

HOW TO ACE THE INTERVIEW

Once your potential co-op employer receives your resume and cover letter, you will be contacted by the employer, a co-op advisor, or a co-op community coordinator to set up a phone interview. Interviews can be scary, but if you have some knowledge about how interviews tend to go, and think through how to answer some commonly asked questions, your interview should go smoothly. Remember first impressions count, maybe even more than they should. Also remember that you have already successfully interviewed with a co-op faculty or staff member. Try to use any feedback you received about that interview.

Many students set up a phone interview appointment via email with the employer or use their cell phones. Students may also do their phone interviews from a phone room offered for that purpose in the Co-op Office in South Hall. You'll need a permission slip from the faculty member who is the job supervisor or your co-op advisor. Arrive a little early, because first impressions are important and you want to call right on time. Give the permission slip to Virginia Garrette or one of the co-op faculty members to gain access to the phone room. If someone else is using the booth, Virginia can find you another phone to use. Fill out the log sheet with the employer and number you are calling. This way you can have some privacy and you don't have to pay for the call.

It's difficult to predict exactly what the interview will be like, but you can expect that the employer will be using the interview to try to get a sense of:

1. Do you want the job? Be sure to show your interest in and enthusiasm for the job and your knowledge about the employer..
2. Do you have the talents and skills to do the job?
3. Do your communication skills meet expectations?
4. Do you have the right mind-set for the job and company?
5. Will you "fit in" with the other staff?

According to CollegeGrad.com there are eight common types of interview questions. Being prepared for all of these types of questions will help your interview go more smoothly and make you feel more confident. Please visit <http://www.collegegrad.com/> for a more detailed description of these question types.

1. Credential verification questions
2. Experience verification questions
3. Opinion questions
4. Dumb questions
5. Math questions
6. Case questions
7. Behavioral questions
8. Competency questions ¹

The employer may ask you to say a little about yourself, and why you are interested in the job, therefore plan ahead to have about a paragraph's worth of information about your education, experience, talents and skills that relate to this job. It's impressive for an

¹ Collegegrad.com. (2006). The Eight Types of Interview Questions. Retrieved May 19, 1999, from <http://www.collegegrad.com/jobsearch/16-4.shtml>

employer when you can show that you took the initiative to research the organization or business by talking about some of their organizational goals and programs that resonate with you. Co-op employers like to help Antioch students meet their educational and career goals; therefore you should also mention ways in which the job would be educational for you and help you meet your goals.

Over the past few years we have noticed increased use of "Behavior-Based Interviewing (BBI)." It is hard to say if any given employer will use this kind of question or not, but it's good to be prepared for it. BBI means that the employer asks you to describe a situation you've been in, and how you handled it ("Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects in your classes. How do you track your progress so that you can meet the project deadline?"). The idea here is that your past behavior is the best predictor of your future behavior, a consistent finding in psychology research. You might think of some situations in previous jobs, classes and life where you applied some of your skills, for example when you took initiative, saw a job through to completion, solved or coped with interpersonal conflict among co-workers or classmates, or communicated something to someone that was difficult. If asked such a question, describe the situation or task, then the action you took, and the results of that action. If you can think through a couple of past situations like this, you'll be ready when asked a BBI question.

There will inevitably be questions you didn't anticipate. It is fine to take your time to think through your answer ("Give me a minute to think about your question..."), or to answer honestly that you're not sure. Remember that the idea is to be yourself, because the employer is trying to decide if you are a good fit for their environment and if you're not, it's best to know that now. But on the other hand, don't be too modest, or volunteer negative information about yourself unless you're asked! You have many skills and a lot of interest and energy to offer them, so be as positive and enthusiastic as you can.

Finally, you will likely be given the chance to ask some questions of the employer. You will be able to ask better questions by researching the organization. The more you know about a potential employer, the better. Prepare some thoughtful questions in advance, but also offer questions raised by the conversation. Employers are impressed when applicants ask questions that show they have thought about the work setting ("What kinds of special projects are coming up during the four months I will be working with you?" "I talked with another student who co-oped with you and I'm interested in learning about the status of the project she worked on."). They know you are trying to figure out how the setting will fit your needs, just as they are trying to size up your fit with their setting.

You might practice answering other possible interview questions such as: What is your greatest strength/weakness? Why should we hire you?

You might also want to screen your speech for some verbal tics that many Antioch students have inadvertently picked up. The most common ones are to use the word "like" or the phrase "you know" repeatedly:

"Like, I don't know, like, what kinds of, like, work you want me to do? Can you, like, tell me more about, like, what my job will be?"

"You know, I wonder about what my work schedule will be. I often, you know, think about my previous jobs, you know, and how they apply to my co-ops."

This is not only annoying, but an employer may see it as a sign of immaturity or poor communications skills. By using “like” to modify everything, you avoid putting yourself on the spot by saying something is something – you slide away from definition by saying it is only like something. No one can disagree! Another annoying verbal tic is to use a questioning inflection at the end of declarative sentences. The combination is deadly:

“So, like, I need to get registered soon? I have to, like, meet the deadline for registration for next week? I’m really hoping, like, that you can hire me?”

In a phone interview, your speech is all the employer has to go on, so try to avoid such verbal tics during your interview.

With a little planning and preparation, your co-op job phone interview will be successful. Both you and the employer will come away with a better sense of your suitability for the job.

Here’s another good source for interviewing tips.

<http://kolias.com/education/jobinterview.htm>