STAR** method in mind!

### **“Tell me about yourself.”**

This is a standard ice-breaker in most interviews. Don't tell the interviewer your life story; keep your answer related to the job you're seeking.

*“When I began my studies at USU, it took several semesters before I really found my place in the Political Science Department. Since then, I've done three different survey research projects for Utah State's Admissions Office regarding the needs and perceptions of incoming freshmen. I love the combination of working with data and making solid recommendations to administrators based on my work. This position will allow me to provide quality research to clients for use in making decisions.”*

### **“Tell me about a time when you were part of a team and the role you played?”**

Employers have identified the ability to work in a team as one of the most important skills they seek. Your answer should illustrate your ability to both contribute to and lead a team.

*“As VP of Programs for the Social Work Club, I led a team of six in organizing a fundraising auction. One of our team members missed a key deadline early in the project. I resisted my initial temptation to do the work myself, and after talking with her realized she didn't feel comfortable approaching businesses for donations. She did say how much she liked web design and offered to create a web page for the auction. I found another team member who could solicit donations and the event raised \$5,500 in scholarships for our chapter.”*

### **“What's your greatest strength?”**

Don't just talk about your strength—relate it to the position. Let the employer know you are a qualified candidate and why.

*“I know how to work on a team doing effective research. I can research a problem in the area of bioinformatics by accessing web and print resources. Additionally, I have experience in preparing and presenting research at a state-wide poster session in Salt Lake City. These experiences will allow me to contribute my writing and research skills with immediate impact and little training time. I am very familiar with the projects I would be working on, having talked with Dr. Albrecht, a researcher in your Idaho Falls office, whom I met at Utah State's Technology Career Fair.”*

### **“What's your greatest weakness?”**

The key to a successful answer is to not only discuss a weakness (nothing too negative), but more importantly, how you compensated for this weakness.

*“While working as an inventory clerk at a sock manufacturer who shipped specialty socks all over the world, I really had to improve my organizational skills to get everything finished each shift. I had to do inventory, oversee shipping orders, and answer approximately 30 emails each day from vendors. After the first week of having to work overtime, I started to answer emails at the beginning and end of each shift, instead of throughout the day, so I could focus on the tasks I needed to complete while ensuring my emails were accurate. This really worked and I was more productive. After the second week, I never missed answering an email in the 24-hour guideline set by customer service.”*

### **“Describe a time when you had to present complex information in a simplified manner.”**

Focus on what was difficult and how you simplified the information to present effectively. Employers consistently rank communication skills among the top skills they seek when hiring.

*“My company put me in charge of detailing improvements and changes to the server to a group of visiting project managers with little experience dealing with complex databases. I provided packets with charts and graphs to complement my presentation and focused on the how the product would be a beneficial solution to their needs while breaking down the components at their more basic level.”*

### **“How do you make yourself indispensable to a company.”**

Employers are looking for both technical and interpersonal competence. Students who have related work experience generally answer this question best because they know what working for a company entails.

*“As our office event planning intern, I work really closely with the fair/expo coordinator at Career Services. I email employers, update registration information on the website using ezPlug, answer phone calls from employers, and address any foot traffic that walks into the center. My supervisor told me she can't see anyone else doing this job because I do it with enthusiasm and still maintain professional communications with all types of students, staff, and employers.”*

## Interviewers' Favorite Questions

**“Describe a specific problem you encountered and how you dealt with it?”**

Be logical. Share the problem and then illustrate the step-by-step procedures you used to correct it.

*“When working as an intern on a land surveying project for the Federal Highway Administration in Teton National Park, I caught a measurement error that could have resulted in having to move a three-mile section of new bike path. My boss told me that if I hadn't caught the error before the asphalt was laid, it would have meant a \$15,000 change order which the agency would have had to absorb. As a result, I am more sure of my problem solving skills.”*

**“Tell me about a time you had to work under pressure to meet a deadline?”**

Illustrate both how you handle priorities/deadlines and work under pressure.

*“In the publishing industry juggling priorities is a way of life. There was an incident in the call center I work for when I received a frantic phone call from one of the managers, and I had to drop everything to get a change processed. What he asked was almost impossible, but with help from my team and working extra hours, I was able to accomplish the goal. The manager commended me for pulling off the changes and meeting the tight deadline.”*

**“Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish a task with someone who was particularly difficult to get along with.”**

Employers want to hear something that shows you have the ability to be sensitive to the needs of others but can still influence them. Don't just say, “I avoid them” or “I just did the work myself.” An employee who can't delegate doesn't have long-term management potential.

*“While working at Target preparing for “back-to-school” season, I had to manage a crew of two others on a night shift to have the aisle set up and stocked by morning. One of the crew grumbled about having to work a night shift and seemed to disagree with me over my approach to the project. I pulled him aside, to a private location, and asked if anything was bothering him and also asked him to explain his approach to resetting the aisle. We talked and he explained some personal issues he was facing. I simply listened quietly while he explained his plan for resetting the aisle. We adapted the project to include his ideas into my approach and the project got finished early. I learned that everyone has something to contribute and that listening is just as important as talking.”*

**“What do you see yourself doing in five years.”**

Your response should include something related to the job you are interviewing for (i.e., retail, construction management). You don't want to say you see yourself in a completely different industry or field than the one you're interviewing for.

*“While I have really enjoyed working towards a BS degree in civil engineering, it wasn't until my internship with UDOT that I really found what I'm good at. I excel at solving problems in the field with data, crews, and subcontractors. I know I have the technical knowledge and interpersonal skills to be a project manager with Bechtel and would really like to be in your San Francisco office in five years.”*

**“Give me an example of a situation in which your ethics were challenged. How did you handle it?”**

Make sure your answer shows both your understanding of right and wrong, as well as your ability to use fact and discretion.

*“This example represents my first realization that I was in a position of responsibility and had to be firm in my beliefs or I could really make a mistake that could impact my position and others. While working for Dr. Welker in the Biology Department, I recorded grades in Banner and made copies of tests. I had to keep information about my peers confidential and that sharing any information would be wrong. That was the first time I had to say that I would not cross that line—and I did not.”*

**“Why should we hire you?”**

Be ready to explain how your skills and experience are suited to the job, how you would “fit” into the organization, and how much you really want the job. Make sure to discuss your ability to add value to the organization.

*“With over two years of solid experience in client relations, I will be able to hit the ground running immediately. My energy and quick learning style will be an additional advantage. My co-workers would tell you I'm a team player who maintains a positive attitude and outlook. I have the ability to stay focused in stressful situations and can be counted on when the going gets tough. Above all, I am very interested in a career with your company and confident I can meet the challenges of this position.”*

**“Do you have any questions for me?”**

This is a question you can always anticipate. Prepare several specific questions that illustrate your interest in the position and organization.

**Best Questions for You to Ask the Interviewer**

An interview is meant to be a two-way conversation. The interviewer's job is to determine whether you're the best fit for the position. At the same time, you should be asking questions to determine if the position and company are right for you. Your questions will typically fall into the following three areas; select several in each:

**The Organization:**

- What do you see ahead for the company in the next five years?
- How do you see the future for this industry?
- What do you consider to be your organization's most important assets?
- What can you tell me about new products or plans for growth?
- Does this organization have a mentor or coaching program?
- How would you describe your company culture?

**The Position:**

- When you think of the most effective person who has ever held this position, what three qualities or traits did this person possess?
- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of the job?
- What kind of training do you provide?
- What is the natural career path for employees in this position?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in this position?

**The Expectations & Next Steps:**

- What are the most immediate challenges I would face in this position?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first year?
- How will I be evaluated and how often?
- What are the next steps in the interview process and when do you hope to make a decision? (always ask this question)

**What Not To Ask**

Never ask a question that you can find the answer to on their website. You should do your research before the interview. You can ask questions about something you read on their website.

The 1<sup>st</sup> interview is not the place to negotiate salary- you CAN ask general questions about the salary and benefits such as the bottom range or what is included in the benefits. Do research on the market to know the average salary of that type of job (see pg. 11 for resources). Make an appointment with your Career Coach to practice talking about salary and benefits.

**Instead of...**

"What is your turnover rate?" ask "*How long have you and the rest of the team worked here?*"

"How often do you promote people?" ask "*Are there professional development opportunities?*"

"What would you change about the company?" ask "*What is a challenge you think I will face in this role?*"

**Write down questions you thought of while researching the company that you would like to ask during the interview:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_



Your first interview with a potential employer may occur virtually, especially if you are interviewing with an organization outside of Utah. **Relocating can add diversity to your background and help you “grow your career.”** You may receive a call from an employer as a result of an application you submitted, after meeting at a career fair, or to set up a virtual interview; whatever the circumstance, be prepared.

## Take a Surprise Call in Stride

If you receive an unexpected call as a result of networking on your part, be calm. Sound positive, friendly, and confident. If you are expecting a call from employers, answer your phone with a professional greeting such as “Hello, this is (your name).” Take a moment to gather your thoughts and the items listed in the next section. You might say, *“Thank you for calling, Ms. Martinez. Could you wait just a moment while I close the door?”* Additionally, if you are unable to speak on the phone such as if you are driving, it is ok to ask if you can call them back when you can devote your full attention.

## How to Prepare for a Virtual Interview

Be prepared for the virtual interview just as you would for an in-person interview. Have ready:

- Pen and paper for taking notes
- Your resume
- A list of accomplishments, experiences, and key points that relate to the position
- Research you have done on the company
- Questions to ask the interviewer
- Your calendar to schedule future interviews and follow-up dates
- Dress as if you were going to an in-person interview

## Pace the Conversation

Let the representative ask most (but not all) of the questions. Keep up your end of the conversation—this is, after all, a sales presentation. Ask a few questions of your own that will reveal your knowledge and enthusiasm about the company you are interviewing with.

## Beware of “Yes/No” Answers

“Yes” or “No” answers are excellent when you want to end a conversation in a hurry AND YOU DON’T WANT TO! Answer questions thoroughly and

include appropriate examples of your skills and talents as they relate to the job.

**Be brief, but thorough.** Use examples whenever possible that allow you to talk about previous work experience, relevant projects, and anything else that allows you to display your knowledge of your field and of the company.

## Take Notes

These notes will be valuable to you in preparing for the face-to-face meeting and in writing a thank you letter or e-mail, which you should send as soon as possible after the interview.

## Follow-up

As with any interview, follow-up is critical. Confirm the spelling of the interviewer’s name and be sure you have his/her contact information. This follow-up communication enables you to reiterate your interest in the position and summarize your qualifications as they relate to the position you interviewed for.

## Last but not Least.....

The following tips will help ensure your success in a virtual interview:

- Make sure your voice mail greeting is appropriate and professional.
- Speak directly into the speaker, enunciate, and speak clearly.
- Smile—this comes through in your voice.
- Dress professionally. This can put you in the right “frame of mind” for the interview.
- Make sure your environment is quiet and free from distractions feel free to use an office at Career Services as a quiet spot for an interview.
- Finish the interview by reiterating your interest in and qualifications for the position.
- Avoid filler words (“um,” “ah,” “ok”).
- Practice, if possible, by doing a mock interview at Career Services.
- Prepare notes for questions you have and key points you want to bring up.
- Avoid chewing gum, eating, or drinking.
- Ask for extra time, if needed, when answering questions.
- Don’t feel the need to fill in silences or gaps in conversation.

**Steps to Follow-up**

Immediately after any meeting make some notes about what occurred. Follow-up as soon as possible with a thank you (email, telephone, handwritten note, or typed letter). Any written messages should contain no grammar, spelling, or format errors. Keep your communication brief and professional. Make sure to obtain business cards so spelling/titles are accurate. The following are suggestions for effective follow-up by type of encounter:

**Immediately after the Interview ask yourself:**

- Who did you meet?
- Why can you do the job?
- What does the job entail?
- What went poorly? Why? Did you neglect to discuss key qualifications/skills?
- What is the next step in the selection process?
- What skills/experience was the interviewer visibly impressed by?
- What questions were you asked?

**Writing the Follow-up**

- Remind the contact when you interviewed.
- Emphasize any key skills you can contribute to the workplace including ones you may have forgotten to mention.
- Use success statements to SHOW not TELL the employer you are a great match for the position.
- Ask for a meeting and/or a referral to another potential contact.

**Sample Interview Follow-Up (Email Version)**

Omit return address and date when emailing

Omit inside address when emailing

Dear Dr. Bryan:

Thank you for interviewing me yesterday for the associate engineer position. I enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your research and design work. I am very interested in working for Atlantic Engineering Systems designing hydraulic systems.

My education and internship experiences fit nicely with the job requirements, and I can be immediately effective given my computer and design skills. I neglected to mention in the interview my membership in the Society for Women Engineers at Utah State University. As a member of this student organization, I have gained valuable leadership skills and participated in a variety of community service activities.

I want to reiterate my interest in the position and in working with your team. You provide the kind of opportunity I seek, and I would be happy to meet with you again. Again, thank you for the interview and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Omit handwritten signature when emailing

Jane Hancock

**For assistance in writing effective, customized follow-up messages and other employment documents, see your Career Design Specialist.**

**Aggie Handshake is your exclusive online resource to:**

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- Apply for student employment, work-study, internship, and career positions
- Network with employers, alumni
- Schedule interviews with regional/global employers

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[TheMuse.com](http://TheMuse.com)- read articles about career strategies, explore companies, and helpful tips

[GlassDoor.com](http://GlassDoor.com)- find job postings, learn about salaries, read company reviews from employees

[CareerBuilder.com](http://CareerBuilder.com)- explore careers, search for jobs, browse resources and find advice

[USU Library](http://USU Library)- Use <http://libguides.usu.edu/c.php?g=332838> to research companies and learn about different industries



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