

## Understanding the Interview Process

For accounting firm hiring managers and job seekers alike, the interview is an important step in determining the best course of action for an employment opportunity. For those seeking to fill an accounting position, the interview allows the hiring manager to determine which candidate will best suit the organization's needs. Conversely, for the job candidate, the interview will help determine whether or not accepting the position will propel their career in the right direction.

Understanding what goes into a successful interview can help ensure that the right information is gathered upon which to base those decisions.

### Different Types of Interviews

A successful interview starts with determining which format is best suited for the job at hand, for example a one-on-one meeting, group interview or panel discussion.

Scott Moore, director of Student and Professional Pathways for the [AICPA](#), recommends that employers utilize—and candidates be prepared to participate in—a combination of these tactics.

“Typically, when you think of the interview process, there are usually several rounds of interviews during which the organization whittles down the number of candidates,” said Moore. “What I recommend is that organizations include both a one-on-one and a group interview so interviewers can see how candidates are going to react in different situations.”

### Asking the Right Questions

When it comes to interview questions, variety also breeds success.

Because accounting is the language of business, interviewers and candidates should never underestimate the value of accounting-specific questions. Be ready with the basics. “What is working capital?” and “Is it possible for a company to show positive cash flow but still be in financial trouble?” are both excellent queries that can help interviewers gauge a candidate's industry knowledge without delving into more complex valuation questions—and allow a candidate to showcase their technical abilities.

Behavioral questions can also provide employers with insights into a candidate's decision-making skills and professional demeanor, while giving the interviewee a glimpse into the corporate culture. These would include questions like “How do you handle a challenge?” or “Have you ever made a risky decision?”

“My personal approach is to ask interviewees really open-ended questions,” said Moore. “By asking these types of questions, you allow the candidate to respond in a variety of ways, which helps you gain insight into their psyche and glean where their natural tendencies will drive them in the workplace.”

### Additional Resources

Pre-employment tests are also occasionally used to vet candidates and determine who is best for the job at hand.

Digging into previous work is also a common strategy.

“With certain protection laws, this gets a little sensitive because you can't release financial information,” said Moore. “But there is still the opportunity, especially for consultants, to provide summaries of their previous work.”

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In fact, Moore suggests that post-interview, potential employers task candidates with providing writing samples and case studies of previous assignments, as this will allow them to see the candidate's writing style and critical thinking skills.

### Preparation and Research

For both candidates and employers, preparation and research is important. For candidates this includes researching the organization as well as the individual with whom they are interviewing.

Employers should conduct the same due diligence.

"If you are not familiar with the companies a candidate has worked for, researching those organizations will allow you to have a better understanding of where they have been and how their role fit into the bigger picture," said Moore. "That way, in the interview you can really focus on their skills and achievements and gain insight into the person individually."