

## INTERVIEWING- Tip Sheet

### Before the Interview

#### Two Types of Research

1. Research Yourself (Self-Assessment) – Identify and evaluate your education, experience, skills, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses.
2. Research the Employer – Gather as much information about the employer as possible.
  - size and location(s) of organization
  - product line, industry, service
  - recent news/trends
  - culture, mission and values
  - clients, potential markets
  - training provisions
  - structure of organization
  - stock history
  - length of assignments
  - past, current and potential growth
  - the competition
  - name/title of interviewer

#### Preparation: Interview Practice

Big Interview is an online system that combines training and practice to help improve interview technique and build confidence. The system offers written and video curriculum covering resume writing, the job search, interviewing, job offer and salary negotiation, and the first 90 days on the job. It also provides mock interview practice and a recording tool, as well as a mechanism for sharing videos for feedback. Students may access Big Interview at [rmu.biginterview.com](http://rmu.biginterview.com). Enter your RMU email address, name and preferred password. Click “Create my Account.”

Students may also participate in a practice interview with their success coach. The service consists of a resume review and a brief videotaped practice interview or phone interview followed by personal feedback.

#### Preparation: General Tips

- Prepare a list of well-researched questions for the interviewer.
- Prepare necessary logistics for in-person interviews. Get detailed directions. If driving, practice driving the route at the same time of day as the interview, to observe traffic patterns. Investigate and identify parking options. Your goal is to arrive 10-15 minutes early – but no earlier than that.
- Organize materials such as transcripts, work samples and updated resumes.

#### Preparation: Interview Attire

Research shows that hiring decisions are often impacted by the first impression. For interviews, conservative attire rather than a fashion statement is best. However, the style of dress should be reflective of the type of work or industry. Those entering a creative field or industry may have the opportunity to express more personality and style. If unsure, ask a professional in your field and/or your success coach about appropriate attire. Overall, keep it simple, polished and professional. Be memorable for your unique abilities and successes, not by being inappropriate or outlandish.

#### Clothing

Formal, two-piece matching suit  
Shirt should be light, solid color (white or light blue)  
Conservative tie (solid color or small-patterned)

Belts should match shoes  
Skirt should come to the knee  
All clothing should be pressed and clean

#### Footwear

Choose dress shoes that are polished and well-maintained  
Solid color navy or black socks (gray or black if wearing a gray suit). No white socks!

Closed toe pumps with low to moderate heel  
Skin tone hosiery or panty hose (no patterns)

#### Hair and Accessories

Hair should be brushed and neat  
Long hair can be worn up or down  
Facial hair should be minimal and well groomed  
Neatly trimmed hair, mustache and sideburns

Remove facial and body piercings and cover tattoos  
Choose natural tones of eyeshadow and lipstick  
Wear a minimum of jewelry  
Use minimal or no fragrance

## During the Interview

### Your Entrance:

Have a positive and cheerful attitude. Be sure to smile and show your enthusiasm toward the job and organization. Also, be courteous to those you meet and interview with. Give the interviewer a warm greeting with a firm handshake.

### Your Presentation:

Relax, be yourself and think of the interview as a conversation and exchange of information between two people. Remember to use the interviewer's name in the conversation. However, be professional and courteous – do not address your host by their first name unless they ask you to do so.

### Components of a Strong Answer:

- Use active verbs and concrete examples. Be concise and complete. Summarize key points and make transitions.
- Back up a statement with a specific example.
- Share the outcome or solution to a specific problem.
- Summarize to emphasize your strengths.

### Your Questions:

- Be sure to ask the interviewer questions. Good questions reflect your interest in the position and the research you have done about the organization. (Review sample questions at the end of this tip sheet.)

### Nonverbal Behaviors:

Studies show that nonverbal communication accounts for more than 50% of the interview. Be aware of posture, eye contact, hand gestures, facial expressions and active listening. Here are examples:

#### Positive:

- Appropriate dress, matching the interviewer's organization
- Firm handshake
- Good eye contact
- Occasional affirmative nodding of the head
- Leaning forward (but do not lean on the interviewer's desk)
- Sitting with hands, feet and arms unfolded
- Smiling appropriately
- Sitting up straight in the chair
- Maintaining a pleasant facial expression

#### Negative:

- A weak and ineffectual handshake
- Lack of eye contact
- Inappropriate facial expression or lack of expression
- Poor body posture, either sitting or walking
- Squirring in the seat or sitting on the edge of the chair
- Nervous habits or gestures
- Frowning

### Your Exit:

- Thank the interviewer. Ask about the next steps in the interview process and about the employer's timeline for making a decision. Ask them what type of follow-up they prefer (phone or email).
- Reaffirm interest and enthusiasm for the position. Give the employer a firm handshake and walk confidently from the interview.

## After the Interview

### Assess Yourself:

Evaluate what you did well and what may need improvement. Seek assistance from your success coach, if needed.

### Write a Thank You Letter or Email:

Personalize the letter/email and try to set yourself apart from other applicants. You may also strengthen or add a point about your qualifications in relation to the position. Don't just say "thank you;" reiterate your interest in the job or organization and mention some specifics from the interview.

## Types of Interviews

### Screening Interview

The goal of this type of interview is to get the facts from the candidate by identifying relevant skills and abilities, verifying the resume and looking for a solid fit with the position. It is usually less than one hour and can take the form of a campus, site visit, videoconference or telephone interview.

### Virtual Interview

Interviews conducted by video, telephone or digital communication platforms are on the rise and may be used for a screening interview only or for the full interview process. A virtual interview allows the employer to conduct an interview regardless of the candidate's physical location. When used as only part of the process, a virtual interview may help determine whether the candidate should be considered for an on-site interview.

There are two basic types of virtual interviews. In one-way virtual interviews, candidates are provided with questions on the screen and generally given a certain amount of time to answer each question. With this type, candidates have no interaction with anyone from the hiring organization. In the second type, a two-way virtual interview, the candidate interacts with an interviewer in real time via the internet.

Keep in mind these tips when participating in a virtual interview:

- Get your technology in order. Be sure the technology being used for the virtual interview is installed and working before your meeting.
- Prepare your environment: silence your cell phone, turn off your TV or radio, and check for distractions.
- Position your camera to have a blank background if possible.
- Have relevant materials handy: your resume, paper and pen to take notes, research on the organization, a list of points to cover and questions you want to ask.
- Dress professionally. Also, be aware of your appearance, body language and tone of voice.
- Send a thank you letter by mail or email to anyone who participated in the interview.

**NOTE:** You may schedule an interview room for your phone or video interview. Rooms are available on a first-come, first-served basis and should be scheduled in advance. Contact the Career and Professional Development Center (CPDC) at 412-397-6333.

## Interview Techniques

### Behavioral Interview

This very popular interview style is based on the idea that a candidate's past behavior is useful in predicting future performance. Typical questions center on how a candidate has handled past situations where skills and teamwork have been demonstrated. Topic areas could include project work, relevant work experiences, difficult situations, accomplishments and leadership roles. Example questions are provided in this tip sheet.

\*\* When responding to a behavioral question, use the **STAR** approach. It is important to discuss a specific example and include information about the **situation**, the **task**/problem to which you had to respond, the **action** you took and the **result**. Provide examples with positive outcomes.

## **Case Interview**

This style of interview presents the candidate with a simulated business problem. It is used to assess presentation skills, logic skills, analytical skills/reasoning, critical path thinking, problem-solving ability, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity and communication skills. Case questions typically come in three different forms: business problems, guesstimates and brainteasers. Business problems assess broad functional skills, big-picture perspective, and comfort with details and analysis. Guesstimates measure comfort with ambiguity and creativity. Brainteasers are riddles that attempt to assess problem solving and creativity. Business problems are the most commonly used type of case questions. Case questions can be very difficult. It is important to remember that there may not be a “right” answer. The interviewer will be evaluating your problem-solving skills as well as how you think on the spot and react under pressure.

## **Group Interview**

There are two types of group interviews. In a panel interview, several interviewers take turns asking the candidate questions. When interviewing with a panel, it is important to engage in conversation with all of the interviewers, not just the one who asks the question. A group interview can also involve multiple candidates being interviewed at the same time by one interviewer. This type of interview may involve a group exercise and discussion to assess interpersonal and problem-solving skills.

## **Technical Interview/Presentation**

Candidates applying for positions in technical fields may be asked a series of specific technical questions or asked to complete technical assignments such as a programming task. Some employers may also ask candidates to make a brief technical presentation.

## **Improper or Illegal Interview Questions**

Generally, employers should ask questions related to the job for which you are interviewing and your abilities to perform the duties. For example, an employer cannot ask what country you were born in, but he/she can ask if you are authorized to work in the United States. If you are asked an improper or illegal question in an interview, you may opt to offer the information requested if you do not mind sharing it. If uncomfortable answering the question and/or you do not want to provide the requested information, you may instead choose to ask the interviewer to discuss how the question relates to the duties of the position. If you believe you have been asked an improper or illegal question during an on-campus interview, it is recommended that you share your concern with appropriate university personnel.

## **Commonly Asked Questions**

### **Goals/Interests**

1. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
2. Do you have plans for continued study?
3. Why did you decide to seek a position with our organization?
4. What do you know about our company?
5. What are your short and long term goals? -OR- Where do you see yourself in five years?
6. What do you do in your spare time?
7. What salary are you expecting?
8. What interests you most about this position? What concerns do you have about this position?
9. Are you willing to relocate?
10. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
11. What criteria are you using to evaluate companies/organizations?
12. What specific goals have you set for yourself for the next ten years?
13. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
15. How do you determine or evaluate success?
16. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
17. How would you describe your ideal job following graduation?
18. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

## **Experiences/Skills/Accomplishments**

1. What do you consider to be your greatest strength? Weakness?
2. How do you think a friend, classmate or professor who knows you well would describe you?
3. Why should I hire you?
4. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this job?
5. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
6. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
7. In what part-time or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?
8. Tell me about yourself.
9. What unique qualities or abilities would you bring to this job?
10. Tell me about your internship (job, extracurricular activity).
11. How do you work under pressure?
12. What supervisory or leadership roles have you held?
13. What would your supervisors tell me about you?
14. What have you learned from your mistakes?

## **College Experience**

1. What subjects did you like best and least? Why?
2. How has your college experience prepared you for this job?
3. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
4. Are your grades an accurate reflection of your abilities? Why or why not?
5. Tell me about your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences at college.
6. Why did you select Robert Morris University?

## **Behavioral Interview Questions**

1. Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.
2. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to use your verbal communication skills in order to get a point across that was important to you.
4. Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.
5. Give me an example of an important goal you had set and tell me about your progress in reaching it.
6. Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation that you have completed.
7. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get the job done.
8. What did you do in a project or class to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.
9. Give me an example of a time you were asked to do something you were not trained to do or was not part of your original job description.
10. Tell me about a time when you worked in a group and encountered a problem with a group member. How did you deal with the problem?
11. Describe a time that you failed at something. What did you do afterwards?
12. Tell me about a project that you had either at work or school. Describe in detail how you managed it. What was the outcome?
13. Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure.
14. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
15. Describe a situation in which you've recommended a solution to a tough problem. Tell us the reason for that solution.

## **Case Interview Questions**

### **Business Problems:**

1. Impact on company of a consolidating industry?
2. Should Company X add capacity?
3. How should Company X react to a new competitor?
4. Should Company X enter/exit a new/old market?

**Guesstimates:**

1. Estimate the weight of a 747.
2. How many pennies are in the Robinson Mall?
3. How many disposable diapers were sold in the U.S. last year?
4. Approximately how much money does a large ski resort make in a weekend?

**Brainteasers:**

1. Why are manhole covers round?
2. You are in a room with three light switches, each of which controls one of three light bulbs in the next room. Your task is to determine which switch controls which light bulb. Your constraints are that you may flick only two light switches and you may enter the room only once. How would you set about determining which switch controls which bulb?

**Education Questions**

1. Why do you want to teach?
2. What is your philosophy of education?
3. What was your biggest problem in student teaching? How did you resolve it?
4. What are the rules of your classroom? How are they established?
5. Are parent/teacher conferences important? Why or why not?
6. Describe your ideal classroom.
7. A student is consistently late to your class. How would you handle this situation?
8. How would you handle a student who continually “acts up” in your class?
9. How do you engage a parent in the education of his/her child?
10. What do you expect from your supervisor?

Additional interview questions for educators:

Education World: 30 Favorite Questions for Future Teachers

[www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin352.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin352.shtml)

Teacher Catapult: 88 Teacher Interview Questions

[www.teachercatapult.com/teaching-articles/teacher-interview-questions](http://www.teachercatapult.com/teaching-articles/teacher-interview-questions)

**Technical Questions**

1. Please describe any technical hobbies or interests you have.
2. How do you approach a technical problem? Give an example.
3. What exposure have you had to (software, hardware, product marketing, budgeting, etc.)?
4. Briefly describe a technical project that you found challenging or rewarding.
5. What have you done above and beyond course work especially in an area related to your major?
6. Have you published any papers or projects?
7. Have you ever been in a situation where you found yourself without the specific technical knowledge to perform a task essential to your project? What did you do?
8. Tell us about your experience dealing with end-users.

Additional technical interview questions:

IndiaBix: Technical Interview Questions and Answers –

[www.indiabix.com/technical/interview-questions-and-answers](http://www.indiabix.com/technical/interview-questions-and-answers)

The Balance Careers: Most Common Technical Interview Question

[www.thebalancecareers.com/top-technical-interview-questions-2061227](http://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-technical-interview-questions-2061227)

## Interview Questions for You to Ask

Prepare a list of well-researched questions to ask the interviewer. Keep in mind that your questions should reflect the amount of research you have done rather than your lack of knowledge about the organization. Avoid asking questions regarding salary or benefits. The questions below are guidelines; create and adapt questions to meet your individual needs and interview situation. Be prepared to ask three to six questions for each interview. Time availability may determine how many questions you will be able to ask.

1. Which parts of the job are most challenging?
2. How are the goals for this job set?
3. What activities are routinely performed in this job? What is a typical day like?
4. What other departments/divisions do you interact with the most?
5. How much travel is involved and to where?
6. Where will the position be located?
7. Will relocation be required in the future?
8. What is the length of the training program/period?
9. What is the typical career path for someone in the position?
10. What is the average time to move within this career path?
11. What is the potential growth of your organization?
12. What is the organizational structure and how does this position fit into the organization?
13. How often are performance reviews given?
14. Is this a newly created position?
15. Who would evaluate my work?
16. Does the organization endorse promotion from within?
17. What skills have you found to be valuable in this job?
18. Does the organization encourage professional development?
19. What is the work environment like?
20. What do you view as the most positive and least positive aspects of the organization?
21. How much visibility does this position have?
22. What is the turnover rate in the organization?
23. Please describe your organization's management philosophy.
24. What are your expectations for new hires within their first three to six months on the job?
25. How long has this position existed?

## Additional Resources

Big Interview (interview curriculum and practice) - [rmu.biginterview.com](http://rmu.biginterview.com)

Vault: Career Advice (sample questions, informational videos and interviewing blog) - [www.rmu.edu/csspd](http://www.rmu.edu/csspd)

Vault Video: 4 Strategies for Nailing the Video Interview -  
<https://access.vault.com/resume-tips/4-strategies-for-nailing-the-video-interview>

Vault Video: Tips for a Successful Phone Interview -  
<https://access.vault.com/resume-tips/tips-for-a-successful-phone-interview>

Interviews - [www.monster.com/career-advice/job-interview](http://www.monster.com/career-advice/job-interview)

Learn How to Ace a Job Interview - [www.thebalancecareers.com/job-interviews-4161912](http://www.thebalancecareers.com/job-interviews-4161912)

Phone Interviews Tips - <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-ace-a-phone-interview-2058579>

The Path to Interviewing Success - <https://collegegrad.com/interview>

Video Interview Guide: Tips for a Successful Interview -  
<https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/video-interview-guide>