

# The Gamecock's Guide to INTERVIEW PREP



**Luck is what happens when  
preparation meets opportunity.**

— attributed to Seneca

## MAKE A STRONG FIRST IMPRESSION

### LOOK AND DRESS LIKE A PROFESSIONAL.

- 92 percent of employers surveyed said that appearance influenced their opinions about candidates.
- Wear appropriate business attire or a suit that is properly fitted.
- Make sure your shoes are clean/polished and attire is well pressed with no stains or wrinkles.
- Groom yourself appropriately (showered, clean hair, clean fingernails, etc.).
- Keep jewelry and perfume/cologne to a minimum.
- Visit the Gamecock CommUnity Shop on campus in the Carolina Coliseum to utilize free professional clothing for interviews!

### SHAKE HANDS FIRMLY & MAINTAIN EYE CONTACT WITH THE INTERVIEWER.

- A firm, confident handshake sets the tone. It shows you're poised, professional, and ready.
- Demonstrate active listening by looking at the speaker.
- Don't be caught looking at the floor, the room, etc.
- Silence your cell phone, watch, or other devices and put them away to avoid any distractions.

### ARRIVE AT LEAST TEN MINUTES EARLY.

- Account for possible traffic or any parking needs.
- Make sure you have adequate directions. If needed, drive to the location in advance to determine how long the trip takes and to make certain you know where you are going.
- Confirm time, day, and location of your interviews, as well as who will interview you beforehand.

### INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND INDICATE WHO YOU ARE THERE TO SEE.

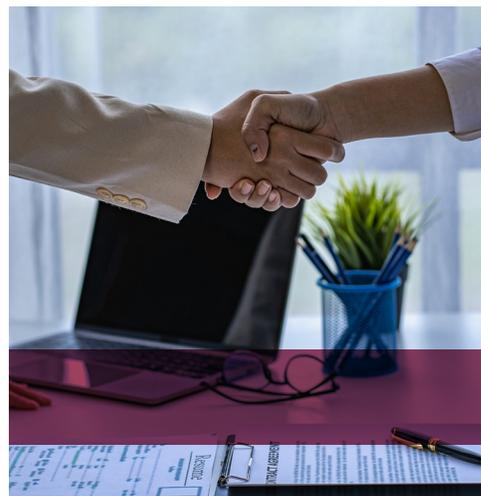
- Remember the interview starts the moment you enter the door and doesn't end until you leave.

### KNOW HOW TO PRONOUNCE THE INTERVIEWER'S NAME.

- Repeat their name when you greet them to help you remember it.

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**Career Center**

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

## VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

### PREPARING FOR A VIRTUAL INTERVIEW

Before you jump into the interview:

- Confirm which link you're supposed to use. The employer should provide the link (Zoom, Teams, etc.) in the scheduling description.
- Log in early to make sure that your webcam, microphone, and speakers or headset are working and that your internet connection is stable.
- Make sure you're in a quiet, well-lit space with a blank background or utilize a blurred background to eliminate distractions.
- Confirm your browser is supported by the video platform. It is recommended to not use a mobile device for virtual interviews.
- If you're using a mobile device: Handshake supports mobile, but double-check that the app is up-to-date and your device meets requirements.
- Make sure you join on time, camera on (unless specified), and you're prepared with notes and questions.

## ON-CAMPUS INTERVIEWS

Want to connect directly with employers? On-campus interviews make it easy. Meet recruiters, learn about companies you're interested in, and explore real job and internship opportunities — all right here at USC.

### HOW IT WORKS

1. **Log in to Handshake.**  
Search for on-campus interview opportunities and check application deadlines (most are about four weeks before the interview date).
2. **Apply through Handshake.**  
Upload your resume and submit your application.
3. **Watch for updates.**  
If selected, Handshake will notify you so you can schedule your interview time.

### WHAT TO KNOW

- Dress in business professional attire.
- Review the Career Center's Handshake [No Show & Cancellation Policy](#).



## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

### INVESTIGATE THE EMPLOYER.

- Google the organization's products, services, benefits, philosophy, facilities, mission statement, operating budget, revenue, and anything else you can find.
- Research the company culture and history by trying to talk with contacts or your network inside the organization.
- Research the latest trends (e.g., salary ranges) of your intended profession.

### UNDERSTAND THE POSITION FOR WHICH YOU ARE INTERVIEWING.

- What qualifications does this position require?
- What are the duties and responsibilities for this position?
- How do your skills fulfill the requirements/transfer to this position?

### PREPARE FOR QUESTIONS.

- Identify your experiences, skills, and characteristics related to the position.
- Formulate answers to commonly asked interview questions.
- Know how to identify and respond to the hidden agenda of trick questions.
- In addition, make a list of questions you will ask the employer at the end.
- Analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Be able to state them clearly.

### COMPILE RELEVANT INFORMATION.

- Some organizations will ask you to fill out an application in addition to providing your resume.
- This may require information such as past addresses, phone numbers, salary history, supervisors, etc.
- Take extra copies of your resume to an in-person interview, as well as a nice pen, notepad or folder.
- If appropriate, take your portfolio.
- Develop a brief overview of who you are and your professional/academic background as it relates to the position for which you are interviewing.
- Identify why you want the job. Practice your response.

### PRACTICE!

- It is essential to rehearse answering questions prior to a successful interview.
- Practice your skills using [Big Interview](#), an online practice interview service that allows you to record yourself with a webcam answering practice questions, access a question library with instructions for how to answer different types, and watch relevant videos with tips.
- The Career Center offers face-to-face practice interviews both in-person and virtually for you to practice responses, receive constructive feedback to assist in developing stronger interviewing skills, and gain confidence.
- Schedule an Interview Prep appointment through [Handshake](#).

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

### VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Use proper grammar. Do not say “um,” “like,” and “you know” when speaking.
- Pause for a moment before answering to formulate an organized response.
- Answer questions thoroughly by using examples and stating results.
- Express yourself succinctly and clearly. Don't monopolize the conversation or ramble.
- Make sure you answer the question asked. If a question is multifaceted, be sure to address each part.

### NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

- If appropriate, shake hands firmly with the interviewer and anyone else to whom you are introduced. Keep in mind that not all cultures participate with this gesture, so pay attention to the employer and follow their lead.
- Make eye contact when speaking to someone.
- Be aware of your posture at all times—stand tall, sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair during the interview. Crossing your legs at your ankles is a comfortable way to sit professionally.
- Beware of talking with your hands too much — perhaps fold your hands in your lap.

### YOUR ATTITUDE

- Show confidence, interest, assertiveness, and enthusiasm. Do not be arrogant, aggressive, or immature.
- Be yourself and honest in all your answers.
- Smile, relax, act friendly instead of stiff and staunch.
- Be courteous, polite, and respectful.
- Allow the interviewer to lead the interview.

## YOUR PAST

- Don't be evasive. While past failures need not be volunteered, don't try to cover them up. If you do have a "blemish" in your past, simply explain the circumstances around it without giving excuses or blaming others. Discuss what you learned from the situation and how you overcame it.
- Never speak poorly about former supervisors, colleagues, or employers. If you were unhappy, simply explain that it was not a good fit.

## BE ATTENTIVE

- When introduced to others, remember their names.
- Don't ask questions about information that was already addressed in the interview.
- Ask for a business card at the close of the interview to ensure that you have proper contact information.

## NEGOTIATING SALARY

- The employer should be the one to introduce this topic.
- It generally will be discussed during a second interview or at the time of the job offer.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Thank interviewers for their time.
- Indicate that you look forward to hearing from them soon and welcome them to contact you if they need any additional information.
- Send a thank-you note/email within 24 hours reiterating your interest in the position.
- Follow-up promptly by providing any credentials, references, transcripts, or samples of work that might have been requested by the interview.



## LEARN INTERVIEW QUESTION STYLES

### DIRECTED

- Has definite structure.
- The interviewer will generally have an itemized agenda, as well as a list of specific questions they want to ask you.

### NON-DIRECTED

- Less structured.
- The interviewer may ask very broad, general questions and not take charge.
- Sometimes, the fun, tacky, trick questions fall under this category, such as: "If you could eat one last food for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?" or "If you were a kitchen utensil, which would you be and why?"

### TRADITIONAL

- May seem more general in nature.
- "What do you think about...?"
- "Do you...?"
- "Have you ever...?"

### SCENARIO-CASE

- Designed to evaluate your probable performance or technical knowledge by asking hypothetical "what would you do if...?" questions.
- A specific problem or situation will be given, and you will be asked for solutions or recommendations.
- Your problem-solving abilities and thought process may be equally or more important than your response to the question.

### ETHICAL DILEMMA

- Determines how you would respond to an ethical situation.
- Your responses may be used to assess your work ethic and/or if you hold the same philosophies or values as the organization.

### STRESS

- Not as common as others
- Used for positions where it is important to determine how candidates react to and hold up under pressure (such as law enforcement).
- Often include a tough scenario or ethical dilemma, particularly no-win questions.
- Frequently include timed or problem-solving tasks.

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING & USING THE S.T.A.R. METHOD

Behavioral interviews assess how past experiences predict future performance through specific examples of your skills and behaviors. Apply the STAR Method to structure your responses.

## THE STAR METHOD

This technique structures responses to behavioral interview questions. Use the listed percentages as time guides, keeping answers to 1-2 minutes. Response should be impactful and concise, yet detailed enough to highlight your relevant skills and abilities.

<b>S</b> SITUATION	<b>T</b> TASK	<b>A</b> ACTION	<b>R</b> RESULT
Describe a specific scenario, problem or challenge that you experienced.	Explain your specific role or responsibility and the ideas you used to resolve the problem or situation.	Discuss specific steps you took and obstacles you overcame to complete the task and/or solve the problem.	Highlight positive outcomes, goals attained, accomplishments, valuable lessons and/or key takeaways.
20%	10%	60%	10%

## INTERVIEW TIPS

**Focus your responses on actual behaviors and experiences.**

Interviewers can detect when you're not being truthful, which may make you appear untrustworthy and may not match up with your application materials. So be honest!

**Describe your role in past situations.** Using "we" statements in examples of teamwork or collaboration can make it difficult for an employer to have a clear understanding of what *your* skills are. Focus your response on how you contributed to the outcomes of the team efforts by using "I" statements.

**Provide specific examples of your actions.** Avoid giving generalized answers. Share specific, clear examples that give your interviewer insight to your potential.

**Reveal your skills related to the job.** When asked questions relating directly to the responsibilities of the role, refer to the job description to hone in on what skills are important. Give examples where you demonstrate mastery of those skills.

## PREPARING YOUR RESPONSES

Use the STAR method worksheet to prepare 3-5 experiences in a bulleted outline. Highlight your relevant skills for the role.

In responses, identify and include relevant technical and transferable skills. Select scenarios that reflect favorable behaviors or actions. Practice responses showcasing skills from coursework, jobs, internships/co-ops, study abroad, volunteering, and/or extracurriculars.

When applicable, highlight specific measurable accomplishments or significant challenges you successfully navigated to demonstrate your positive impact.

## TIME TO PRACTICE

Schedule a mock behavioral interview with your Career Coach or use the Career Center's online practice interview tool for immediate AI-powered feedback on content, delivery, tone and non-verbal communication.

Connect with USC alumni on the [USC Mentorship Hub](#) or [LinkedIn](#) who are willing to provide insight on your target company or profession of interest.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Reflect on what went well and what could be improved. Celebrate wins and make notes to prepare for future interviews.

Email interviewer(s) within 24 hours to thank them for their time and reiterate your interest. Email multiple interviewers individually. Include reasons you think you'd be a great fit for the role.

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING EXAMPLE USING THE S.T.A.R. METHOD

*"Tell me about your experience working in a fast-paced environment?"*

Here's how the interviewer gauges your response to stress and deadlines. How do you manage your time, set priorities and work with others? As is the case with most behavioral questions, it is asking for a story.

**SITUATION** "When I was working for the university's catering office, I was responsible for booking reception rooms for special events. A woman called two weeks before her daughter's wedding to cancel her reservation for the reception room. A death had occurred in the family and the wedding was postponed until further notice."

**TASK** "The customer was obviously very upset about the unfortunate circumstances, and I knew it was my job to carry out the logistical procedures for canceling a room, as well as to put her mind at ease about the reception arrangements."

**ACTION** "Although deposits are generally non-refundable due to loss of revenue, I felt certain it was not too late to book another event, so I checked with my manager regarding the possibility of refunding her deposit. We were able to rebook the room with another event, return her full deposit, and I assured her we could reschedule the reception whenever the family was ready."

**RESULT** "The customer wasn't expecting to get any money back and was pleasantly surprised, as well as relieved, that canceling the reception plans wasn't a hassle. She wrote a very nice thank-you letter to my manager commending the way in which I handled the situation, and my manager complimented me for taking initiative with this customer."

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING WORKSHEET: THE STAR METHOD

Use the STAR Method to respond effectively to behavioral questions.

**S:** Describe the **Situation** you experienced.

**T:** Explain the **Task** and how you solved it.

**A:** Discuss the **Actions** taken, steps followed and obstacles overcome.

**R:** Highlight the **Results**, outcomes, goals attained, accomplishments, etc.



**Use the STAR formula to prepare examples for your interview.**

Skill	Your STAR Story	
<b>Teamwork/ Collaboration</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Decision Making</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Creativity/ Innovation</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Communication</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Prioritization/ Time Management</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Integrity/ Honesty</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Leadership/ Initiative</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Analytical/ Problem Solving</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Flexibility/ Adaptability</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Goal Setting/ Achievement</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Persuasion</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:
<b>Conflict Management</b>	Situation:	Action:
	Task:	Result:

# SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## ANALYTICAL/PROBLEM SOLVING

- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- Give me an example of when you identified potential problems and resolved the situation.

## COMMUNICATION

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills to get a point across.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to handle an irate customer.

## CREATIVITY/INNOVATION

- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way.
- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you developed/implemented.
- Tell me about a time when you created a new process or program that was considered risky.

## DECISION MAKING

- Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make within the past year.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed.
- Discuss a time when you had to make a quick decision.

## GOAL SETTING

- Give me an example of an important goal that you have set and tell me how you reached it.
- Tell me about a goal that you set and did not reach.

## FLEXIBILITY/ADAPTABILITY

- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control.
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to be tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.

## INTERPERSONAL

- Give me an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual and how you dealt with it.

## LEADERSHIP/INITIATIVE

- Tell me about a time when you were able to provide a co-worker with recognition for the work they performed.
- Describe a leadership situation that you would handle differently if you had it to do over again.
- Tell me about a time when you were in a leadership role and were faced with resistance.
- Tell me about a time when you showed initiative and took the lead in a team project.

## ORGANIZATION/TIME-MANAGEMENT

- Describe a situation that required you to do several things at the same time.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you were unable to complete a project on time.

## WEAKNESSES

- Describe for me a time when you failed at something and how you responded.
- Tell me about a time when you did not live up to your full potential.

## TEAMWORK

- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team and a member was not doing their share of the work.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work in a team in which the members did not get along.

## INTEGRITY/HONESTLY

- Tell me about a time when you challenged the status quo to do what you felt was right.
- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a problem that challenged fairness or ethical issues.

Ready to learn more and practice interview skills for a job interview or graduate school? For more examples of interview questions and tips on how to respond to them, visit [Big Interview](#) and register for an account with your USC email.

# SALARY NEGOTIATION

## REASONS TO NEGOTIATE SALARY

- Your skills, experience and education are worth more than the offered amount.
- The pay range for the position is less than the industry average.
- The cost of living is higher in the area where the job is, and the salary does not reflect that.
- You have been made multiple offers with similar salary and benefits packages.

## KNOW YOUR VALUE

- Evaluate your personal salary requirements. BE HONEST! How much do you need to earn?
- Find out what your skills and level of experience are worth in the job market (i.e., internships, co-ops, volunteer and part-time work, education level, etc.).
  - Speak to staff at the Career Center regarding your experience level and estimated market averages based on experience
- Research career fields and salary averages for various occupations. Check out the following resources:
  - [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
  - [O\\*Net](#)
  - [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
  - [NACE salary survey](#)
  - [Gamecock GradStats](#)
- Investigate cost of living adjustments to salary based on employment location.
- Develop a salary range with a high, low, and middle range. Make sure your range is not to spread out.
- Examine the company's hiring history to find out what they have historically paid/advertised for this position and the skill/experience level required.
  - This area is a little more challenging to research. You may be able to conduct informational interviews or if you know someone at the company, speak to them.
  - Many companies' websites offer job postings and may list salary ranges and job descriptions of the positions for which they are hiring.

## WHEN TO NEGOTIATE

- Ideally, the best time is AFTER AN OFFER IS MADE by the employer. Discussing salary before an offer is made may screen you out of the job if your requirements are too high, or it may lock you into a low salary. It can also make a poor first impression.
- When asked what your salary requirements are by a potential employer during an interview, INDICATE A RANGE, not a specific dollar amount (i.e., "Based on the industry average and my level of experience, I am seeking between \$43,000 and \$47,000").
  - This range should be slightly higher than the low end of your range. For example, low range \$40k, mid-range \$43k, and high range \$46k based on industry research and assessment of self.
- Occasionally, salary requirements will be discussed prior to an offer, and it is important to handle each situation with confidence. While these are not negotiations, they can influence how later negotiations may go. Here are some examples of situations where salaries may be discussed and suggestions on how to handle these discussions:
  - When responding to an ad or application- Indicate "open" or "negotiable" under salary requirements.
  - If asked for a salary history, you can indicate "competitive" unless it asks for specific salary dollars. If asked for specific salary dollars you can list total compensation package (i.e., base salary, bonuses, medical, profit sharing, etc.). Be aware that most companies verify past salaries with previous employers: therefore, it is important to be truthful.
  - At networking events, discuss with others what your interests are (not specific jobs but more general positions) and get their opinions on salary ranges for those positions.
  - When dealing with employment agencies, be honest about your expectations and salary history.

# HOW TO NEGOTIATE

## LET THE EMPLOYER GO FIRST WITH THE OFFER

Maintain an honest yet non-emotional response based on your research.

- First, restate the offer - then “digest” it. Your body language should demonstrate thought, not emotion. If it is less than you expect, you can indicate that it is lower than you expected based on your research. Be prepared to verify how and where you researched!
- Then, counter their offer with your researched response and desired range. It is very important to remain objective, positive, and courteous during this conversation. They will respond with what they are able or not able to offer. Sometimes this may involve speaking to another person in the company and getting back to you.
- Know that employers will not usually rescind an original offer because of your counteroffer. In rare instances, however, employers may be forced to rescind based on current corporate circumstances such as downsizing, mergers, acquisitions etc. The employer should return with a response which, hopefully, meets your needs; otherwise, they will discuss why they are unwilling to negotiate and state that the offer stands.

## SALARY IS NOT THE ONLY AREA TO NEGOTIATE

When the employer responds with a “no” to the above scenario or in certain jobs/industry when salary is non-negotiable from the start, know that you have other options to negotiate.

- These include bonuses, salary reviews (consider timing, basis, and percentage) health, dental, life and disability insurance, retirement or pension plans, overtime policies, profit sharing plans, vacation and sick days, tuition reimbursement, employee discount, company car/expense accounts, termination contract, stock options, relocation/moving expenses, professional memberships, certifications (i.e., computer programming) and sign on bonuses.

- The position and company will dictate what is offered and what you can negotiate. Sometimes Human Resources departments can offer information regarding specific benefits and what options are available, then you can come up with some suggestions to make your offer more appealing.
- You may try to negotiate the timing of your first salary increase. Instead of receiving your first increase at one year, you may negotiate to be evaluated in six months and receive the same percentage allowable at that time based on your performance.

## OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

You may hear the following objections. Here are some methods for overcoming these:

- “Not within the budget” — communicate your VALUE to the employer.
- “Others in the organization with similar qualifications and experience aren’t paid that much” — emphasize fair compensation for expected performance based on VALUE.
- “Your salary history does not justify such an increase” — stress that you expect to be compensated for the VALUE of your work and what you expect to achieve within the organization.

## KNOW WHEN TO SAY WHEN

If you feel like the employer is getting frustrated with your proposals or states that is all they can do for you, stop, and evaluate what is on the table.

- You do not want to give the impression that you are impatient or greedy.
- When the company comes back to you with their final offer, be prepared to evaluate the offer and decide.

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# THE FINAL OFFER

## TAKE TIME TO EVALUATE

One to two days is usually acceptable.

- Weigh your options and evaluate your total compensation package (salary, benefits, incentives, allowances, etc.).
- Ensure you are clear on specific duties, responsibilities, and performance expectations.

## GET THE OFFER IN WRITING

Once both parties have confirmed an offer verbally, ask for a copy in writing.

- Follow up the conversation with a thank you letter/ email outlining your understanding of the terms, your enthusiasm about starting with the company, and your appreciation for their decision to hire you.

## SALARY NEGOTIATION LETTER SAMPLE

Dear Mr. or Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you so much for the generous offer for the Associate Mechanical Engineer position at Ball Aerospace. I truly believe my interests and values align with Ball and would love the opportunity to work full time for you.

Based on my research with comparable roles and after reviewing the employee benefits offered, I'd like to discuss the salary further. Do you have any flexibility on the salary number? I was thinking of something in the range of \$68,000-72,000. I believe that the additional compensation would be fair based on my prior experience and familiarity with this role.

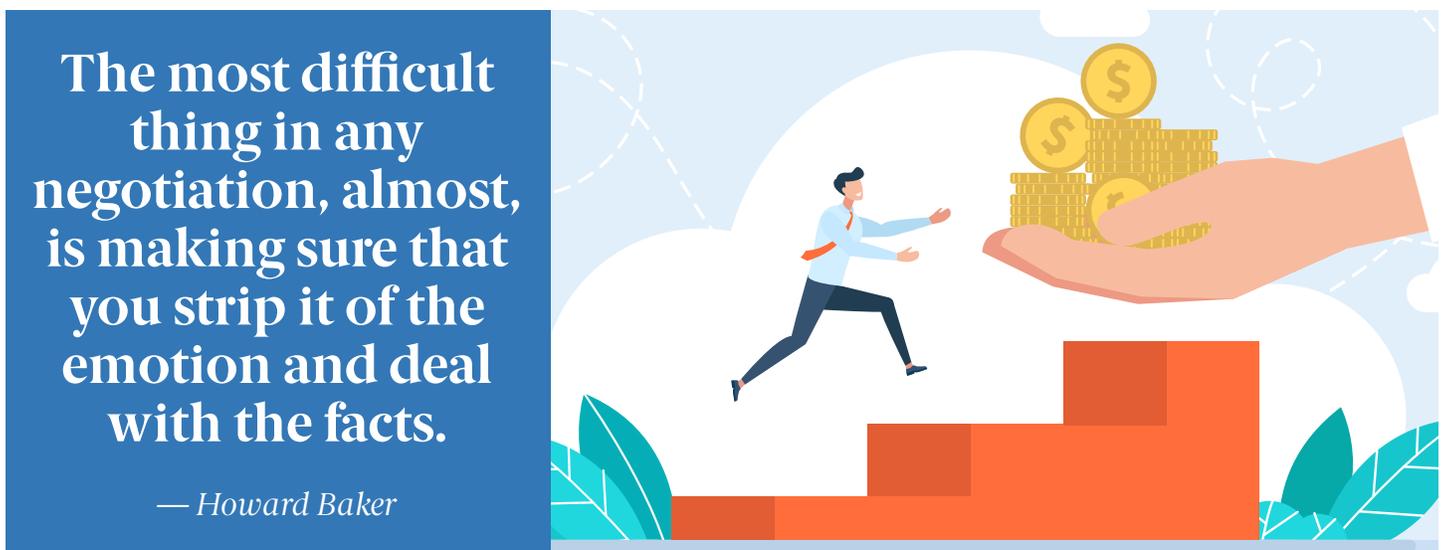
I recently received an offer from ExxonMobil for \$101,000, however, I would love to work for Ball Aerospace as it is a company I've enjoyed working for in the past through my internship.

As we move forward in this process, I'd like to work with you to make sure your expectations are in line with my professional achievements and experiences. I look forward to hearing back from you!

Thank you,

*Your Name*

Your Name



## ACCEPTING A JOB OFFER

The initial tenet of the Carolinian Creed, referencing students' obligation to uphold a code of civilized behavior, states, "As a Carolinian, I will practice personal and academic integrity." When conducting a job search or interviewing with employers, your display of ethical behavior and professionalism may be perceived by employers as an indicator of your performance as an employee. Unprofessional student/alumni actions may harm not only your opportunities, but may also impact the Career Center's and University's relationship with employers.

One of the most damaging behaviors to your professional reputation is to accept an internship or job offer, and then renege on the offer. When you accept a position in good faith, the professional approach to the job search is to:

- Notify other organizations for which you are an active candidate that you have accepted another offer;
- Withdraw from any interview schedules in Handshake;
- Go into your Handshake profile and update your User Settings. This is found by clicking on your name in the upper right hand corner of your screen. De-select the box that says "Make Profile Public to Employers."
- Notify the Career Center or Office of Career Management by completing the Annual Graduation Survey (for full-time hires) or [Report Your Experience](#) (for internship and co-op positions).

# AVOID ILLEGAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## THEY CAN'T ASK THAT. CAN THEY?

There are specific question types barred by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

- The interviewer will generally have an itemized agenda, as well as a list of specific questions they want to ask you. Glance it over and be prepared to avoid divulging uncomfortable or inappropriate information about yourself.

## ILLEGAL TOPICS AN EMPLOYER CANNOT ASK ABOUT

It is illegal to ask a candidate questions about their:

- Age or genetic information
  - The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 protects job seekers over 40.
- Birthplace, country of origin or citizenship
- Disability
- Gender, sex, or sexual orientation
  - Asking your preferred pronouns can be seen as a courtesy.
- Marital status, family, or pregnancy
- Race, color, or ethnicity
- Religion
  - However, religious organizations can discriminate based on religion.

Sometimes the United States government requires employers to ask about race, age, and other details. That can be for census data or affirmative action programs. Keep this in mind if you are applying for a state/federal job.

## GREY AREAS

- Height/Weight
  - These can tie into race. That's why they are considered illegal interview questions.
- Financial Information
  - Some questions about financial status have been used to discriminate against minorities.
- Unemployed Status
- Background Checks
  - If background checks aren't used against a protected group, they're not inappropriate interview questions.

- Citizenship
- Medical Questions & Examinations
- Credit Checks
  - Check the Fair Credit Reporting Act and the Consumer Credit Reporting Reform Act.
- Arrest Record/Convictions
  - This is illegal in some states. Be sure to check and see what information the employer is allowed to obtain.

## ADDITIONAL SUBJECTS

- Emergency contact information isn't on the list of illegal interview questions. Even so, employers shouldn't ask it until after they hire.
- Military Service
  - This isn't on the list of inappropriate interview questions. However, in most cases employers shouldn't ask about the type of discharge.
- National Organizations
  - Employers can't ask about non-professional organizations. If they do, it can be seen as asking about race, gender, age, etc.

## MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO HANDLE AN ILLEGAL QUESTION DURING AN INTERVIEW

1. Decide whether you want to answer. You don't have to answer illegal employment questions.
2. Know that the employer can't retaliate if you lie to answer illegal job application questions.
  - That violates your civil rights.
3. Get a written copy of the question. If you can't, write it down and save it.
4. If you decide to report the employer, contact the EEOC office near you.
5. If you still want the job despite the red flags, dodge the question or answer it. Either way, move on.
6. If they hire you, keep a copy of any discriminatory interview questions. If you're fired later, you may have a legal claim.

## THANK YOU NOTES: TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

- Send within 24 hours of your interview. For Friday interviews, send by end of business day or Monday morning at the latest.
- Email is generally preferred for speed, but a handwritten note can stand out for traditional industries. Match the company's communication style.
- Keep it concise (3-4 paragraphs maximum).
- Skip generic templates that could apply to any job. Personalize your note to the interviewer. If you interviewed with multiple people, personalize a note for each one and reference specific conversation points.
- Use a professional tone while letting your personality show through.
- Avoid being too wordy or sounding desperate. You don't need to restate your entire resume or be too pushy about next steps.
- Proofread. Proofread. Proofread. Double-check all spelling, especially names and company details. A typo can undermine an otherwise strong impression!

### WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Express genuine appreciation for their time.
- Reiterate your interest in the position.
- Briefly reinforce 1-2 key qualifications or address any concerns that arose.
- Include any information you forgot to mention during the interview.
- End with a professional closing.

## THANK YOU NOTE SAMPLE

Dear Mr. Anderson,

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to interview for the sales position at Verizon Wireless yesterday. I appreciated your hospitality and enjoyed meeting you and your staff, as well as taking a tour of the office. I hope I was able to demonstrate my ability to prioritize, meet deadlines, make decisions, and maintain organization successfully coordinating multiple projects simultaneously based on our conversation.

The interview confirmed my initial positive impressions of Verizon Wireless, and I want to reiterate my strong interest in working for your organization. I feel confident that my past experiences at AT&T and Chick-fil-a, combined with my education from the University of South Carolina, will allow me to become a successful part of your company. I strive to maintain a positive attitude and be proactive, resourceful, and flexible, as well as display strong people skills as part of a team, in my work.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at (631) 544-0000. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Kristi Jackson



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