CHAPTER 1:  
OFFICE OF CAREER STRATEGY

The Office of Career Strategy (OCS) offers programs that help students and alumni of Yale College, students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and Postdoctoral Scholars define and further their career goals. Our role at the Office of Career Strategy is to help you learn about yourself, learn about career options, and make informed decisions about your future in order to realize your goals. We do this through individual and group meetings, through the provision of research materials, and through the coordination of programs that put you in direct contact with professionals and organizations in a wide variety of fields.

We encourage you to begin connecting with our office early in your Yale career; by starting early, you may take advantage of all the programming available, adding interesting internship experiences and making valuable networking connections. Building toward a career decision is much less stressful than trying to do it all in one year, one semester, or one week.

All Yale College students, GSAS students, postdocs and Yale alumni - are invited to visit OCS to learn about our services, programs and resources.

SERVICES AND RESOURCES

ADVISING
The Office of Career Strategy offers individualized career and professional school advising appointments and mock interviews to Yale College and GSAS students and alumni. In addition, you can take advantage of our same-day walk-in appointments available Monday through Friday for quick questions and application material critiques.

EVENTS
The Office of Career Strategy offers workshops, information meetings, networking events and career panels on campus during the academic year and collaboration with alumni in various cities during the summer.

JOB AND INTERNSHIP RESOURCES
The Office of Career Strategy coordinates on- and off-campus job and internship interviews, and directs summer internship programs in the U.S. and abroad. OCS also maintains an alumni and peer mentoring database, and can assist you with identifying and developing job and internship opportunities that fit with your specific goals and interests.

WEBSITE
The Office of Career Strategy maintains a website with a wealth of career information in addition to internship and job postings. You can explore this site at ocs.yale.edu. On our website you can explore various careers, view webinars on career search strategies and learn more about creating your application materials.
Chapter 2: Interview Preparation

Congratulations! The countless hours you spent polishing your résumé and writing a tailored cover letter have paid off! Your target employer is interested in learning more about you and has scheduled an interview. You’ve got their attention, now how do you keep their attention and land the job or internship?

Interviewing is a skill. Like all skills, it can take time to build up your proficiency. The more time you spend practicing for interviews the more comfortable you’ll be when it’s time to shine.

Preparing for an interview is hard work and is time consuming; researching the employer, reflecting on their needs and how your background fits, and preparing thoughtful answers and examples you can use to answer questions on your qualifications doesn’t happen overnight.

Too often candidates make the mistake of waiting to prepare for interviews until they hear back from employers, but this may be too late. It’s not uncommon for interviewers to contact candidates only days before they would like to have the interview. Consider all of your commitments, academic and extracurricular; if you get a call or email from an employer on Monday to set up an interview on Wednesday, will that give you enough time to prepare? Preparing early and building your skills over time will make it easier for you to effectively present yourself in an interview.

There are many steps in the preparation process. The following sections will walk you through the steps and provide you with tips and resources to help you along the way. In addition, The Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors are available to conduct practice interviews with you. Practice interviews will help you polish your presentation and become more comfortable talking about your skills, attributes and qualifications in an interview setting. Practice interviews will also give The Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors an opportunity to provide you with specific, individualized feedback on your performance, and guidance on areas that can be strengthened. It’s always best to work the kinks out with The Office of Career Strategy before you’re in a situation where the stakes are higher. Practice interviews can be scheduled on the Office of Career Strategy website in the Talk to a Career Advisor section. You can also practice online mock interviews under the Symplicity Resources tab.

Employer Research

Do your homework. Just as you wouldn’t go into an exam without reviewing all your materials, you shouldn’t go into an interview without first gathering information about the employer and field. Researching the employer will help you to speak intelligently about how your skills, experience and background can help them achieve their goals. Your research will also be useful as you craft thoughtful questions to ask your interviewers.

Professional Voicemail

Employers may call you at any time to set up an interview. Make sure your voicemail message is professional and pleasant, something you want a potential employer to hear.

Example: “Hi, you’ve reached Jon Edwards. I’m sorry I missed your call. Please leave your name and phone number, and I’ll return your call as soon as possible. Thank you and have a nice day.”
The company website is packed with useful information on the mission, goals, history, products and services of the company or organization. Websites also contain information on leadership and senior team members, often with full bios highlighting their backgrounds. Press releases will tell you about new initiatives, products, programs and services the employer wants the public and their constituents to know about. These also give you insight into their strategic vision and goals.

In addition to the company website, use industry overview websites, like Career Beam or Career Insider, and search engines such as Google to search recent media mentions of the company/organization; look for articles that talk about the company’s most recent accomplishments or its future direction. Not all media coverage will be referenced on a company/organization’s website, and there may be key information about the company/organization that you need to know. For example, if a start-up you’re interviewing with is in talks with an established company interested in acquiring them, you need to know about it and will want to ask about the effects of a merger on the position you’re interviewing for. This information may not be mentioned anywhere on the start-up’s website, but not knowing this information will make it readily apparent that you didn’t put much time into researching the company.

It’s also a good idea to begin following the company/organization on social media. Like their Facebook page, follow them on Twitter and LinkedIn, add them to your circles on Google+, and read their blog posts. This will give you insight into company culture and how the employer interacts with customers and constituents, how they present their brand, and the information they choose to broadcast to the public.

If you know who you’ll be meeting with during your interview, you can look those individuals up on the employer website or on LinkedIn to get a sense of their background and any shared connections, affiliations, or common interests.

Beyond researching the company, you should also make sure you’re up-to-date on trends and current events that may have an impact on the industry. Industry-specific publications and websites can help you learn about general trends and how they may influence the position and/or effect the company. Read about the competitive landscape; what are competitors or affiliates doing that may impact the company/organization, or impact the position you’re interviewing for?

**General Interview Questions**

Every interview is different, and there is no way to predict with any certainty exactly what you’ll be asked. But there are common types of questions and sought-after transferrable skill sets you may be asked about.

Start by reviewing the job description. Underline or highlight skills, attributes and qualifications the employer is seeking in a candidate. For each of those skills, attributes and qualifications, prepare to present an example that demonstrates that you have the requisite background.

If the job description is brief or non-descript, think about the skills and attributes that would be necessary to be successful in the role, and use those to prepare examples.

Common skills and attributes that employers will formulate questions around include the following:

- Dealing with challenges
- Adaptability and flexibility
Interpersonal communication    Writing
Persuasive speaking      Problem solving
Research                  Creativity
Attention to detail      Teamwork
Time management and multitasking   Leadership
Persistence      Resilience
Critical thinking  and analysis    Decision-making

Appendix A has a list of questions you can also use to begin practicing for your interviews.

Basically, the employer is trying to gauge your interest in and knowledge of the work they’re doing, determine if you have the skills and personal qualities they feel are essential to fill the role, and assess your overall capacity to do the job. They are also assessing your fit with the culture of the company or organization, and how your personality would mesh with the team, department or division in which you’d be working if offered the position.

When preparing for interviews, it’s helpful to brainstorm your top selling points relevant to the position and examples of how you’ve demonstrated those skills and attributes to back them up. Stories and examples that demonstrate multiple skills that can be used to answer a range of questions can be useful. Have these on hand to use when appropriate, as a go-to when flustered or stuck, and as a way to summarize your candidacy as a wrap-up at the end of the interview. Make sure to use your strongest example first, and avoid repeating stories or examples.

Telling Your Story

“Tell me about yourself.” This seemingly innocuous question is – in one form or another – a common question you may be asked at the start of an interview. If you’re not prepared, this question can be challenging to answer.

In asking this question, interviewers are hoping to learn about your skills, motivations for choosing certain academic and professional pursuits, and assessing your overall ability to communicate your experiences and background effectively and confidently. They are also assessing how you handle an unstructured, open-ended question and what you feel is important to mention.

This is your chance to highlight your strengths, interests and relevant components of your background; in addition, because many interviewers ask follow-up questions based on your answer, is a way to direct the interview. Since this question is often asked at the onset of an interview, it gives you the opportunity to immediately convey confidence and enthusiasm, as well as set the tone for the remainder of the interview, and should therefore be carefully considered.

Your “interviewing story,” as it is often called, is unique to you, but certain aspects are commonly included, such as an introduction to who you are (“A junior at Yale studying…”), your reasons for choosing your course of study (“I became fascinated by the intersection of business and society, and therefore have chosen courses and projects that have allowed me to…”), and motivations for pursuing the job or internship you’re interviewing for (“I am drawn to the opportunity this position provides to …”). Go beyond repeating your résumé; fill in the blanks and bring your story to life.

You should then delve into one or two specific current or past experiences you’ve had which speak to your
commitment to this specific field or industry, as well as your ability to effectively make an impact in any given
situation. Inherent throughout these statements should be the use of skills that are relevant and valuable to the
position for which you are interviewing.

Start by considering what information you want your interviewer to know about you. Review your résumé
and choose which pieces of your background you want to highlight. Avoid going into too much depth on your
personal history. Though the question is open-ended, your interviewer is not looking to hear about where you
were born and how many siblings you have. Focus on conveying information that is relevant to the position and
employer, and that helps them get to know you as a candidate.

Use the questions below as prompts to guide your story.

• What class year are you? Have you declared a major, or do you know what you intend to major in?
• Are there any aspects of your academic background that are relevant for the position? (Courses or study
  abroad experiences that sparked your interest in the field? Projects you completed? Faculty research proj-
  ects you’re assisting with?)
• What have you done during your summers? If you’ve had an internship or job that impacted your career
  interests or is relevant to the interview, highlight what you learned or accomplished during the experience.
• What activities or groups are you affiliated with at Yale? What is your role within the group? What experi-
  ence or exposure are you gaining from the affiliation?
• What sparked your interest in the field?

Finish your interviewing story by bringing the conversation around to why you’re interested in the position
with the company/organization you’re interviewing with. How have all of your experiences - academic, work,
and extracurricular - led you this place? Why is this position the next logical step for you? How did you come to
the conclusion that this position is one that interests you?

There is no set rule as to how long your story should be, though a general guideline is to keep your story under
two minutes. If you go longer than that you run the risk of losing your interviewers attention.

Finally, as important as it is to structure and plan how you present your story, it is equally important to practice
it, as what is in your mind is often not what is actually communicated in the moment. Your story needs to sound
natural, not scripted; each time you present your story it may be a little different, and that’s OK, as long as you
are communicating key highlights and content. Avoid writing every word out and memorizing it; this will make
your story sound unnatural, rehearsed and overworked.

**Illegal Questions**

Prospective employers are prohibited, by State and Federal laws, from asking certain questions that are not
related to the job for which they are hiring. For example, prospective employers should not be asking ques-
tions relating to your race, gender, marital status, age, religion, ethnic background, disabilities, or national
origin. Refer to Appendix B for more information on illegal questions.

In the event you feel an employer has exhibited inappropriate interview conduct, please contact the Office of
Career Strategy at ocs.yale.edu or 203-432-0800. Please note the situation will be kept confidential and the
employer will only be contacted with your permission.
Ultimately, a well-crafted story is one that provides a solid introduction, while compelling the interviewer to want to learn more about you, and ideally to see a direct fit with your background and the needs of the particular position or organization. First impressions are made quickly; make sure that impression is a positive one, presenting you as a confident, self-aware young professional.

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

During an interview it’s common to be asked about your strengths, weaknesses, and significant accomplishments. Questions may take many forms including “Tell me about the personal qualities you’re most proud of” or “Tell me about a time you failed to accomplish something you set out to do.” Though the form may vary, the underlying question is the same. In asking about strengths and weaknesses, employers are looking to gauge your level of self-awareness and ability to honestly assess areas where you can improve. It’s also a chance to see how well you maintain your composure when asked a challenging question.

In an interview it’s important to verbalize and give detailed information about what you’ve done well in past roles. The best responses are specific, clearly stating what you accomplished and how you did it to paint a picture of who you are and what you’re good at. When discussing your strengths, highlight a proven skill and connect it to the position you are seeking. Make sure to exhibit pride in your strengths but avoid seeming arrogant. Always have examples prepared to demonstrate your strengths. It’s easy for someone to say their greatest strength is persuasive speaking, but without an example to demonstrate this skill, it’s an empty statement.

The weaknesses questions strike fear in the hearts of many interviewees, and for good reason. You’re being asked to lay your vulnerabilities out on the table. But with thoughtful preparation, addressing your weaknesses can be painless.

First, you need to honestly assess yourself, you skills set and personal attributes, and determine where you can improve. Choose a skill or attribute you are working on developing or improving -- such as your ability to build consensus within a team you’re leading; tendency to overthink projects and get bogged down in details; or patience with the pace of long-term projects and the length of time it takes to see results -- and prepare a specific example of how you are working on strengthening or developing the skill or attribute that is not as strong.

Avoid using a key job requirement as a weakness. For example, if the position requires you to use Excel, don’t say that learning technology, or Excel specifically, is a weakness of yours. Also, be careful to avoid responses that could be seen as cliché. For example, discussing your perfectionism as a weakness can be seen as disingenuous and trying too hard. Also, in most instances, it’s best to avoid cute answers, such as stating that your weakness is chocolate or that you can’t cook. Unless you’re applying for opportunities in the culinary world, these answers may be seen as inappropriate. If you’re set on responding with a cute or quirky answer, be prepared to quickly follow-up with a serious response.

It’s best to prepare two or three strengths and weaknesses with corresponding examples that you can discuss in an interview since most interviewers are rarely satisfied with only one strength or weakness.

**WHY THEM AND WHY THAT ROLE**

At some point during the interview most employers will ask why you want to work for them and what appeals to you about the position to which you are applying. It’s essential to prepare a thoughtful and thorough response.
Be specific! Avoid vacuous answers such as “I’m impressed by your reputation” and “I think I’d like the position and would be good at it” and delve deeper. Why do you want to work for that company or organization versus every other similar company/organization out there? What sets them apart and makes you want to contribute your skills and talents to their work? Spend time reflecting on these questions before your interview. Use your research to brainstorm your answer, and practice saying it out loud to assure your answer flows smoothly and naturally. When discussing the role you’re interviewing for, tie your skills and attributes to the needs of the position. Explain the research you’ve done on the industry and role, and the process by which you’ve concluded that this position is a good fit for your background. Also keep in mind that your answer should focus on what you can bring to them, not what they can do for you.

**Behavioral Interviewing**

Behavioral interviewing refers to a style of questioning that asks you to provide examples of how you’ve performed in the past in specific situations or demonstrated your skills and attributes. The theory behind behavioral interviewing is that your past reactions are a good indicator of how you will react in the future if faced with a similar situation.

These questions tend to begin with “Tell me about a time when…” or “Give me an example of a situation where you’ve…..” When faced with these questions, it’s important to structure your answers in a way that assures you’re telling a complete story and answering the question at hand. All too often when answering these questions, people fall into the trap of rambling or giving an overly-detailed account of a situation and lose the attention of interviewers.

The STAR process is a framework you can use to structure answers to behavioral questions. The STAR acronym stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. Using the STAR process will help you hit key points and present your examples in a clear, structured manner.

**Situation:** What was the situation you found yourself in? Was there a problem that required resolution or an initiative that you were asked to lead? Set the stage and briefly provide background and context. Choose examples that will give you the opportunity to demonstrate the skills and attributes the employer is seeking. Ideally choose examples that are relevant and somewhat recent. You can draw from internships, leadership roles, extracurricular activities, or academics. Avoid personal examples unless they are directly related to the position.

**Task:** What tasks were you assigned or responsible for? What were you trying to accomplish? What was your role and what strategies did you develop to solve the problem or accomplish the goal? Make sure to focus on your individual role, especially if you were working in a team. Though the ability to work well in a team is valued, the interviewer is assessing you as an individual, and the contributions you are able to make. If your example only addresses what “we” did, the interviewer may wonder what you, as an individual, are capable of.

**Action:** What steps did you take to accomplish that task? What was your plan of action? Focus on the action-able steps you took, discussing the specifics of your task in a concise step-by-step sequence. The key word is concise; avoid bombarding your interviewer with too much detail.

**Results:** What happened as a result? What were your outcomes? How did your efforts help the overall success of the office or organization? If possible, quantify your answers. Summarize your accomplishments and outcomes, and how your efforts added value.
Practice is the key to effectively presenting examples in an interview. Think about it as a form of storytelling; as the storyteller, it’s your job to clearly explain your experiences in a way that paints a picture for your interviewers, clearly illustrating your background, skills, and personal characteristics.

CASE INTERVIEWS
Case interviews are a specialized form of interviewing that needs to be approached, and prepared for, in a specific way. This style of interviewing is most commonly used by consulting firms, though many other employers will also employ cases to help them gauge a candidate’s ability to think, reason, apply logic, handle pressure, and communicate ideas.

Traditional interviews are designed to “get to know” the applicant; case interviews allow employers to make projections on how candidates will function within the job itself. Cases may occupy a part of an interview or may fill the allotted time. Such interviews put candidates in hypothetical situations, have them solve complex business problems, and test candidates’ ability to function under pressure. A situation, problem, or data set is presented, and you will be asked to comment on it, analyze it, offer proposals, or come up with a solution.

There are three basic categories of case questions: market-sizing questions, industry-based cases, and quantitative questions and brain teasers.

Market-sizing questions test your ability to be resourceful and work with broad numbers. You should know general numbers, such as U.S. population or number of households, and be prepared to make a “best guess” estimate for an answer based on your projections. Questions such as “how many contact lenses are sold in the U.S. each year?” and “how many ping-pong balls would fit on a regular school bus?” are examples of market-sizing questions.

Industry-based case questions can be strategy- or operations-based, and will test your knowledge of general business terms and concepts, as well as your ability to apply them to a given situation. Questions such as “Disney is considering buying Marvel Comics; should they?” would be an example of an industry-based case question.

Quantitative questions and brain teasers are meant to assess how well you think on your feet, and may or may not have a definite answer. For example, “Twelve is what percentage of 144?” would have a definite answer, where as “Why are manhole covers round?” will not.

There are many resources available to help you prepare for case interviews including online and print resources and weekly practice case interview sessions organized by Yale’s Graduate Consulting Club. Review the information in Appendix C to get started and check the YGCC’s website for practice times and locations (www.yalegradstudentconsulting.org).

GROUP INTERVIEWS
Occasionally, employers will invite you to take part in a group interview, which is basically interviewing with a group of other candidates who are seeking the same position you are. Group interviews can be intimidating since it forces you to see your competition and at times, openly compete with your classmates. This type of interview is more common for team-oriented positions that depend on group dynamics, such as consulting. Interviewers are using the group interview to assess how well you work with others, the role you tend to fill
within a group, your ability to listen and communicate your ideas, and how well you give and accept constructive suggestions.

Often times these interviews will begin with the interviewers briefly speaking about the company and position and will then move into group exercises. The challenge with group interviews is to know to what extent to be a team player versus setting yourself apart from the group. A common mistake is to try to assume leadership of the group or to be the most noticeable contributor to a discussion by dominating the conversation. This will make you stand out, but not necessarily in the way that you want.

For a position dependent upon group dynamics, they may be looking for a facilitator, supporter, or a coordinator rather than a dominator. Focus on demonstrating what you have to offer and how you can contribute to the group. Don’t prevent others from contributing and showcasing their ideas -- remember, your listening skills are also being evaluated. If someone makes a good point or has a good idea, acknowledge it. Contribute to the discussion by adding on to what others are saying, complimenting their ideas and building on to them to enhance the discussion. Avoid being overly critical of someone’s contributions; bringing others down will only make you look bad, especially if done so in a manner that is too judgemental or harsh. Be a participant. Recognize the good work of others and support it. Offer constructive critique where you feel it’s merited. Most importantly, be yourself.

**Questions for Them**

As the interview is drawing to a close, it's common for the interviewer to ask if you have questions for them. The worst answer you can give to this question is “no” or “you've answered all of my questions.” Not having questions for them signals disinterest. Employers are assessing your preparation, interest, and inquisitiveness. This is a chance to leave a final impression, finish strong, and establish yourself as a top candidate.

It’s also important to remember that interviewing is a two-way exchange; it’s not only about the employer assessing your fit for the position, but it is also chance for you to determine if the position and work environment fits with your goals, interests, and personal values. It’s essential to prepare at least a few questions you can ask on topics that matter to you. Use the prompts below to help you brainstorm questions:

- How would this position be interact with the larger team/other departments/divisions?
- What do you like best about working at ________________? What keeps you excited about your work?
- What are the opportunities for training and advancement?
- Can you tell me about your performance review process? Who evaluates employee performance? How is success measured?
- Is there a typical career path for people beginning in this role?
- I know the company prides itself on ___________ and _______________, so what would you say is the most important aspect of your culture? How would you describe the company culture?
- How do you think I could help the company meet its goals?
- How do you see the person in this role making a positive impact on the ____________ (projects, initiatives, services, programs, etc.) this position would be involved with?
- To what extent are interns able to get exposure to ______________ (client meetings, team meetings, etc.)?

Avoid questions on salary, benefits such as vacation time, and schedule flexibility. Asking about these topics
During an interview, before they’ve determined if you’re the best candidate for the position, can be seen as presumptuous; these should be saved until you get an offer.

You also want to avoid questions that are too basic or indicate that you haven’t done your homework. If the answer can be found by looking at the company or organization website, including general questions on their programs, products, or mission, then it’s too basic. Use the basic information you find on their website to develop thoughtful, in-depth questions that reflect your inquisitiveness and your genuine interest in learning more about their work and how you can contribute.

Responding to Questions on Salary Expectations

Occasionally employers will bring up salary in an interview. They do this for a number of reasons. If they have a limited hiring budget and/or a low starting salary, they may want to determine if you would consider the salary prior to moving forward with the process. If there’s a significant mismatch between your needs and expectations and what they’re able to pay, they may not want to waste your time or theirs. Conduct preliminary salary research prior to an interview so that you are prepared in case this comes up. (e.g. see glassdoor.com or salary.com).

If asked about salary expectations, you can first respond by indicating that your salary requirements are negotiable, and that as you learn more about the specific responsibilities of the position you would be happy to discuss a fair salary.

If pushed for a number, you can ask the interviewer if they have a salary in mind for the position, or you can give a broad range consistent with the going market rate uncovered through your research. Qualify your answer by restating that as you learn more about the specifics of the position, you’d be happy to discuss salary further.
CHAPTER 3:
PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION

FIRST IMPRESSIONS
You can have stellar answers to the questions being asked, but if you are dressed inappropriately or unprofessionally, if every other word is “um,” or if you’re staring at the ceiling as you’re talking, you may not make it to the next round. The verbal and non-verbal messages you send to an interviewer matter. The quick tips below will help you make that positive first impression and avoid behaviors that can ruin the professional presentation you’re aiming for:

You only have one chance to make a first impression; make sure your attire sends the right message and is appropriate for the field in which you’re interviewing.

Practice your handshake to make sure you’re comfortable and confident when engaging in the common greeting.

Eye contact, posture, and body language play an important part in interviewing and send important messages about your confidence and comfort. Make sure you are sitting up straight, making regular eye contact with all interviewers, and avoiding wild gestures.

Filler words such as “um,” “like,” and “you know” are distracting and take away from the confident, polished communication skills you’re trying to demonstrate to a future employer; avoid using these words in an interview as much as possible.

Avid chewing gum or large mints during your interview.

Turn off your cell phone before you go into your interview.

WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT NOT TO BRING
So what should you bring with you to an interview? It’s always a good idea to bring a few copies of your résumé and a reference sheet with names and contact information for those who have agreed to serve as references; though you may not need these, it’s a good idea to have them on hand just in case. You should also have a notepad and pen, the names of your contacts or interviewers, directions, and a list of questions you’d like to ask. All of these can be kept in a professional portfolio. Depending on your field, you’ll also want to bring writing samples or a creative portfolio, if applicable. And don’t forget identification, especially if you are having an on-site interview at your potential employer’s place of business; you may need to show identification to get a visitor’s pass.

Conversely, there are things you should not bring with you to an interview. Consider the overall image you want to convey. If you want people to see you as a future colleague and young professional, look the part from head to toe. Carrying a backpack and having extra copies of your résumé in a folder make you look like a college student, which of course you are, but if your goal is to present the image of a young professional ready to enter the workforce these do not help your cause.
It’s also a good idea to avoid bringing coffee or tea with you to your interview. You don’t want to risk spilling anything on yourself or the floor, not to mention that stale coffee breath is not very inviting. Though fresh breath is a must, gum should be avoided, or at the very least properly discarded before you arrive at your interview. The same goes for breath mints, make sure to finish or discard your mint before you arrive at your interview.

Though no one expects you to leave your cell phone at home when you head out to an interview, you need to remember to turn off your cell phone before your interview. There is nothing more distracting than a ringing, beeping or vibrating phone. And if you happen to forget to turn your phone off and it rings during an interview, do not answer it. Turn it off, apologize for the interruption, and continue your interview.

**Eye Contact and Body Language**

It’s not only what you say but how you deliver your message. Non-verbal factors such as posture and eye contact play a critical role in an interview and can make or break your candidacy.

Eye contact is an area where many novice interviewees struggle. Making eye contact with your interviewers conveys confidence and certainty; poor eye contact may be seen as a lack of confidence or make you appear disinterested and disengaged. You may have a great answer to the question being asked, but if you’re looking at the floor or the ceiling while talking, the interviewers could doubt the sincerity of your answer and your confidence in what you’re saying. Of course there can be too much of a good thing. Interviews are not a staring contest; glance away occasionally to avoid making your interviewer uncomfortable.

If there are multiple people involved in the interview, make a point to look at all of them while you are speaking. Focus your attention on the person asking the question, and keep that person as your primary focus as you answer, but don’t exclusively keep eye contact with them and ignore all others in the room.

For some people, making eye contact can be uncomfortable. Conducting practice interviews with The Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors will help you increase your comfort with making eye contact, and can help increase your overall confidence in your ability to effectively present yourself during an interview.

Similar to eye contact, your posture says volumes about your comfort and confidence, as well as your level of interest in the position. Make a point to sit up straight. Lean in slightly when speaking to show interest, but as with everything, don’t overdo it; leaning too far forward may be seen as overly aggressive. Conversely, leaning back in your chair can be perceived as arrogant or disengaged.

**The Art of the Handshake**

A handshake is essential in many professional situations and is a key element in making a positive first impression on your interviewers. A strong handshake demonstrates confidence, friendliness and professionalism, whereas a weak handshake can get the interview off on the wrong foot.

Wait for your interviewer to initiate the handshake. If you’re sitting, make sure to stand up before shaking hands; this demonstrates respect. Always have your body facing the person -- if you’re turned away it may seem like you’re in a hurry or not interested in speaking to them. Extend your right hand out in front of your body with your elbow slightly bent and your thumb pointing to the ceiling. Firmly grip their hand and gently pump
your hand two to three times before releasing your grip. Maintain eye contact with the person throughout the handshake.

When gripping someone’s hand, you want to avoid being too forceful and crushing their hand; this can be viewed as overly aggressive and can be painful for the other person. Conversely, you also want to avoid a limp handshake; this can be interpreted as weakness and a lack of confidence. Practice with family and friends to get comfortable shaking hands and to get a feel for how much pressure to exert when gripping someone’s hand.

Keep in mind that protocols may vary internationally; if interviewing abroad, take time to research the proper handshake etiquette for region where you’ll be interviewing.

**CHAPTER 4: INTERVIEW STAGES**

**FIRST ROUND INTERVIEWS**

First round interviews generally serve as an initial screening of applicants to assess which are best suited to the position, weeding out candidates who are not as strong a fit. These interviews tend to include general questions on your background, experience, skills, interest in the position, knowledge of the company and of the industry. Interviewers are assessing your professionalism, confidence, and ability to clearly express your thoughts verbally. In some fields, there may be a brief case study or scenario to assess your logical and critical thinking abilities and knowledge of the industry. For writing-heavy positions, there may also be a writing test.

First round interviews can be in-person or conducted on the phone or through Skype, and generally last 30-minutes to an hour. A recruiter, human resources representative, department representative or search committee often conduct the first round screenings.

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**Quick Tips**

**Do:**

- Sit up straight and lean slightly forward
- Focus your attention primarily on the person who asked the question
- Smile, and express your energy and enthusiasm; maintain constant positive energy
- Nod to show interest and engagement
- Always speak positively about past employers; turn negatives into positives and learning experiences
- Treat everyone with respect; every interaction, no matter how trivial, will be evaluated

**Don’t:**

- Use filler words such as “um,” “like,” and “you know”
- Slouch; this makes you appear disinterested
- Overdo your hand gestures or wave your hands around too much; this can be distracting
- Fidget, play with your hair or pick at your nails; this is distracting and draws attention away from what you’re saying
- Point; this may be seen as aggressive
- Fold your arms across your chest; this may be viewed as defensive or make you seem unapproachable
- Rub your nose or eyes; this will be distracting and make others reluctant to shake your hand
SECOND ROUND INTERVIEWS

Second round interviews are generally in-person and longer, lasting several hours, a full day, or in some cases, multiple days. They can be done through phone or Skype if an in-person interview is cost-prohibitive.

During second round interviews you typically meet with the position supervisor, department head, and co-workers. This can be done through a series of individual sessions, small group sessions, panels, or a combination of these. If on-site, you’ll most likely tour the office or facilities, and see the physical space you’ll be occupying if chosen.

In this round, questions are typically more detailed, focusing on how your skills and background relate to the specific position. You may also be asked about any deficiencies, or lack of skills or experience in relevant areas. The human element also comes in to play, with interviewers assessing how well your personality fits with the staff, supervisor, and with the company culture. They’re assessing how personable you are and how you interact with your potential future colleagues. A meal may also be included, giving interviewers a chance to assess how you carry yourself in social settings.

Second round interviews usually conclude with a discussion on next steps in the hiring process, including hiring timelines and when you can follow-up for more information.

PHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone interviews are a common first-step in the process of landing a job or internship. They may be used as an initial screening to determine who is invited for in-person interviews, or in some cases, may be the only interview. Either way, it’s a chance to make a positive first impression, which is crucial in securing a position; take it seriously.

In preparation for a phone interview, find a quiet space where you won’t be disturbed. If interviewing from your room, let your suitemates know you’ll be on a phone interview and ask them to be quiet. You may want to put a sign on the door to remind them. Set up the call for a time when you have at least 30 minutes free; ideally have an hour free so that you can spend time getting settled and set-up prior to the call and have extra time in case the interviewer is running late.

Many people find it helpful to dress the part. This can help you get in the right frame of mind for the interview. At the very least, make sure you’re awake, dressed, and moving around well before your phone interview; you don’t want your voice to sound rough and scratchy, like you just woke up. Have a glass of water on hand; inevitably your mouth will go dry at a crucial moment and you want to be ready.

With phone interviews it’s essential to express enthusiasm through your voice. When in person you have many ways to show your energy and enthusiasm. On the phone, your voice is it. Your vocal clarity, tone, pitch, volume and speed matter. Express your ideas clearly and confidently, and avoid speaking too fast. As with in person interviews, avoid filler words, such as “um,” “like” and “you know.” On the phone, where your voice is the only thing the interviewers are focused on, the use of these fillers is magnified.

One benefit of phone interviews is that you can have notes in front of you. What is the message you really want...
to convey to your interviewers? Are there key pieces of your background that you want to make sure to highlight? Have note cards outlining these areas. You shouldn’t write out every word you want to say, that will make you sound scripted, but rather have bullet points. You can also have a copy of your résumé and the cover letter you submitted as well as the job description printed out in front of you for reference.

You can have your laptop open and have the employer website up in case you need to quickly look something up. But beware, this can be a distraction. Your focus should be on the interviewer at all times. If you need to look something up, make sure your interviewer can’t hear you typing and that you stay tuned into the conversation.

Skype Interviews

The first thing you need to do to prepare for a Skype interview (aside from researching the employer and practicing!) is to plan where you’re going to have your interview. Background is important. You want to choose a place that will appear clean, tidy and professional on camera. Though your room may be the first place you think about, you need to evaluate whether there’s a place in your room that will fit the bill. A neutral, clutter free background is best; blank walls, though a bit boring, are preferable to a distracting background. Also consider lighting. Avoid backgrounds that are too bright, as that will be distracting for your interviewer, as well as settings with poor lighting. If the only spot in your room that isn’t filled with posters or art is next to a bright window, then you may want to explore reserving other options, such as a room in your college or in the library.

Once you’ve identified an appropriate location, plan a test run. Ask a friend to Skype with you to test out your webcam and microphone, and to get an objective opinion on the background and lighting. If you do plan to have the interview in your room, make sure to let your suitemates know and ask them to keep the noise at a minimum.

Treat a Skype interview as you would a face-to-face interview and dress appropriately. Though Skype may feel more casual, you need to look the part. It may be tempting to only dress professionally from the waist up, but how professional do you really feel in a shirt, tie and suit jacket on top and sweat pants on bottom?

Throughout the interview, look at the camera, not at the screen. This is the Skype equivalent of making eye con-
tact with your interviewers. Though this may feel awkward, especially at first, it’s what’s best for the interview-
er. It’s OK to glance at the screen from time to time to gauge the reactions of your interviewers, but spend most
of the interview looking right at the webcam. Think about this from the perspective of your interviewers; would
you want watch a candidate who is looking down the whole time or one who appears to be looking right at you?

As you would in an in-person interview, smile and express your enthusiasm for the position. Sit up straight and
make sure your body language mimics the enthusiasm and energy expressed in your voice.

At the conclusion of the Skype interview, make sure to hang up and take yourself offline.

**Navigating Meals**

Having lunch or dinner during your interview is common during second round interviews that last a half-day
or more. Meals are also common if the position will have you interacting with clients, constituents, or donors in
social settings.

It’s essential to remember that even though lunch or dinner may feel less formal than an in-office interview, it’s
still an interview and you are being judged. You must demonstrate professionalism at all times. Though meals
tend to be more conversational than a formal series of questions, your interviewers are assessing your communi-
cation and interpersonal skills. Meals are seen as an opportunity to get to know you and for you to get to know
them. Questions may turn to personal topics, such as where you grew up or what you do in your spare time.
Make sure to avoid topics that are too personal, inappropriate, or may be controversial.

**What to order?**

If you know in advance where you’ll be eating, do a little research ahead of time. Review the menu and decide on
a few possible options. This will allow you to focus on engaging your interviewers rather than reading the menu.

When you arrive, you can ask your interviewers if they have any recommendations. This can give you an idea
on the price point you should stay within. You can also let them order first, and choose something at that price
point or less.

Consider what will be easy to eat. Avoid foods that have the potential to be messy or difficult. That cheeseburger
may be just what you’re craving, but the catsup on your tie and greasy hands that result may not align with the
professional image you’re trying to present. Avoid ordering alcohol, even if your interviewer orders something
to drink. You want to stay on top of your game and keep your head clear.

**Table Manners**

Just as important as what you say during a meal is the way you carry yourself. Good table manners are a must.
Shortly after being seated you should put your napkin on your lap. Pay special attention to your posture, keep
your elbows off the table, and always avoid speaking with your mouth full. Courtesy and professionalism
shouldn’t be limited to your interviewers; you want to be polite to the wait staff and host, thanking them app-
propriately.
CHAPTER 5:
AFTER THE INTERVIEW

THANK YOU NOTES
After an interview it is essential to send a thank you note to everyone who participated in your interview. Doing so will show your interest and professionalism; failure to do so may cost you an opportunity.

Thank you notes should be sent ideally within 24 hours of your interview and within 48 hours at most. You want your thank you note to be received before hiring or second round decisions are made since your note, or lack of one, may sway the employer’s decision. In instances where decisions are made shortly after interviews, as may happen with on-campus recruiting, you want to send out your thank you notes as quickly as possible.

Thank you notes can be sent through email, or depending on what you feel your interviewer may prefer, can also be in the form of a handwritten or typed note. Certain fields, such as publishing, relish a handwritten note on quality paper or note cards, whereas employers in the technology and social medial fields may view a handwritten note as antiquated. In a world where professionals are bombarded with a dizzying number of emails every day, a handwritten note can stand out in a positive way; however, always use your judgment as to the preferred method of communication in your field of interest.

You may wonder if you really need to send a thank you note to every person who participated in your interview. In the majority of cases, yes, you do. In most cases, there are only a handful of people who participated in your interview, and it’s important to acknowledge each of them, thanking them for taking time out of their day to speak with you. In some instances, you may interact with a large number of company representatives, especially if asked to give a presentation as part of your interview, or in the case of social events that are part of a full-day or multi-day interview. In this situation, you may not spend much time, if any, interacting directly with each person, negating the need for individual thank you notes. But this is the exception, not the rule. In most cases you will need to send individual notes to every person who participated in your interview within 24-48 hours of your interview.

POST-INTERVIEW REFLECTION
Interviewing is a skill that takes time and practice to perfect. After each interview, reflect on what went well and what you can improve upon for future interviews. Use the following prompts to begin your reflection:

• The three things that made my interview a success were:
• Three things I would change about the next interview:
• The ways I will improve these three things for the next interview are:
• Which of the interviewer’s questions were difficult to answer? How would I respond differently if asked this same question again?

If your interview didn’t go as well as you’d hoped, don’t let that get you down. Schedule an appointment with an Office of Career Strategy Career Advisor to discuss strategies to help you make your next interview a success. Also, if you’re having trouble pinpointing where the interviews are going well and where they’re not, you should
schedule a practice interview. Practice interviews will give Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors a chance to see you in action and give an objective opinion as to where your opportunities for improvement lie.

FOLLOW-UP

Common questions many students have are when and how to follow-up with employers after an interview. Unfortunately there isn’t one set answer to this question. Every situation is different and should be handled accordingly.

At the end of an interview many employers will give you information on their hiring timeline and next steps, specifically when they plan to begin making offers or when they plan to invite candidates to second-round interviews. If this information does not come up at the end of the interview, it is perfectly acceptable to ask about the next steps in the process or when they anticipate making hiring decisions.

The timeline they provide will guide when you should plan to follow up. For example, if the interviewer tells you they are interviewing candidates over the next two weeks and will be making decisions after they finish those interviews, then you should not send them an email next week asking for a status update. In this case, you should wait for about two and a half weeks before you send a follow-up email inquiring about the status of your candidacy. Always respect the timelines and guidelines employers give you; not doing so may be seen as annoying or indicate that you may not be good at listening or following directions.

If nothing was mentioned during the interview, it’s appropriate to send a follow-up email a week after your interview to express continued interest and ask about the hiring timeline.

Although you may be eager to learn about their decision, the employer likely has other responsibilities that take precedence over making hiring decisions. Avoid the temptation of following up too soon or too often; there’s a fine line between showing you’re interested and appearing desperate.

RECEIVING OFFERS

Job and internship offers are typically extended verbally by the job/internship supervisor, hiring manager, HR representative, or recruiter. This is all the more reason to have a professional voicemail and to check your voicemail regularly when going through interviews.

The employer representative will typically inform you that they’d like to offer you the position and briefly outline the terms of the offer, including salary or hourly rate, start date, and any other essential criteria, such as length of employment if the offer has a set end-date.

When you receive the call, be enthusiastic and professional, expressing your thanks and interest. Ask for some time to consider the offer. Even if you know you’ll accept it, it’s best not to make a decision on-the-spot -- wait until your initial excitement has subsided a bit. In the case of full-time job offers, you also want to take time to review the details, such as a benefits package, before making a commitment.

Make note of the date by which you need to respond, and don’t forget to confirm their phone number so you know how you can reach them to discuss your decision.
Evaluating Offers

It’s important to take time to evaluate an offer to assure you’re making an informed decision. There are many factors to weigh into your decision, including salary, benefits, growth opportunities, cultural fit, and the fit with your goals and interests.

Salary

Evaluating your salary isn’t as cut and dry as it may initially seem. When evaluating salary, the first thing to realize is that the salary in your offer letter is your gross salary, which is different from what actually ends up in your bank account. There are numerous deductions that come out of your salary before it gets to you, including federal, state, and in some instances, local taxes, as well as pre-tax deductions for expenses such as health insurance and employer-sponsored retirement plans.

What’s left is your net salary. Your anticipated net salary is what you should use to get a clear picture as to whether the salary offered will allow you to meet your anticipated expenses. If evaluating multiple offers, make sure to consider cost of living variations. A $2,500 monthly net salary will go much further in Austin, TX than in San Francisco, CA. You can use cost of living and salary calculators on websites such as bankrate.com to help you evaluate these factors.

It’s also important to review information on salary ranges to determine if the salary you’ve been offered is within market range. Factors such as size of the company/organization, prestige, location, and cost of living will all impact the ranges. When researching salary ranges make sure to use calculators that give you city-specific information. The following websites can help you research salary ranges: www.salary.com; www.glassdoor.com; www.payscale.com; www.bls.gov. Also, the Document Library in the Yale OCS Symplicity database, you’ll find a link to the NACE Salary Calculator. In addition, professional associations for your field may have salary survey data that can give you additional insight.

Benefits

Salary tends to be the primary factor that students and recent graduates consider when evaluating an offer. And though it’s an important factor, it shouldn’t be the only one. Benefits, specifically those that employers pay for or contribute to, can make up a significant portion of your overall compensation package and can impact the amount of money that ends up in your paycheck. Common benefits employers may offer include subsidized health insurance, contributions to employer-sponsored retirement plans such as 401K’s, paid vacation and sick days, tuition reimbursement, and bonuses.

The benefits package can vary widely from one employer to the next, making it even more important to thoroughly review and understand all components of your compensation package before accepting offers, especially if weighing multiple offers.

Opportunity and Fit

Beyond compensation and benefits, you want to consider the potential for skill development and career growth, as well as your overall interest in the position. Keep the big picture in mind; sometimes the opportunities that are the best springboards for launching a career can pay the least. Consider the potential doors the position can open and potential career paths that may follow; the lower paying position may be worth it if it will help you get to where you want to be.

Depending on your personal situation and preferences, there may be additional criteria you want to consider as
you evaluate offers, including location and proximity to family or friends, opportunity to get a foot in the door in a competitive field or employer, or the potential to make an impact on an issue or cause that is of great importance to you. Also consider the culture of the organization and people you’ll have the opportunity to work for; mentoring relationships, working in an environment that is suited to your preferences, and working with people you genuinely respect can make a difference in your overall satisfaction. Take time to reflect on what is most important to you, and factor those criteria into your decision.

One simple technique that can be quite helpful when weighing an offer is to make a list of the pros and cons of the offer, and then use this list to rank and evaluate each pro and each con. This can help you visualize the benefits and downsides.

Remember, you’re not in this alone. Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors can help you think through your options and answer any questions you have on this process.

**Salary Negotiation**

Should you negotiate? This is an important question commonly asked by students, and like many aspects of the interview process, the answer is that it depends.

First, do not attempt to negotiate until you have a formal offer. Second, you need to thoroughly evaluate the offer and determine if it’s in-line with the salary range for the position type within the geographic region where you’d be located. Use the resources provided in the Evaluate Offers section to begin your research. If your research shows that the offer is below the industry standard for the location and company profile then you may want to negotiate.

Recognize that as a student or recent graduate, you may have less room to maneuver than you may imagine. Intern and entry-level salaries are often set within a defined limit. As you gain additional experience and expertise, with tangible accomplishments and results, you have more leverage for negotiating salary, but as a student or new graduate, you may be seen as untested and unproven unless you have directly applicable experience that allows you to hit the ground running so to speak.

If you choose to negotiate, you should be prepared to give specific reasons why you feel your skills and qualifications warrant a higher salary. If you have directly applicable experience, a set of skills that uniquely qualifies you for the position, or proven accomplishments or deliverables in a previous role, then prepare to present those as part of the discussion.

Salary can be an uncomfortable topic for many people to discuss, but as long as you’re conducting yourself and addressing your reasons for negotiating in a professional manner, there’s nothing wrong with asking for

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**Negotiating Competing Offers**

Students often ask if it’s possible to leverage multiple competing offers to get a higher salary. Yes, this is possible, but you need to be careful when attempting this.

If you receive multiple offers from competing employers within the same industry, and one offer has a higher salary, you can inform the other employer of the competing offer and ask if they would be willing to match the salary.

Only attempt this if you are genuinely interested in and seriously considering the offer from the second employer. If your first choice is to work for the employer with the higher salary, then negotiating an offer with your second-choice employer only to turn them down after they match the offer may burn bridges.
the salary you feel is in line with your qualifications. Keep in mind that most employers will not make an instant decision; give them time to consider your request. They may need time to conduct their own benchmarking and review their capacity to increase your offer.

Show excitement for the position and for the employer throughout the discussion. Avoid bringing in personal needs or obligations; the focus should always be on the professional value you bring. Stay calm and in control, and of course never be negative, sulk, or in any way indicate dissatisfaction if your negotiations don’t yield the results you intended. Thank the employer for their consideration of your request and move forward in deciding whether to accept or decline. Always end the conversation on a friendly note. You don’t want to be labeled as the new hire that reacts in an immature or unprofessional manner when things don’t go your way.

Employers spend a significant amount of money and time identifying and hiring the right talent to fill their openings. As long as you avoid insulting or offending them with your negotiations, they’re still going to want to bring you on to their staff. You have nothing to lose, but a lot to gain in terms of learning how to navigate a potentially uncomfortable yet essential professional situation.

**Accepting Offers**

After you have decided to accept a job or internship offer, Office of Career Strategy recommends notifying the employer by phone and following up with an acceptance letter, which can be in the form of an email. Often times employers will also have a formal acceptance letter which they will need you to sign, along with any additional paperwork confirming the terms of employment, including salary and start date.

Please keep in mind that when you accept an offer, you have a professional obligation to join that employer. Reneging on an offer (i.e., accepting an offer, changing your mind and then rejecting it) is both unacceptable and unprofessional; doing so damages your professional reputation, the reputation of Yale alumni employed by that organization and, of course, the reputation of Yale University. It is unethical to accept a job offer and later choose to decline. Don’t accept unless you are committed.

After you’ve accepted an offer, inform all other employers to which you’ve applied or interviewed with that you are withdrawing your name from their pool of candidates. It is unethical to continue interviewing with other employers after you’ve accepted an offer.

**OCS Policy on Reneging on Offers**

The Office of Career Strategy considers reneging on a job offer to be a very serious offense, as it damages relationships with employers and has a lasting effect on all Yale students. In accordance with the seriousness of reneging, it is our policy that first years, sophomores, and juniors who accept an offer and then renege on their acceptance will lose access to on-campus recruiting and potentially other Office of Career Strategy services as well.

Seniors who accept an offer and then renege on their acceptance may lose access to on-campus recruiting and to all alumni Office of Career Strategy services (job search assistance, law school and/or health professions advising) as well.
Declining Offers
If after evaluating a job or internship offer you decide to decline the offer it’s important to inform the employer as soon as possible so that they can offer the position to another candidate. It’s recommended that you call your employer contact and speak to them to inform them of your decision; do not leave them a message on their voicemail, show them the courtesy of speaking with them. Follow-up with an email confirming that you are declining.

When you speak with the employer, express appreciation for the offer, mentioning specific aspects of the company/organization that most impressed you, and then clearly inform them that you have chosen to decline their offer. Avoid discussing negative aspects of the position or employer that may have influenced your decision, and don’t feel as though you need to provide details as to why you have chosen to decline. It’s essential to avoid burning bridges and to leave the door open for future opportunities; handling the situation with the utmost professional courtesy will accomplish this.

Not responding to an employer’s offer or not responding on the timeline agreed upon when you were given the offer is unacceptable and reflects poorly on you, on OCS and on Yale. Show the employer the respect they deserve by following up in a timely and professional manner.

Final Thoughts
Share the good news! After you accept an offer, send updates and thank you’s to everyone who helped you out along the way, including faculty, advisors, alumni contacts, Office of Career Strategy Career Advisors, and anyone else you’ve consulted along the way. Reaching back out to thank people for the impact they’ve had on you will go a long way in cementing your connections and making your contacts feel appreciated.
Appendix A: Sample General/Behavioral Interview Questions

Introduction/General

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- Why did you choose Yale?
- What have you done that you are proud of? What is your greatest accomplishment?
- How do you spend your free time?
- What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- How would you describe your ideal job?
- What type of work environment do you prefer?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Who do you admire most and why?

Position-Specific

- How would you describe yourself? What personal traits make you stand out for this role?
- What interests you most about a career in __________?
- Why are you interested in this position? What appeals to you about the role?
- What are you hoping to gain and learn from the position?
- What in your background best qualifies you for this position?
- What differentiates this company/organization from other companies/organizations you are interviewing with?
- What are the greatest challenges you think the industry is facing?
- What challenges do you think our company/organization faces?

Leadership

- Walk me through your resume. Tell me a little more about each of your leadership experiences.
- Describe a leadership role you’ve held and tell why you committed your time to it.
- What would you say were the most important responsibilities in your most recent leadership roles?
- What has been the most difficult project you’ve tackled in your academics or leadership roles?
- Give an example of your ability to build motivation with your classmates.
- How did you build a shared vision/goal?
- How do you instill in others an atmosphere of support, responsiveness and respect?

Creativity

- How do you define creativity?
- In the past 4 years, what have you done that you consider truly creative?
- Which of your creative accomplishments has given you the most satisfaction?
- Provide an example of a time when you offered an innovative solution to a difficult problem.

Analytical

- How would you describe your approach to problem solving?
- Tell me about a complex problem you solved—walk me through your thinking as you solved it.
- Describe a situation in which you had to apply your skills to learn a new technology/process.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
Teamwork
- What makes you a good team member?
- How do you determine the role you play in a group?
- What makes you most effective with people? What kinds of people do you find most challenging? What conflicts or difficulties do you experience?
- How have you handled a difficult working relationship?

Communication Skills
- How would you describe your communication skills?
- Would you rather write a report or give a verbal presentation?
- How would you rate your writing abilities? Listening skills? What have you done to improve them?
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone’s opinion.

Management Skills
- How do you prioritize your schedule / handle different priorities?
- How do you make important decisions?
- Describe a situation demonstrating your ability to transition quickly and effectively between tasks.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Describe a difficult situation that you feel you should have handled differently. What did you learn from the experience?
- Provide an example of a situation where you had to manage multiple competing deadlines? Were the deadlines met?

Drive
- What does success/failure mean to you?
- Give me an example of how you demonstrate initiative.
- Describe an example in which you aspired to reach a goal. What obstacles confronted you? What did you do to overcome them?
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about the most successful project you’ve completed and why you consider it successful.
- Are your grades a good measure of your ability to learn? Are they a good indicator of your academic achievement?

Conclusion
- Is there anything else you’d like me to know about you?
- Summarize your candidacy -why should we hire you?
Appendix B: Illegal Questions

In the United States it is illegal for an employer to discriminate against a job applicant because of race, color, religion, gender, age, national origin or disability. There are federal and state laws in place to prevent discriminatory employment practices. The following are some illegal interview questions along with related questions that are legal, and a discussion of how to answer them.

Work/Visa Status and Citizenship
- Illegal: Are you a U.S. citizen? You sound like you have an accent, where are you from? Where were your parents born? What is your native language?
- Legal: Are you authorized to work in the U.S.? What languages do you speak (if relevant to the position)?

Marital/Family Status
- Illegal: Are you married? Do you have children? If so, what do you do for child care? Are you planning to have children soon? Have you ever been divorced? Where is your spouse employed?
- Legal: Are you willing and able to put in the amount of overtime and/or travel the position requires? Are you willing to relocate?

Age
- Illegal: How old are you? When were you born? When did you graduate from college? How long have you been working?
- Legal: Do you have any concerns about handling the long hours and extensive travel that this job entails? Are you at least 18 years of age?

Disability Status
- Illegal: Do you have any disabilities or medical conditions? If so, how serious? How is your health? Do you take any prescription drugs? Have you been diagnosed with a mental illness? Have you ever been an alcoholic? Have you ever been in rehab?
- Legal: Are you able to perform this job with or without reasonable accommodation? Do you have any conditions that would keep you from performing this job? Do you take illegal drugs?

NOTE: Employers may require that all job candidates for certain positions pass a medical exam relevant to the responsibilities of the job, and to pass a drug test.

Religion
- Illegal: What is your religion? Are you practicing?
- Legal: Can you work on weekends (should only be asked if the position requires working on weekends)?

NOTE: Questions about an applicant’s religious affiliation or beliefs (unless the religion is a bona fide occupational qualification), are generally viewed as non job-related and problematic under federal law. Religious corporations, associations, educational institutions, or societies are exempt from the federal laws that the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces when it comes to the employment of individuals based on their particular religion. In other words, an employer whose purpose and character is primarily religious is permitted to lean towards hiring persons of the same religion.
Arrest Record

- Illegal: Have you ever been arrested?
- Legal: Have you ever been convicted of any crime other than a traffic violation?

NOTE: There is no Federal law that clearly prohibits an employer from asking about arrest and conviction records, however several state laws limit the use of arrest and conviction records by prospective employers. Review state-specific laws for additional guidelines.

Three options for answering illegal questions:

1. Answer it. If you think the interviewer was simply trying to get to know you, and naively asked an illegal question, you can choose to answer the question. Consider the intent of the question. For example, was the interviewer asking about your birthplace because the he or she grew up in the same region and is trying to get to know you, or because of they have concerns about your social status or ethnic background. If you are comfortable answering, then it’s fine to do so.

2. Side-step it. You could discretely refuse to answer the question yet address the concerns that they raise. For example, if your interviewer asks you whether or not you have children, he or she might really be getting at whether your family responsibilities would interfere with the frequent travel that the job requires. You could respond by saying something like “I can assure you that my personal life will not interfere with my professional responsibilities.”

3. Question the relevance. You can ask your interviewer how the question relates to the position you’re interviewing for. This may alert them to the inappropriate nature of their question. If you feel that they are asking an inappropriate or discriminatory question, you can refuse to answer their question and either try changing the subject, or you could choose to excuse yourself from the interview.

More information on federal laws regarding prohibited employment policies and practices can be found on the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission website - www.eeoc.gov.
Ten Keys for Acing the Case Interview

1. Understand the Question: Before jumping into your answer make sure you understand the entire question. Restate the question and make sure that all of the information you heard was correct and clarify any questions about the prompt itself. It does not make sense to ask a clarifying question about the prompt halfway through the case. For example, if the prompt states that you should estimate the demand for haircuts in the United States you should clarify if the interviewer would like the information in number of haircuts, the monetary value, or both.

2. Take Time to Think: After receiving the prompt and asking some clarifying questions, take a few minutes and think about what approach you are going to take for each section. Jot down notes for each part of the question and consider which framework you are going to use (more on this later). A few minutes of silence may seem awkward, but interviewers understand that you need time to gather your thoughts. Many students jump right into an answer and are caught stumbling through the case without a clear direction.

3. Form a Partnership with the Interviewer: The case interview is a partnership between the interviewer and the applicant. Remember that the interviewer is the “client” in the consulting engagement. Your task is not simply to answer the questions, but to build a relationship with the client, find out critical pieces of information that may have not been revealed, and read subtle cues from the interviewer. For example, if part of the analysis is to identify costs, you should provide an answer and then ask if you have missed any important costs. Additionally, as you analyze the case and provide analysis, watch the non-verbal communication of the interviewer. Are they nodding their head in agreement or taking notes, or do they look lost and confused?

4. Listen attentively throughout the Case: Listening is crucial for the consulting case interview. The interviewer will give you clues throughout the case and if you do not pay careful attention you may miss an important point, taking you down the wrong path. One of the worst things you can do is ask a question that has already been answered or make an assumption that has already been refuted with case information. If the case is about projecting the market for premium travel packages, you should realize the importance of the word “premium”. This will dictate your approach.

5. Use Frameworks: Frameworks are ways to structure your answer, making it easier both for you and for the interviewer. It helps the applicant by structuring their thoughts and making sure they don’t forget a key part of the analysis. At the same time, it helps the interviewer by providing a clear train of thinking instead of jumping around from point to point. An example of frameworks is Porter’s Five Forces, 3 C’s, 4 P’s and dozens of others. It is not imperative to memorize every framework, but it is important to have structure in whatever way you decide to approach the question.

6. Take Meticulous Notes: Be scrupulous in your note taking; it is not enough to just listen attentively. Why? Having detailed notes will help you avoid making careless mistakes and keep your thoughts organized if in front of you are written down all the key pieces of information. The accessibility of your already composed thoughts and key bits of information will also serve you by affording more time to creatively and analytically consider your answers. Also, make use of highlighting, circling or whatever type of marking up you prefer—it’s a great way to prepare for the summary at the end of the interview (more on this later). Keep in mind, too, that in some cases, the interviewer may ask you for your notes after the interview in order to check your organization and/or make sure you do not disclose information to other applicants.
Make Assumptions: Making assumptions during the case (and estimations) will help you solve the problem faster and make it easier to make calculations to continue with your analysis. For example, if you are doing a market sizing on how many coffee cups are sold in the U.S., you might say, “I am going to assume a U.S. population of roughly 300 million people divided equally among the 0-20, 20-40, 40-60, and 60-80 age range”. Remember to always justify your assumptions: “I am going to assume we can capture 10 percent market share, because of x and y”. Estimations are also a key way to simplify your analysis, but make sure you are not estimating or rounding a number that needs to be exact (like profit margin).

Ask Great Questions: The consulting case is largely about asking the interviewer the right questions in order to learn more about the organization. Because the interviewer usually has information which is not immediately revealed, you should ask intelligent questions before making your own assumptions. Questions have to be probing and show your intelligence and understanding of the subject matter. Instead of asking to learn more about the competition, you may ask, “Do you have any information or insight on the breakdown of the fast-food industry? How many major competitors are there and what are their respective market shares? On what basis do they differentiate themselves?”

Provide Insight Beyond the Case: It is not enough to simply answer the questions posed by the interviewer. Throughout the case, your role as an applicant is also to give insight wherever you can, showing the interviewer your intelligence, thoughtfulness and expertise in business strategy. For example, if you are estimating revenues from radio advertising, you may offer additional insight about how much TV or online ads cost as a way to estimate radio ads. Additionally, you may even go beyond the questions in the case in the conclusion and offer two or three things the organization should consider that were not posed by the case but may be good business strategies.

Have a Conclusion: There is nothing more awkward in a case interview than when the applicant answers the last part of the question and assumes they are done. When giving a presentation or writing a class report, would you ever end your analysis without a conclusion? Take a few minutes at the end to gather your thoughts and provide a thoughtful summary that includes the question posed, your approach and assumptions, and your final conclusions. This is a great way to set you apart from other applicants and, if done correctly, will end the interview on a high note (even if there were blunders at various points in the interview).

**Consulting Case Topics and Frameworks**

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**Business Frameworks**

3 C’s (Company, Customer, Competition) - A framework for analysis that includes understanding the internal operations and strategy of a company, the customers and demand for the product, and competition in existing and new markets.

4 P’s (Product, Price, Promotion, Place) - A framework used to analyze marketing initiatives and new product launches. Product refers to the characteristics of the item being sold. Price refers to the amount it is sold for.
Promotion refers to the strategy of how it is sold (PR, Marketing, etc.). Place refers to the channels through which it is sold and how it is positioned.

Cost vs. Benefit - A simple framework that allows you to divide your analysis of a business case between the costs that will be incurred by a specific action (physical costs, reputation and brand, etc) as well as the benefits that will result from the action (efficiency, revenues, strengthening of brand, building relationships, etc.)

Fixed vs. Variable Costs - Costs can be split up between those that stay constant, regardless of a company’s activity (fixed costs) and those that vary based on the amount of sales (variable costs). An example of a fixed cost is rent. An example of a variable cost is raw materials.

Internal vs. External - A framework that analyzes a business case from internal perspective (culture of organization, core competencies, products, etc) and the external perspective of the organization. (Barriers to entry, capacity of industry, competition, etc.)

McKinsey 7-S Model - Strategy (firm’s goals), Structure (organizational form that best suits firm’s goals), Staffing (what type of staff does firm require), Style (management style), Skills (what skills do employees need), Systems (what measurement systems are needed), Shared Valued (firms’ culture).

Porter’s Five Forces - Developed by HBS professor Michael Porter, this is a framework to analyze an industry. The five forces are Power of Suppliers, Power of Buyers, Substitutes, Rivalry (among firms), and Barriers to Entry.

Profitability - Profit is defined as Revenues – Costs. To analyze a profitability scenario you can analyze revenues (quantity * price) and costs (fixed vs. variable costs discussed above). To fully understand profitability study an accounting income statement.

STP (Segmenting, Targeting, Positioning) - A framework for finding the correct market for a product or service. Segmenting refers to identifying the distinctions between customers, targeting refers to identifying the target group, and positioning refers to the strategy of appealing to this target group.

Supply vs. Demand - Economic analysis which aims to forecast the price of a good or service based on the intersection of supply and demand curves. Supply analysis looks at production of goods and services to see how much is available for the market. Demand analysis looks at consumers desire for a good or service and how much they are willing to pay for it.

SWOT - A simple presentation framework that allows you to pinpoint an organizations Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Value Chain/Supply Chain Analysis - A framework for understanding the flow of goods and money in an industry. Components include Inbound Logistics, Production Logistics, Outbound Logistics, Sales and Marketing, Service.

Other Frameworks - Macroeconomic Frameworks, Political Frameworks – (non profit motivating organizations), Organizational Change Frameworks, Produce Life Cycle.
There is no better way to prepare for case interviews than to do as many practice rounds as you can. You can schedule a mock interview at the Office of Career Strategy and also find friends to practice with. Begin by reading Case in Point by Marc P. Cosentino and reviewing the following websites which offer case-interview resources.

- CQ Interactive - This site can be accessed through the “Samples/Tools - Interviewing” section of the Office of Career Strategy website.
- CaseQuestions.com
- Practice Cases from Bain and Company
- Video Example from McKinsey
- Interactive Cases from Oliver Wyman