

Article Source: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/college-student-interview-tips>

5 Best Interview Tips for College Students

Hey, everybody, and welcome. My name is Jenn, and I'm a certified career coach here at Indeed with over 10 years of experience working with different job seekers, I've personally worked with hundreds of people from a variety of different industries, including students who are seeking their first full-time roles.

So if you're in college and you're looking to ace an interview for your first job, internship or maybe a work-study opportunity, stick around. Because I'm going to be sharing my top five interview tips for college students. These will show your interviewer that you're confident, prepared and ready for the role.

Tip 1: Do the research

So first up, do the research. Researching is a vital part of the interview process.

It allows you to connect your skills and experience with the goals of the company. And when you're researching, you're going to want to check multiple sources. Because certain websites are better for finding particular types of information than others.

And as you continue your search, be sure to **check out the company's website**. If researching a company is new to you, try to spend about 30 minutes looking at the career pages if the website has one. Here, you can find detailed job descriptions and more information about different role offerings.

It's also smart to check out a company's about us or product and service offering pages to find out more about what the mission and goal of the company really is. You know that you've conducted really good research when you can speak about how one of your personal goals aligns to those of the company, or when you can talk about how your skill set would complement or even better enhance their current service offerings to customers. During the interview, show off all of the research that you've done by recalling the details that align with your personal goals.

For example, if you see that the company is active in the community, mention that you have a desire to work with a community-focused organization when they ask you, why do you want to work here? And finally, when you're researching, ask around. If you've been referred to this role by a friend or family member, ask them what it's really like to work at that company.

Using your personal connections is a smart way to find honest points of views about what it's really like to work at a company. And if you're looking for more tips on researching companies, be sure to check out the career guide article listed right here for more in-depth information.

OK, next tip.

Tip 2: Make a good impression

How you present yourself the day of the interview can significantly impact your chance of success, and presenting yourself well includes things, like your attire, your punctuality and your application materials.

In terms of attire: Look at the company website for indications for how their employees are dressing, and aim to dress at least one step above that. A really good practice is to dress business casual at a bare minimum.

Next step: Be on time. I know this can be easier said than done, but the key to success is for planning to expect the unexpected. So, for example, if you're interviewing by video, be sure to test your check the date before. This includes your microphone, your audio, your camera, and even checking your internet connection. Doing this the day before allows you to spot any potential issues before the start of your interview. And if you're interviewing on-site, be sure to arrive at least 15 minutes early.

Bonus tip: Note that your interview can start the moment that you arrive. So be friendly to any receptionists that you talk to, or smile at the people that you meet while you're waiting for your turn to be called.

Next: Come to the interview prepared with materials that you need to be successful. This can include bringing multiple copies of your resume just in case the interviewer asks for them or if you'd like to have it on hand for reference. And it could also include bringing a pen and paper or any other materials that you'd like to take notes.

Tip 3: Know how to answer common interview questions

Tell Me About Yourself

One of the first questions that you can expect to be asked is "Tell me about yourself". In short, this is a two to three-minute professional summary that briefly explains where you are in your career and where you're looking to go.

What are recruiters really looking for in an answer when they ask, tell me about yourself? Job seekers often ask me, recruiters have read my **resume**. Don't they know this stuff?

Long story short, yes. In most cases, your resume has been reviewed. But in some cases, it probably only received a quick read. Plus, the recruiting process can be very disjointed. The person that's conducting the interview may not be the recruiter who selected you. So in short, it's wise to assume that your interviewer doesn't know the details of your professional history.

In any case, when an interviewer asks you, tell me about yourself, they don't really want to hear about your resume. Instead, they're interested in learning about your professional journey and how your skills are suited for the role that they have.

To craft a strong answer to the question, aim to create a compelling story. So as with writing any other story, you want to start by creating a good outline. When structuring your response, I recommend using the **present, past, future** format.

First, talk about your current situation and goals. Then talk about how your past experience is useful for this job. Just pick one or two. Don't pick too many, but don't have zero either. End by talking about your future goals and how this job relates to those future goals.

Here is an example from your teacher:

Present: *Currently, I am a high school student at XYZ School, and I am looking for a summer job to gain working experience. I love coffee and Starbucks, which is why I want to apply to be a cashier at Starbucks.*

Past: *I know that a cashier should be a very friendly person who can solve customer problems. In my past school projects, I always get along very well with my classmates. We often go to Starbucks for our team meetings too. Whenever people in my group have conflict, I can listen to everyone patiently and think of a reasonable solution for everyone to be happy.*

Future: *In the future, I hope to study business at the University of Toronto, and I believe working at Starbucks for the summer will give me valuable experience for my studies.*

Behavioral-based interview questions

Behavioral interview questions are interview questions that assess your actions and reactions in a given professional setting or situation. They often help employers determine your skills and qualities, such as problem-solving, customer service, critical thinking and communication.

The most effective answers to these questions are structured with the STAR format:

- **Situation:** Describe a situation in your work experience pertinent to the question.
- **Task:** What was your task in this situation?
- **Action:** What action did you take to address the situation?
- **Result:** What was the outcome of your action?

Here are some common behavioral interview questions and sample responses. Discover what purpose each serves and what skills and qualities they test. Use these to craft your own effective answers using the STAR method:

1. Give me an example of a time you had a conflict with one of your fellow team members. How did you handle it?

This question is likely to come up during an interview for a position in a team environment. It aims to assess your conflict-management skills and determine how you value your coworkers. In your answer, consider discussing a time when you and a coworker disagreed on how to solve a problem or faced personal differences.

Example: *"At LabCorp Inc., my team was responsible for a project with a short deadline. I had one view of how it should be accomplished, which seemed to have support within the team. However, one person*

disagreed and was causing tension as a result. I knew for us to complete the project in time, I had to find a way to bring this person on board. So I took him to lunch, talked with him one-on-one, and tried to understand his point of view.

I managed to find a compromise that we could take to the rest of the team. It was not exactly what he wanted, but he said he would be OK with it. The team was agreeable, and we worked together to get the project done on time.”

2. Tell me about a time you made a mistake that affected a customer. How did you resolve the problem?

This question is for positions that involve client- or customer-facing roles. You can use this question to demonstrate your customer service, communication and critical thinking skills under pressure. You can also use it to showcase your integrity and ability to admit and correct your mistakes.

Example: “I was on the wait staff of Coppa’s Restaurant when a customer at one of my tables ordered our special salad. She said she did not want peanuts because she is allergic to them, but I neglected to inform the kitchen staff.

When I brought the dish out, thankfully, she saw the problem before she started eating. Naturally, she was very upset. As the waiter, it was my responsibility to satisfy the customer. I apologized to her and, to make up for my mistake, I did not charge for the salad but instead offered her a coupon toward her next meal, which she gladly accepted.”

3. Describe an occasion when you failed at something. What did you learn?

This is another very common behavioral interview question that assesses your integrity. It’s also a chance to discuss your potential weaknesses and how you plan or have begun to improve upon them.

Example: “At Bright Star Shipping, we had the opportunity to bid for a multi-million dollar contract. My team was tasked with putting together a sales presentation. We had a week to prepare it, but we allowed other projects to take up our time. As a result, we ended up rushing to complete the presentation, and it showed. There were typos in the text, the graphics looked amateurish and there were even some factual errors. The client was not impressed, and we lost the contract.

After that experience, we all learned to better prioritize projects, and try to have other work re-assigned when we need to focus attention on one thing.”

Tip 4: Draw from all of your experience

One of the common misconceptions that I find when working with college students is the thought that the experience that they share has to be from full, paid time, professional work. And really, this isn't the case. In an interview, be sure to draw from experiences, like work that you did with **student clubs and organizations**.

It could also be any **volunteer work** that you received school credit for, or that choose to do on your own, or any kind of **community involvement work**.

The value of the stories you choose to highlight is not whether or not you were paid to do the work. It's a skill set you're able to demonstrate. So choose stories that highlight skills, like customer service experience, teamwork, collaboration, and leadership. And be sure to use the STAR method that we just discussed.

Tip 5: Ask thoughtful questions

When there are about five to 10 minutes left in an interview, you'll often be asked if you have any questions for them. It's smart to come prepared with two to three questions that you could ask that will help you gain a better understanding of the role or the company.

Some example questions you can ask are:

- What does a typical workday look like for somebody in this role?
- How is success measured
- What are some skills that a successful person in this role typically has?

In addition to taking the time to learn more about the company, asking questions allows you to clarify any gray areas you have about whether or not the role or the company could be a good fit for you.

And as a good rule of thumb, **always keeps the questions professional**. Unless the interviewer has opened up the conversation to include hobbies or outside activities, it's best just to keep the questions about the company or the role.

Bonus tip: Always follow up

This shows a commitment to the role and professionalism. And as a bonus, it keeps you on top of the hiring manager's mind.

Now, there are two types of follow-ups that you should send. The first is the thank you note, and the second is a follow-up email to send after the interview has passed. And if you're going to send a thank-you note, be sure to send it within 24 to 48 hours after the end of your interview.

Homework Questions

1. How do you know when you have done enough research on the company you want to work for?
2. How can you make a good first impression in the interview?
3. How should we answer the question, "Tell me about yourself?"
4. What are behavioral-based interview questions? Give some examples.
5. What is the STAR method to answering questions? Give an example.
6. What are some thoughtful questions you can ask the interviewer?
7. What does it mean to "follow up" after the interview?

