

Preparing for Industry/Non-Academic Interviews

When applying for a job outside of academia, the flow of interviewing often goes in the following order:

- Applicant submits application, either to via email or an online application
- Interview #1: Phone or video screening with applicant and a recruiter, typically 15-30 minutes
- Interview #2: First formal interview, typically 45 minutes to 1 hour
- Interview #3: Final round interview, typically 1-3 hours, depending on the position
- Final offer & negotiation: Typically 1-7 days

Throughout these stages, recruiters and/or hiring managers are initially making their decisions based on risk. In other words, how risky will it be for us to spend time and energy talking to this person? In the beginning stages of the process, you actually do not want to “stand out” as too different – align yourself as closely to the job description as possible. You want to present your skills and experiences as being directly relevant and related to the position and their organization.

In addition to your technical proficiency in the role, recruiters and hiring managers are also often looking for cultural fit at their organization. By demonstrating that you’ve researched their company and culture, and weaving that into the interview and your application, you demonstrate that you would not only be good at your job but also be a good coworker as well.

Interviews: Preparing for the call

While email may be the first contact a potential employer makes with you, many times you will receive an initial phone call from a Human Resources officer or an employer asking to schedule an initial interview.

Consequently, now is the time to update your voicemail greeting. Ask yourself what your future employer will think of your message and how that message represents you. Use these pointers from [Case Western’s Career Development Center](#) as your guide:

- Double check that your voicemail is set up and has space to receive new messages. Delete outdated voicemails that you no longer need.
- Make sure your message is polite, direct, and identifies you as you identify yourself in your job application. (e.g. If you go by your middle name in your job letter, you don’t want your voicemail to associate you with your first name.) Set your new voicemail greeting in a quiet space.
- Make sure your message can be understood clearly. EXAMPLE: "Hello, this is (your name). I am sorry I am not available to take your call right now. Please leave your name, number, a brief message, and the best time to reach you. I will get back to you as soon as possible."
- Return phone calls promptly.
- If you are driving, in class, or otherwise occupied, let the call go to voicemail and call back at a better time.
- *Once you have applied for a job, every call that comes to your phone could be a potential employer. Keep this in mind and answer your phone accordingly.*

Key Resources:



To schedule appts:
du.edu/pcu



To explore online resources:
career.du.edu



To email your Career Advisor:
Ashley.Weibel@du.edu



To use the DU Career Network:
DU.firsthand.co

Interviews: On the line with an employer

Quite possibly the most important thing to have in front of you when you speak to a potential employer is your calendar. Keep a current log of all your commitments so that you are ready to schedule an interview when an employer calls.

For some jobs, an HR officer may use this initial call as a preliminary interview. This first interview is often called a “screening” interview and is primarily used to confirm that you are the applicant you claimed to be on your resume/CV and confirm that you’re a candidate of interest for them.

These calls are typically are no longer than 30 minutes in length. Common questions for one of these screening phone interviews may include:

- Tell me about yourself
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why are you interested in our company/organization?
- 1-2 specific questions related to your experiences as it is relevant to the position
- Closing: time for you to ask a question or two

Additional tips for preparing for these calls:

- Use headphones so your hands are free to take notes during the call
- Have notes in front of you with the stories / experiences you want to highlight
- Prepare 7-10 stories of your experiences that you think through ahead of time, so you can focus during the interview on telling the story well and not remembering details.
 - Use <https://du.biginterview.com/> as a free resource to prepare!
- Prepare at least 3 questions for the employer in case they give you time at the end of the phone screening.

How Do I Prepare for an Interview?**Step 1: Research the Company/Organization**

Prior to the first interview, thoroughly research the company or organization, including:

- Mission, vision, values
- Current initiatives or projects, upcoming events (if applicable)
- Company language and internal organizational structure → usually the website addresses this
- Who you will be interviewing with (panel, individual, etc.)

Step 2: Prepare Specific Examples and Stories

I recommend preparing 7-10 unique “STAR” stories prior to an interview. STAR stories are used to answer behavioral interview questions, which almost always start with “tell me about a time when...”. The premise behind these questions is that whatever you did in the past (the story you tell) will be an indication of what you will do in the future. The key to these kinds of questions is telling a very specific story that highlights relevant skills and experiences.

S – situation: give contextual details that explain when, where, and what you were doing

T – task/obstacle: explain the task at hand or obstacle that you faced

A – action: describe the SPECIFIC actions that you took, or your approach to the process, to address the task or obstacle

Key Resources:

To schedule appts:
du.edu/pco



To explore online resources:
career.du.edu



To email your Career Advisor:
Ashley.Weibel@du.edu



To use the DU Career Network:
[DU.firsthand.co](https://du.firsthand.co)

R – result: describe the final outcome or result, what you learned and how/if it connects to the position you’re interviewing for

Step 3: Practice!

Although awkward, practicing your interviewing skills is one of the best ways to improve. Some practicing ideas:

- Reread every bullet point on the job description and pretend it got rephrased into an interview question. For example: *Teach diverse populations of community college students using inclusive pedagogy* on the job description would be turned into this question: “*tell me about a time when you’ve taught diverse populations and your theoretical approach to teaching.*”
- Schedule an appointment with your career advisor on Pioneer Careers (www.du.edu/pioneercareers)
- Use the video or voice memo feature on your cell phone or computer to record yourself answering basic questions. Listen back and take notes on how you can improve.
- Use the free resource Big Interview (<https://du.biginterview.com/>, create a free account with your DU email address) to record yourself and watch helpful videos about every step of the interviewing experience.

In addition to practicing your stories, be prepared to also “translate” your experience in academia to a non-academic organization or role. Don’t assume that the interviewer knows what you mean when you mention a specific poetry journal, professional association, or other professional accomplishment: tell them plainly! If you were selected to be published in a literary magazine, tell them how competitive it was to be selected, how many people on average applied, etc.

Common Interview Questions

Here are some basic questions you should be able to answer:

- Tell us about yourself. (Prepare a 2-minute response.)
- Why are you specifically interested in our company? This position?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses (as they relate to this position)?
- How do you handle conflict with team members and/or supervisors?
- What would be your top priorities in the first 90 days in this position?
- Do you have any questions for us? (*typically, this is the last question of the interview)

Interview wardrobe, space, and demeanor

Preparing your wardrobe

Be comfortable and be yourself. While you should dress professionally, you should choose an outfit in which you can sit comfortably and feel relaxed.

Preparing for Skype or Zoom interview

- Curate space and practice in it!
- Consider putting a light right in front of your computer so that you are well-lit. Never sit in front of a window.
- Avoid white walls and busy, bright wall art. Choose a wall with a calming color, a bookshelf, and/or a plant. The more comfortable and calming your space looks, the better you and the committee will feel.
- Test technology and retest it.

Key Resources:



To schedule appts:
du.edu/pco



To explore online resources:
career.du.edu



To email your Career Advisor:
Ashley.Weibel@du.edu



To use the DU Career Network:
DU.firsthand.co

CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Make sure your furniture does not squeak; if you do not have a good chair, consider purchasing one.
- Keep all liquids and food items away from the interview space. While holding a cup of coffee or tea may put you at ease, during an interview, it is an accident waiting to happen.
- Use the bathroom right before the interview.
- Log in to the call exactly at the designated time. Do not be early, and do not be late.

Preparing for an in-person interview

- Be prepared for the weather of whatever city in which you are interviewing. Think about shoes (or a change of shoes) in addition to coats, hats, gloves, and umbrellas. Bring a hairbrush. Prepare for a building in which there may be too much heat or A/C or no heat or A/C.
- Bring a few copies of your job materials. If you're interviewing for an academic job, you might also want to bring a few syllabi from courses you've taught (occasionally a committee will ask for them).
- Find out where in the building you should arrive and to whom you should speak upon arrival.
- Do not bring coffee, tea, or food into the building.
- Be punctual! Double-check time zones!

Interview demeanor

- Online interviews can have a little bit of a lag. Make sure that someone is done speaking before you talk. If you are unsure, you can start with a filler word, "right, yes, great, etc." and then a pause.
- To indicate you are done speaking, even a non-verbal gesture, like a nod, or a hand movement signaling handing things over, can be useful.
- Practice active listening. Many people nod naturally when they are listening to others, and something like that is important in online interviews, especially, so that the speaker knows their words are being received.

Second Interviews

The success of a second interview for an industry job is largely dependent on your research and preparation. If you've been selected for a second or later interview, remember that they've already decided that you've met the bare minimum qualifications for the position, and now it's a matter of best fit.

Prior to the second interview refresh yourself on the following:

- What is the company's organizational structure?
- Who will you be meeting with? What are their roles?
- Does the company have any big projects or initiatives underway?
- What are some trends in the industry that are affecting their business?

There is no one typical second interview structure, but here are some common formats/agendas:

- Panel interview with the team you would potentially work with
- Individual interview with a hiring manager
- Quick call/interview with a senior manager or internal leader
- Presentation on a specific topic related to the position (rarely spontaneous, this is often given to you early to prepare)
- Tour around the office/facility

Key Resources:



To schedule appts:
du.edu/pco



To explore online resources:
career.du.edu



To email your Career Advisor:
Ashley.Weibel@du.edu



To use the DU Career Network:
DU.firsthand.co

CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In this second interview, you may end up “recycling” some of your answers from the first interview, especially if the screening interviewer was different from the next interviewer(s). This is ok! Your interviewers will likely be different in each round. If there is a mix of old and new interviewers, feel free to repeat answers you gave in an earlier round.

Thank You Notes & Emails

It is customary to write a short thank you after an interview, either over email or handwritten. Handwritten is preferred if you have an on-site visit or long interview process. If you had a large interview panel, the appropriate action is to email your thank you to your main contact and ask them to forward the thank you to the search committee or panelists. Send your thank-you note within 24 hours of the interview.

The thank you note should be short and include the following information:

- Thanking them for their time and effort to interview you
- Personal note(s) related to something you learned (*I was impressed by your presentation on _____, I hope you have a great vacation to Maine, etc.*)
- Reiterate your interest in the position

Key Resources:



To schedule appts:
du.edu/pco



To explore online resources:
career.du.edu



To email your Career Advisor:
Ashley.Weibel@du.edu



To use the DU Career Network:
[DU.firsthand.co](https://du.firsthand.co)