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Casey Floyd, senior director with Darden's Career Development Center, helps a student prepare for internship recruiting.

10 Essential Tips for Interview Success, According to UVA

Darden Career Coaches

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By Mary Shea Watson

From January through mid-February, 82 companies will descend on the **University of Virginia Darden School of Business (https://www.darden.virginia.edu/)** to interview First Year students from their MBA summer internships. With the help of the School's **Career Development Center (https://www.darden.virginia.edu/mba/career-support)** (CDC), those companies will field more than 4,200 applications and facilitate nearly 2,000 interviews with students in Darden's full-time MBA Class of 2021.

With a plethora of qualified candidates and recruiters with packed schedules conducting interviews at top business schools across the United States, how can one stand out in the interview process? In the midst of prepping hundreds of students to succeed in their MBA summer internship interviews, seven Darden career coaches offered their best tips to achieve success during the interview process.

1. Research the company.

“Company and industry research is critical before every interview,” said Paul Reeder (MBA '98), senior director of financial services careers.

After two decades with leading finance firms around the world, Reeder knows the importance of well-sourced data. “Setting up Google news alerts is just the beginning. You need to understand the industry context in which the company operates so that you can build stronger statements about why you are interested in the industry broadly and this company specifically.”

2. Prepare a story that speaks to every bullet point on your resume.

“Anything on your resume is fair game,” said Jenny Zenner (MBA ’03), senior director of technology and startup careers. Zenner’s professional tenure includes recruiting and product management at global tech firms, as well building her expertise in performance psychology.

“If you list a competency in SQL, for example, be prepared to demonstrate that competency,” Zenner said.

3. Practice mock interviews with friends or colleagues.

Over the course of just one week in early January, CDC career coaches facilitated over 150 mock interviews with First Years. “That incredible volume alone speaks to how important it is to practice,” said Casey Floyd (GEMBA ’17). With years of experience in corporate relations, recruiting, and marketing, Floyd brings a unique employer- and student-minded perspective to coaching Darden students.

“Above all, you need a solid, well-researched and authentic answer to the question every recruiter is going to ask: ‘Why this company?’” said Floyd. “By asking that question, recruiters want to know why you — instead of every other candidate they interview — will be the best fit for their role.”

4. Get comfortable listening to yourself.

As more recruiters look to digital tools to facilitate virtual recruiting, interviewees have to consider how they present themselves on computer or even phone screens.

Denise Karaoli, director of international careers, encourages applicants to record themselves on their phones or via online platforms such as Interview Stream. Karaoli has spent over a decade working with Darden’s international students, helping them secure incredible employment outcomes.

“For telephone interviews, secure a place with no distractions and great reception. Stand up straight, dress up for the interview and use a mirror while you are speaking. These steps add energy, quell nerves and put your best voice

forward,” Karaoli said.

Karaoli also advised remote interviewees to “choose an area with good lighting and a simple background. Set your computer to eye level and look into the camera, sit energetically in interview dress and, as always, don’t forget to smile.”

5. Be composed under pressure.

“It may be the interviewer’s intent to purposefully create a stressful environment for you,” said Ed Yu, senior director of investment banking careers. Yu has spent 14 years coaching Darden students who seek roles in the world’s leading investment banks.

“There are stressors associated with every job, and an interviewer may be trying to gauge how you respond to those stressors,” said Yu.

6. Plan out your day well in advance.

Christy Gunville, senior director of consulting careers, recommends that job seekers thoroughly prepare in advance but, on interview day, remain flexible to the circumstances as they unfold in the interview session. A seasoned management consultant and certified leadership coach, Gunville brings enthusiasm and deep expertise to Darden’s aspiring consultants.

“Take care of the basics that are under your control ahead of time, including deciding what you’ll wear, printing out copies of your resume and cover letter, researching the bios of your interviewers, and determining when to arrive. But then, be adaptable as needed in your interview responses, from the content you share to your nonverbal delivery in order to match the style of the interviewer and the way the session unfolds,” Gunville advised.

7. Continue to build your network.

“Reach out to your networking contacts to let them know where you are in your job search process,” recommended Jeff McNish, assistant dean for career development. McNish credits one of his MBA career coaches with giving him the confidence he needed to land a great role after graduation.

“You never know who might be able to lend a hand in your current or future job search,” McNish said.

8. Have fun!

While interviewing might sound like the farthest thing away from fun, Gunville emphasized the need to bring positive energy and enthusiasm to every interview.

“We can’t emphasize excitement enough. Interviewers want to see your excitement for what they do day-in and day-out,” said Gunville. “It shows that you’re going to like being in the role. That level of interest and engagement needs to come across. Know their products and service, and be excited about business challenges they’re trying to tackle.”

9. Take time for yourself.

“In the middle of your job search and interviewing process, be sure to do something you love,” recommended Floyd. “Whether it’s going for a run, reading a book, or spending time with friends or family, do something that relieves stress from your job search. Recruiters notice whether or not you’re arriving to an interview well-rested.”

10. Send a thank you.

“It’s the courteous thing to do,” Reeder said. “Send an email thanking each of your interviewers individually that evening, and you might even consider following up with a written thank you note. Everyone loves getting mail.”

*For more job search tips from Darden’s career development team, be sure to subscribe to updates from the **Career Development blog (<https://blogs.darden.virginia.edu/career-development/>)**.*

About the University of Virginia Darden School of Business

The University of Virginia Darden School of Business delivers the world's best business education experience to prepare entrepreneurial, global and responsible leaders through its MBA, Ph.D., MSBA and Executive Education programs. Darden's top-ranked faculty is renowned for teaching excellence and advances practical business knowledge through research. Darden was established in 1955 at the University of Virginia, a top public university founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1819 in Charlottesville, Virginia.

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