Career Planning

Interviewing

APEX WOOSTER
Skills Employers Look For In Recent College Graduates

Employers place the greatest value on demonstrated proficiency in skills that cut across all majors. Employers deem these skills critical to a candidate’s potential for career success and more important than a student’s choice of undergraduate major.

**Top Skills:**

- Ability to clearly communicate orally and in writing
- Ability to work effectively with others in teams
- Ethical judgment and decision making
- Critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills
- Ability to apply knowledge and skills to real-world settings
- Ability to solve complex problems
- Ability to locate, organize and evaluate information from multiple sources
- Ability to innovate and be creative
- Stay current on changing technologies and their applications to the workplace

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**Employers place the greatest degree of importance in the following areas:**

**Ethics:** “Demonstrate ethical judgment and integrity”

**Intercultural Skills:** “Comfortable working with colleagues, customers, and/or clients from diverse cultural backgrounds”

**Professional Development:** “Demonstrate the capacity for professional development and continued new learning”

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**Employers like candidates whose undergraduate experiences included:**

- Solving problems with people whose views are different from their own
- Gaining an understanding of democratic institutions and values
- An internship/community-based field project connecting classroom learning with real-world experiences
- A senior thesis/project demonstrating knowledge, research, problem-solving and communication skills
- Multiple courses involving significant writing
- Courses that build their civic knowledge, skills, and judgment essential for contributing to society
- Completing a research project collaboratively with peers
- A service-learning project with a community organization
- Completing a field project in a diverse community with people from different backgrounds
- Completing a study abroad program

Most employers believe that it takes BOTH specific knowledge/skills and broad knowledge/skills to achieve long-term career success. Employers value graduates’ completion of various applied and project-based learning experiences indicating that they would be more likely to consider hiring graduates who engaged in these types of experiences.
What Are The Different Types Of Interviews?

Screening
A screening interview is a type of job interview that is conducted to determine if the applicant has the qualifications needed to do the job, thus narrowing the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. A screening interview is typically the first interview in the hiring process, and can be conducted over the phone or in-person in such places as a job fair or on a college campus.

**Tips:** Be prepared to articulate how your qualifications match those of the job.

Telephone
Many times employers use phone interviews in place of an in-person interview as a way to minimize the expenses involved in interviewing out-of-town candidates. Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for an in-person interview. Secure a landline, if possible, to ensure a good, consistent connection.

**Tips:** Have in front of you: your resume, the job description, examples of how you meet specific qualifications, information about the company, and prepared answers to some challenging questions. Smile, speak slowly and enunciate clearly.

Video Conferencing/Skype
More and more employers are using video conferencing software such as Skype to conduct interviews.

**Tips:** Plan to use a quiet space with a plain background. Check your technology the day before, dress professionally, smile and look straight into the camera to maintain eye contact as if it were a face-to-face setting.

In Person
The personal interview provides the hiring manager the opportunity to meet the candidate in person and review the candidate’s qualifications to determine suitability for the position. It also provides the candidate the opportunity to learn about the position and its requirements, and to present information on ones skills and experience.

**Tips:** Arrive 10-15 minutes early, be courteous to everyone you meet, be aware of your body language, and focus on what you can do for the organization.

Committee or Panel
This type of interview is where the candidate meets with several decision-makers at once. It’s an efficient way to interview candidates and allows for different interpretations or perceptions of the same answer.

**Tips:** Be sure to make eye contact with everyone, no matter who asked the question. It’s important to establish rapport with each member of the interview team. Try to find out the names and job titles of the participants so a thank you note can be sent to each person.
How Do I Prepare For The Interview?

Preparation is critical in conveying a positive and polished image and having a productive and successful interview. Before going on your first interview, there are three steps to take in order to prepare yourself.

1. Know Yourself

   • Think about your skills, interests, and values.
   • Consider your strengths and weaknesses.
   • Be able to discuss decisions you have made and the thought behind them.
   • Identify accomplishments you are proud of and things you might have done differently.
   • Provide examples to demonstrate how you have developed your skills.
   • Be able to articulate why you are interested in the position and/or the field.
   • Define your long-term goals.

2. Know the Employer and the Field

   • Research the employer, the position, and the industry or field.
   • Know what salary range is usual for this type of position.
   • Read current periodicals and trade journals to learn about current trends in the field.
   • Review mission statements, annual reports, and company literature.
   • Think about the firm's competitors, its clients or customers.
   • Be familiar with the employer's organizational structure.

3. Practice for the Interview

   • Meet with a career advisor to review your interview strategy.
   • Participate in a videotaped mock interview.
   • Use the Optimal Interview program found on the Career Planning website to practice anytime.
   • Review interview questions with a friend and/or record yourself and critique your answers.
   • Prepare questions you want to ask the employer.

Additional Tips

   • Be your "best" self; let them get to know you and what you can bring to the organization.
   • Think about what an employer wants to know and prepare examples.
   • Prepare a game plan or strategy for every interview; make sure you share the information that you feel is most appropriate and relevant.
   • Keep to the point. Don't bring up extraneous matters.
   • Be as specific as possible.
   • Don't try to dominate the interview. Let the interviewer guide the questions.
   • Ask appropriate and well thought out questions.
   • Don't expect an offer on the spot.
How Do I Discuss My Independent Study At Interviews?

Although Independent Study is often thought of as pressure to produce, students who complete this project gain skills that will not only be valued by employers but throughout life.

Skills Gained Through Independent Study

- Time Management Strategies
- Decision Making Capabilities
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Organizational Experience
- Research Techniques
- Presentation Skills
- Writing Skills
- Creativity
- Stress Management

Utilizing Independent Study as an Example of Your Work

- Cover Letters/Resume: You can mention Independent Study in your application for employment as a project that has prepared you to perform the responsibilities of a specific position.
- Formal and Informal Interviews: In conversations with employers and professionals working in the organization of interest, it can be helpful to discuss your Independent Study project and the extent of involvement required of Wooster students to complete this requirement.

Tips for Explaining Your Independent Study to Others

- For people who are not familiar with Independent Study, they might be surprised at the scope of this academic requirement.
- Explain your project in a logical fashion: start at the beginning and explain your activities sequentially. Emphasize specific skills gained and results found during the process.

For example:

Independent Study is required of all seniors the The College of Wooster for graduation. I chose ______ as my topic of study and prepared a detailed outline planning my project that included targeted completion dates for each phase of the project. Realizing that I would need monetary support to travel to New Mexico to interview members of the Native American population I wanted to study, I contacted various professional organizations and submitted grant proposals to secure $__________ of funding toward my efforts. I then conducted research using the Internet and ______ databases to identify sources for additional information relevant to the topic. I prepared a draft of interview questions to be used with participants and discussed my strategies for interviews with Native Americans. Upon my return, I transcribed the qualitative portion of the interviews and entered the quantitative data into ______ statistical program to complete an analysis. Once the findings had been determined, I wrote an 80-page thesis describing my study and used Microsoft Excel to create a variety of graphs for presenting the numerical results. I then defended my Independent Study to members of my academic department.
What Are Some Questions Asked By Employers?

1. Questions about your college experience
   - Why did you choose The College of Wooster?
   - Why did you choose your major?
   - Which classes and subjects did you like the best? Least? Why?
   - Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic ability?
   - Describe your most rewarding college experience.
   - Have you participated in any extracurricular activities?
   - What have you learned from participating in them?
   - What do you like to do in your free time?

2. Questions about your characteristics
   - What do you consider to be your major strengths and weaknesses?
   - How would a friend or a professor who knows you well describe you?
   - What accomplishment has given you the most satisfaction?
   - What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

3. Questions about your work experience
   - What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
   - What job have you enjoyed the most?
   - What kind of work environment do you prefer?

4. Questions about the position/employer
   - Why did you decide to seek a position with this firm/organization?
   - What do you know about our firm/organization?
   - What criteria are you using to evaluate a particular firm/organization?
   - What factors are important to you in a job?
   - What are you looking for in a supervisor?
   - Do you have a geographic preference?
   - Are you willing to travel?
   - How do you handle pressure?
   - How do you evaluate success?
   - What are your long-term goals?
   - Where do you see yourself in five years/ten years?

5. Open-ended questions
   - Tell me about yourself.
   - Why should I hire you?
   - What makes you unique?
Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interviewing is a technique used by employers to learn about your past behavior in various situations. Why? Past behavior is a better predictor of future behavior than is speculation (on your part) about how you would act in a hypothetical future situation. Proper preparation is key to success in any interview setting. Reflect, identify high quality examples that demonstrate various skill sets and PRACTICE! You can set up a practice interview with any career advisor. It is also suggested you work out answers to questions ahead of time. One approach that is recommended is the S.T.A.R. Method.

**S.T.A.R. Method for Answering Interview Questions:**

- **Situation**
  - Give context to the problem or task you accomplished.

- **Task associated with the situation**
  - Describe the specific task or event associated with the situation. Do not give a generalized background of what you’ve done in the past. The situation and/or task can come from a previous job, class project, student organization, volunteer group, etc.

- **Action YOU took**
  - Describe the action you took to accomplish the task or solve the problem. Be sure to focus on YOUR role within the task. What did YOU do? Do not tell what you *would* do (whenever possible) discuss what you have actually done in the past.

- **Result of your action**
  - What happened? What did you learn? What was the impact of your actions?

Be sure not to simply memorize answers. Rather, think through examples so you can tell a more concise, compelling story when asked to recall behaviors. The S.T.A.R. method gives you a mental outline of how to answers various interview questions.

**Example Behavioral-based Interview Questions:**

- Describe a time when you successfully used persuasion to convince someone to see things differently.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgement and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to set a goal and were able to meet it. (when you did not)
- Give me an example of a time when you had to follow a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go ‘above and beyond’ in order to get the job done.
- When was a time you had too many tasks and you had to prioritize your actions?
- Give me an example when you had to make a ‘split second’ decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict?
- Tell me about a time when you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a time you had to make a difficult decision in the past year.
- Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something, but failed.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventative measures.
- When was a time you had to make an unpopular decision?
- Describe a time you set your sights too high (or too low).
What Are Some Questions Appropriate to Ask During an Interview?

1. Please describe the typical path of a ______________________ in this firm/organization.
2. What will be my opportunities for advancement?
3. Where will this job fit into the organizational structure?
4. How will I be evaluated?
5. What issues or concerns are facing this department/organization/firm now?
6. What are the goals for this department/organization/firm for the upcoming year?
7. What new projects has this department/organization/firm undertaken recently?
8. Do you have any questions or concerns about my qualifications that I might answer for you?
9. When may I expect to hear from you?
10. What is the nature of your search process?

The End of the Interview

At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you. Make a short, concise summary of your qualifications and stress your interest in the position:

"This interview has convinced me that my abilities match your needs. I am very interested in the position. Could I call you in a few days to check on the status of my application?"

After the Interview

Within a few days after your interview, send a short thank you letter to refresh the employer's memory of you. This is your opportunity to mention any experience or skills that were not discussed in your interview. Try to offer new information, if possible.

A "post-interview assessment" can help improve your technique and continue to build your confidence and skills. Analyzing the interview, and talking about how you were feeling during and after it, can be very helpful in preparing for the next interview.

Consider:

Discussing the interview with someone who listens well and cares about your success.
Comparing notes with others who have gone through the interviewing process.
Asking yourself:
   - What were my strengths in the interview?
   - What did not go as planned?
   - What can I do differently next time?

Keep in mind that the art of effective interviewing takes practice. Good luck!
Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you, the job candidate. An employer’s questions – whether on the job application, in the interview, or during the testing process – must be related to the job you’re seeking. For the employer, the focus must be, “What do I need to know to decide whether this person can perform the functions of this job?”

If asked an illegal question, you have three options:

- You can answer the question – you’re free to do so, if you wish. However, if you chose to answer an illegal question, remember that you are giving information that isn’t related to the job; in fact, you might be giving the “wrong” answer, which could harm your chances of getting the job.
- You can refuse to answer the question, which is well within your rights. Unfortunately, depending on how you phrase your refusal, you run the risk of appearing uncooperative or confrontational – hardly words an employer would use to describe the “ideal” candidate.
- You can examine the question for its intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job. For example, the interviewer asks, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” or “What country are you from?” You’ve been asked an illegal question. You could respond, however, with “I am authorized to work in the United States.” Similarly, let’s say the interviewer asks, “Who is going to take care of your children when you have to travel for the job?” You might answer, “I can meet the travel and work schedule that this job requires.”

### Examples of Illegal Questions and their Legal Counterparts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry Area</th>
<th>Illegal Questions</th>
<th>Legal Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Origin/Citizenship</td>
<td>Are you a U.S. citizen?</td>
<td>Are you authorized to work in the United States?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Where were you/your parents born?</td>
<td>What languages do you read, speak, or write fluently? (This OK, as long as this ability is relevant to performing the job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your “native tongue”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Are you over the age of 18?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When did you graduate?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What’s your birth date?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital/Family Status</td>
<td>What’s your marital status?</td>
<td>Would you be willing to relocate, if necessary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who do you live with?</td>
<td>Travel is an important part of the job. Would you be able and willing to travel as needed by the job? (This OK, as long as it is asked of ALL applicants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you plan to have a family? When?</td>
<td>This job requires overtime occasionally. Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary? (This OK, as long as it is asked of ALL applicants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How many kids do you have?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your child care arrangements?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliations</td>
<td>What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?</td>
<td>List any professional or trade or other organizations that you belong to that you consider reflect your ability to perform this job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>How tall are you?</td>
<td>Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job? (Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safely performing the job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much do you weigh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest Record</td>
<td>Have you ever been arrested?</td>
<td>Have you ever been convicted of _______? (The crime named should reasonably relate to the performance of the job in question)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>If you’ve been in the military, were you honorably discharged?</td>
<td>In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? What type of training or education did you receive in the military?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry Area</td>
<td>Illegal Questions</td>
<td>Legal Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Performance</td>
<td>Do you have any physical or mental impairment that would keep you from performing the job you seek? What physical or mental impairments do you have that would affect your job performance?</td>
<td>Are you able to perform the essential function of the job you are seeking, with or without accommodations? (OK as long as interviewer has thoroughly described the job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Requirements</td>
<td>How many days were you sick in your last job?</td>
<td>Can you meet our attendance requirements? How many days were you absent in your last job? How many Mondays or Fridays were you absent last year on leave other than approved vacation leave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Injury</td>
<td>Do you break bones easily? Do you expect the leg to heal normally?</td>
<td>How did you break your leg?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Use</td>
<td>What medications are you currently taking? How often did you use illegal drugs in the past? Have you ever been addicted to drugs? Have you ever been treated for drug addiction? Have you ever been treated for drug abuse?</td>
<td>Are you currently using illegal drugs? Have you ever used illegal drugs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Use</td>
<td>How much alcohol do you drink? Have you ever participated in an alcohol rehabilitation program?</td>
<td>Do you drink alcohol? Have you ever been arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>What is your corrected vision? When did you lose your eyesight? How did you lose your eyesight? Are you color blind?</td>
<td>Do you have 20/20 vision? (If a job requirement.) Can you distinguish between color bands? (If this is an essential function)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental State</td>
<td>Do you see a psychiatrist for stress?</td>
<td>How well can you handle stress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Ability</td>
<td>Are you able to sit? Can you carry objects?</td>
<td>Can you sit for four hours at a time? Can you carry 3lbs boxes to the copier? (If essential functions of the job.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Tell me all of your disabilities? Please complete the following medical history: Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list and give dates. What was the date of your last physical exam? How’s your family’s health? When did you lose your eyesight? How?</td>
<td>What are your job skills, educational background and prior work experience? Are you able to perform the job functions with or without reasonable accommodations? (OK if interviewer has thoroughly described the job) As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations, based on results) Can you demonstrate how you would perform this job-related function?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheelchair Use</td>
<td>Why do you use a wheelchair and will we have to make any accommodations for the wheelchair?</td>
<td>Will you need any accommodation to participate in the recruiting process?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy*