



Internship Interview Preparation

How to Tell Your Story

Developed for California State University Long Beach

01 Preparing for the Interview

Use this checklist to help you prepare for your internship interview or job interview. Under Before the Interview is information that will help you prepare your responses to align with the needs of the organization. The checklist under Day of Interview are tips to help you start your interview strong, even before the first question is asked. The checklist under After the Interview are action steps that will confirm for your new supervisor and colleagues that you are fully prepared to be part of the team if you are selected.

Before the Interview

- ✓ Research organizational information, including mission and vision of the organization, key leaders, brief history of the organization, current projects and initiatives, and latest news updates.
- ✓ Research expectations of the job or internship for which you are interviewing. Know the knowledge, skills and abilities you are expected to possess. Understand what a typical day looks like if you get the job, and be familiar with how your success will be measured.
- ✓ Research available information about your interviewer(s) using professional social media sites and the organization's website.
- ✓ Confirm date, time and location of the interview. If the interview is virtual, confirm equipment and software required.
- ✓ Practice interview responses to align your education and experience with the needs of the organization.

Day of Interview

- ✓ Dress appropriately for the interview. A rule of thumb is to dress one step above what you would normally wear if you were doing this job. For example, if you would wear business casual everyday, you should wear business formal to the interview.
- ✓ Have enough copies of your resume for all of your interviewers, and a few extra, in case others join.
- ✓ Have all the information necessary to complete a job application available, should you be asked to complete a job application before or after your interview.
- ✓ Arrive 10 minutes before your interview. If the interview is virtual, log on 10 minutes before your interview time.
- ✓ Wait for the interviewer(s) to determine if a handshake is appropriate.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact and positive body language during the interview.

After the Interview

- ✓ Send a note of appreciation to all those who interviewed you. Email messages are generally acceptable. Remember, even if you do not get a job offer, interviewers will remember your thoughtfulness should you interview with them again in the future.
- ✓ Jot down notes about what you learned from the interview. Pay attention to how your success will be measured if you are selected for the role. Consider the formalities you observed including attire and relationships.
- ✓ If you are offered the internship or job, ask for 24 hours to make an informed decision. During that time, take one last opportunity to ensure the opportunity aligns with your goals and expectations before you accept.

02 Identifying Your Transferable Skills

Transferable skills are your knowledge, skills, abilities and talents that can be used in many different jobs and career paths. Your education, employment, and extracurricular and volunteer activities have provided you with numerous transferable skills. These transferable skills are key to helping you achieve an internship. On the following page is a template to help you map the skills you gained from school, work and the community, with the needs of the internship that you seek. Below are three simple steps to help you map your transferable skills, and a sample of what your map may look like.

1. **Brainstorm all knowledge, skills and abilities**, big and small, that you acquired (new skills) or strengthened (existing skills) during college, work, and extracurricular activities. Consider your skills in two categories:
 - a. **Hard Skills:** Technical skills that often can be measured; sometimes associated with specific professions.
 - b. **Soft Skills:** People skills that often cannot be measured; mostly associated with all professions.
2. **Identify needs** of the internship you are seeking. Here's how to identify these needs:
 - a. Look at the job description and focus on the the specific needs of the position.
 - b. Research the organization and identify the broad needs the organization has of all their employees.
3. **Match** your knowledge, skills and abilities with the needs of your desired internship.

YOUR KNOWLEDGE, SKILL OR ABILITY	EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU HAVE USED IT	NEED OF THE INTERNSHIP
Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrote a PowerPoint presentation for Communication Studies class that included statistical analysis using Excel. Result in A+. • Designed recruitment flyers using Word for honor society resulting in 30% increase in membership. 	This internship requires Excel charts from community survey data. Narrative reports are created using Word, and presentations are given using PowerPoint.
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Received Team Member of the month at part time retail job three times. • Member of student organization team dedicated to planning three social events. 	This internship requires teamwork to support an eligibility worker, case manager and field staff.
Teaching/Training Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer trainer for people in rehabilitation following injury. • Regularly asked by Sociology professor to tutor other students in class. 	This internship seeks those who have experience taking curriculum, training others, and measuring learning.
Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked part time while maintaining 15 units each semester with a 3.7 GPA. 	This internship meets with multiple clients everyday and requires good time management skills.

03 Mapping Your Skills with the Needs of the Internship

YOUR KNOWLEDGE, SKILL OR ABILITY	EXAMPLE OF HOW YOU HAVE USED IT	NEED OF THE INTERNSHIP

Telling Others About Yourself

Often, the first question you will be asked during an interview for an internship or job is, “Tell me about yourself.”

The question allows the interviewer to get to know you at a high level, including relevant information about your education, work experience, extracurricular and volunteer activities, and the specific reason you are interested in this opportunity. Information you provide in this first question sets the tone for subsequent questions. And since this question is typically the first to be asked, you can be well-prepared with a response that addresses the needs of the organization. Here’s a structure to help your interviewer(s) get to know you, while keeping your information concise and relevant:

1. Start with a pleasantry.
2. Briefly summarize your education and any relevant volunteer, extra curricular or work experience. Use the information you gathered for the "Mapping Your Skills with the Needs of the Internship" worksheet in this workbook (Page 03) to keep your response relevant.
3. Briefly describe one success you have had in school, an extracurricular activity, or at work. A good way to start this section is with, “An accomplishment I am particularly proud about...”
4. End with a statement that affirms why you are interested in an internship or job with this specific organization.

“Tell me about yourself,” is a question you will likely receive in any interview, so practice your response with someone you trust to get feedback. Allow yourself some flexibility to adjust parts of your

Sample Response:

“Thank you for speaking to me today about this internship opportunity. I am a Senior Human Development major at California State University Long Beach, where I maintain a 3.6 GPA. I’ve been balancing a part time job with school, which has strengthened my time management skills and responsibility. On campus, I volunteer as a new student mentor, where I help first-year students get involved with student organizations. This volunteer opportunity has developed my coaching skills, which is why I applied for this workforce development internship. Coaching clients to help them find a job is aligned with my talents and interests. An accomplishment I am really proud about is a presentation I recently made on workforce trends for school. My professor praised me for the thorough research I conducted and for my engaging presentation, successfully turning complex data into useable information for job seekers. I’m really excited to bring my skills in conducting research, making presentations, and coaching others to this internship.”

Sample Response:

“My name is Marcus and I am a Communication Studies major at Long Beach State. I am excited to be here today to talk about how my education and experience fit the needs of this internship. In addition to being a full time student, I have a part time job with a vintage resale store, where I create social media posts to advertise their merchandise. I have been an officer for Phi Beta Lambda, a leadership honorary, for the last two years, where I successfully created marketing campaigns that increased membership by 35%. I am eager to apply the knowledge I acquired in school, along with my experience with marketing and social media, to help promote the fundraising efforts of your nonprofit organization in this internship.”

Traditional Interview Questions

During an internship or job interview, you will be asked several traditional interview questions. Traditional interview questions help the prospective employer gather information about your background, including your knowledge, skills, abilities, interests and work preferences. Your responses are compared with the qualification of the position and what the organization has to offer. Your interview will be strong when you can best demonstrate that you meet both the needs of the position and the culture of the organization.

To understand the needs of the position, read the job description or advertisement closely, making note of specific knowledge, skills and abilities required or desired. If you know of someone who is currently in the position or in a similar position (even if it is at another organization), ask that person to help you understand what a day is really like on the job, and the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to be successful. Use professional sites such as Glassdoor and LinkedIn to gather intelligence on the position. By understanding the needs of the specific position to which you are interviewing, you can respond to traditional interview questions in a way that demonstrates how your background matches the needs of the position.

The culture of an organization can best be described as the broad expectations and needs the organization has of all employees, regardless of title or position. For example, some organizations have a formal structure, where decisions are made according to level in the organization. In other workplaces, decisions are decentralized. Some organizations prefer to promote from within, where other organizations prefer to hire outside candidates when making a promotion. Some organizations encourage teamwork to complete assignments, where other organizations rely on individuals to complete assignments. To understand the culture of the organization, study the organization's website for clues. Do an internet search to see what information you can find on the organization. Use sites, such as Glassdoor and LinkedIn, to see what people who are already working for the organization are saying about their workplace. By understanding the culture of the organization, you can respond to these questions in a way that demonstrates you are a fit for both the position and the organization.

The information you gather about the needs of the position and the expectations of the organization can be used to help you complete the "Mapping Your Skills with the Needs of the Internship" worksheet in this workbook (Page 03) to sort your thoughts. Completing this pre-work will best prepare you for traditional interview questions.

When you are asked a traditional interview question, keep your responses direct. A good rule of thumb is to ask yourself, *did my response give enough information to demonstrate I meet the qualifications of the position and that I am a good fit for the culture of the organization?* Traditional interview questions are best addressed by sticking with just-the-facts. There are far too many potential traditional interview questions for you to prepare responses for every possibility. Rather, prepare responses for the ones you are most likely to be asked. For questions which you may not have prepared a response, lean on the pre-work you completed to address the needs of the position and the organization.

06 The STAR Structure

During your interview, you will likely be asked behavioral interview questions, which inquire about a specific time when you were faced with a situation, requiring you to take action and use specific skills. The premise of behavioral interview questions is the belief that how you handled situations in the past, will predict how you will handle them in the future. Examples of situations include completing projects, learning new skills, applying your knowledge from school, collaborating with coworkers, and serving clients and customers. When you tell a story about a success you've had in the past, you are helping prospective employers envision how your past success might be applied to future opportunities.

Behavioral interview questions will often start with, “tell me about a time,” “describe for me,” or “give me an example,” followed by a situation. Tell your story using the STAR format, which is an easy way for a prospective employer to understand the situation and your specific contribution that resulted in success. Here's how the format works:

- **Situation:** Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish.
- **Task:** Describe your specific goal.
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to address the situation. Try to order your actions using, “first,” “second,” and “third.”
- **Result:** Describe the outcome of your actions. What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Be sure to include multiple positive results in your story.

Try to keep your stories 30 seconds to one minute in length. On the following page is a template to help you collect your STAR stories, including common areas in which you should look for stories. Start by brainstorming your success stories from college, part time jobs, and volunteer and extracurricular activities. Come up with multiple stories in each of the areas. Then select for the strongest stories with the best results in each area. Practice telling your STAR stories with someone you trust for feedback. Below is an example of a STAR story.

AREA	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULTS
A project or event you coordinated.	During a part time job with a local City, residents spoke at a City Council meeting of their interest in helping their unhoused neighbors. Specifically, they noted the need for people experiencing homelessness to have supplies for hygiene during the pandemic.	My supervisor asked me to coordinate an event for the community to donate toiletries, and asked that the event be held within one month.	First, I contacted nonprofits that serve people experiencing homelessness to identify a list of products they needed. Next, I found five public buildings where we could have receptacles for donations. Third, I developed a marketing campaign, using social media and public announcements to involve the community. Lastly, with a team of three other part time staff, we carried out the event over a period of four weeks.	As a result of my event, we collected over 1,000 pounds of toiletries to donate to four nonprofits serving unhoused individuals. The City Council gave me a commendation during a City Council meeting. And my supervisor thanked me for achieving this in one month.

AREA	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULTS
A new skill or task you learned.				
A problem you solved.				
A time you helped a customer, client or someone else (e.g. customer service).				
A concept you learned in school that you applied to a real situation.				
A project or event you coordinated.				
A time you taught or trained someone else.				
A team that you were part of that accomplished a project together.				
A time you demonstrated creativity to solve a problem.				