The key to a successful interview is researching, reflecting and being prepared to address the following areas:

**KNOW THE POSITION**
- Carefully review and understand the position description
- When a written description is unavailable, ask the hiring manager for details and/or speak with professionals you know at the organization or in the same industry
- Understand the desired/required qualifications, and be ready to share relevant examples from your experiences

**KNOW THE ORGANIZATION**
- Research the organization’s mission, vision, and values
- Be familiar with the organization’s products/services as well as recent news and trends
- Be prepared to share specific ways you will help the organization reach its goals

**KNOW YOURSELF**
- Know what is on your resume and be prepared to elaborate and offer specific examples
- Create a list of strengths and skills you have to offer that relate to the position
- Come up with brief stories about your past skills, strengths, and accomplishments to illustrate your experience and skills; real-life examples provide evidence of your abilities

**RESOURCES TO HELP YOU**
- Attend a Career Services workshop on interviewing
- Meet with a career counselor to strategize and practice
- Use the online resource Big Interview (access through MustangJOBS) to prepare interview question responses and practice interviewing
- Use LinkedIn.com to learn more about the organization and its current/past employees

**WAYS TO STAND OUT**
- Use Portfolium to prepare a portfolio; bring a tablet or printout to showcase your portfolio during the interview
- Research interviewers’ profiles on LinkedIn.com; knowing about their background can help you establish rapport
- Present yourself professionally by being well-dressed and groomed; visit Career Services’ website for videos and tips on professional attire
- Prepare thoroughly to demonstrate your genuine interest in the position and ensure that you share the most relevant information with the employer
GENERAL TIPS

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early and turn off your cell phone
- Use effective non-verbal communication: a firm handshake, friendly smile, and appropriate eye contact
- Remember that body language can help convey confidence, enthusiasm and interest
- Be courteous to everyone and only speak positively about others (faculty, past employers, etc.)
- Always be sincere and honest
- Research salary information so that, if asked, you have a reasonable range in mind
- Prepare several questions to ask the employer
- Keep in mind that interviewing is a two-way process; throughout the interview be observant and obtain additional information that will help you determine whether the position/employer is a good fit
- Collect business cards from all interviewers and promptly send separate thank you notes (email and/or mail) and any requested materials
- At the conclusion of the interview, ask about the next step in the process and when you will be contacted
- If you have not heard from the employer by the date they said they would contact you, allow 1-2 extra days, then take the initiative to follow up
- Phone interviews require similar preparation, but present unique challenges; for tips on how to successfully interview by phone, please refer to the Telephone Interviews handout on Career Services’ website
COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Anticipating common interview questions is an important step in preparing for your interview. The shaded boxes offer guidance on how to approach the most challenging questions. Additionally, expect to be asked industry/field-specific questions.

PERSONAL

• Tell me about yourself.

Your response should not include your entire life story, nor a narrative version of your resume. Instead, share a brief overview of how your background relates to the position and why you are the right candidate for the position. Start by offering a quick synopsis of where you are right now (major, university, year in school, etc.), then segue to highlighting key past experiences and skills that qualify you for the position. Conclude by telling the employer why you are excited about the position.

• What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?

It is important to reflect on this question in advance. Be prepared to share at least three strengths which directly relate to the position. Oftentimes it can be difficult to evaluate one’s own strengths, so consider feedback you’ve received from others (professors, past supervisors, peers, etc.) or ask people who know you well to share their insights. If you’ve taken StrengthsQuest, your top five talents can provide a helpful starting point. When answering this question, don’t just name a strength. Demonstrate the strength by providing an example of a time you used it, resulting in a positive outcome. The CAR technique described on page 7 provides a useful framework for sharing your example.

• What are your weaknesses?

Employers ask this question to assess your self-awareness and check for red flags that make you a risky hire. Choosing a weakness that is a major part of the position description could make you seem unqualified. On the other hand, don’t try to play off a strength as a weakness ("I work too hard."); employers may think that you have something to hide or lack self-awareness. The best strategy is to choose a professional weakness that is not integral to the position and that you have already worked to improve. Use the CAR technique as a framework for sharing what actions you have taken to improve your weakness. This demonstrates that you are driven to develop yourself and concludes your response positively.

• What three words would your peers use to describe you and why?
• Tell me about an important goal that you set in the past. Were you successful? Why?
• Who or what influenced you most with regard to your career objectives?
• Where do you see yourself in five years?
EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

• Why did you choose to attend Cal Poly?
• Describe your current or most recent job, internship, or leadership experience.

It’s easy to get lost in describing the day-to-day details of your most recent experience. What employers really want to know is how this experience makes you qualified for the position. Focus on accomplishments and achievements, using specific examples (quantify when possible), to highlight your ability to contribute to the employer.

• How has your education prepared you for this position?
• What makes you qualified for this position?
• Describe a project you have completed and the steps you used to complete it.
• What did you enjoy most about your last job or internship? Least?
• How would a former supervisor describe your work?

THE POSITION

• What motivated you to apply for this position?

Your response should cover two main areas: 1) Why this opportunity appeals to you and 2) How your skills and career goals will contribute to the employer. Thorough research of the employer and position is key to articulating why they appeal to you. The employer wants to know that you are genuinely interested. To describe how your skills and career goals fit with the position, review the job description and develop examples to demonstrate how your skills and experience meet the employer’s needs.

• Why do you want to work for our organization?
• What do you know about our company?
• How does your previous experience relate to this position?
• What is the most attractive aspect of this position? What about the least attractive?
• Describe three skills or qualities you would bring to this position.
• What significant trends do you see in this industry?
• How do you like to be supervised?
• Why are you the best candidate for this position?

This question often comes toward the end of the interview, offering the perfect opportunity to convince the employer that you are the best applicant. You could highlight your experience, technical or soft skills, education, or fit within the company/organization. Choose 3-4 solid reasons to persuade them why you’re the best candidate. This is not the time for modesty: It’s your chance to set yourself apart from the competition and demonstrate how you’re uniquely qualified. If the interviewer does not ask this question, be prepared to offer this information as a summary statement at the conclusion of your interview.
QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

Interviewing is a two-way process. It’s your opportunity to learn more about the position and employer and determine if they are a good fit. Asking questions also demonstrates your interest in the position.

- What type of training is offered to new employees?
- What is a typical day or week like?
- What are some of the challenges you think a new person in this position would face?
- What are your department goals for the coming year? What are the long-term goals?
- What are some common characteristics of successful employees?
- What is the greatest challenge facing your staff/department now?
- If hired, what types of projects might I expect during the first six months here?
- What type of training is available?
- What is most engaging about the work for you? And your employees?
- What does your organization do to foster team building among employees?
- What is your favorite work event or tradition here?
- How would I be evaluated in this position?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process? When can I expect to hear from you?
- Prepare specific questions for each employer (e.g. “I’m interested in knowing more about the new product line that your company just launched.”)
Employers use behavioral interviews to evaluate a candidate’s experience and behaviors so they can determine the applicant’s potential for success. Behavioral questions center around skills, qualities, and abilities important for success in the position.

Utilize the CAR technique (sometimes referred to as the STAR technique) in answering behavioral questions: State the Challenge you faced, the Action you took, and the Result you achieved. The stories you share with the employer should illustrate your qualifications for the position.

**APPLYING THE CAR TECHNIQUE**

“Tell me about a time you worked on a team and encountered conflict.”

**Challenge (~30% of response)**

“I was working in a team of five in my Services Marketing class. We were analyzing survey data to determine the effectiveness of customer service for a local retailer. One of our team members continually failed to show up for group meetings or turn in assignments.”

**Action you took (~50% of response)**

“After talking with other group members, I approached the team member to find out more about his lack of participation. After finding out that he had a family illness he was dealing with, we worked out a plan for him to contribute to the project, but on a smaller scale. He agreed to work on the written report, which was due at the end of the quarter.”

**Result you achieved (~20% of response)**

“Our team bonded after understanding the team member’s situation. The team member, after our discussion, contributed significantly to the assignment. We received an A on the project!”

**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

- Carefully review the position description to anticipate possible behavioral questions; when you respond, relate your experience and skills to the position
- Select situations and experiences in which you successfully demonstrated the behaviors important to the position
- Many companies rate your responses to behavioral questions; be detailed and specific in discussing how you contributed to the success of the project, situation, or event; and make sure to cover all three parts (Challenge, Action, and Result)
- Be sure to specifically highlight your individual contributions when you discuss team projects
• Describe your most rewarding college experience. Describe your most challenging college experience.

• Describe a specific time when you were very busy and how you prioritized your schedule.

• Describe a time you failed at something.

• Tell me about a situation where you had to assert yourself to get a point across that was important to you.

• Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stress that tested your coping skills.

• Describe a situation in which you had to deal with an upset customer or co-worker.

• Give an example of your ability to manage or supervise others.

• Describe a workplace challenge you faced and how you handled it.

• Tell me about a time you worked in a team environment and encountered conflict.

• Describe an experience involving a deadline.

• Describe a time you went above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.

• Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership.

FOR ADDITIONAL HELP (visit website for details)
» Make an appointment with a career counselor
» See your College Specialist Career Counselor’s drop-in hours
» Stop by FasTrak (no appointment needed)
» Attend a workshop

careerservices.calpoly.edu | 805-756-2501