

College of Engineering

Internship Preparation

What to Expect During the Interview

Typical 30-Minute Pattern

There is not a lot of time to state your case, so be concise and organized – but not too brief.

Most internship and entry-level interviews tend to fit a general 30-minute pattern: five minutes for small talk, 15 minutes to discuss your background and qualifications for the job, five minutes for you to ask questions, and five minutes to wrap it up.

It Starts Before You Say Hello

The typical interview starts before you even get into the inner sanctum. The recruiter begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified as the candidate. Remember, you are expected to shake the recruiter's hand upon being introduced. Don't be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness. It's a good idea to arrive at least 15 minutes early. You can use the time to relax and look over your notes.

Making Small Talk

Many recruiters begin the interview with small talk. Topics may range from the weather to sports to the traffic and will rarely focus on anything that brings out your skills. Nonetheless, you are still being evaluated, so do more than smile and nod.

The Recruiter Has the Floor

The main part of the interview starts when the recruiter begins discussing the organization. If the recruiter uses vague generalities about the position and you want more specific information, ask questions. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job and the company. As the discussion turns to your qualifications, be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative – low grade-point average, lack of participation in outside activities, or no related work experience, for example. It is up to you to convince the recruiter that although these points appear negative, positive attributes can be found in them. A low GPA could stem from having to fully support yourself through college; you might have no related work experience but plenty of experience that shows you to be a loyal and valued employee. Recruiters often ask about why you chose your major and career goals. Answers to these innocent-sounding questions give employers information about your direction and motivation.



Your Turn to Ask Questions

When the recruiter asks, “Now do you have any questions?” it’s important to have ready a few intelligent, well-thought-out questions. Your questions should bring out a sincere interest in and knowledge of the organization.

Expect the Unexpected

Many times unusual questions – “Tell me a joke” or “What time period would you like to have lived in?” for example – are asked simply to see how you react. You can’t prepare in advance for the unexpected, so stay calm and give a natural answer.

The Close Counts, Too

The interview isn’t over until you walk out the door. Remain enthusiastic and courteous. Often the conclusion of the interview is indicated when the recruiter stands up. Shake hands and thank the recruiter for considering you.

Evaluations Made by Recruiters

- How mentally alert and responsive is the job candidate?
- Is the applicant able to draw proper inferences and conclusions?
- Does the applicant demonstrate intellectual depth?
- Has the candidate used good judgment regarding life planning?
- What is the applicant’s capacity for problem-solving?
- How well does the candidate respond to stress and pressure?

