



Interviewing Guide

Getting Started: Preparing for your Interview

Effective interviews require careful and thorough preparation on your part. Knowing what to expect, the kinds of questions you may be asked and how to respond, gives you greater self-confidence and increases the chance that your interview will be successful.

Are you prepared to take that call?

Before preparing for your interview, you will be scheduling it.

- If the employer calls to schedule an interview, let it go to voicemail: this gives you time to check your calendar and prepare your response.
- Make sure to clarify some details beyond date and time: where the interview will be held (or will it be a virtual or phone interview), who will you be meeting with, how long the interview will be, what kind of interview will this be (interview formats listed on page 4), do you need to bring anything, etc.
- Even if you accept the interview over the phone, it is good to confirm details over email (if the employer does not email you details, you can email them saying thank you for the opportunity and confirming details).

Step 1: Self-Evaluation and Understanding

Employers are interested in learning about how your education, experience, skills, and personal qualities fit with their company and the position. The job description will be helpful in evaluating your “fit” for the company and position. You may also want to review your resume and cover letter to prepare yourself for elaborating on your experiences and skills; self-assessments (such as [Focus2](#)) may help you in this process. As you begin to prepare for your interview, consider how you may discuss the following areas with an employer:

- Educational Experiences (including study abroad)
- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Extracurricular and Cadet Leadership Experiences
- Future Professional Plans (Your goals for 5-10 years beyond your first job.)
- Skills
- Work Experiences
- Professional Interests
- Reasons you're interested in the company and position
- Accomplishments
- Challenges that you have conquered

Step 2: Research the Employer and their Industry

Do your research because employers will notice. Your responses to the interview questions will reveal to the employers how prepared you are. Thorough preparation will also give you an idea of the qualities and skills employers are looking for and will help you to anticipate the kinds of questions you might be asked. Be sure to do research on:

- Type of organization
- Mission and goals of the company
- History of the company
- Individuals that you will be interviewing with
- Key individuals within the company
- Company location(s)
- How the company is organized
- Leading competitors
- Type of training available to new employees
- Types of paid and non-paid benefits

Connect your research back to your self-evaluation in step 1. What strengths do you possess that relate back to the position? What experiences have you had that may benefit the company?

Step 3: Practice Answering Interview Questions

There are several ways that you can practice answering questions. We have included a few techniques that you can use when practicing for an interview.

1. Write out your responses, relating your experiences and skills to the company and position; see end of document for possible questions.
 - a. Keep in mind that most interview responses will be about 30-45 seconds in length, about 5-7 sentences.
 - b. Once you have written out your responses, read through your answer a few times. This will help you articulate your answers the way that you intend them to sound. Once you feel comfortable answering the question, you can practice answering the question aloud without looking at your responses.
2. Use the [STAR Method](#)
 - a. The STAR method is primarily used for behavioral based interview questions. Interviewers ask behavioral based questions to learn more about how you have or may react in a particular situation. With these questions, you are typically asked to provide an example or elaborate on a particular situation (“Tell me about a time when...” or “Describe an example of when you...”).
 - b. The STAR Method can be used to help formulate and deliver a well-developed and concise answer. STAR stands for Situation (define the situation) and Tasks (identity the task performed) required Actions (define the action that you took) and Results (summarize the result). STAR provides a foundation to begin outlining the problem, how you handled it, and what results you received through your actions. The Office of Career Services has a handout on the STAR Method if you would like to view some sample questions.
3. Complete a Video Practice
 - a. Using a webcam or your phone, have a friend ask possible interview questions and record your responses.
 - b. Share your videos with a Career Services staff member and seek feedback.
4. Conduct a mock interview with OCS staff
 - a. You can complete a practice interview conducted by a member of the Career Services staff. We will ask you a set of questions and provide you with feedback and additional tips that you may want to consider as you prepare for your interview.

Resources for Preparing for an Interview

There are numerous resources to help you prepare for an interview.

- **VAULT** has an interview question library with general and industry specific interview questions for you to review (Case Interview Guide, Job-Hunting Skills Guide, sample interview questions, etc.).
- **FOCUS 2** is an online, self-guided program which identifies your work values, skills, personality preferences, and natural strengths, which may help when answering interview questions.
- **LinkedIn** is a networking and job search platform with over 500 million members. You can research if any VMI alums work at the company of interest and reach out to ask questions and get guidance.
- **Glassdoor** or **Indeed** are useful for researching salary ranges, employee reviews, and interview tips. Use LinkedIn to research VMI alums at the company who may provide guidance.
- **Employer Website and Social Media** - The companies website may include information about recent projects, their vision for the future, and information about the interview process for job candidates. You can also follow the company on various social media platforms to get an idea of the culture and current projects (just make sure your profiles are professional).

Interview Checklist

Before the Interview

- Save the date on your calendar and ensure that you do not have any conflicting obligations.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, cover letter, and perspective job description (at least 5 copies).
- Common items you may want to bring include: a padfolio or notepad, a pen, and mints.
 - Optional items to bring: a portfolio of your work (note: just make sure that no portfolio items are confidential), transcripts, or your list of references.
- Ensure that you have the appropriate clothing in advance of your interview.
 - Note: The uniform for On-Post interviewing is grey blouse.
 - For interviews off-post, these tips may help:
 - A well-fitting black, charcoal, or navy suit (make sure to remove tags on the cuff and the “X” shaped threads on the back of your jacket).
 - A shirt or blouse. Ironed, if needed, in a conservative color. Stick to natural fabrics like cotton.
 - A tie with a professional print.
 - Comfortable shoes (shined, if needed) in a neutral color.
 - A professional briefcase, purse, or messenger bag.
 - Minimal jewelry and accessories.
- Research the company, the department, and write up some notes and questions to take with you to the meeting.
- Practice responding to interview questions.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to your interview in case there are parking or traffic issues; you will want to check-in with reception 10-15 minutes before your interview. Be prepared to arrive early and stay late.

During the Interview

- Body Language and Verbal Communication
 - Have a firm handshake, but do not squeeze too hard.
 - Maintain eye contact.
 - Pause before answering questions; even if you are prepared with an answer, give yourself a second to make sure that you can answer the question thoughtfully.
 - Avoid verbal fillers (um, like, you know, etc.) and fidgeting.
 - Have a positive attitude and smile; remember that you were selected for an interview, so they are interested in learning more about you.
- Use your padfolio to take notes about the company and any follow-up questions you may have for the interviewers; other than your padfolio and pen, try not to keep too many items on top of the table.
- At the end of the meeting, ask for business cards from the interviewers so that you can send them thank you notes after the meeting.
- Ask the interviewers questions. Typically about 8-10 minutes will be available for you to ask questions. Bring some prepared questions, but also include a question or two that was generated through the interview process (use your listening skills). Be sure to include questions about the next step of the process, such as if there will be another round of interviews, when you will be notified, if you need to provide any additional references, etc.
- Make sure to thank everyone for their time.

After the interview

- Reflect on the interview. Write down any last minutes notes or questions and gauge how you feel about the opportunity.
- Send a follow-up thank you email or handwritten note to the interviewer soon after your interview. Experts recommend sending this note/email within 24 hours and no later than one week after your

interview. Express your thanks to the employer for their time and let them know whether or not you are still interested in working for the company. If you are still interested, be sure to include what you particularly like about the company. Reiterate the skills that you can bring to the job and refer to something specific that was discussed during the interview to remind them of your conversation. If you became more interested in the position after the interview, let them know why. If you aren't interested in the position, be sure to keep your message professional.

- Follow-up a few weeks after your interview. There isn't an exact science as to when you should follow-up, but you should wait at least one week before sending another follow up email.

Interview Formats

You should be familiar with the different formats so that you can be prepared for various interview situations.

Screening Interview

- Used primarily to determine if the candidate possesses the required skills and qualifications and to verify the factual content of his or her background; employers are typically looking for red flags as to why they shouldn't bring you in for an interview.
- Usually brief and may be conducted via phone, video (Skype, Zoom), on post, or in a personnel office.
- The interviewer, often a personnel or human resources representative, may use an outline to ask specific questions of each candidate and determines whether or not you advance to the next step.

Telephone/ Virtual Interviews

- Typically falls under the screening interview category.
- Interview recommendations:
 - Clarify who will initiate the Skype or telephone call.
 - Make sure to find a quiet area with minimal distractions and background noise (cadets are welcome to use the OCS conference room, with appointment).
 - Film yourself using your webcam or phone answering practice interview questions and share it with the Office of Career Services for recommendations.
 - Dress professionally as you would for an in-person interview.
 - Test your webcam and audio beforehand.
 - Set-up your webcam so it is level with your face and minimize distractions (glare, messes, etc.).
 - Speak clearly and slowly in case the interviewer is taking notes.
 - Also, make sure the area has a reliable phone/internet connection.
 - Have a back-up plan (other contact information) in case there is an issue.

On-Site Interview

- Conducted at the organization, allowing you to see the physical surroundings.
- As a serious candidate, this becomes a more in-depth interview; employers are interested in you and what you bring to the table. If you are meeting with multiple departments, you may need to cater your responses based on the department.
- Interview may last all day, giving you the opportunity to see what the organization is like; some organizations may ask for a writing sample at the end.
- Types of on-site interviews:
 - One-On-One Interview
 - As a candidate, you are paired with one interviewer.
 - Board/Panel Interview
 - Meeting with several interviewers at once; less subjective.
 - Behavioral Interview
 - Remember to use the STAR method on page 2.
 - Case Interview
 - Candidate is given a dilemma or situation he/she would encounter in this type of job and is asked to respond, typically with time constraints.

- Group Interview
 - Interviewed with a group of other candidates (interviewing with your competition).
 - Used to evaluate your teamwork skills and how you work in a group setting.
 - This type of interview is all about balance between sharing your opinion and listening. You want to be confident and express your views, but make sure to acknowledge others and not dominate the conversation.
- Technical Interview
 - Typically used with technology-focused positions (software engineering, computer science, etc.).
 - Used to assess how you analyze the problem as well as your technical abilities to make sure that you have the skills required for the position.
- Presentation Interview
 - Usually used by employers to gauge your public speaking and communication skills.

What to Ask When it's Your Turn

You need to bring relevant questions of the employer regarding the organization and the position to enable you to thoroughly evaluate the job and determine if it is the right fit for you. Employers can learn a lot about you by the questions that you ask. If you have done your research on the organization and know what job factors are most important to you, you will be able to ask well thought-out questions. Do not ask obvious questions that are answered on their website. Sample questions:

Training and Supervision

- Who would I be reporting to? What kind of supervision would I receive? What kind of management style does he/she have?
- How often are performance reviews given? What are you looking for this position to accomplish?
- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- What kind of professional development do you offer?

Typical Duties

- How would you describe a typical day/week in this position?
- What does the workflow of this position look like? Is there a busier time of year?
- How much travel is normally expected? Where would I be traveling?
- Can you show me examples of projects that I would be working on?
- What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next three months?
- What kinds of assignments can I expect in the first six months?
- Can you tell me about the team that I will be working with?

Company Specific

- Use your research about the product lines/services/programs to inform your questions
- What are the current goals that the company is focused on, and how does this team work to support hitting those goals?
- How do you think this company will change over the next 5 years? 10 years?
- What skills and experiences would make an ideal candidate? What kind of person do you think would be most successful at this company?
- What are the biggest challenges that someone in this role may face?
- What is the largest problem facing your staff or department and would I be in a position to help you solve this problem?
- From your website, I noticed... Can you expand on that?

Benefits

- Be careful of asking questions about benefits that may be associated with working for this company during an initial or screening interview.

Sample Questions and Answers

The success of your interview will depend in great part on your ability to effectively answer the interviewer's questions.

1. "Tell me about yourself?"

This is commonly used as an icebreaker, an opportunity to see your reactions, body language, how well you can communicate, etc., and a chance to find out about your job skills. You want to state experiences and skills that are relevant to the employer and demonstrate your In your answer: give a brief introduction, tell your key accomplishments (results, impact, or numbers), key strengths related to these accomplishments (including any areas of expertise), why these are important to the employer, and how you see yourself fitting into the position/organization you're applying for. For example: "I am currently a senior at Virginia Military Institute majoring in Civil Engineering. For the past two summers, I have interned for Kimley-Horn and the Department of Transportation, which were both excellent experiences and taught me how to think critically when problem solving. I have studied at Virginia Military Institute the past four years, where the military system developed my self-discipline as well as my attention to detail. I am looking to move to California after graduation, and this opportunity to work for the City of Long Beach will allow me to use my knowledge of CAD and identify possible design improvements."

2. "What is your greatest weakness?"

This may sound like a negative question, but the employer is trying to gain an understanding of what you view as key areas for improvement. Tell the employer your weakness (that will not affect your ability to do the job) and share what you are doing to address the weakness. For example: "I am naturally a straightforward person, and this personality trait has helped me get work done efficiently. However, not everyone responds well to my frank nature when I am giving feedback. To keep my relationships strong with my teammates, I have just started taking a leadership course and I have been attentive to how I phrase criticism when giving feedback."

3. "What do you consider to be your most significant accomplishment? What is the most significant contribution you have made within a team or organization?"

Try to think of accomplishments which might be most related to the position you are applying for, something that will be an asset to the organization and will demonstrate initiative or resilience. If possible tell about a specific accomplishment that added value to the organization, be sure to tell about outcomes. You can use examples like the military system at VMI, leadership experiences, GPA, research projects, etc.

4. "Where do you see yourself 5 years from now? What are your future goals?"

The interviewer may be trying to ascertain whether your goals fit with the organization, what expectations you have of the organization, and if you are goal directed and plan ahead. If you desire advancement and have leadership aspirations try not to come across as too pushy. For example: "I understand that my growth within this organization will depend on my job performance and the growth of the organization, as well as my education. My first focus is on exceling at this position, and within the next few years, I am planning on getting my MBA to enhance my education on the global economy and work on my management skills."

5. "Why are you interested in our organization/this position?"

The employer wants to see what you know about the organization and that you're genuinely interested in the organization and position. This is where all your hard work pays off. Show that you have researched the organization and thought about how it fits with your goals, skills, etc. Example: "I have been reading about your new training program and am really excited about...." or "After talking with other people who work for _____ I feel that this is a good company for me because..."

6. "What did you not like about your previous supervisor/company?"

Eventually, you will leave the company, and employers want to see the likelihood of you maintaining their reputation. Speaking badly about your previous supervisor or company may indicate to your prospective

employer that you may speak badly about them in the future. Employers can also gauge your “fit” with company culture by your response, so it is important you focus on the positive aspects of the position and why you are ready to move-on. Focus on what you loved or learned: if you enjoyed the position, talk about why you loved being there. If you did not enjoy the position, focus on what you learned from it. For example: “Though the people at my previous company were great to work with, there were limited opportunities for growth due to the size of the company. I am excited for the opportunity to work at a larger establishment to challenge myself and have more professional development opportunities. This position is a great match for my skill set, and I hope to bring my knowledge and experience to your company.”

Other Common Interview Questions

1. What do you know about our company?
2. What are your greatest strengths?
3. Tell me about a time when...
4. How have your experiences prepared you for this position?
5. Describe your ideal working environment.
6. Why should we hire you?
7. In what ways can you add value to our company/team?
8. What kind of qualities do you prefer in a supervisor?
9. Describe an example of when you showed...(certain skill or quality)
10. What did you enjoy most about your last job? Least?
11. How would your last supervisor evaluate you?
12. How would your best friend describe you?
13. Why did you choose your major?
14. Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team.
15. Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.
16. How did you prepare for this interview?
17. Tell me about a time you failed.
18. Describe a time you did more than what was expected or required.
19. Do your grades reflect your ability?
20. Why did you choose to attend VMI?
21. How do you feel about travel or relocating?
22. Give an example of a solution you provided an employer.
23. What unique qualifications do you have that other applicants may not?
24. Tell me about a conflict you had with a co-worker or client.
25. What role have you played in team situations?