

Guide to Interviewing (Practicum and Internship)

You have invested considerable time and energy into carefully selecting sites, creating stellar CVs and writing convincing cover letters. The interview process requires equal amounts of preparation, stamina and reflection. The importance of conducting a professional interview cannot be overstated. Thorough preparation for an interview can help distinguish you as a hardworking applicant. Asking key questions can help you determine how the site will meet your training needs. Articulating your knowledge and interest with poise, while managing the anxiety produced by the interview situation, helps you shine during interviews. What follows is a guide to how to prepare and conduct successful interviews; tips on travel arrangements; and the next steps to follow after the interview. In addition, there is a listing of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers.

Before the Interview

Interview Logistics:

- Be prepared for sites to call at any time
- Update voicemail with a professional message
- Carry your calendar (marked with important obligations) with you to easily schedule appointments
- Keep a list of sites/site supervisors handy
- Beginning the second week of March (provided you have not already heard from a site), you can contact the site to determine if they have received your application.
- Do NOT contact sites for any other reason
- Allow voicemail to screen calls unless you are fully prepared to speak to a site director (i.e., distracted by other tasks, just waking up, etc.)
- Alert others at home, work and practicum that you may need to attend an interview with short notice
- When talking with APP, get all the information necessary to get to the interview (time, date, location, special driving/parking instructions, with whom you'll be interviewing, etc.)
- Know exactly where you are going (talk to fellow students, don't solely rely on Mapquest).
- Take a test drive to the interview site so that you know how to get there, and how much time you will need
- Plan to arrive early
- If a scheduling conflict arises between two sites, ask both if accommodations can be provided (be professional in doing so). If unavoidable, you may need to pick which interview you most want to attend.
- Avoid canceling any interview! If you must, do it early (preferably before the interview is even offered). If you cancel, speak with someone directly and avoid leaving a voicemail.

Interview Preparation:

- Research the organization and role thoroughly by visiting the website and gathering as much information as possible
- Prepare and practice responses for standard questions (but not to the point of being scripted and not spontaneous)
- Role-play responses to these questions with a friend/peer. This practice can help alleviate some anxiety and help you sound more professional
- Practice your interviewing on Interview Stream – record and review your interview responses. Share them with others for more feedback
- Meet with a Career Advisor to practice or review in person

The Office of Career Services is available to help you with interview preparation. Contact Career Services by logging into HANDSHAKE or email careerservices@thechicagoschool.edu with questions or to schedule an appointment.

Typical questions may include the following:

- *What attracted you to our site?*
 - *What brought you to the field?*
 - *Tell me about yourself.*
 - *What are your strengths and weaknesses?*
 - *Why do you feel this site would be a good fit with your interests and background?*
 - *What is your theoretical orientation?*
 - *What do you hope to learn here?*
 - *Why are you interested in working with XYZ population?*
 - *What are your career goals?*
 - *Talk about a difficult or interesting case.*
 - *What are your research interests?*
 - *Tell me about your personal interests.*
 - *Tell me about an ethical dilemma you've encountered and how you resolved it.*
 - *Tell me how you handle stress.*
- Always have questions prepared to ask the interviewer. Some questions may include the following:
 - *Detail the types of training opportunities available at the site.*
 - *Describe the types of supervision provided.*
 - *Describe the types of clientele served at the site.*
 - *What practicum student characteristics are necessary to be successful in this setting?*
 - *What goals are set for trainees?*
 - *How are offers extended to students (explained in more detail below)?*
 - Avoid asking questions that make you look as if you are only interested in how hard you will have to work, how difficult the schedule will be, or how much vacation time you will receive.
 - Talk to fellow TCSPP students at the sites of interest
 - Check the database for updates
 - Review site information (e.g., population served, therapeutic activities offered, etc.) before going to interview
 - Thoroughly review your application (e.g., strengths, experiences, interest in site) before going to interview

During the Interview

ARRIVE 15 MINUTES EARLY: TRAFFIC IS NOT AN EXCUSE FOR BEING LATE

- What to wear?
 - Business attire
 - Conservative colors
 - Men: Jacket (generally a suit) and tie
 - Women: Pants or skirt (whichever is more comfortable).
 - Polished shoes (NOT new shoes – walking tours, slippery bottoms, blisters, etc.)
 - Nothing extravagant (jewelry, perfume/cologne)
- What to bring?
 - Copy of application packet, especially CV/resume and any correspondence
 - Notebook/pen for taking notes

The Office of Career Services is available to help you with interview preparation. Contact Career Services by logging into HANDSHAKE or email careerservices@thechicagoschool.edu with questions or to schedule an appointment.

- Cell phone (in case you need to call en route). **Turn off cell phones before entering the building.**
 - Mints, water bottle, tissue (try not to keep anything out but have it if necessary)
- What not to bring?
 - Anything more than what you need
 - Gum
 - In the waiting room:
 - Get to the site early, but don't arrive in the waiting area until 10 minutes before (use spare time in car/cafe/cafeteria, review application, relax, use the restroom)
 - Be very friendly with everyone (you never know who's working the front desk)
 - Sit professionally - the first impression starts as soon as you arrive
 - Introduce yourself to your interviewer with first and last name, a comfortable handshake (not too loose or too firm), and eye contact
 - First impressions are powerful, so concentrate on that first exchange
 - Kindly decline offers for coffee prior to the interview (a stimulant, diuretic, something easily spilled). Hydrate yourself before the interview and/or bring bottled water
 - Don't place so many items on your lap that it becomes difficult to easily stand up and greet others
 - Interview formats
 - Most will be unstructured and individual
 - Group interview: Student interviews with a group of applicants
 - Don't dominate; don't be silent
 - You have to participate in some way
 - NEVER criticize, talk over or disregard others' contributions
 - Consider how you want to be perceived (i.e., building off other's ideas, process comments, etc.).
 - Group interview: Student interviews with a panel of interviewers
 - Relax
 - Make eye contact with everyone
 - Try to connect with everyone
 - On-site interview:
 - Take notes, but not at the sake of detachment/no eye contact.
 - Show a range of affect (initial anxiety is ok, but it should subside)
 - Take foibles in stride
 - Demonstrate desirable clinical traits (thoughtfulness, warmth, curiosity, self-assuredness, active listening, etc.)
 - Be prepared to handle the zinger question, take your time and manage your anxiety.
 - Have thoughtful questions to ask (sample list provided above)
 - Show genuine interest in the position

Post Interview

- Journal reactions; what went well? what felt awkward/uncomfortable?
- Clarify notes for future reference
- Write a short thank you letter or email to each interviewer. Include points from the conversation and send it the same day as the interview.
- Think about how you want to rank the site.
- Think about whether or not you want to work there and what you could gain from the experience.

The Office of Career Services is available to help you with interview preparation. Contact Career Services by logging into HANDSHAKE or email careerservices@thechicagoschool.edu with questions or to schedule an appointment.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it normal to have one interview offer now?

Following the second Friday in February (when students can begin mailing applications), practicum sites can begin to interview. There is great variability as to when sites interview (a couple of sites may even interview after Notification Day!). If you have less than two interviews scheduled by designated date (see APP manual), please contact APP to discuss other practicum sites to apply to. Offers can be made by sites beginning on the fourth Monday in March.

Is it ok to screen my calls at home during interview offer season?

Yes! In fact, it is recommended that when you are not in an ideal position to speak with a site, let your voicemail pick up the call. Just remember to have a professional-sounding outgoing message. So if you just are walking in the door with your hands full, are trying to get the kids ready for bed, listening to extremely loud music, let the call go to voicemail. Retrieve the message soon, and then call back at a more ideal time in the next 24 hours.

In addition, let other household members know that interview offer phone calls will be coming in. Either ask them to screen calls using voicemail, or ask them to answer the phone in a polite and professional manner. Make sure they take all messages carefully, and write down the information clearly.

If I have two interview offers at the same time, what should I do?

What if two sites want to interview me on the same day?

It is perfectly fine to politely explain this dilemma to the person scheduling the interviews, and ask if there is any flexibility in scheduling interviews. Try to be flexible with them as well, and make sure that you speak with both sites that have the scheduling conflict to ensure you have the most options and an easy resolution.

What if I get sick just before my interview date?

The start of the interview period does fall within the midst of flu season. Needless to say, it can be a very stressful period. During this time, be especially mindful to take care of yourself and lead a healthy lifestyle.

Nonetheless, in the event that you become sick contact the site as soon as possible. While maintaining appropriate boundaries, explain that due to an unexpected illness, you will be unable to keep the scheduled interview. Clearly state that you continue to be very interested in their training opportunity. Ask if it is possible to reschedule the interview. Provide a range of times and be flexible around this issue.

Are group interviews common? How do I handle a group interview?

Many sites do employ some version of a group interview. There are two types of group interviews, one in which you are among a group of other interviewees, and another where you are a single interviewee being interviewed by a group of interviewers.

If you are one in a group of interviewees being interviewed either by one or several site staff, remember your training as an active listener. Be polite to other interviewees, and listen to their answers. When you speak, try to engage everyone, interviewers and interviewees alike, by making eye contact and using gestures, such as nodding and smiling. Never criticize another person's comments. It is acceptable to acknowledge similar ideas you might have with other responses. Be involved in a discussion, but be mindful that you are not dominating the conversation, or that you are not participating at all.

The Office of Career Services is available to help you with interview preparation. Contact Career Services by logging into HANDSHAKE or email careerservices@thechicagoschool.edu with questions or to schedule an appointment.

When you find yourself walking alone into a room full of staff members, try to take a deep breath and relax. This is actually a wonderful opportunity for you to get a glimpse of the group dynamics that exist among the staff at that site. Again, make an active effort to engage everyone in the room through eye contact.

How do I answer this question: “What are your weaknesses?”

Generally, sites ask this question as a way of finding out what areas of growth you have identified and want to strengthen. They may then consider whether or not their site can meet your needs in this way. They are also looking for an honest answer. Stating that ‘you care too much’ or ‘work too hard’ does not always sound authentic. Without disclosing something that causes concern about your abilities or leads the site to believe that you would be a very poor fit, it is reasonable to share a topic/area that you want to learn more about. Stress the developmental opportunities that you are seeking (and that the site can provide), such as gaining increased experience with a particular population, type of setting or type of treatment modality. For instance, you might say that you find the Rorschach fascinating and useful but have only administered it a few times and would like more exposure to this and other assessment tools.

What questions should I ask?

Maybe more importantly, which questions *shouldn't* you ask? Avoid asking questions that make you look as if you are only interested in how hard you will work or how much money or vacation time you will get.

Instead, ask about the opportunities available at the site, types of supervision provided, types of clientele served at the site, characteristics of a trainee that does well at the site, and site goals for trainees. Ask questions specific to the site, such as asking for elaboration about an elective rotation or training opportunity that drew you to apply to that site. Always ensure that you have questions, as this demonstrates your curiosity and sincere interest in the site and enthusiasm for the training experience.

Will they ask you to review testing materials/scores? Will they ask me to read/analyze clinical vignettes?

Some sites will ask you to demonstrate your diagnostic or clinical skills through case evaluation. This might be in written or oral form. Before you go to an interview, brush up on the basics of assessment, DSM diagnoses and theory. While in the interview, speak about what you know, and avoid stretching your knowledge beyond which you are certain. Be sure to state what additional information you would like to gather to more fully diagnose or treat the client presented in the case. Often the information provided is minimal, and by stating what information is missing, you reveal what information you use to diagnose and treat clients.

How do I handle a “zinger” question?

A zinger, or unexpected question that seems to come out of left field, can be asked of you on an interview. By definition, zinger questions are hard to define. Some examples include: “Who is your favorite superhero?” “If you had a dinner party, which historical figures would you invite?” First, it is important to stay calm and composed. Be very mindful of your reaction. Difficult questions are asked not so much for the content of your answer, but rather to observe your reaction to a stressful situation. If you do not know how to answer and need to buy yourself a bit of time to compose an answer, you can say “That’s an interesting question” or be amused or curious about the many ways that the question could be answered. Also, it is better to quietly think about an answer for a few seconds than to let nervous chatter fill up the time.

Can we tell sites how we will rank them on Notification Day?

Talk with the APP team for your program regarding any specifics and deadlines.

The Office of Career Services is available to help you with interview preparation. Contact Career Services by logging into HANDSHAKE or email careerservices@thechicagoschool.edu with questions or to schedule an appointment.