

Networking & Interview Guide for All Students



**UNIVERSITY
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This packet is intended to assist in improving your networking and interviewing skills. Included in this packet are best practices from the University Career Center (UCC). Information and sample conversation starters, responses, and questions within this packet are not intended to be used verbatim. In order to network and interview successfully, you need two components: 1) Know yourself well, and 2) Understand the needs of the organization. Ensure you stand out from the crowd by demonstrating both components.

The resources this packet highlights are available to all students and alumni; take advantage of the University Career Center and the services we provide you!

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Branding

Dress

Whether you are attending an interview, career fair, or networking event, it is best practice to dress professionally. Be sure to research the organization or event to best determine the appropriate attire. Here are some common guidelines to follow:

- Clothes should be well fitting, in good condition, and wrinkle-free.
- Dark, neutral colors and subtle patterns are acceptable. Ties should not be a distraction, and belts should match shoes.
- Nice slacks, casual dresses, and skirts are acceptable, but **NO** athletic wear.
 - Skirts and dress should hit at the knee. Your thighs should be covered when you sit down.
- Hair needs to be tidy and out of your eyes. Facial hair should be kept neat.
- Clean dress shoes should be worn, avoid flip-flops or open-toed shoes.
- Avoid using strong perfume or cologne.
- Silence all electronic devices and keep them out of sight.
- Avoid carrying oversized bags and consider carrying a padfolio.

Consider using the Career Closet at the University Career Center for assistance in finding the right outfit for your networking event!

Elevator Speech

The elevator speech is a concise presentation of career goals, generally delivered in **approximately 30 seconds**. Focus on skills, knowledge, and experience you can bring to the job, department, and company.

Possible Components of the Elevator Speech

- Brief personal background information, *only if applicable*. Avoid illegal topics.
- Educational experience: university attended, major and minor, certifications, expected graduation date, or any relevant courses taken.
- Related work, internships, organizational, or volunteer experience.
- Top relevant skills/qualities that you will bring to the organization.
- Why you are interested in the position. Why they should hire you.

Do not memorize a script. Create a list of words or phrases that will jog your memory and then practice presenting different versions of the elevator speech. You want to sound intelligent and confident. Keep in mind that conversations are organic and no two will be exactly the same.



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Business Card

The blank side of a business card can be used as a mini-resume to highlight information you want prospective employers or networking contacts to know. It is a great way to expand networking opportunities at meetings and conferences.

What to Include – Front of Card

Include the following information on the front of the card:

First and Last Names: Use the name that you want to be known as. When it is time for the background check, provide all names and nicknames that you have ever used.

Contact Information: Include a professional email address, but do NOT include a physical address on the card that will limit the time that you can use the card. If you have a website and LinkedIn account, include those URLs on the front of the card.

Education and Experience: Include the degree, major, minor, and expected date of graduation.

Tagline? – Maybe! A tagline is a short phrase similar to the headline in LinkedIn. A tagline for a career goal might be: Seeking opportunities in the creative arts or graphic design.

What to Include – Back of Card

The back of the card is the actual mini-resume. Choose the 3 or 4 most important pieces of information to include on the back. Think about accomplishments and experiences that highlight what you can bring to the company or organization and present this information in bulleted phrases.

Be sure that every word is spelled correctly and that all information is grammatically correct. Use a font and white space that ensures the information is easy to read.

Business Card Mini Resume Example

Front of Card

 UNIVERSITY CAREER CENTER TEXAS TECH
Messmore Garrett M.S., Organic Linguistic Policies
https://www.linkedin.com/in/messmoregarrett123 Messmore@email.com 806-123-5555

Back of Card

Skills and Accomplishments
• Research in the areas of applied organic linguistics for both organic and inorganic applications • Numerous peer-reviewed publications and diverse conference presentations • Teaching experience at undergraduate and graduate levels • Earned recognition from undergrads as Most Approachable Teaching Assistant

Networking

Types of Events

Career Fairs

Career fairs provide an opportunity for job seekers to meet with representatives from a variety of organizations in one location. Companies recruit for specific job openings or to connect with participants to provide information on future employment opportunities.

Chamber of Commerce or Community Events

Each city's Chamber of Commerce holds regional mixers, workshops, charity fundraisers, and business card exchanges. These events provide excellent opportunities to meet professionals in your field.

University Career Center

The UCC offers career networking events for all students and majors, including mixers and the Mocktail party. These events are structured to teach networking skills and introduce you to recruiters.

Organizations & Service Groups

Nonprofit groups such as the Rotary Club provide opportunities for volunteers to interact with donors and other volunteers. Your shared charitable interests can often serve as a bridge, casting you in a favorable light to gain key information.

Networking Preparation

Many people are unaware of what networking is and how important it can be when trying to secure a job. Networking simply refers to finding job-related contacts and it is a lifelong practice. Most professionals who are just beginning their careers may feel that they have few, if any, networking contacts in their field. It is important to consider the many different areas of networking as you create your own group of contacts from current and former positions. It is interesting to note that many positions are filled by those who came to the attention of personnel managers by recommendation. Suggestions for building contacts include:

- Friends/Family
- Professors
- Former Supervisors
- Counselors
- LinkedIn
- Mentors

Job Fair Preparation Checklist

Are you ready for the job fair? A good first impression is invaluable; a poor one is hard to overcome.

- ✓ **Do Your Homework:** attend the **How to Work a Job Fair** webinar
- ✓ **Dress Professionally:** wear conservative, professional business attire
- ✓ **Be Professional:** arrive early, exhibit a positive attitude, meet everyone with a firm handshake, and make eye contact
- ✓ **Practice Elevator Speech:** prepare a 20- to 30-second introduction that highlights your qualifications
- ✓ **Bring Resumes:** provide a mistake-free resume to highlight relevant experience; cover letters are not necessary at a job fair
- ✓ **Ask Questions:** increase your knowledge of the company and its open positions
- ✓ **Be Realistic in your Expectations:** on-the-spot job offers are rare, but you may be contacted for a future interview
- ✓ **Be Prepared to Apply Online:** recruiters take note of candidates who follow employer procedures
- ✓ **Follow-up with a "Thank-you" Letter:** set yourself apart by following up with a thank-you letter to emphasize your interest in the company and position

Interviewing

There are many types of interviews and they can be used in combination with one another to provide hiring managers and committees in-depth data about each candidate. In a **structured interview**, each candidate is asked similar questions in a predetermined format. **Unstructured interviews** are more casual and unrehearsed. Below are the most common types of interviews.

Traditional Interviews

The applicant is asked questions that require factual input or opinion. For example, “what is your major” is a question that requires a factual answer. “What is your greatest weakness” requires an opinion answer.

Behavioral Interviews

The interviewer asks questions based on the idea that past experiences predict future behavior. Answers to these questions provide examples of what was accomplished or what skills were used in the past. Answers to behavioral questions require validation of the skills needed for the position.

For example: “Tell me about a time you missed an important deadline and how you handled it.” The interviewer may ask a probing question that elicits more details. Behavioral questions are intended to determine actual abilities and skills relevant to the job. Use the STAR method to answer behavioral questions. (See Page 8).

Mass Interviews

Many large companies will create a specific date and location for invitation-only candidates to interview with multiple managers. These mass interviews generally take place after candidates have been prescreened through other venues such as university job fairs.

Panel Interviews

In a panel interview, one applicant is interviewed by multiple interviewers. Generally, a panel interview takes place at a conference table, and several interviewers take turns asking questions. Make eye contact with all interviewers when answering questions. In some instances, the members of the panel may meet individually with the interviewee.

Phone Interviews

Generally, a phone interview is a prescreening interview or a first interview for a candidate who is not local. It helps the company assess fit with their culture and the position. A successful phone interview may lead to an in-person interview.

For phone interviews, dress as if interviewing in person. Take the phone interview just as seriously as any other interview.

- Stand up – walking can help alleviate nervousness, and standing will make your voice clear and confident.
- Look in a mirror – make eye contact with yourself and smile to remain engaged and enthusiastic throughout the interview.
- Turn off call waiting to avoid interruptions during the interview.
- Create a quiet environment with no distractions – no barking dogs, no TV, no children, no driving.

Video Interview (Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.)

These types of interviews are a cost-effective way to prescreen candidates.

- Dress for the interview; do not wear only a shirt and tie or a blouse and jacket over gym shorts or yoga pants because standing may be required.

- Create a professional setting from the interviewer's point of view. It should be organized, neat, and well-lit.
- Be professional with facial expressions and tone of voice. This mode of interview can be awkward for both the candidate and the interviewer, so be sure to look at the camera when speaking and at the screen when listening. Looking at the camera is like looking the other person in the eye. Looking at the screen, moves your face down so eye contact is lost.
- Ensure a quiet space and treat this interview just as a face-to-face interview.
- While this video may seem dated, all the information is valid and helpful. Watch this video for a quick demonstration of lighting and setting for a video interview.
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQwanxQmFnc#action=share>).

Before the Interview

The purpose of an interview is for you as a candidate to share your skills, abilities, education, personal attributes, and experiences that demonstrate a great fit for the company. If invited for an interview, the employer already thinks you are qualified for the position on paper. Demonstrate a willingness to fit in well with the organization and benefit them. Also, during an interview, you will determine your interest in working for this company. Finally, the overall goal of the interview is to be offered a position!

Research the Organization

A great technique for reducing anxiety surrounding the interview process is to prepare thoroughly for the interview. It is important to research the company; focus on what makes them different from similar companies, their mission or overall goal, and their future goals. During the interview, focus on your contributions to these goals.

Prepare Stories

Practice several different types of stories that will assist you in answering behavioral or situational questions. (See Behavioral Interview Questions, Page 8).

What to Bring

Bring multiple copies of your resume, a list of references that can be left with the prospective employer, a list of open-ended questions to ask when prompted, and a padfolio and pen for notes during the interview.

Arrive Early

Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early to demonstrate professionalism and an understanding of the importance of the interview. Arriving more than 15 minutes early may put the interviewer in a bind and make them feel they need to complete their earlier appointment quickly. Also, by arriving too early, you may communicate that you do not have anything better to do with your time.

Remember, the interview starts the moment you exit your car or enter the building. Therefore, it is best to remain as professional, friendly, and polite as possible to all people before and after the interview. Turn off phones at all times.

During the Interview

Nonverbal Communication

Often positions are filled based on how likely a person is to fit in well with the company culture, so it is important to engage in appropriate soft skills. Soft skills include shaking hands with the interviewer, smiling, making consistent eye contact, and showing enthusiasm for the job. Appearing relaxed and confident demonstrates your ability to fit in well with the other staff and be a valuable member of the organization.

Whenever interacting with others, power, status, and level of confidence are communicated. It is important that nonverbal and verbal communication match. If verbally indicating enthusiasm, then physical and nonverbal behaviors need to convey the same enthusiasm.

- Strike a balance between high status (e.g. direct eye contact and sitting tall) and low status (e.g. waiting to sit until invited) behaviors in the interview
- Avoid fidgeting
- Engage in mimicking behaviors to indicate a feeling of closeness and respect for each other

Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

From the interviewer's point of view, the purpose of this question is to break the ice and get the candidate to talk. As the candidate, use this opportunity to share what you want the prospective employer to know. The answer should last **no longer than 60 seconds**. Use this question to guide the interview, so the follow-up questions focus on information you provide. Do NOT memorize a script! Remember, answering this question does not require giving a full biography of yourself. Select information that is relevant to the job and that the hiring manager should know. Do not repeat the resume!

Components of the Answer

- Brief personal background information, *if applicable*; avoid illegal interview topics
- Educational experience: university attended, major, graduation date, any pertinent courses taken
- Related experience, internships, work, organizations, or volunteer experience
- Top relevant skills and qualities
- State your interest in the position

Why our company?

For this question, demonstrate that you have researched the organization. In your answer, indicate that you are not just looking for any position, but rather that you are seeking a position at this specific organization. If possible, set yourself apart from other candidates by demonstrating how you can contribute to the company's goals.

What are your strengths?

Make sure the strengths you mention are related and useful to the position. Rather than providing a list of your strengths, you may wish to share 1 or 2 strengths with examples. Providing examples with specific stories will make your answers more credible and memorable.

What are your weaknesses?

Most of the interview should focus on positive information. However, do not avoid talking about negative points, but remain as positive as possible throughout the interview. Unless asked, share only one weakness. Think of a weakness as a strength taken a little too far. Share when you noticed the weakness, the steps you have taken to overcome it, and finish with how much you have improved in this area.

Where do you see yourself in 5, 10, 15 years or the future?

Interviewers want to see that you have an interest in the field, are ambitious and goal-oriented, and are considering how you can contribute to the field. It is fine if you are a little vague with this response because you do not need to have your future completely mapped out.

Why should we consider you for this position instead of other equally qualified candidates?

There is little time in an interview, so focus on what you can contribute because they are actually asking, “what makes you unique?” Therefore, focus on how you can uniquely contribute, pulling from three specific areas: 1) your education, 2) your experience, and 3) your personal attributes.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral questions ask about your behavior in a past situation and the results. The questions will either be positively or negatively focused. If the focus is negative (tell about a time you missed a deadline), it is your job to bring them to a positive conclusion. For these questions, prepare several different types of stories but do not memorize your responses. With behavioral questions, they are asking for specific examples, not general statements. To answer these questions more smoothly, you can use any behavioral method such as STAR, SAR, SARA, or CAR.

Situation – what happened?

Task – what task did you need to complete?

Action – what actions did you take? Elaborate on this section.

Result – the result should always be positive.

Negative Interview Questions

The interviewer may ask questions to see how you cope with negativity and handle conflict. If the outcome of an experience or example you wish to share ends negatively, then make sure you share what you learned to bring it to a positive. For example, “tell me about a professor or supervisor you didn’t like and why.” This question assesses how you handle conflict. They want to see that you can take ownership of the part you played in the issue. To make this response easier, focus on “I” statements, such as “I was not accustomed to his management style.” End your response by emphasizing the positive outcome.

List of Possible Interview Questions

About You

1. What experience have you had?
2. Briefly describe your background for me – include high school, college, and activities you were involved in. What were your main interests during those periods?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. What were your challenges during your internship? How did you handle them?
5. Do you prefer working with groups of people or alone?
6. Tell me about your experience. Where? Was this a pleasant or unpleasant experience?
7. Describe your ideal manager.
8. Why should I hire you instead of other qualified applicants?

Motivation

9. Why did you decide to become a _____?
10. What are your future plans?
11. How do you respond when a friend asks you the question – “What do you do all day in this job?”
12. What kinds of extracurricular activities are you interested in?
13. What kinds of decisions do you enjoy making the most? The least?

Relationships with Coworkers

14. How would you provide for individual differences within the workplace?
15. What kind of relationships would you like to have with your peers?
16. Tell me about a memorable problem you resolved collaboratively.

Relationships with Colleagues

17. What characteristics do you look for in management?
18. What kind of relationships would you like to have with your managers?
19. How do you think _____ should be evaluated at the end of the first year? How would you like to be evaluated?

Job and Field-specific Strategies and Techniques

20. What are the current methods and resources in your field?
21. What new or different ideas would you implement in our system?
22. What professional organizations do you belong to? What type of positions have you held in these organizations?
23. What do you think should and can be done to improve communication between colleagues and managers?

Organization Specific

24. How do you feel about living in our community?
25. Are you involved in community activities?
26. What can you offer our community outside working hours?
27. Describe some particularly tough problems you have had to deal with and how you handled those problems.

Random Questions

28. If you could be any color in a bag of M&Ms, what color would you be and why?
29. If you could be any brick on a wall, what brick would you be and why?
30. Your life is a novel; what is the title? Why?
31. If you could pick a famous person to interview, who would you pick and why?
32. If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?

Incorporating Marketable Skills into the Interview

Marketable skills are identified by employers as necessary for a specific career or field. As you think about your previous experience, knowledge gained from course projects, and involvement in organizations, you will see that you have skills that are marketable across many fields.

Marketable skills include specific skills such as planning events or managing projects. Marketable skills also include transferable skills – those skills that would move with you to any job or field. Your ability to communicate and apply critical thinking skills are two examples of transferable skills.

Everyone has transferable and marketable skills. First, the skills must be identified, and then they must be demonstrated in the resume and in the interview. Incorporating these skills into the interview using your achievements will demonstrate self-awareness. In addition, including marketable skills shows that you understand the needs of the company and what you bring to the position to meet those needs.

Questions for Interviewers

Asking good questions can demonstrate an interest in the company. It is important to come to an interview prepared with several questions to demonstrate your interest. You may wish to have a few extra questions prepared in case they answer some of your questions throughout the interview. Evaluate your interview questions using these criteria:

- Is it open-ended?
- Does it reflect that you researched the job and company?
- Does it demonstrate that you are thinking about how you can contribute to their organization?

Before you leave the interview, do not forget to thank them for the opportunity and ask for a business card in case you have any follow-up questions. By getting the business card, you have their contact information to write them a brief thank you note.

Illegal Interview Questions

There are several reasons that illegal or inappropriate questions might be asked during an interview. One reason is that the interviewer is unaware that certain questions are illegal. A second reason is that the interviewer wants specific information and will ask the illegal question to get it.

Illegal interview questions are prohibited by law because they are used to discover personal information that is not specifically related to the candidate's ability to perform the job functions. Information from these illegal questions might be used to discriminate against protected groups of citizens. Employers may ask specific questions if the question is clearly related to the qualifications or responsibilities of the job.

For additional information, see the [Fair Inquiry Guidelines](#) established by the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission \(EEOC\)](#).

How to Respond If Asked Illegal Questions

You have several options if you are asked illegal questions during an interview. First, recognize the differences between questions that may be inappropriate, but are not illegal. For example, "tell me a joke" may be inappropriate during an interview, but it is perfectly legal. These legal questions may be intended to determine creativity or how you react when put on the spot.

Possible responses to illegal questions:

- Answer the question if you are willing to divulge the information.
- Ask for clarification. For example, ask "how is this related to the position?" Or ask, "how will this impact the position?"
- Answer the legal version of the question. For example, if you are asked if you plan to have more children, do not answer yes or no. Instead, provide a more inclusive answer, "I do not have obligations that prevent me from fulfilling the job requirements."
- Be prepared to lose that opportunity if you point out that the question is illegal! However, in some instances, the illegal question may be a test of your ethics related to the job requirements or to test your knowledge related to job functions.

It is a good strategy to already have in mind exactly how you plan to respond to illegal questions during an interview. It isn't necessary to come up with answers to specific questions, just be aware of how you intend to either answer or deflect such questions.

To Disclose or Not to Disclose

For job seekers, disclosing a disability is a personal choice. In most cases, if a person can complete the hiring process without having to disclose a disability, it may be best to wait until after a job offer has been made – that is, if disclosure will happen at all. If you are considering whether you need to disclose a disability during your job search, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job?
- Is the disability apparent? If the disability is not immediately apparent, will it become so over time?

If you decide that you do need to disclose a disability, you might find that “what are your strengths?”, “tell me about a time you overcame a challenge”, or “tell me about a time you met a goal you set for yourself” can provide an opportunity to highlight your personal growth and development and to positively reframe a situation that could be perceived negatively.

Practice! Practice this conversation with a UCC staff member, with a trusted friend or mentor, or by yourself. Below are some points that might help get and can be adapted as needed to fit your unique situation.

- Share general information about your disability. Explain why you are disclosing your disability and how it affects your ability to perform job tasks.
- Identify the types of accommodations that have worked for you in the past.
- Describe the types of accommodations you anticipate needing in the workplace.

Resources

The [EEOC](#) is responsible for enforcing federal laws regarding discrimination. The [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) has extensive information for applicants and employers on the types of accommodations available for individuals.

After the Interview

After the interview, write a few notes to remember the interview questions and other details. This information can be helpful for writing thank you notes and for any type of second interview or follow-up you might have with the company.

Thank You Letter

Always send a thank you letter; it is acceptable to send either an email or a handwritten note. It demonstrates your enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity and can make the difference between getting the job or not. Send a brief, to-the-point email to each person who interviewed you. Check the letter for spelling and grammar mistakes. Ensure that the interviewer’s name and title are correct.

- Thank the interviewers for their time and the opportunity to interview.
- Mention something specific (a question, etc.) that occurred during the interview.
- Emphasize skills, strengths, and abilities you can bring to the job.
- Express your interest in the position.

Responding to a Job Offer

Salary Negotiations

What is Total Compensation?

Total Compensation is salary plus benefits. Take time to research health insurance, retirement system policies, personal days, and sick leave. Look at the potential options offered by the company, including:

- Tuition assistance for advanced study
- Merit-pay alternatives
- Bonuses
- Release time to work with your mentor

Can you negotiate?

Yes, salary negotiation is an option. You may receive additional incentives if you have experience or skills in a selected field. It is not a good practice to negotiate salary just to be negotiating. Only negotiate when you have a compelling reason; you are in a better position to negotiate if you have more than one job offer.

There are three critical factors involved in negotiating: **power, information, and time.**

Power: Learn about the real power factors involved. What is your power over the other side of the table? Do you have a relationship of any kind with the interviewer?

Information: Good negotiating requires gathering information and planning your approach. You will need to articulate clearly your strengths and abilities to meet the needs of the company.

Timing: Know the employer's timeframe as well as your own. The best time to negotiate is after a serious job offer has been made and before you have accepted it.

Signing the Contract

The contract is a binding legal document; read it carefully and ask questions to verify and clarify details. Having signed the contract, you are legally committed to that position for the agreed timeframe. Your reputation and that of TTU suffers if you accept an offer and later renege.

UCC Networking and Interviewing Resources

The UCC offers several options for building your networking and interviewing skills. Take advantage of one or more of the following services available to students and alumni:

Career Coaching: The UCC has counselors available to meet with students and alumni by appointment. Sessions can cover a variety of topics, including resume development, job search strategies, interviewing skills, and other career-related concerns. As job candidates, you will need to participate in both one-on-one and panel mock interviews.

Events and Webinars: Each semester, the UCC offers several events and webinars on various topics, including resume writing, interviewing, networking, job searching, and more! Visit the [UCC website](#) for a list of events and webinars.

Online Resources: The UCC offers numerous online resources to assist students with their career development, including application documents, job search strategies, interviewing, and salary negotiation.

- The [UCC](#) includes resources on events, career exploration and development, job boards, and instructions on creating a credentials file.
- [O*NET OnLine](#) is a government website that provides occupational information for over 900 occupations.

Contact the UCC to schedule an appointment or utilize Raider Success Hub!



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