PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is coordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations.

Resources

- **Native Land**

- **Office of Indigenous Relations**

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AGENDA

- Preparing for interviews.

- In person and virtual interviews.

- Types of interview questions.

- After the interview.

- Wrap-up, Q&A.

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WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CONCERNS AROUND INTERVIEWS?

REFRAMING INTERVIEWS

- Mutual exchange of information.

- An opportunity for you to learn if role aligns with your interests, skills, goals, and values.

- A chance to reflect on and share personal highlights and accomplishments.

Image taken from Giphy

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW?

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

- Review resume and job description.

- Research employer (mission, challenges, motivators, culture, strategic plan, company, website, social media, LinkedIn).

- **Practice interview questions.**

- Prepare questions to ask the interview panel.

- Know yourself and what you bring to the position.

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KNOW THE INTERVIEW DETAILS

- If information is not provided, you can ask about the format of the interview.

- How many people will interview you? Who are they?

- How long will the interview be?

- What will the interview entail?
  - Questions?
  - Technical component?
  - Presentation?

Image taken from Google

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VIRTUAL &
IN-PERSON INTERVIEWS

WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN PREPARING FOR VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS?
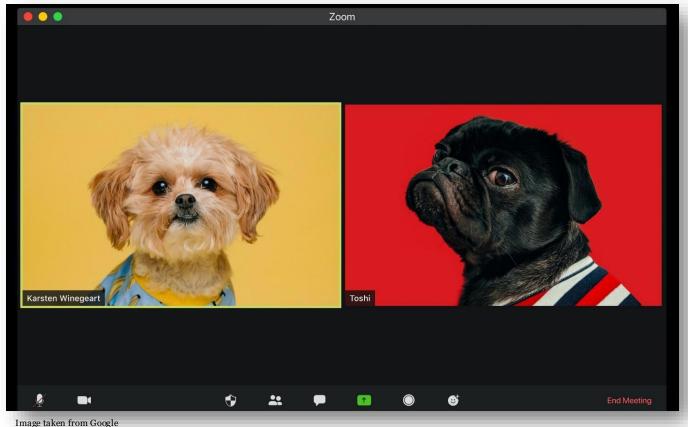
VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

- **Sound**: find a private, quiet space. Use headphones to block out external noises.

- **Background:** have a clean, simple and professional background.

- **Camera angle:** ensure camera is at eye-level.

- **Lighting:** use natural light or a lamp. Ensure you are not backlit.

- **Dress:** dress appropriately/professionally.

- **Test your tech:** practice the platform in advance.

- **Be early:** set-up computer, close extra tabs, mute notifications, open any tools/resources needed.

Image taken from AAMC

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VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Image taken from Google

- **Eye contact:** look into the camera at times.
  TIP: put a sticker beside your camera.

- **Be mindful of body language:** use open body language, avoid slouching.

- **Facial expressions:** nod, smile, use expression when appropriate.

- **Voice and tone:** speak clearly, maintain good volume/pace. Ensure tone conveys interest, enthusiasm and professionalism.

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WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN PREPARING FOR IN PERSON INTERVIEWS?

IN PERSON INTERVIEWS

- Plan your travel and logistics (i.e., parking, room location, account for traffic/interuptions).

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.

- Dress appropriately and professionally.

- Bring a notebook, pen, water bottle, resume.

- Maintain open body language (eye contact, good posture, arms not crossed).

- Keep phone on silent/set it aside to avoid distraction.

- Avoid wearing strong scents (scent-free workplaces, allergies).

Image taken from Google

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TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Classic questions.

- Behaviour-based questions.

- Situational/hypothetical questions.

- Technical or skill- testing questions.

- Problem solving questions.

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

CLASSIC QUESTIONS

Focused on:

- Getting to know you.

- Knowledge about the role/organization/industry.

- Why you are interested in/qualified for the role.

Examples:

- ***Tell me about yourself.***

- What motivated you to apply for this position?

- What interests you about this role/our organization?

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

- What are your strengths and/or weaknesses?

- Why do you think you will be successful in this role?

Image taken from Giphy

SUGGESTIONS FOR 'TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF'

- When/how did you become interested in this field/role/opportunity?

- What knowledge, skills and/or experience do you have?

- What are your short/long-term career goals?

- Can you tie this into the opportunity you're pursuing?

- Anything else worth sharing? (interests, hobbies, fun facts about yourself?)

- Give yourself about 90 seconds (give or take) for this answer

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BEHAVIOUR-BASED QUESTIONS

BEHAVIOUR-BASED QUESTIONS

- Most popular type of interview question.

- Designed to learn about how you've done/handled something in the past.

- **Typically begin with:**
  - Tell me about a time when…
  - Describe a situation where you had to…
  - Recall an instance when…
  - Give me an example of…
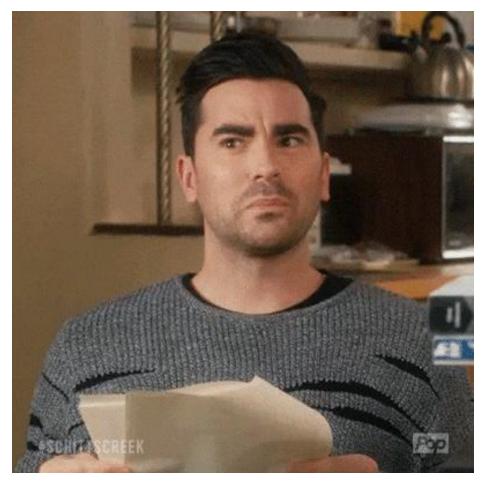
- Try to deliver response in ~80-100 seconds.

Image taken from Giphy

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STAR APPROACH

Situation	**Provide background and context** • Who, what, where, when. • Be brief: you are just providing the context here.
Task	**Describe what you needed to do** • What goals did you need to reach? • Include challenges and expectations.
Action	**Explain what you did and how you did it** • Include the tool(s) and/or skills you utilized. • Try to include all the actions you took, step by step, to paint a clear picture for the interviewer(s). • Focus most of your response on this part of the STAR approach.
Result	**The outcome of your actions** • What did you accomplish? • Include any positive feedback/recognition received. • What did you learn?

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"TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU COMMUNICATED SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE TO A NON- SCIENCE AUDIENCE?"

Situation	In my second year of University, I was a volunteer for the "Lets Talk Science" outreach program at the University of Waterloo.
Task	I was tasked with designing and delivering an engaging, age-appropriate workshop on the climate crisis for students in grade 8 at a local elementary school
Action	I started by reviewing the 8th grade science curriculum to make sure the content I created would build on what students were already learning. I researched key climate change topics and identified what would be most relevant for this age group. To help simplify complex ideas, I reached out to a few of my professors and TAs for advice on how to break things down clearly. I incorporated a mix of visuals, short videos, hands-on activities, and real-world examples to keep things engaging.
Result	The workshop was well received—the students were very engaged and asked thoughtful questions. Several teachers commented on how it sparked further discussion in class. I received feedback that the session was informative, easy to understand, and motivating, which made me feel proud of creating something that made a real impact.

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SITUATIONAL/HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

SITUATIONAL/HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS

- Asked to see how you would react to and handle real life situations on the job.

- Evaluate problem solving skills, decision making.

- Focus on how you approach tasks, manage relationships, and difficult circumstances.

- Typically begin with:

    - What would you do if...

    - Describe how you would...

    - What approach would you take...

    - Imagine you...

Image taken from Giphy

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

Imagine you are assigned to a group project, and one of your team members isn't contributing their fair share. How would you handle the situation?

You are juggling multiple projects with overlapping deadlines. How would you prioritize your tasks and ensure timely delivery for each project?

Your supervisor gives you a task, but you're unsure how to complete it. What would you do?

If a customer is unhappy with a policy you can't change, how would you handle it?

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TIPS FOR ANSWERING HYPOTHETICAL/SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS

- Make sure you fully understand the situation presented in the question. Ask for clarification if anything is unclear.

- Organize your response by outlining the steps or strategies you would take in the given scenario. Use a logical and coherent structure.

- Be realistic and feasible. Avoid suggestions that are impractical.

- Can use the STAR method but answer will focus more on the **action**(s) and **result** since they are giving you the situation and task.

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TECHNICAL, SKILL TESTING AND PROBLEM SOLVING

TECHNICAL/SKILL TESTING

- Gather proof you have the practical skills.

- Can be hands on (i.e., programming on a computer).

- More common in technical, scientific, industrial/manufacturing fields.

  - How do you optimize a SQL query for performance?

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Written or spoken.

- Demonstrates structured thinking.

- Emphasis is on **thought process** (right answer may not matter).

  - How would you estimate the number of geese on the UW campus?

Resource Alert: Technical Interviews- Harvard

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TECHNICAL INTERVIEWS

Image taken from Shorelight

- Field/subfield/domain.

- Organization size.

- Asynchronous vs. synchronous assessments.

- Prep platforms:
  - Glassdoor.
  - HackerRank.
  - LeetCode, NeetCode.
  - Techie Delight.

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WRAPPING UP AN INTERVIEW

Employers will often conclude an interview with:

- Is there anything else that you'd like to add/share with us?

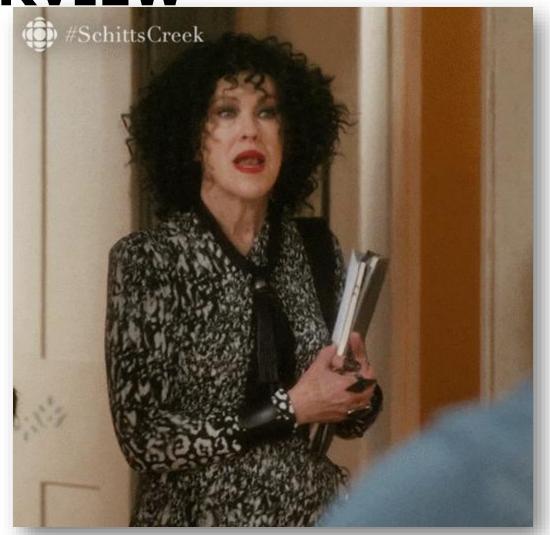- **Do you have any questions for us?**

Image taken from Giphy

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WHAT ARE SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK AT THE END OF AN INTERVIEW?

EXAMPLES

- What aspects of the role do you believe to be the most rewarding/challenging?
- Can you give an example of projects that previous Co-op students worked on in the past?
- How would you describe the work environment at the organization?
- In what ways can I prepare for this job if I am the successful candidate?
- Are there any upcoming projects that the team is particularly excited about?
- Is there anything about my resume that I can clarify/elaborate on?
- Can you tell me what the expected salary is for this position to help me arrange my budget for next term?

TIP: Avoid questions that can be easily researched.

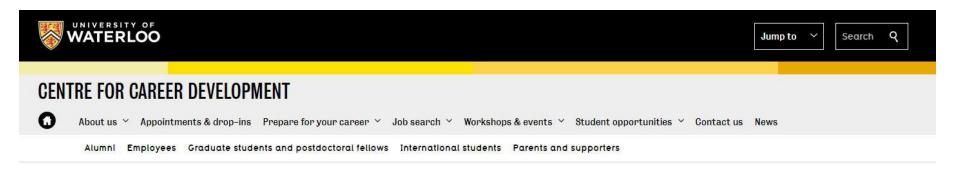UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO | Centre for Career Development

RE-CAP AND FINAL TIPS

- Prepare!

- Save job descriptions (especially for jobs you really want)!

- Treat the interview like a **conversation**, not like an exam.

- Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the role/organization.

- Make sure you have a list of questions to ask.

- Practice in a way that makes sense for you!

- Send a thank you/follow up email.

Image taken from Google

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CENTRE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Visit our website for:
- Booking appointments/ drop-ins
- Job search resources
- Pre-recorded workshops
- And more!

https://uwaterloo.ca/career-development/

Optional Resource: Use 1Mentor to Explore Career Opportunities

1Mentor is a data-driven AI platform that can help connect your coursework to relevant career paths. The platform allows you to:

- Browse occupations related to your major
- View current in-demand skills
- Receive personalized learning recommendations

1Mentor is recommended for students planning for co-op or long-term career development. It is accessible using your UWaterloo credentials – see next slide for login instructions.
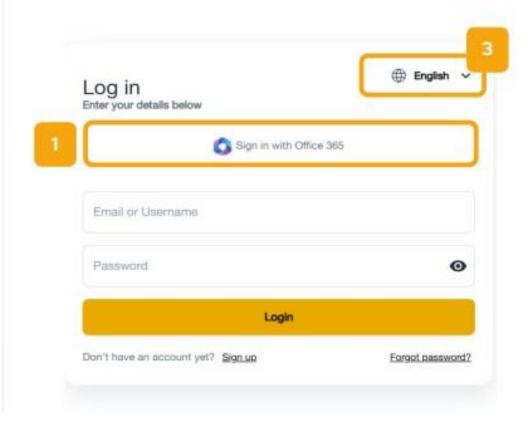
Account creation

1. **Sign in with Office 365:** Click on the option at the top to sign up.
2. **University credentials:** A screen will appear where you can input your University of Waterloo credentials.
3. **Language:** You can choose the language of your preference.
4. **Read and accept Privacy Policy**

3 English ∨

Log in
Enter your details below

1

🔵 Sign in with Office 365

Email or Username

Password 👁

Login

Don't have an account yet? Sign up   Forgot password?

Microsoft

Sign in

2

Email, phone, or Skype

Can't access your account?

Next

Welcome to University of Waterloo

🔑 Sign-in options

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QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, FEEDBACK?