

SAN DIEGO MESA COLLEGE

Career Services



2026-2027

INTERVIEW PREPARATION HANDBOOK

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TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

PHONE SCREEN



A phone screen is an initial call to determine whether you are a good fit to come in for a full interview. If you receive a spur of the moment call, ask to schedule a more appropriate time.

INDIVIDUAL



An Individual interview Sit down with a solo interviewer and focus on highlighting how your skills, experience, and accomplishments proving you're a great candidate for the job.

BEHAVIORAL



A Behavioral interview are more in-depth. The employers might ask about specific situations in your previous role, your actions, and the results.

VIRTUAL



In a virtual interview, you Meet the interviewers remotely. Prepare the right on-screen look and make sure all of your tech systems are ready.

PANEL



Panel interviews consist of numerous interviewers from different perspectives in the organization, such as HR, your potential manager, and other employees.

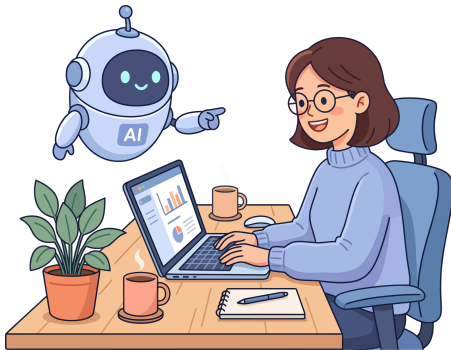
GROUP



In a group interview, the hiring team interviews a number of candidates at the same time. This is most common for retail, seasonal hiring, and hospitality jobs.

SCREENING METHODS

AI-ASSISTED



AI-Assisted interviews typically involve recording video responses to pre-set prompts or chatting with an automated system. Treat it like a real interview — dress professionally, speak clearly to the camera, and test your tech beforehand.

WORK SAMPLES



Employers may ask you to complete a short assignment, writing prompt, or problem-solving task to see how you perform real-world duties. Take your time, follow the instructions closely, and double-check your work.

PORTFOLIO



Expect to walk the interviewer through actual projects, designs, or papers you've completed. Pick your best pieces and be ready to explain your process and the impact of your work.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS



Every candidate gets asked the exact same set of standardized questions. Keep your answers clear, focused, and directly tied to the specific skills they are looking for.

INTERVIEW DON'TS



ARRIVE LATE



USE INAPPROPRIATE LANGUAGE



CHEW GUM



DRESS INAPPROPRIATELY



RAMBLE



LIE ABOUT YOUR TRAITS OR SKILLS



GLANCE AT YOUR PHONE OR WATCH



SPEAK POORLY OF PAST EMPLOYORS

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

As a general rule, dress how you would for a day at the job you are interviewing for. If you do not know what this looks like, aim for business casual.



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The Stand is San Diego Mesa College's **FREE** food pantry and clothing closet available to all students!



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INTERVIEW PROCESS



Before the Interview

- Research the company, dress to impress, prep your key points, and practice interviewing.
- Make sure to prepare a few good questions to ask them too!
- Have physical copies of your resume ready, and bring a notebook and pen to take notes.



During the Interview

- Listen carefully and make sure you answer the questions that are asked.
- Tell your story by sharing real examples of your experience, and stay positive throughout the conversation.
- Be aware of your body language—make good eye contact, offer a solid handshake, and express genuine interest in the role.



After the Interview

- Send a thank-you email or card within 24 hours to express your interest and appreciation for their time.
- Stay positive, keep it professional, and follow up as specified by the employer.

HOW TO APPROACH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Q. Tell me about yourself

Start with a confident, compelling statement of who you are, emphasizing recent and applicable experience and achievements. Then, plan in advance and outline which details will impress the employer. Remember, the employer only has a limited amount of time.

Q. Why are you interested in this position?

Research the company and the role, and discuss how your skills and experience align with the company's objectives. Showcase your motivation and enthusiasm. Explain how you believe the role will challenge you, enable you to learn new skills, and contribute to your long-term career goals.

Q. Tell me about a time when you...

Approach behavioral-based questions with storytelling. Employers are more likely to be engaged with information that is presented in the form of imaginative and thought-provoking stories. The STAR method is an effective format to structure your answer for behavior-based questions.

The STAR Method



Situation

An event, project, or challenge faced



Task

Your responsibilities or assignment for the situation



Action

Steps or procedure taken to relieve the situation



Result

State the impacts or results of your actions

Q. What are your greatest strengths?

Embrace this question as an opportunity to talk about your best qualities. Avoid choosing generic strengths that anyone can claim. Avoid general statements such as "hard worker" or "people person." Be specific and prepare an example to demonstrate each strength.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

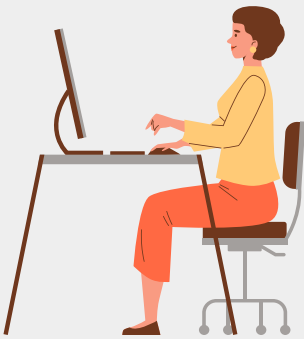
Don't try to play a strength off as a weakness. Don't choose a weakness that could limit your performance at the job. Choose a weakness that you are actively working on and describe how you are striving to improve.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS



Give a confident handshake:

A handshake lacking confidence can tell the employer that you are nervous and maybe lacking the skills for the job, while too strong a handshake can project arrogance or aggressiveness.



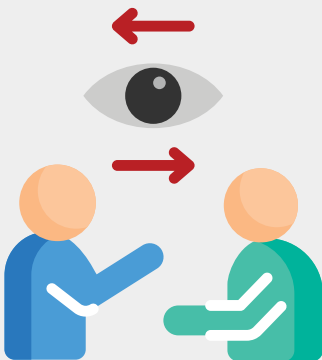
Stand and sit up straight:

Good posture shows energy and engagement. A slouching posture looks tired and uncaring.



Be calm and collected:

It is completely normal to feel nervous during an interview. Practice grounding techniques such as resting your hands comfortably on your lap or desk or taking steady breaths so the conversation stays focused on your skills.



Make eye contact with the interviewer:

Looking around the room or looking down while you are talking can convey a lack of confidence, a lack of interest, or discomfort with the discussion.

PREPARING QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

It can be an advantage to ask 2-4 questions towards the end of the interview in order to make sure that the position is the right fit for you and to show your enthusiasm for the role. The questions you choose to ask depend on the job, the company, and your goals. Below are some example questions.

1. What would a typical day or week in this position be like?

2. How would you describe the company's culture and values?

3. Are professional development opportunities available in this role?

4. How would you define success in this role?

KEEP IN MIND!

Some of the questions you prepare may be answered throughout the interview, which may require you to ask another question. Ensure your questions are relevant to the position, and always maintain a professional tone.

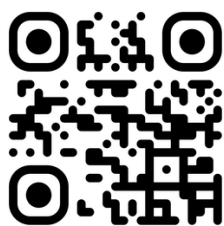
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Career Services

ADDITIONAL HANDBOOKS

linktr.ee/SDMesaCareerHandbooks1

- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Internship



STAY CONNECTED!

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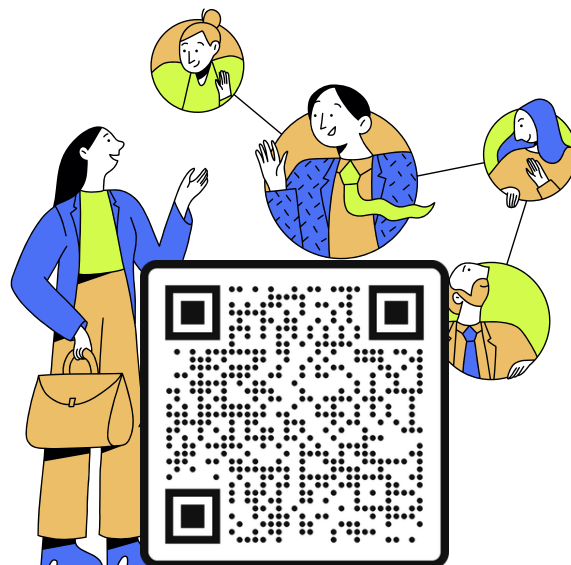
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