Some Key Points

There is no one way of interviewing; you will have to develop your own style. Employers use interviews to assess your fit and qualifications for the position as well as the organization. Interviews are also an opportunity for you to learn more about the job and the company so you can determine if this position is a good fit for you. It is important that you use the interview to promote your skills and personal attributes in a compelling manner that demonstrates your enthusiasm for the position.

Interview Formats

On-Grounds
You must complete the mandatory On-Grounds Interviewing Orientation to participate in On-Grounds Interviews. The OGI Orientation is available on our website under the MyUCS section of the UCS website. In On-Grounds Interviewing, an organization comes to the University to interview a number of candidates. These are usually screening interviews before an on-site visit. If an information session is held the night prior to the interview, the employer expects you to attend. This way, the recruiter will not have to repeat company information in your interview.

On-Site/Off-Grounds
Off-Grounds interviews offer you an opportunity to see the physical location of a company. You also get the chance to meet different people within the organization. These interviews can last a full day or longer and may include different elements such as multiple panel interviews, presentations or case interviews. You may be evaluated during meals and travel, so treat everything as the interview. Check out our handout “On-Site Visits with Employers” (available online and in our office) for more information.
Panel
During a panel interview, questions may be rapidly paced and coming from a variety of individuals in the organization. It is sometimes more difficult to achieve rapport during this type of interview, so remember to maintain eye contact with and involve each person on the panel. Be professional, and remember to smile. Get a list of all those in attendance for thank-you notes.

Telephone & Virtual Interviews
Telephone and virtual interviews are often used for initial screening interviews. They’re generally brief (thirty minutes or less). The purpose of screening is to weed out weaker candidates before the more intensive on-site interviews. The employer may contact you to arrange a time for a telephone or virtual interview or just begin interviewing when you answer the phone. If you are not prepared for a “spontaneous” interview, ask the employer to reschedule or call back in five minutes. An employer may request to schedule a virtual interview with you using technology such as Skype as well. Here are some tips to help you shine:
- Ensure that you are in a quiet, private location for the interview, and without distractions.
- If possible, try to conduct your interview via a telephone landline or high-speed data connection (DSL, cable modem, etc.).
- For virtual interviews, make sure to test the connection prior to the interview. Check for video quality, image quality and sound. Consider raising the height of your webcam in line with your hairline, as this can prevent your face from appearing flatter and wider.
- Lighting is of critical importance for virtual interviews. Depending on your space, experiment with lighting to give definition to your face, instead of harsh, direct light on your face.
- Keep your resume and notes nearby.
- Concise, well-worded responses are critical; speak clearly and slowly to give your interviewer time to think about your response and take notes.
- Be aware that you may be on speakerphone with more than one person listening. Write down their names as they’re introduced so you can address individual interviewers, if needed.
- If possible, try to dress in professional clothes, even if you are participating in a phone interview—this can help get you in the right mindset for interviewing.

Types of Interviews
Just as interviews may occur in different formats, there are various types of interview questions you may be asked. Below are the three most popular.

Resume-Based
- Uses the resume as the source for most questions.
- Focuses on past performance in academics, employment, and activities. Ex. “Tell me about your experience as a facility manager at the AFC.”

Tip: Be able to expand on each item on your resume. Be prepared to go into great depth if asked for specific details.
Behavioral

- Based on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior on the job.
- Evaluates a candidate’s skills, abilities, and interests, reveals willingness to change and gain from experience (both success and failure).
- Situation-based questions are used. Ex. “Tell me about a time when you had to work with a team to accomplish something.”

**Tip:** Use the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) technique for structuring your answers. Briefly explain the Situation and the Task that was at hand. Go into detail about your Actions (not your group’s or your team’s), and briefly describe the end Result.

**Example Question:** Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.

**Situation:** Define the situation or “set the stage”
*Every year, my student organization sponsors a fundraising event to benefit a local food bank.*

**Task:** Identify the task/project that you performed
*As Philanthropy Committee Chair, I was in charge of organizing the event last semester.*

**Action:** Describe the actions you took/initiated. Make sure to use “I” language and focus on your specific actions and skills that you used to accomplish the task.
*I organized and led a committee of 8 members to handle logistics involved in the fundraiser. I managed the budget, created the timeline and delegated responsibilities to each committee member, setting weekly meetings to check on progress.*

**Result:** Summarize the outcome.
*I was very proud of the event. 250 people attended the event and we raised $3,000 for the local food bank.*

Case

- Presents interviewee with a problem, or case, to solve. Your answer is not as important as your analysis of the problem. Ex. “How many golf balls would fit in a swimming pool?”
- Usually used during in-person interviews.
- Commonly used by consulting firms.

**Tip:** Think out loud so the interviewer can see how you solve problems. Also consult the “Exploring a Career In Consulting” handout in the UCS Library and online.
Before the Interview

Remember, the interview starts long before you appear in the interviewer’s office!

Research the Industry & Employer

Thoroughly research the organization and industry to impress the interviewer and to allow more time to discuss specifics of the position. For example, look at the organization’s webpage and printed literature. Check recent news headlines about the company. Review industry trade publications to learn more about recent trends, issues and news. If provided, familiarize yourself with the key information (name and role) on your interviewers via LinkedIn. You can also follow the company’s social media presence across different platforms. Demonstrating knowledge about the employer and industry is an excellent way to communicate your interest, which is almost as important as your ability to do the job. Lack of research is consistently cited by employers as a reason candidates do not advance in interviews, so make the time for it.

Know Yourself

- Identify several key strengths, with examples from your past experience, to help the employer visualize you as a strong candidate. Check out UCS self-assessment resources for help.
- Evaluate problem areas in your record and be prepared to offer a strong explanation for these during the interview, if necessary. Do not volunteer negative information about yourself or a former employment situation and try to balance anything negative with a positive outcome.
- Be aware of cultural differences in communicating, especially if you are looking for international jobs. See the book Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands, available in the UCS library.
- Review the job description and take note of any specific skills, characteristics or experiences mentioned. Be prepared to discuss specific examples of your experiences that match those qualifications.

Prepare Yourself

- Meet with a UCS counselor for a mock interview.
- Know exactly how to get to the organization and be prepared to arrive early and stay late. Aim to arrive at least 10 minutes early to the interview.
- Dress to project the image of confidence, success, and respect; your total appearance should be appropriate to the job. See our Pinterest page for examples at http://pinterest.com/uvaucsel/.
- Prepare to bring additional materials to the interview such as copies of your resume, a list of references, samples of your work, or transcripts.
- Plan ahead by thinking about what you want the employer to know about you. Prepare key points you want to communicate about yourself and how you plan to make them. This will help tremendously when you are asked open-ended questions such as, “Tell me about yourself,” or “What do you think makes you a strong candidate for our position?”
- At the end of an interview, candidates are usually given time to ask their own questions. Formulate questions in advance to fall back on in case you do not think of any additional questions during the interview. Not having questions to ask is also another consistently cited reason why candidates don’t advance in the interview process.
During the Interview

Your first task will be to build rapport with the person who greets you at the organization (front desk/reception staff), and later with your interviewer(s). Building rapport involves three things: attitude, non-verbal behaviors and verbal behaviors.

Attitude

Think positively! If you don’t think you are the best candidate for the job, how can you hope to convince the employer you are? The fact that they have selected you for an interview shows that they are already interested in learning more about you.

Non-Verbal

93% of communication is non-verbal. Project positive non-verbal behaviors that contribute to rapport:

- **Handshake** — Make sure to give a strong, firm hand-shake when meeting your interviewers.
- **Eye contact** — should be open and direct when listening, asking, and responding to questions. Eye contact is usually broken when concentrating or reflecting on what you want to say or what has been said.
- **Posture** — should be well-balanced, erect, relaxed, forward-facing, and open. Know your nervous habits and practice controlling them. Leaning forward slightly can help communicate interest.
- **Hands** — should be used in a relaxed way for animation, communicating excitement, interest.
- **Facial expression** — conveys your sincerity and can add to or detract from your words. Don’t be afraid to smile!
- **Voice tone** — should be firm, warm, well-modulated and relaxed.
- **Timing** — it is alright to pause before and while you are answering a question.

Verbal

How you communicate verbally involves your ability to:

- Use active verb and provide concrete and concise answers (think STAR method!)
- Summarize and make transitions.
- Be positive and confident and “own” what you have done and what you know.
- Create a dialogue by asking relevant questions, requesting more information when you are asked vague or difficult questions, and avoiding yes/no answers that close the conversation.

Twenty Questions Employers Might Ask

1. “Tell me about yourself.”

   **Employer Motivation:** To see how well you can communicate and structure your thoughts.
   **Strategy:** Prepare for this question in advance. Pretend that the employer said “Tell me about yourself and why you are interested in this job?” You might answer this question by quickly mentioning your relevant background, experience and skills and then explaining why you believe the job would be the next logical step for you.
2. “What are your greatest work and non-work accomplishments?”

   **Employer Motivation:** To know what you care about and what motivates you.
   **Strategy:** Choose something about which you are passionate. “Getting accepted to U.Va.” is an accomplishment common to everyone attending this University, so you may want to think of other accomplishments.

3. “Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.”

   **Employer Motivation:** To find out about your work-related values.
   **Strategy:** Be truthful about what matters to you professionally rather than personally.

4. “How did you prepare for this interview?”

   **Employer Motivation:** To see if you have made an effort to research the company, an indicator of your interest and initiative.
   **Strategy:** Talk about any research you’ve done through the company website, news articles, employees of the company, etc.

5. “What do you know about this organization?”

   **Employer Motivation:** Similar to the previous question, the employer is checking your knowledge base and interest.
   **Strategy:** Provide an answer that indicates that you have researched the company before the interview. Example: “I’ve talked with some of your employees and they feel that this a good company to work for because…” “I have been reading that your company is really growing fast, planning two new branches this year. I want to work for your company because the future looks promising.”

6. “What are three of your biggest strengths and three of your biggest weaknesses?”

   **Employer Motivation:** To find out if your strengths would be used in the position and to find out if you are aware of the areas where you need improvement.
   **Strategy:** Provide specific examples of your strengths (e.g. “I’m an excellent writer. Most of my teachers have commented on my ability to organize my thoughts and communicate with a variety of audiences.”) With your weaknesses, explain how you work around them or try to strengthen them. Avoid sharing a weakness that directly relates to the job’s requirements.

7. “Describe your ideal supervisor.”

   **Employer Motivation:** To see if you would be effective working for the supervisor.
   **Strategy:** It is much easier to answer this question if you already know the supervisor and his/her style. If not, you may want to state broad preferences, or consider mentioning how you would be a good supervisee.
8. “Why did you choose your major?”

   **Employer Motivation:** To find out your interests and preferences and then see if they fit with the job and the company culture.

   **Strategy:** Be open about your interests. Consider what aspects of your interest are most relevant to the job and focus on that side (e.g. your love of quantitative analysis vs. your love of team projects.)

9. “Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team.”

   **Employer Motivation:** To assess your teamwork, interpersonal and leadership skills.

   **Strategy:** Pick a specific example that has a “happy ending” and about which you are proud.

10. “What does diversity mean to you and how can it impact teams and results?”

    **Employer Motivation:** To assess your knowledge and commitment to diversity and to examine your understanding of effective interpersonal and team dynamics.

    **Strategy:** Describe your definition of diversity and how it might be a fit for the organizational structure, keeping in mind any research or literature you may have seen on this issue.

11. “What have you learned from your past jobs?”

    **Employer Motivation:** To see if you can learn from your experiences.

    **Strategy:** Highlight some skills that you have gleaned from each of your major job/internship experiences and perhaps how you have refined those skills in subsequent positions.

12. “What specific skills have you acquired or used in previous jobs that relate to this position?”

    **Employer Motivation:** To see if you have a clear idea of the skills needed for the position that is advertised.

    **Strategy:** Be sure to have thought about your skills before the interview. A good way to do this is to highlight the skills mentioned in the job description and then think about how you might be able to prove each of those skills (based on past experience in classes, jobs and activities).

13. “What did you like least about your previous job?”

    **Employer Motivation:** To gauge how you deal with obstacles and/or conflict and to assess your performance in a work setting.

    **Strategy:** Definitely give this question some thought prior to any interview. Try to balance anything negative with something positive.

14. “Tell me about a time when you disappointed a supervisor.”

    **Employer Motivation:** To see how honest you are about your mistakes.

    **Strategy:** Pick something small to discuss (e.g. one day being late or making an error early in your training). Be sure to explain how you learned from the experience.
15. “How would you motivate a co-worker who was performing poorly on a team project?”

**Employer Motivation:** To see how you relate to others and perhaps how you can think outside the box.

**Strategy:** Draw upon your teamwork experiences, both school- and work-related, to present a thoughtful and logical approach.

16. “Tell me about an unpopular decision you made. How do you make the decision? In retrospect, how do you think you handled it?”

**Employer Motivation:** To see how you make decisions and how you handle differences of opinion.

**Strategy:** Include all aspects of the decision-making process as well as your analysis of the decision after the fact.

17. “How would your best friend describe you?”

**Employer Motivation:** To see if you can confidently state your strengths.

**Strategy:** A popular variation of this question is to state three adjectives that describe you—short but informative.

18. “How will employment with us contribute to your career plans?”

**Employer Motivation:** To gauge what your long-term career goals are and how they fit with his/her particular organization.

**Strategy:** Provide an outline of what your career goals are at that time, but you don’t necessarily have to have a concrete timeline for the next twenty years in mind.

19. “Why should we hire you?”

**Employer Motivation:** To see if you can concisely sell your strengths.

**Strategy:** You may want to say something like “I think there are three main reasons you should hire me. First...” Three main selling points will stick in the interviewer’s mind. Structuring your answer with numbers will keep you focused. This is not the time for many details. This question is best answered with a summary of your major assertions.

20. “What salary do you expect?”

**Employer Motivation:** To see if your expectations are in line with his/hers.

**Strategy:** Prepare for this question by doing research before hand to learn about average salary ranges for the position. Do some online research or speak with alumni to learn more salary ranges for the position and cost-of-living. Never state a flat dollar amount unless you know what the job pays. Try a neutral statement: “I would expect to be paid what other persons in this position/area are paid” or state a range that you know would encompass any offer, but which goes a bit higher than you would find acceptable. Also note that you are open to negotiating the salary if you are offered the position.
Illegal Questions

Questions that relate to gender, race, color, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disabilities are illegal, unless the employer can demonstrate that they relate to bona fide requirements of the job. Generally, questions about family planning and home responsibilities are also illegal. However, illegal questions do get asked in interviews. If you do want the offer, then three possible strategies are to:

• Answer honestly, explaining how your circumstances may be an asset, if possible.
  Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married?
  A: I will be getting married in August and my fiancée and I have agreed to focus our job searches on Atlanta. We are both very committed to our career goals and to working hard to support each other.

• State what you assume the employer hopes to learn by asking the question, and then answer in response to that assumption. Sometimes this gives the interviewer time to recognize that an illegal question has been asked.
  Q. I notice you have an engagement ring; when will you be getting married?
  A. I guess that, in asking about my wedding plans, you may be wondering if I am truly committed to a career, and more specifically, whether I would be likely to be able to move at the end of your training program.

• Sometimes it is possible to answer with humor or to simply deflect the question, if you are good at thinking on your feet.
  Q. Do you have any health problems?
  A. Yes – I’m a workaholic.

[These ideas are from Get Hired! Winning Strategies to Ace the Interview by Paul C. Green, p. 129.]

Questions for Employers

Your research of an organization or position may not provide all of the information that you will need before you take a job. Listed below are sample questions that you may want to ask during the interview to supplement your research. Avoid asking questions that begin with is, are, and do. These questions lead to yes/no answers. Instead begin your questions with who, what, when, where, why, or how:

• How would you describe the duties of the position?
• How would you describe a typical day and/or a typical week in this position?
• How much travel is normally expected?
• How frequently do you relocate professional employees?
• Why are you looking to fill this position? (Is it a newly created job? Did the previous employee leave? Why?)
• What are the things you like least/most about working here?
• Outside my department, with whom will I work?
• Who would my supervisor be and what is his/her management style?
• How does one advance in the organization?
• How often are performance reviews given?
• About how many individuals go through your training program each year?
• What is the average age of top management?
• Will you describe ____________ to me? (The personality of a ranking officer often reveals a lot about the company philosophy).
• How many people are you interviewing for this position?
• If I were extended an offer of employment, how soon after this would you like me to start?
• When can I expect to hear from you?

After the Interview

• Use the interview as a learning experience. Take notes on what you would like to improve for the future. If desired, review your experiences with a UCS Counselor.
• Send a follow-up note within forty-eight hours, to thank the interviewer and stress points in your background that qualify you for the position. Both can stress specific topics discussed during the interview. This “thanks” can be delivered via email or mail, the important thing is that you do it in a timely fashion.
• It is usually best not to accept a job offer on the spot; state your interest and appreciation for the offer and request a reasonable amount of time to consider it, e.g. several days, 1-2 weeks.
• Be sure to evaluate all aspects of the job before accepting it rather than afterward. Once you have accepted a position, the employer considers your commitment binding. If you have received an offer through On Grounds Interviewing, reneging on that offer seriously damages the University's reputation with the employer, and can contribute to a negative perception of future U.Va students who may wish to work with that company. Do your part and show employers that U.Va students are respectful and courteous.

Resources at UCS

1. Mock interviewing services, in which you can be interviewed by a UCS counselor, then critiqued. Make an appointment by calling 434-924-8900.
2. InterviewStream, a virtual interviewing resource available under MyUCS which will allow you to participate and record a mock interview via webcam.
3. Books on interviewing/job search skills, including:
   Get Hired! Winning Strategies to Ace the Interview, Green
   Knock 'Em Dead with Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions, Yate
   Interview for Success, Krannich & Krannich
   Ace the Technical Interview, Rothstein
   Hire the Best and Forget the Rest, Mercer
   Sweaty Palms; the Neglected Art of Being Interviewed, Medley
   The Harvard Guide to Consulting, Consentino (case interviewing information)
   Adams Job Interview Almanac, Adams
   Vault Guide.com to Case Interviewing
   101 Great Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions, Fry