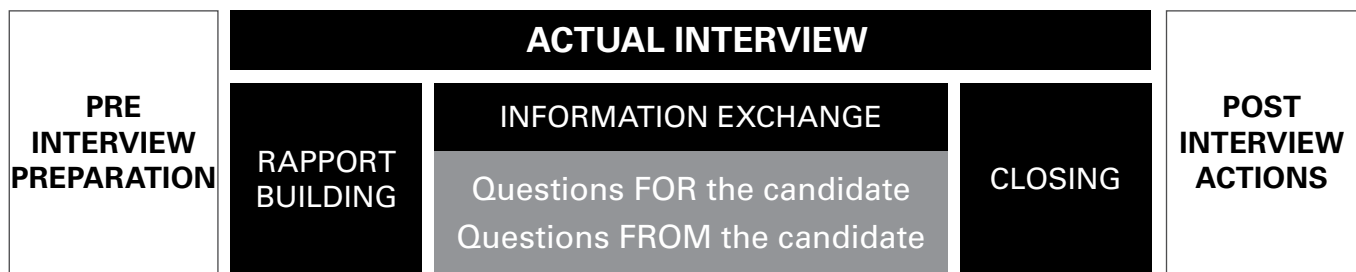


INTERVIEWS

The interview process

Interviews are part presentations, part conversations between prospective employers and prospective employees with the same purpose – gathering and sharing information on which they will base an important decision – the person who will fill a particular position.

- The employer seeks to determine the ‘best fit’ candidate to successfully take on specific job tasks by asking questions about a candidate’s related experiences, skills, abilities, personality and career interests and presenting additional details about the position and organization.
- The candidate seeks to explain how competencies they developed through school, work and volunteering relate to the job tasks and to address any concerns the interviewer may have about their candidacy. In addition, candidates look for information to decide if they will be happy with this position, such as accountabilities, organizational culture, reporting structure and career building opportunities.
- The actual interview is a 3-phase process usually lasting only 45 to 90 minutes. This short window of time demands that both parties prepare before the actual interview in order to make the most of the opportunity.



Look inside for practice tips you can use at every phase!

Additional Interview Tipsheets:

A list of interview questions is available online at mru.ca/careerservices/tipsheets and on campus at Career Services in A200.

If your interview is a non-traditional one such as a Skype or video interview, check out the *Interviews – Purposes and Types* tip sheet for additional information.

Pre Interview Preparation

1. When the interview is scheduled, ask who you will be interviewing with, and the interviewing process. Ask for a detailed job description – many employers will provide them.
 - » If a job description is not available, review similar descriptions from career libraries, on the Internet and through LinkedIn profiles for similar roles. Being aware of duties and tasks that make up day-to-day work and position accountabilities for similar roles improves your ability to link your experiences with on-the-job competencies.
 - » If you have contacts in the organization, talk to them about hiring procedures. If you know someone who has recently interviewed there, ask about the process they experienced. A Google search or company LinkedIn profiles may help you find people you know working at the organization.
2. Conduct background research on the position and the organization such as products/services offered, market position, growth plans, recent awards and media coverage. Industry research on opportunities and challenges is also valuable in demonstrating your knowledge and interest.
3. Analyze your skills as they relate to the job you are seeking. Thoroughly review your resume. Identify key stories – concrete, positive examples where you demonstrated your ability to do components of this job. This will help you feel more confident and in control during the interview.
4. A job description and the *Interviews – Questions* tip sheet can help you predict, prepare and rehearse responses to common interview questions. Interviews are often the ‘final lap’ of a job competition. Do more than re-state what is on your resume or cover letter. Make brief notes outlining key points to take into the interview along with at least two extra copies of your resume, a list of your references, a pen and paper. A portfolio of relevant work samples can be used to ‘prove’ job-related ability.
5. Develop your agenda for the interview. What do you want to learn, share and show? Be your best self. Imagine how you would act, look and respond if you were to ‘ace’ the interview. Then pattern what you do and say along those lines.
6. Ensure what you plan to wear is appropriate for the position and is clean, pressed and ready to wear. If you are unsure of the dress code, err on the side of conservatism.

Interview Meeting

Rapport building

Your interview starts when you walk in. The way you interact with the interviewer and office staff determines their assumptions about your ability to get along with staff and clients. To create a good first impression:

- Be polite and professional from the start. Arrive 10 minutes early. Turn off and put away all electronics, including your phone. Introduce yourself to the receptionist and advise them who you are there to see.
- Shake hands when you meet the interviewer(s). In the interview room, wait to be seated until a chair is offered. Use the interviewer’s last name unless asked to do otherwise. Maintain positive body language: sit straight, lean forward, maintain eye contact, control nervous behaviour and smile. Many interviewers begin with small talk – common ground topics to relax both parties and ease into the information exchange part of the interview.



The information exchange

Questions for the Candidate:

- Employer questions aim to learn if you truly have the ability to do the job, if you understand the organization and how the department/work group supports it, if you actually want the job you are interviewing for, and if you are a good fit. Expect questions on strengths, weaknesses, achievements, experience overcoming obstacles, career plans, supervision preferences, and job-related skill levels and experiences. Listen carefully to the question and the underlying job 'need' it may reveal. Where appropriate, link some of the answers you give and questions you ask to specific information you have learned through the research you did to prepare for the interview.
- Avoid giving yes/no or vague answers. Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question. Take time to think through your answer; 5 to 10 seconds is acceptable. Use specific examples which make you proud of your performance and achievements.
- Prepare to answer interview questions using the **STAR** formula. Briefly refer to an actual **S**ituation/challenge and your particular focus/**T**ask. Describe the specific **A**ctions you took to address the situation and end the story or interview answer with the **R**esult you achieved and how you measured your success. This helps the interviewer 'see you at work' with a story that has a beginning, middle and positive end.
- If you have had little experience in an area of questioning, provide an example of when you succeeded at something similar and let them know you are looking forward to developing further in that area.
- Be positive, even when responding to questions regarding negative experiences. Focus on what you learned. Do not talk negatively about previous employers or colleagues, even if asked.
- Emphasize your most relevant background and qualifications. Frame your answers to clearly convey the link to your potential contribution or benefit to the employer. Employers are interested in their business, their department and its success. For most organizations, success is usually measured in terms of improving on products or services, saving time or money, making money or solving problems.

Questions from the Candidate:

- Always come prepared with thoughtful questions about the job, company or industry. Asking simple, self-serving questions or not asking questions at all shows poor preparation and a lack of interest in the job and organization. Questions may be left to the end of the interview or you may ask them throughout.
- Use questions to identify issues important to the hiring person or team. Take brief notes about what you learned during the interview to jog your memory later (see the tip sheet, *Interviews – Questions*)

Closing professionally

Your last impression can be as important as your first.

- Use this opportunity to confirm you are interested in the position. Summarize the top reasons you are an excellent choice or add a detail that would help them see that you would be able to do the job well.
- Clarify when you can expect to hear from the employer or proactively contact the employer regarding a hiring decision. It is during this time you will be asked for references.
- Thank the interviewer(s) for their time, ask for business cards and shake hands with each interviewer.



Post Interview Actions

The interview doesn't end when you leave the office. Immediately after, find a quiet place to:

- Summarize what you have learned. Make notes about questions, impressions, information received and promises made. Ask yourself what you would have liked to have done better for future interviews and conversations or a possible second interview.
- Write a thank you note to each interviewer. Ideally, have thank you cards with you – you can return to drop them off at reception before the day ends. Remember to include something about the job that excited you or mention something you forgot to say or would like to state more clearly. Reiterate your interest in the position.
 - » A thank you email is acceptable but not as memorable. It still should be personalized to each interviewer and contain the same tone as a physical thank you note.

The results

Congratulations, you got the job!

- Never immediately accept a job without thinking about pros and cons. Respond within 48 hours.
- Discuss terms of employment, salary, hours, benefits and working conditions before you accept.
- Ask when you will receive a letter outlining the details or a formal offer of employment.
- If you are considering negotiating compensation, do your homework on starting rates. Be aware that many union or corporate scales are fixed and cannot be negotiated.
- If you cannot negotiate a higher salary but believe you require more compensation, consider negotiating on hours, salary review dates or vacation days.
- Once you have received a formal letter of employment, provide a formal letter of resignation to any current employers. Remain gracious and positive about your experience with them.

Thank you, but we've chosen another candidate.

- Never burn bridges. A rejection today may lead to a job offer tomorrow.
- Ask for insight on what you did well in the interview and what you might improve on.
- Use the opportunity to network. Ask about industry contacts who may be hiring.
- Look for an announcement about who was successful and what they did immediately prior to getting this job. This can often be found on the department website or LinkedIn. Their previous position is now available and could be the stepping stone you need!
- Reward yourself for coming this far in the process.
- Don't stop! Keep busy with part-time or volunteer activities. Move your job search plan forward by making calls, attending professional events and speaking to others about your employment interests and goals.

Career Services can help you:

Meet with a Certified Career Development Professional to discuss your career options.

Have your resume critiqued and get one-on-one interview preparation assistance.

Find relevant part-time, summer and post graduation work through events, fairs and job postings.

CAREER SERVICES

A200 Kerby Hall | 403.440.6307

studentjobs@mtroyal.ca | mtroyal.ca/careerservices