

SPHTM INTERVIEWING GUIDE

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SPHTM Interviewing Guide

What is the purpose of interviewing?

An interview is a discussion between a candidate and a prospective employer. During an interview, the employer is trying to gauge whether the candidate is the best match for the position and assess the candidate's career goals, personality, and relevant skills and experiences. They are ultimately trying to figure out what the candidate wants, if their personality would be a good fit for the office culture, and if the candidate can perform the duties outlined in the job description.

Interview Formats

While there are certain expectations for what an interview looks like, there are actually many different formats of interviews. The type of interview a candidate will have is determined by the employer. While there will be overlap in structure and questions asked, see the table below that highlights the most common types of interviews.

Informational Interview	Informational Interviews are networking opportunities not designed to seek a job but to learn more about an industry and build your connections. See the SPHTM Networking Guide for more information.
Screening Call	Screening interviews are typically done over the phone by the Hiring Manager or HR Rep. These are short conversations to assure that you meet minimum requirements before moving forward.
Face to Face Interview	These are common but have slowed since COVID-19. Interviews take place in person between the candidate and the hiring manager and will assess your personality, skills, and goals. If you are uncomfortable with a face to face, you can request a Zoom or Skype call.
Panel Interview	Panel interviews are similar to face to face, but often include speaking to two or more individuals at the same time. Interviewers may represent different leadership levels within the company.
Phone Interview	These are lengthy telephone interviews that assess your personality, skills, and career goals. It may be offered for convenience or location purposes, but know that social cues are harder to read.
Zoom/Skype Interview	Interviews will take place over Skype or video stream rather than in person but will have the same structure as a phone or face to face interview. Be sure to test your technology before interviewing.
On Campus Interview	Employers will often come to Tulane SPHTM to interview students on campus. These are generally shorter conversations that could lead to a follow up in person interview. During COVID-19, these are likely to take place virtually.
Peer Interview	Peer interviews could be included in a virtual or face to face interview. These involve meeting with potential coworkers to assess your fit with the team and how you behave in social situations.

Dress for Success

If you are participating in an interview, it is important to dress appropriately and professionally according to standard expectations. This also applies to professional and networking events that you may be attending. Even if an organization dresses casually for day to day operations, err on the side of caution and dress professionally unless you are told otherwise by the employer. Dress professionally, conservatively, and cleanly. Even if you're interviewing virtually, dressing up will make you feel more professional and more prepared.

The safest attire for an interview is a dark, conservative, well fitting suit. If you don't have professional clothing, don't panic! Ask your friends or roommate if you can borrow something.

Quick Tips

- Pick out your outfit before the interview to make sure you have everything you need.
- Basic Interview Outfit: Dark suit pants or skirt, long sleeve collared button down or blouse. If wearing a tie, choose a soft pattern and match with a jacket, dress socks, and dress shoes. If wearing heels, choose a low to medium height, close toed and comfortable option.
- Jewelry and makeup should be minimal and natural.
- Avoid bright colors. Stick with dark and conservative clothing.
- Travel light! Try to bring only necessary items into the interview.
- Shoes should be scuff free and close toed. Heels should be low to medium height.
- Fingernails should be clean, even, and free of polish with the exception of clear or neutral colored.
- Avoid elaborate hairstyles. Keep your hair up if you play with it when you're nervous.
- Avoid too much perfume or aftershave.
- Unsure about your look? Consult SPHTM Career Services on your interview attire!

Interview Prep and Arrival

Before interviewing, it is important to research the company and person/people you will be interviewing with. Be prepared to answer questions like, "Why do you want to work here?" or "What do you find interesting about our organization?". If you are not prepared, it will show! If attending in person, bring extra copies of your printed resume and anything else that may be useful (writing sample, references, cover letter, etc.)

If participating in a virtual interview, log on to the call a few minutes early to account for any technical difficulties. If in person, be on time, but arrive no earlier than 10 minutes before your appointment. If you are earlier, wait in your car or a coffee shop. If the interview is taking place in a location you are unfamiliar with, do a test run the day before.

How do I prepare?



Know Yourself. Become an expert on yourself by knowing what you have to offer and being able to talk freely about yourself.

- *Exercise 1:* Make a list of your strengths, which could include natural abilities, skills, personality traits, and qualities and examples of when you have used these strengths. You can pick then which strengths relate to the position.
- *Exercise 2:* Review all of your past experiences, leadership activities, and other resume items in order to be able to talk about them in detail. Write down one accomplishment or positive attribute you achieved related to each resume item.

These exercises will allow you to draw examples in an interview and talk reflectively about your career history.

Example Question: What is one of your strengths?

Not convincing Answer: "Communication is one of my strengths."

Convincing Answer: "Communication is one of my strengths. For example, I interned last semester for a local health policy non-profit. I was responsible for holding community focus groups to determine health issues of concern for New Orleans residents. My supervisor observed me conducting the focus groups and said that I was effective in keeping conversation on track while listening to participants and asking great follow up questions."



Know the Employer. Equally important as knowing yourself is knowing the organization and employer that you are going to speak with so that you can communicate confidently and thoughtfully throughout the interview. Most employers have websites that you can research, but you should attempt to learn as much as you can about the organization beyond web review.

Research the following:

- Mission statements and organizational histories
- Key executives and staff
- Organizational structure
- Major initiatives
- Job description for the position
- Professional background of who you will meet with



Practice Makes Perfect. Familiarize yourself with common interview questions and practice answering out loud in front of a mirror. Practice taking about your skills and accomplishments from the previous exercises to help you speak articulately and convincingly even if you get an unanticipated question. Try not to write out your answers and memorize them. You might sound too rehearsed or get thrown off easily if the question is different from what you expected.

Prepare questions to ask the employer that are involved and cannot be found on the website. This could relate to daily expectations, office culture, or organization improvement goals.

The Interview Process

Most formal virtual or face to face interviews follow similar structural guidelines. In special cases, employers may ask you to come prepared with a presentation or case study evaluation, which would be fitted in the structure as well. The Process guidelines typically go as follows:

- **1. Greeting:** Upon arrival, remember to smile, be polite, keep eye contact, and greet everyone. First impressions are important! The greeting often includes a few minutes of small talk before any serious questioning.
- **2. Employer Questioning:** This will usually take up the bulk of your interview time. You will be asked questions about your experience, background, and interest in the position. While being questioned, remember to sit in your chair straight and maintain eye contact. Be yourself as much as possible and let your personality and voice shine in your answers.
- **3. Candidate Questioning:** At the end of employer questions, you will usually be asked if you have any questions. Always come prepared with questions and ask about the next steps and timeline in the interview process.
- **4. Closing:** It is appropriate to mention your enthusiasm again for the position and ask for contact information from everyone who interviewed you. Close with a smile and a handshake if in person.

Breaking Down Interview Questions

While no two interviews will look the same, there are some common types of questions that you can look at for during a formal interview. These include:



Experience Based

Experience based questions will be fairly straightforward. Employers will choose these questions based off of your resume with a purpose of evaluating and verifying your experiences.

Example: "What did you learn in your MPH program?" or "What was your role in your internship position at LPHI?"

Be sure to review your resume and be prepared to talk about any skills, experiences, or accomplishments.



Behavioral Based

Behavioral based questions are becoming much more common and will usually ask for examples of how you achieved a goal or about a time that you felt accomplished.

Example: "Describe a situation where you had to implement a policy you didn't agree with." or "Give me an example of a time you had to make a difficult decision."

If you have not experienced the situation an employer is asking about, talk about what you would do or a similar experience.



Case Study

Case studies will ask how you might handle and analyze a hypothetical situation.

Example: "What would you do if you overhear a coworker giving out bad information to a patient?" or "What would you do in your first month if given this position?"

While these can be difficult to prepare for, practice a few of these before the interview to get comfortable with thinking on your feet. If you have experienced something similar, you can talk about it.



Personality Based

Personality based questions might be goofy but the goal is to assess how your personality would fit in with the office culture.

Example: "If you were a raindrop, where would you fall?" or "Do you have any fun quirks?"

These are meant to be silly but they still require a response! If you need a minute to think about it, take a few seconds before you throw something out.



Opinion

Opinion questions could be about your self awareness. Employers may also want to gauge your thoughts on the industry.

Example: "What do you think is your greatest strength?" or "What do you believe to be the greatest public health issue facing New Orleans?"

Before the interview, do some research on current events in your industry.

Case Interviews

Certain employers, especially consulting firms, use a "case interview" technique to determine how well-suited you are to performing their type of work. Case interviews are used to measure your problem solving ability, your tolerance for ambiguity, and your communication skills.

Potential Components of Case Interviews

Brainteaser

- Can be little or complex logic puzzles
- Can involve quick math and give you a chance to demonstrate your conceptual skills
- Examples include:
 - What are the general trends in our industry?
 - What makes a product successful?
 - Why are man-hole covers round?

Estimation Question

- May be longer than brainteasers
- May require you to be adept in making assumptions and working with numbers, facts, and the unknown
- Examples include:
 - How many hospitals are in the United States?
 - How much does all the ice in a hockey rink weigh
 - Approximately how many pharmacies exist in the United States

Project Case

- May be written or verbal and take 45 minutes or longer
- Practice is important; some firms will have sample cases
- Examples include:
 - Your client is a mid-sized hospital chain. How would you develop a pricing strategy for the client?
 - A U.S. company is expanding internationally. If its labor costs are competitive, what issues might influence its decision?

What Employers Look for

1. Enthusiasm and ability to think out loud and brainstorm
2. Listening skills, pace of your response, ability to restate the problem, focus
3. Use of sketches, charts, diagrams to describe your logic
4. Ability to summarize final recommendations in a clear and concise manner
5. Confidence

Common Mistakes

1. Ignoring cues of the interviewer; asking open ended questions throughout the entire interview
2. Making poor assumptions and being disorganized
3. Spending too much time on smaller aspects and not referring back to the big picture
4. Not responding well to criticism or questions about your assumptions or your solutions

Additional Resources

1. Practice cases on the websites of consulting firms
2. www.vault.com
3. www.casequestions.com
4. <http://www.acethecase.com>
5. Case in Point by Marc Cosentino



Formulating Answers (S.T.A.R. Method)

Interview questions, especially Behavioral, Experience Based, or Case Study questions tend to center around themes of accomplishments, leadership, dealing with conflict, initiative, and commitment.

Before interviewing, go through the job description one more time to identify examples from your past experience that relate to the position description. For each question, your answers should be framed as if you are telling a story. To do this, it is encouraged to use the S.T.A.R. Method to provide employers with context, concrete examples, and results. This method also allows you to have a beginning and an end to your question/story without fear of rambling.

Situation

Describe the situation at hand. Where were you working? When? What was your role there and why were you in the situation?

Task

What was the task or obstacle at hand?

Action

What did you do to complete the task? What was your direct role?

Result

What happened as a result of your actions?

Reflection (bonus R)

After going through this experience, is there anything you would do differently in the future? Did you learn anything about yourself?

Example: Describe a situation in which you had to work as part of a team.

Situation

Last year in the fall, I worked as an intern at the Louisiana Office of Public Health in the Family and Planning Office. My main responsibility was to conduct a needs assessment in the 9th Ward Neighborhood.

Task

To conduct an effective assessment, I had to seek advice and collaborate as a team with all stakeholders and community members.

Action

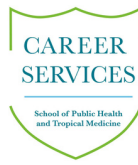
I created a canvassing campaign and assessment survey. I also recruited volunteers to work with me in the neighborhoods. While I held a leadership role, I made sure to ask for feedback from the team.

Result

Because of this team campaign, my office was able to assess the need for additional free reproductive items and implement the change.

Reflection (bonus R)

I feel that this experience has allowed me to open myself up to leadership roles and be able to effectively work in a team.



Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your resume.
- Would you describe your most recent job responsibilities, highlighting the most difficult and most satisfying?
- What accomplishments are you most proud of in your present job?
- What unique strengths would you bring to this position?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What two or three things would be most important to you in your job?
- What are your long-term goals and objectives for the next five years?
- What are your short term goals for the next year?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- What motivates you in a position?
- Can you give me some examples of your problem solving skills?
- Would you share your most significant career frustrations to date?
- What do you do to unwind from a stressful day?
- How would your co-workers describe you?
- Why did you decide to seek a position with our organization?
- What would you like to accomplish in your first month of the position?
- Define your ideal job.
- Do you have management experience?
- Can you describe your management style or philosophy of management?
- Are you experienced in working under pressure and meeting deadlines? If so can you give me some examples?
- Why are you leaving your current role?
- What do you think of your previous company?
- Why should we hire you?
- Describe a situation in which you worked as part of a team?
- Describe a situation when you had to enforce a policy you didn't agree with?
- If you were a raindrop, where would you fall?
- Have you ever not gotten along with someone at work? How did you handle that situation?
- What do you know about our company?
- What are your salary expectations?
- What was your salary history with your previous employer?
- Do you have any questions for us?

The Salary Question

It is typically frowned upon to ask about salary during your initial interview, but the employer may bring it up. The best thing to say at that point is that you are open to negotiating upon offer. If the employer presses you for a dollar amount, you can either give a salary range or say that you would like to defer any conversation about salary until after the company has had an opportunity to evaluate whether you are the best fit for them.

Salary is usually a topic of conversation during the second or third interview when you have had the opportunity to evaluate the position and responsibilities.

Quick Tips



- **Know the market value for your skills.** Research salary ranges for the position you want. Use resources like Glassdoor, www.salary.com, www.careerbliss.com, or LinkedIn salary features.
- **Look at your financial situation.** Find out how much you need to make to cover your bills. Remember to include increased living expenses for expensive cities.
- **If you are asked about your salary requirements,** you can always say salary is negotiable. This will "buy you time". If you give a salary range, make sure it meets your living standards and market value.
- **If the salary offer is too low,** be prepared to make your case why you deserve a higher salary. If the position requires a Bachelor's and you have a Master's, make the argument.
- **Wait to negotiate** a final figure until a job offer is on the table.
- **Look at the whole package, not just salary.** Health benefits, flex time, vacation, parking, and professional development should all be considered.
- **Stay professional and conversational.**
- **New graduates are often eager to take whatever salary is offered.** Expect to start out in an entry level job, but also expect to be paid what your education and skills merit.
- **Conversations about salary should ideally be discussed over the phone instead of email.** Tone can sometimes be misunderstood over email messages.

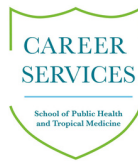
Virtual Interviews

Zoom and Skype interviews are becoming the norm. While it may seem less daunting than face to face, these can be tough, especially if you don't have visual or social cues. Here are some tips to remember.

- Emerging research suggests that employers have a hard time differentiating the quality of a candidate from the quality of their technology used for the virtual interview.
- Find a quiet, private spot where you have good internet connectivity and good lighting.
- You have the advantage of having notes, but try not to seem over rehearsed or rustle papers.
- Wear professional clothes to stay in a serious mindset.
- Some people find that standing while talking on the phone keeps them engaged and enthusiastic.

Additional Skype/Zoom tips:

- Test out your equipment beforehand. Use a desktop if possible, or make sure your laptop is fully charged.
- Dress as you would for an in person interview.
- Be aware of your background. Create a professional background or use a Zoom background.
- Practice looking at the camera and not your own image!



Thank You and Follow Up

Continue to make a good impression by writing a thank you to everyone you met with during the interview process. These are most commonly email messages. Send within 24 hours, and keep it short and to the point. This is not another cover letter. However, you should take the opportunity to thank the employer for their time, reiterate your interest, mention a particular aspect of the discussion that was interesting to you, and provide any additional information that was asked for.

If you do not get a response by the expected timeline discussed in the interview, wait a few days and then call or email to check in on the application and reaffirm your interest. One call is sufficient.

If you learn that you are not selected, consider writing a letter to thank the employer for their consideration and to ask for any feedback. This demonstrates professionalism and interest in future opportunities.

Sample Email Communication

Date: August 12th, 2022

Subject: Thank you!

Dear Mrs. Clancy,

I want to thank you and your team sincerely for taking the time to meet with me yesterday and speak about your organization.

The interview only furthered my interest in the Program Analyst position, specifically the flexibility of creating my own assessment structures and guides. Thank you for your continued interest in me as a candidate, and I believe it would be a great fit.

I look forward to hearing from you about the position. In the meantime, let me know if there is any additional information I can provide.

Sincerely,

Michelle Johnson B.S. Public Health, 2022 | Tulane University SPHTM

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