Student Guide to *Acing the Interview* – 2019-2020

Interviews are used by employers, grad schools and volunteer sites to: verify a candidate's qualifications, evaluate fit with the organization/team, graduate program and more. Interviews are also critical to help you determine if the position, organization or grad program fits well with your goals, interests, and preferences. **Therefore, it essential to prepare.**

Set Yourself Up for Success at Each Step of the Interview Process:

Interview Lifecycle

Follow-up… with thank you emails w/in 24 hours. Briefly restate interest, fit and mention conversation topic from interviews.

START HERE

Confirm Logistics… details of where, with whom, for how long, interview format? Do not be afraid to ask the recruiter these questions.

ACE the Interview… Preparation will pay off! Get a good night's sleep. Silence your phone.

Research the Organization … use *McCain LibGuides* to go beyond *org's website and Google*; identify org's news, service/products, competitors, etc.; read annual reports; talk to *alumnae* who have work(ed) at the organization or in industry.

Visual Impressions Matter… Plan appropriate attire (including tote, notepad, umbrella, etc.) and interact professionally.

Research the Interviewer(s) … use *LinkedIn* to understand their work context and experiences; consider the questions each might ask. Plan questions to ask them.

Interview Lifecycle

Practice, Practice, Practice… Sign up for fall & spring Practice Interviews with Alumnae or use COMPASS to schedule practice interviews especially if format will be new to you (e.g. case interviews).

Develop Your Answers… to potential questions; Review job description - identify your strengths and best story examples to illustrate that you possess the position requirements. Anticipate gaps you will be asked to address.

Common Interview Formats

Most organizations use a series of interviews to get to know candidates.

📞 **Phone Interviews** are often used for screening or initial interviews to verify a candidate's availability, base skills, and possibly salary range aligns with the position. These interviews are usually 15-30 minutes with 5-8 questions.

- Choose a quiet place with good cell service and sit away from distractions.
- Practice interviewing with a friend or record yourself using your phone, paying attention to your tone, level of enthusiasm, length of your responses (no more than 1 minute each) and how well you answered the questions.

📹 **Video Interviews** are increasingly used to evaluate a candidate's "soft" skills, such as communication and rapport building. *Automated video interviews* require a candidate to provide video responses to computer prompts. The candidate is usually given a few tries at a question. *Skype-style interviews* are two-way, face-to-face conversations with video.

- Identify a quiet place with a solid digital connection and test your connection to the video interview platform.
- Make sure your username and photo are professional.
- Dress as you would for an in-person interview. (See below) Remove any unprofessional items in the background.
- Save application documents on your desktop to share online if needed.
- Practice (e.g. Skype with a friend). Learn where to direct eye contact. Ensure you are confident, pleasant & clear.

Note: For either interview type above, you can have a cheat sheet of your strengths, skills and story topics available, either next to you or taped to the side of your computer screen! Make sure to be ready for the call 5-10 minutes early.

If you need a land line, computer or quiet space, contact mzacarias@agnesscott.edu *to book an interview room.*

👤 Face-to-Face or In-person Interviews are usually the final round. Organizations often mix one-on-one and panel (group) interviews to obtain feedback from multiple interviewers. Ask in advance about the agenda and participants.

What to Wear

Interview attire is more conservative than typical office wear, even for nonprofit, healthcare or public service organizations.

- Wear a suit (pants or skirt) or tailored dress with close-toed, professional shoes. Cover up tattoos if possible.
- AVOID: too short, sheer, low-cut or skimpy attire; heavy makeup/perfume; loud make-up or peeling nail polish.
- Contact mzacarias@agnesscott.edu if you'd like suggestions for free or reduced price professional attire.

What to Bring

- Dark tote or other professional-looking bag that is well-organized and not too stuffed
- Copies of current, proofed resume on 20 lb. paper or ask to print up to 5 copies in Buttrick G12
- Padfolio and 2 pens to take notes about who you meet and the organization/job (Ask if it's OK to take notes first.)
- Reference list with complete and accurate contact information (if requested.)

Plan to Arrive Early and Ready

- Map it ahead of time, including parking. Be sure you know where you are going.
- Go to bed early the night before. Allow time in the morning to review your answers to common questions.
- Eat a light snack before hand – you don't want a growling stomach. Do not smoke in your interview clothes.
- Silence your phone and put it away before you walk in the door. Bring a book or magazine to read.

Convey a Positive, Professional Presence

- Introduce yourself with eye contact, smile and firm handshake to everyone you meet from receptionist to CEO.
- Convey enthusiasm for the opportunity. Do not badmouth prior experiences/employers.
- Remember/write down names or ask for business cards so you can send a thank you.
- Use active posture and positive, engaging facial expressions to show you are listening.

Pre-Interview Research: An Essential Step!

Employers are put off when candidates are unfamiliar with the organization or position. Before interviewing, make sure to:

- **Review the organization:** Explore its website and LinkedIn; Google them and use McCain's Career Libguide to learn more; Read employee reviews on Glassdoor.com; reach out to alums on LinkedIn for interview advice.
- **Review the position posting**. Identify skills, experiences, knowledge, and personal traits the employer seeks.
- **Make sure your LinkedIn profile and online portfolio/work samples are relevant and up to date.**
- **Look up your future interviewers online:** Consider their roles, careers, priorities, and what they might ask you.

Common Interview Questions

Organizations use a variety of interview environments, questions and assessments to evaluate candidates.

Most Common Interview Questions are straightforward, but do require preparation. Prepare for these questions:

Tell Me About Yourself:	Use the formula: present-past-future. Prepare a 1-minute response including only relevant info about: what you are doing now (major/internship/research/leadership role), what led you to that path, and what you hope to do in the future.
Why did you choose ASC/your major?	There is no correct answer. This question is designed to understand your priorities and decision-making. Develop a logical and meaningful answer.
What are your strengths and weaknesses?	Before the interview, make a list of your positive and negative attributes. When asked, mention a few of the most relevant positive ones and least relevant negative ones. Describe how you are working on the negative ones.
Why should I hire you?	Identify your most relevant skills/experiences *and* personality traits for the role.
What questions do you have for me/us?	Be ready to ask insightful questions you cannot answer online. Good options: ○ Organization: culture? what it takes to be successful? ○ Position:% of time on each task? typical growth path? training? ○ Application: Next step in the process? their timeline for making a decision?

Behavioral Interview Questions assume past behavior predicts future performance. Questions like "*Describe a time when (fill in the blank),*" ask you to share specific experience instead of how you'd handle a situation. Consider when you:

Tried to do something & failed	Showed initiative and took the lead	Missed an obvious solution
Had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done	Used persuasion to influence someone's opinion	Used good judgement and fact-finding skills to solve a problem
Dealt with conflict	Faced a stressful team situation	Set a goal & achieved it

To answer these questions succinctly and effectively, tell stories of relevant experiences using the SAR method: Describe **S**ituation you were in; **A**ction you took; **R**esult or Response you created). Identify stories from:

Internships	Work experience	Volunteering/Service
Class Projects	Travel/Study Abroad	Campus Leadership
Athletics	Awards/Accomplishments	Mentored Research

Choose and practice stories:

- That are multifaceted and can be used to convey a variety of lessons or endings
- Where you were the main person or one of the main people leading, making decisions or doing work
- Where you can quantify or explain how you specifically created a positive result or response

Other Applicant Assessments & Interview Types

Computer Assessments are used by many organizations to assess personality, proofreading, analytical ability, quantitative skills or office software expertise (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint). LinkedIn Learning (free for students) offers online courses to review/strengthen your skills. For personality assessments, it's best not to prepare for or overthink the questions, because the focus is on identifying if your personality is a good match for the role or team.

"The Airport Test" is a term for questions used to get to know a candidate on a personal, but still professional level. It refers to how a candidate would get along with a team over time, as if they were "stuck at the airport." To questions like, "What was the last book you read?" or "What do you like to do for fun?" provide an honest, non-controversial answer!

Case/Simulation Interviews are typically used by management consulting and investment firms to assess a candidate's analytical skills. The candidate is asked to analyze a hypothetical problem and share how they would address it. Review case interview advice on McKinsey & Company, Boston Consulting Group and other consulting firms' websites.

Technical Interviews are used when a position requires specific skills that are not easily learned on the job – e.g., computer programming/coding, statistical analyses, numerical problems, mastery of technical software, editing or public speaking. The candidate is given a timed "assignment" to complete while at the interview.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice is the #1 recommendation. You are encouraged to take advantage of the following resources for practice:

- ✓ Practice Interviews with Alumnae in fall and spring (RSVP required – watch your email!)
- ✓ Mock interview with a Career Coach (schedule via COMPASS)
- ✓ Industry-specific advice from alumnae who have agreed to conduct practice phone, video and case interviews

Follow-up – Written Thank Yous are Crucial!

Send emails to all decision makers and influencers within 24 hours. Thank them for their time, reiterate your interest, and briefly refer back to your interview conversation, including an example of how you meet one of the key qualifications.

Also, thank alumnae and others who helped you prepare. Keep them posted. Every communication is a chance to strengthen and learn from your network.

Questions or need help preparing for an interview? Use compass.agnesscott.edu to schedule an appointment.

Thank you to Alumna Jasmine Adams Langevine '07 for contributing to this guide.