

Interview Questions & Strategies

It's an exciting moment when an employer contacts you and offers an interview. For many students, there's the thrill of knowing that your resume and cover letter worked. Then reality quickly sets in. Are you prepared to have an in-depth conversation about this position? How can you best prepare yourself?

Every interview is an opportunity for students as well as employers to explore the right "fit" between an organization, an individual and a specific job. Prepare for your interviews as you would for any important assignment. Begin with researching the firm or organization. How long have they been in existence? Who are the major principals? Who are their major clients? What has been an issue, or major area of growth, in the past year? What is their reputation? How does the organization fit with your career goals and interests?

The next phase of research involves you. What are the most important skills/experiences that you want to be sure to convey? What are your most important traits? Can you describe your thought process as you present a design sheet to an employer?

It's important to prepare for each and every interview. Employers expect that students will conduct research and arrive at the interview prepared to discuss their backgrounds and what they can offer the firm. To be competitive, make sure that you take the time to practice your answers to several of the following questions. Be prepared to talk about yourself in positive terms.

For assistance, contact GSD Career Services to schedule a mock interview appointment. We're happy to help you think about your major selling points, to explore the fit between your interests and a particular job opportunity, and answer any difficult questions.

Be prepared to answer some of the following questions:

Your Qualifications

- Tell me about your studios/courses at the GSD.
- What was your most significant work experience?
- Have you ever supervised anyone?
- Have you participated in any volunteer or community work?

Your Fit for this Particular Job

- Why are you interested in our firm/this job?
- What kind of boss/environment do you work best with?
- Are you willing to work overtime? What kinds of work hours are you looking for?
- What skills do you have that make you qualified for this position?
- What have you accomplished previously that shows you will be successful here?

Your Portfolio

- What were the critical decisions you made here?
- Tell me more about what you were trying to accomplish here (a particular project).
- Tell me why you chose to include this project in your portfolio.

Your Career Plans

- Are you willing to travel/relocate to another city in the future?
- What are your long-range career goals? Where do you want to be in 5 years?
- Are you planning to become registered? (*if in architecture*)
- How do you plan to apply what you have learned in school to your work?

Other Thought Provoking Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What kind of salary are you looking for?
- How are your computer skills? Are you willing to do CAD for the first year or so?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your visa status? Are you planning on returning to your home country soon?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Can you start next week? or When can you start?

Considerations for Designers

Those in design fields (such as Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Urban and Digital Media) may need to bring a portfolio to an interview. Practice talking through your portfolio. In fact, practice talking through your portfolio “upside down” in case the interviewer is sitting across from you.

Describe your role in a particular project if you worked on a team or if the project was part of a studio. Give a brief explanation of the purpose and the design decisions you made in completing the project. Employers value good design; they highly value candidates who can also describe their design process.

Turning the Tables

The job interview is an opportunity for you to discover if a particular job is a good fit for you (as well as for the employer). One way of doing this is to ask questions of your interviewer. This serves two purposes:

- It provides you more information about the job and,
- It demonstrates that you have an interest in the firm and in the job.

The preferred strategy is to ask questions that show a response to what you have learned during the interview. A back-up plan is to have prepared questions in advance. Use some of the following sample questions as a starting point:

- With whom would I work on a day-to-day basis?
- I'm interested in becoming registered. Does your firm offer help in the registration process?
- What are your department's major projects in the coming year?
- What software are you currently using and what is its lifecycle?
- How are projects assigned?
- What is the schedule for a performance review?
- What are the evaluation criteria you use in a performance review?

- I know that you have recently experienced a period of very rapid growth. How has that affected your operations/staff?

After The Interview

The interview process can be exhilarating and frustrating. Please use our services to your best benefit. We're happy to discuss the negotiating process and appropriate salary ranges with you.

- Be sure to send a thank you note following the interview. Emphasize what you can bring to the firm.

Print Resources

Check the following books in GSD Career Services for more information:

"Tell Me About Yourself: Storytelling to Get Jobs and Propel Your Career," by Katherine Hansen, Jist Works, 2009

"Knock 'Em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Guide," by Martin Yate, Adams Media, 2005

"Great Interview: Successful Strategies for Getting Hired," by Vivian A. Eyre, Learning Express, 2000