Interview Fundamentals for Co-op & Internship

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Preparation Guide to a Successful Interview

Before the Interview: Plan and Prepare

1. Cover your basics
   - Confirm all the details you need. Who, format, where, additional things to bring, test component? Who do you need to contact in case of emergencies on the day of the interview? Possible questions to ask when you get the request for an interview:
     - What will the approximate length of the interview be?
     - Who are the individuals that will be interviewing me?
     - What will the format of the interview be?
     - Will there be a test component?
   - Review your online presence. Google yourself to review that what is online about you creates the impression you want to make to your future employer.
- Select your interview attire carefully. It is important to make a great first impression during the interview and your attire is one ingredient of demonstrating your professionalism and interest in the role. For visual examples, visit the Lassonde Co-op/Internship Pinterest page at: Lassonde School of Engineering - Co-op & Internship Program (LSECOP) – Profile | Pinterest

**Key Tips:**
- Be intentional about your attire to showcase confidence and professionalism
- Aim to be remembered for your skills, experiences, interest, not your attire
- Dress to be seen as a colleague, not a student
- Research company dress code and industry norms and dress for your best day on the job, not a typical day.
  - **Business Professional Attire** (conservative environments, consulting firms, financial services, telecommunications)
  - **Business Casual/Smart Casual Attire** (start-ups, technology organizations, government)

2. **Conduct research to anticipate questions and formulate relevant answers**
   - Research the organization, the role, interviewers.
     - Resources for research: company website; glassdoor.com; LinkedIn (company profile and review if you are connected to people who work there to gain insider information)
   - Review the job posting to determine the types of questions you could be asked.
   - Based on your research, prepare questions you might want to ask towards the end of the interview.
   - Using the job posting and your targeted resume, reflect on your skills, experiences to formulate your answers and draft STAR stories (see page 9)

3. **Practice, practice practice**
   - Practise by yourself at first, but do recruit others (friends/family) to help you with mock interviews. Try recording yourself on your phone or laptop so you can hear your answer; view your facial expressions and determine if you are coming across as confidently as you thought.
   - Seek support from the co-op/internship team.

**During the Interview: Make a Great First Impression**

- Be punctual. Arrive and check-in at reception desk 10-15 minutes prior to your scheduled interview. For virtual interviews, aim to be ready to join the meeting at least 5 minutes before your scheduled start time.
- Be professional with all staff as soon as you are on the premises.
- Keep looking at your phone to a minimum. Wear a watch if you need to see the time. Ensure your phone is on silent or better yet, turned off for the duration of the interview.
- Display positive body language throughout the interview.
  - Greet and say goodbye with a firm handshake
  - Make eye contact
  - Avoid fidgeting
  - Keep hands on the table, or on your lap.
  - Sit with proper posture; avoid slouching on your chair.
- Be an active participant throughout the interview. Ask follow-up questions if needed, and ask for clarification.

- When given an opportunity to ask questions towards the end, ask at least two questions to help you learn more about the position/organization. Ask yourself, what information would help re-affirm that your decision that this is a great company to work for. If you have been applying to multiple positions, what question could you ask to help you confirm that this is who you would want to accept an offer from?

**Example questions to ask at the end of the interview:**

  - Can you tell me about the next steps in the hiring process?
  - What are the most immediate challenges of this position that need to be addressed in the first two or three months?
  - What three things are you most proud of with regard to (name of organization/unit)?
  - Earlier in the interview, you mentioned that the values of _____ are very important to (name of the organization/unit). I’m curious to know how these values are reflected in the (name of the organization/unit)’s everyday activities?
  - Can you please describe the team that the successful candidate for this role would be working with?
  - What are the characteristics of an excellent co-op/internship student that you personally value?
  - Would you describe the actions of a person who previously achieved success in this position?
  - What created the need for a co-op/internship student to be in this role?
  - How do you evaluate the success of co-op/internship students?
  - How is feedback given to co-op/internship students?
  - Are there opportunities to cross collaborate with other teams and co-op/internship students at this organization?

- Before you leave, ask if it is possible to have your interviewers’ contact information or their business cards in order to follow up with them.

**After: Follow Up**

- Send a thank you email to each of your interviewers within 24 hours. If you had indicated you would send or do something, follow up based on what you had discussed during the interview.

**Tips for Thank You Emails**

  - Thank interviewers for their time
  - Make reference to specific aspects of the interview (e.g. things that they shared about the role/company/answers to your questions)
  - Reiterate interest in the role

- Reflect on your interview performance. Make note of questions you had a challenge in answering and make a plan to improve your answers for next time.

- Evaluate the organization based on your experience in the interview. How did you feel about the work environment? What was your first impression of the organization and the team? Does it fit what you had envisioned for where you would like to have your co-op/internship? Was the position clarified further and gave you a better understanding of the expectations of a co-op/internship student?
**Interview Formats**

Most co-op and internship interviews have one or two stages: the screening stage and the evaluation or fit stage. Any additional interviews will be dependent on each employer and are often indicators that there are many exceptional candidates. Within each stage, the format of the interview can vary.

**Stage 1: Screening Stage**

Questions asked at this stage are geared towards confirming your qualifications. They may ask questions that require you to provide more details about what is already mentioned in your resumé. At this stage, they may also ask about your availability (when you can start, length of term(s) you are able to go on co-op/internship), and confirm your enrolment in the co-op/internship program.

**Formats**

a) Telephone  
   - Sample Questions: mostly a combination of fit and general technical questions. Situational and behavioural questions could be asked at this stage, but it is not common.

b) Video/Online  
   - Pre-recorded or interactive (typically with a recruiter). Pre-recorded interviews will have set questions for you to answer within a given time frame.
   - Sample Questions: mostly a combination of fit questions. You are likely to be asked about your interest in the organization and/or why you are applying for a co-op/internship at that organization.

c) Online Assessment (typically for programming and development roles)  
   - At this stage, employers will ask you to complete online test which you are required to do within a given time frame (e.g. coding challenge via HackerRank or the organization's internal tools)

**Stage 2: Evaluation Stage**

In this stage, the Q&A portion is a significant factor in your success in the recruitment stage. The questions you will be asked will require you to provide evidence and examples of skills and qualifications that are required for the co-op/internship position you are applying for.

**Formats**

a) Telephone and/or Video  
   - This format is usually provided as an alternative for out of province or remote locations.

b) Technical Interview  
   - Computing students: depending on the position you are applying for, questions or testing can relate to algorithms, architecture design, finding and patching bugs, testing domain knowledge or understanding operating systems. See resources on page 4 below.
   - Mechanical/Civil/Electrical/Geomatics/Space: be sure to keep a copy of the job posting. Any technical skills mentioned will be an excellent clue to help you prepare. You may be asked to demonstrate skills or knowledge in:
     - CAD design and modelling skills (AutoCAD, Solidworks, Microstation other), 3D printing
Electric circuits, electrical test equipment (oscilloscope, power supplies, etc), PLC Programming

Auto CAD Civil 3D, field and laboratory testing of soil, aggregate, concrete, mortar and bituminous paving mixtures

Electronic/optical instruments (total station), creating topographic maps, surveying skills, AutoCAD, ArcGIS

c) In-person

- Traditional Q & A in a one-on-one, group or panel interview
- Questions can be a combination of fit, situational, technical and behavioural questions.

Types of Interview Questions

General Fit Questions

- **Tell me about yourself.**
  - There are many different ways to answer this question. No matter how this question is framed, the underlying intention behind this question is that your interviewer would like to know, “Can you tell me 3-4 things that can convince us that you are a good fit for this co-op/internship?”

*Sample framework answer:*

- **Who are you?**: I'm a 3rd-year digital media student + a key theme in all you do/something you are passionate about/ a unique interest/fun fact about you.
- **What do you bring?**: what relevant experience/projects/activities you have. State at 1-2 relevant experiences and 1-2 relevant skills
- **Why are you here?**: answer the question, “why are you interested in X company” or “Why do you think you would be a good fit for this specific role? e.g. I’m excited to learn a bit more about how…./…which is why I am happy to be interviewing with you today about X role”

- What are your top 3 strengths and your worst weakness?
- What do you know about our organization and what motivated you to apply for a co-op/internship here?
- What factors contributed to you pursuing your degree in Engineering or Computer Science?
- In what ways do you think your education has prepared you for this co-op/internship?
- How satisfied are you with your current academic record? What would you change about it?
- What has been your greatest accomplishment to date? What has been your greatest failure so far?
- What is your preferred type of work environment? Structured or unstructured?
- What do you know about our organization and what motivated you
- Why should we hire you?
- What frustrates you the most? What motivates you?
Situational Questions
These questions typically present you with a scenario and ask you to provide a solution to a problem that is posed.

- What would you do if I asked you deliver a presentation on groundwater and surface quality sampling?
- Imagine that it is your first day on the job, you came in expecting to meet with your mentor to discuss what you will do for the day. However, you find out that your mentor is unexpectedly away and now have no idea what to do. Would this be a good day or bad day for you?
- If you were given 3 different projects by your team, but all due at the same time, how would you handle this situation?
- If you could rewrite the co-op/internship job description for this role, what would you change and why?

Behavioural Questions

- Tell me about a time you worked on a team and things didn’t go so well. What did you do?
- Describe a situation where you received negative feedback about your work. How did you handle the feedback?
- Walk us through a time when you managed or led a project.
- Collaboration is important to us. Can you give us an example of a time when you worked with a team to resolve a problem?
- Tell me about a time that you failed or did not meet a goal. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you had to persuade others to consider your idea on how to solve a problem. What specifically did you do?

Technical/Competency/Job Knowledge Questions
these can also be framed in situational or behavioural format

- Walk me through your experience with _____? (a specific function that is mentioned in the job responsibilities, e.g. AutoCAD, budget forecasting, programming, purchasing, etc.)
- Describe for us what you know about the Software Development Life Cycle and any models you have experience or are familiar with?
- What is a new engineering skill you learned recently. How did you go about acquiring this skill?
- How would you explain a car’s wheel and axle system to a layperson?
- Tell us about something that you designed in the past 2 years. How did you come up with the idea and what was the final product?
- There are 3 or more errors on the code presented to you. Tell us which ones they are and how you would improve it.

Technical Interview Resources for Computing Students:

There are a multitude of resources for tips on a successful technical interview. To start, we recommend the following:

Books:
- Book: Cracking the Coding Interview by Gayle Laakmann McDowell
Online Resources

- Check out company specific interview guides. These guides provide you with an overview of what to expect for that specific company and outlines the technical interview process. Here are a few examples of excellent guides:
  - Amazon Software Development Engineer Hiring Process: Software development topics | Amazon.jobs
  - Facebook: Preparing for your Software Engineer Interview at Facebook: Preparing for your Software Engineering Interview at Facebook | Facebook careers
  - Google: Interview tips - Google Careers

- Algorithms:
  - LeetCode - The World’s Leading Online Programming Learning Platform
    - It is highly recommended to practice easy to medium questions for co-op/internship positions.
  - Byte by Byte Blog: Blog - Byte by Byte (byte-by-byte.com)
  - Hackerrank: HackerRank

- Other:
  - LinkedIn Learning: LinkedIn Learning | formerly Lynda.com (yorku.ca) (York University students can access this for free with Passport York Account)
  - Glassdoor.ca is not only for job postings – learn about salaries and interviews from a community of job seekers or contribute your own experiences. Glassdoor Job Search | Find the job that fits your life

Answering Interview Questions

General

- Tailor your answers to the job that you are applying for. Utilize the research you’ve performed throughout the application process to craft answers that confirm you possess the skills and qualifications required for the co-op/internship position.
  - For example, if you are asked for weaknesses, you want to be careful not to indicate a key requirement of the job if that is your true weakness. When asked for strengths, you want to state your strengths that will be essential for your success on the job.
- Every question you are asked often has an underlying intention behind the question. Try to identify the intention behind the questions before answering.
- Think your answer thoroughly first before beginning to speak. It is okay to pause briefly before you answer to plan your response. If you didn’t hear the question or understand it, ask for clarification or for them to repeat it.
- Provide well-organized answers that have a logical flow of information. Try to answer concisely.
- Always provide specific examples to add context.
- Avoid giving negative information when possible; minimize negative aspects if directly asked
- Answer honestly; never lie or stretch the truth in an interview
Behavioural Questions

When you hear a question that begins with “Tell me about a time when...” or “Can you describe a situation when...”, it is a behavioural question. We strongly recommend using the STAR framework to provide a comprehensive answer.

- **Situation** – Provide context – where were you? What were the circumstances? What was the problem that needed to be solved? (Usually 1-3 sentences)
- **Task** – What was YOUR particular role in this situation – what were you tasked with doing? (1 sentence)
- **Actions** – This should be the longest part of your answer – what did you do to accomplish the task? Provide specific details that illustrate your use of the competencies that the employer is looking for. (at least 4-7 sentences).
- **Result/Relate to Learning or Reflections on Learning** – What happened because you used your skills effectively? What is a positive result?

Telephone and Video Interview Tips
Adapted from online source: Bright Network

Congratulations! You’ve landed a telephone or video interview. In addition to preparing your answers, conducting research and practicing your answers so you deliver them with confidence, here are some additional tips to help you present your best self in your upcoming telephone or video interview.

1. **Have everything on hand**
   Make sure you have a copy of your resume and job posting handy because it’s fairly likely they will be drawing on it. Also, brief notes on information about the employer. And bullet points of related strengths (technical and non-technical) that you’d like to make sure you highlight.

2. **Don’t Google it**
   If you’re asked a question you don’t know, don’t try to wriggle out of it by having a quick search on Google. This is usually pretty obvious. Try to work around the problem or ask a clarifying question to try to help you get to the answer.

3. **Minimize distractions and interruptions**
   Make sure you are somewhere quiet and where you can speak uninterruptedly without any risk of poor telephone reception. If you are at home, let your roommates/family know to minimize the noise around you. Avoid multi-tasking while on the call, and stay focused.

4. **Take Notes**
   Note-taking can be a valuable tool to aid the flow of your conversation, and help you remember and refer back to key points discussed throughout the interview. Hand-written notes are always recommended, since the sound of typing can be distracting to you and your interviewer.

5. **Listen well and be thorough but concise**
   Allow your interviewer guide the conversation. Listen well to pick up the key points and subtle points they make. When it’s appropriate for you to talk, do not over-talk, and provide thorough but concise answers. Know that it’s OK to have natural pauses in conversation, and gather your thoughts before answering questions; don’t feel compelled to fill “empty air”.

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6. **Remember that the interviewer cannot see you in person.**

In a phone interview, your interviewer cannot assess the non-verbal cues and body language that accompany what you say. All that they can use to gauge your enthusiasm and level of interest is your voice, so inflection and tone are very important. Remember to smile, because it can help you to project a positive image and tone of voice.

In a video interview, be sure to dress as you would for an in-person interview to demonstrate your professionalism. Use your hands to be more expressive, but avoid having your hands block your face. It is good practice to review your camera angle so that it captures your half body, and you can use your hands without taking attention away from your face. This will also help you exude confidence, whether or not you feel it!

7. **Evoke a professional state of mind**

Some people prefer to stand during a phone interview, to project more energy and resonance in their voice. Some people find that dressing as though the interview is in-person helps to evoke a proactive and professional state-of-mind.

8. **Don’t eat**

Avoid chewing gum, sucking on hard candy, or eating anything. It’s a good idea to keep a small glass of water handy, and take small sips to prevent mouth dryness and enhance your voice.

9. **Use the interviewer’s name**

As often as it seems appropriate, address your interviewer by name. Whether you use his or her first name or last name (prefaced by the formal title of Mr. or Ms., not Mrs.) depends largely on you taking your cue from the conversation. In North America, it is not required to address individuals as “Sir” or “Ma’am” or “Madam”. Be sure to listen carefully, and when in doubt, formal is best (e.g. ”Mr. Smith” or ”Ms. Ellesmere”) unless or until the hiring professional invites you to use his or her first name.

10. **Thank the interviewer and ask about next steps**

At the conclusion of the interview, convey your interest in the position discussed (if indeed you are interested) and ask about the typical next steps in the firm’s interview process.

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**Next Steps and Reminders:**

- Meet with a Workplace Learning Coordinator for specific feedback on your applications and interview skills. Our drop-in schedule can be found at: [Drop-ins – Lassonde Co-op/Internship (yorku.ca)](https://yorku.ca)
- **When asked, you can** refer your interviewer to contact the Co-op & Internship Office (lsecoop@lassonde.yorku.ca) about presenting an offer or the Co-op Program’s processes.
- If you have any questions about accepting an offer, please contact a co-op coordinator at our main address, lsecoop@lassonde.yorku.ca.