

BENNINGTON

Interview Guide

Practice Tools

- **Online interview tool.** The “Big Interview” program has practice questions, tips and extensive resources. Go to biginterview.com. Use your Bennington email to create an account and login.
- **Interview practice room.** If you want a quiet space to try this out, use our interview practice room, Barn 119, bookable [here](#).
- **Mock (practice) interview.** Make an appointment via [Handshake](#) with a career advisor for a mock interview, in order to practice and gain feedback in person.

Interview Tips

- **Practice.** The best way to ace an interview is to be prepared. Review a list of sample interview questions (on the following page) and rehearse your answers ahead of time. Mock interviews are a great way to do this. Make an appointment on Genbook with a FWT staff member to practice.
- **Relax** before the interview. Get a good night’s rest, eat a healthy breakfast, and take some deep breaths. Remind yourself why you are a good fit for the job.
- **Dress for the job.** As a general rule it is good to dress conservatively and interview in professional attire if you’re interviewing in person. However, for some positions this might not make sense. For example, in many arts positions it is helpful to show just a bit of your personality/style. It is always a good idea to dress modestly at first, and to avoid perfume / cologne.
- **Arrive 10-15 minutes early.** Allow time for everything to go wrong (traffic, missed subway, can’t find the office, etc). Showing up even a few minutes late to an interview can be a deal-breaker. It’s a great idea to use Google Maps to find a nearby coffee shop and plan to arrive there well before the interview. This way, you won’t be stressed about arriving on time and you can take a few minutes to feel centered before you walk over to the office. If you’re doing a phone interview, give yourself time to get settled in a quiet place with good phone service.
- **Be yourself.** Interviewers are looking to know you as a real person, not to hear stock answers.
- **Be honest about your experience.** Interviewers can tell right away when you are making things up or embellishing your work. If you don’t have a certain type of experience, say so. Highlight your eagerness to learn new skills and your confidence that you’re still the right fit.
- **Highlight your achievements.** The interviewer expects you to “sell yourself.” Practice this ahead of time. You should come prepared to show how you will add value to the organization.
- **Know the organization.** Read any materials that the organization has sent you or that are available and take notes. Then, prepare specific questions that show that you did your research.
- **Finish strong.** Plan to send a thank you note via email less than 24 hours later while the interview is still fresh for both you and the interviewer. See the FWT Office [thank you letter template](#)

Sample Interview Questions

Before your interview you’ll want to be prepared to discuss a bit about yourself and the organization you want to work for. Thinking through your potential answers and having a thorough knowledge of what the company does beforehand will help your confidence and will set you apart from other applicants. Here are a few sample questions to get you prepared:

Tell me about yourself.

This is probably the most common of all interview questions, and typically the first thing a job candidate will hear. It is important that you have a rehearsed, polished answer to this question that is directly relevant to the position. This opening question is your first impression and your best “pitch” for yourself as an asset to the organization you want to work for. Make sure to get feedback from multiple people (faculty, advisors, and career development staff) about your answer to this question before you go to the interview.

What experience do you have that makes you a good fit for this position?

If you haven’t already outlined your qualifications, now is the time to describe how your past experiences match the

job description. Highlight experience that is directly connected to the position or that shows transferable skills—skills you developed in an unrelated field, but that are an asset to the position you’re applying for as well. Make sure to rehearse your answer ahead of time and check that it directly matches the qualifications listed on the job description. Try to think from the perspective of the employer: they do NOT want to know your full history, but simply “can you do the job?”

What are your weaknesses?

Interviewers want to hear about your real weaknesses; this is a chance for them to gauge your honesty. Claiming your biggest weakness is perfectionism and you work too hard might sound disingenuous. Still, it is important to discuss your weaknesses in a way that will not damage your chances. Phrase your answer to end on a positive note to show what measures you are taking to improve yourself.

Why are you interested in this opportunity at this company?

The interviewer wants to hear exactly why the company caught your attention. This is the perfect time to show off your research and tell the employer why you are interested in this opportunity as opposed to any other. It’s also a good opportunity to tell an employer what you are hoping to learn through this experience.

Ask About the Job

Usually, an employer will ask you if you have any questions for them before the interview is over. Always take this opportunity. Asking questions shows that you’re present and engaged with the process and that you aren’t just looking for a job, but for an opportunity to be invested in the work and the community. Think about what questions you have before the interview, and pay attention during the interview to see if any new questions arise.

Possible questions to ask

- How does this position fit into ‘X’ team or the company?
- What kind of challenges would someone expect to face in this position?
- How is performance measured in this position?

What NOT to ask

Avoid anything that indicates you’re not flexible, such as:

- Will I have to work weekends?
- Can I work from home?
- How often will I have to work more than 40 hours?
- Will there be an opportunity for a raise?

Ask About the Company

Possible questions:

- What are some of the big projects that need to be addressed?
- Can you tell me about your company’s social responsibilities?
- What’s the leadership style like here?
- What long-term opportunities are available?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- What is it like to work here?

What NOT to ask:

You don’t want to ask anything that makes it obvious you haven’t done your research, such as:

- What does your organization do? Who is your target audience?

Ask about next steps

Possible questions:

- What are some next steps in the process?
- Who is the best person to follow up with?
- When is the company aiming to fill this position?

What NOT to ask

- How did I do in this interview? Did I get the job?

Tips for Professional Calls

Sometimes the telephone is the first “person to person” contact you will have with an employer, so it is important to be professional. An unprofessional phone conversation or voice mail message can hurt even the most talented candidate in a job search.

Here are some tips to remember when making and receiving professional calls.

Making the call

- Be prepared. Know who you are calling and what information you need. Anticipate information they may need from you and have it ready.
- Make the call from a quiet place and have paper and pen ready to take down important information.
- Politely introduce yourself and briefly state the reason for your call. If you know to whom you need to speak, ask for him/her.
- Get the name of the person answering the phone.

“Hello, my name is _____. I am a Bennington College student and am calling to check on the status of my application for the XYZ internship. May I please speak with _____?”

- Always thank the person to whom you spoke for his/her assistance.

“Linda, thank you for your assistance today. I look forward to hearing from Pat.”

Leaving a message

If your contact is unavailable, ask if there is a better time to call. You may also ask if you can leave a message. Avoid leaving multiple, or long detailed messages.

- When leaving a message, remember that someone will be jotting down the important information.
- Speak slowly and clearly, perhaps a little slower than you would normally speak.
- State and spell your name, phone number and purpose for your call. Indicate when would be the best time to reach you.
- It is a good idea to repeat your name and number at the end so the listener can write it down or check it.

“Hello, this is Jane (brief pause) Smith (brief pause). I am a student from Bennington College. My number is (slowly) 8-0-2 (brief pause) 4-4-0 (brief pause) 4-3-2-1. I am calling to check on the status of my application for the XYZ internship position. The best time to reach me is after 3 daily. Again, this is Jane Smith at 802-440-4321 and I look forward to hearing from you.”

Receiving Calls

Once you have started sending out your resume, any call you receive could potentially be an employer. Here are a few tips so that you do not unexpectedly make a poor impression.

- Always answer your phone professionally. Unless you are certain of the number that is calling you, do not assume that the caller is someone who knows you. If necessary, move to a quiet space quickly.

“I am glad you called, would you be able to hold on for a moment while I move to a quieter room?”

- Be sure you know to whom you are speaking. Ask if you missed the name and organization, or if you are unclear about something.

“I am sorry; could you please give me your name again? I’m not certain I heard you clearly.”

- Smile. They cannot see you, but if you are smiling, you are more likely to sound positive and upbeat.

Receiving messages

Answering machines and voicemail boxes should be changed (if necessary) once you begin your job search. Employers do not want to sit through 5 minutes of your favorite band, or start talking after your recorded “Hello” only to hear “Gotcha!” halfway through their introduction.

- Messages should be brief and clear.

“You have reached the voicemail of Alex Bell. Please leave a brief message and I will return your call promptly.”

- If you share a phone with another person, come up with a good system for taking messages. Keep paper near the phone; agree to take down the name, organization and number of any caller and where these messages will be left for the recipient.
- Always return employer calls promptly.

When to call

- Wait around a week to 10 days after sending application material via mail before following up with a call; this can be shortened to 3 days to a week for email.
- The best time to call is generally in the morning between 9 am and 10 am.
- Typically, it is best not to call between 12 – 2 pm since this is when most people take lunch.

Questions? We’re here to help! Reach out to fwt@bennington.edu or make an appointment for a mock interview or to go over more points in detail.