

the  
**ACCOUNTING**  
**INTERVIEW**  
guide

*dress, office visits, interview questions & more*



the  
**BEAN COUNTER**  
with Andrew Argue

# Intro

Congratulations!

You've secured an interview with an accounting firm! You are in an enviable position and should be very proud of yourself. The very fact that you have been given an interview slot means that you have passed the laugh test! What's this, you ask? It means that based on your credentials and your social interactions with the firm so far, the company is still interested in you.

While this may sound like a no brainer, take a moment to consider this: You have already made a positive first impression. **You are one step ahead of the competition!** Also, by this point, the firm has seen your resume. Therefore, your GPA and experience are good enough for you to be taken seriously as a candidate.

# Intro

You should be very proud of this fact and use it as a source of confidence for what you are about to face. **As a word of caution, it is NOT the time to get cocky.**

There are typically two stages of interviews in the hiring process: The campus interview and the office interview. The main difference between these two is that the campus interviews are typically held by members of the firm's human resources department (i.e. recruiters) and the office interviews are conducted by actual CPAs and audit staff.

Depending upon your line of service, a partner or a manager may interview you on campus. I

# Preparation

**Research** the name of the person you are interviewing with. Try to find topics you both are interested in through [LinkedIn](#) (i.e., college experience, getting a CPA, joining Beta Alpha Psi). Also, research the company you are interviewing. Check out their website and Google their company name to see if they are in the news.

Prepare with **mock interviews** early and often. You must prep with mock interviews before you even get to the interview stage. Here are a couple of easy ways to get a mock interview experience:

- Go to the career center
- Ask your friends!
- Email me!

Behavioral Interviews are based on the notion that past behavior determines future behavior. When answering behavioral questions, consider the STAR Method.

# Preparation (continued...)

These are questions that require deep thought and careful preparation. If you've never practiced these questions, you may either stumble, or not have an answer at all. Look out for the next part of the series where we delve into all the questions they will ask you, and how to respond!

**S - Situation:** Detail the background; provide a setting and a content for the event.

**T - Task:** Describe the challenge and expectations. What needs to be done and why?

**A - Action:** Elaborate on your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?

**R - Results:** Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc.

# Appropriate Dress



## Women

Having the appropriate dress for an interview is essential. You don't want to look too flashy, sexy, or rich, but you do want to look polished, clean cut, and presentable. For women, you can get away with a dress; however, I recommend you go for a suit.

Skirt or pant suits work, but if you decide to wear a skirt, make sure it reaches at least the knees for an interview. Most women should wear closed-toe heels—no peep toes and no strappy heels. Here are some quick tips to keep in mind:

- Basic colors: black, navy, gray
- The skirt suit is the most professional option
- You can buy suit separates on sale and mix and match
- Wear heels to the interview
- Wear minimal jewelry
- Wear your hair down or pulled back in a simple bun
- Remove any nose or lip piercings
- Don't wear a low cut top
- Try not to wear overly chunky jewelry

# Appropriate Dress

## Men

For men it's rather simple: Wear a suit with a tie. |

**A few common mistakes for guys:** Not wearing a belt, wearing white socks, wearing suits that don't fit, and forgetting to shave. Make sure you wear a crisp and simple suit, and look clean-shaven and polished.

Men's Warehouse is often the best place to go for suits and it tends to have great deals. Yes, I know Men's Warehouse won't make you dress like Don Draper but it's exactly the style you are looking for in an accounting interview.

# Appropriate Dress (continued...)

## Men

Here are some quick tips to keep in mind:

- Basic colors: black, navy, gray - black is the most professional option
- Try not to wear something too flashy or trendy
- Wear a watch and make sure it looks professional, but not too expensive
- Remove any earrings
- Wear a tie and ask your friends if the colors on the tie match your shirt

Lastly, a personal tip I like to encourage all men to try: Before you start doing interviews, get your shoes shined. When you cross your legs or sit down, a raggedy pair of shoes can really stand out. Pay the \$10 to get them polished and you'll feel more confident knowing you've got shiny kicks.

# Campus Interviews

**Campus interviews** are typically held on college campuses or 3rd party sites. They are not often conducted at the office of the firm. For the campus interview, you may be dealing with a recruiter who does this everyday. He has seen the best candidates, but he certainly has seen some of the worst. The point is, he knows how important this interview is to you and will want to see how you handle yourself under pressure.

Unless your GPA is extremely low you probably won't be asked too many questions about it. However, if your GPA is very high (i.e. 3.7 or greater), make sure you touch on that at some point. Recruiters often pride themselves on the "stats" of the class they bring into the firm. If GPA is your strong point, you have already won half the battle of impressing the recruiter.

If not, don't worry. Your GPA is at least high enough to get you into the interview chair. At this point you need to focus 100% on the real secret to what the recruiter is looking for:

**personality.**

# Campus Interviews (continued...)

The tone of your interview is likely to be more conversational than fact based. Don't expect to get any technical accounting questions unless it pertains to something on your resume. The recruiter will be attempting to judge how you handle yourself in a social setting.

If hired, you will spend a great deal of your life interviewing clients and conducting meetings. Because of this, it is in the firm's best interest to gauge whether you have the social skills required to pull this off. While they are not necessarily looking for the best talker, they will want to see you demonstrate that you can have an intelligent and informed conversation.

Oftentimes, right before the interview, you end up waiting in the lobby. Get up and remember to shake hands with everyone in the room. If they start to talk with you, **chances are they work for the company** you are interviewing with. Exchange pleasantries: "How 'bout that weather, gorgeous huh?"

# Pre-Interview Social

Typically **office visits are two day adventures** designed to test your stamina and ability to perform under pressure for extended hours. Many times you will be asked to stay at a hotel the night before the office visit and asked to attend a “pre-interview” social. This is not a time to build relationships with the cute guy or girl you are interviewing with... **there will be plenty of time for that once you start full-time** (and are traveling together for multiple weeks). For now you must be on your A game.

While we touched on the appropriate dress for the interview, the pre-interview social is a little different. The dress is typically business casual (which mean no jeans). For the men, plan to wear khakis or other dress pants and a button down shirt. For women it's a little straightforward - I would recommend a conservative dress with a cardigan and heels.

# Pre-Interview Social (continued)

While you may not think the pre-interview social is an actual interview, it is. **The company representatives are watching for how much alcohol you drink, how you interact with your peers, how you interact with the employees of the company, how you dress, how comfortable you are with making small talk, etc.** Each of these things - and more - will be taken into account when determining whether or not you will receive an offer at the end of the process. Make sure to reach out to the event organizer to confirm the dress and time of the event. This is not something for which you can show up late. You also shouldn't be early as conversation may be a little awkward, especially if very few people are there.

Once you arrive, make sure you talk with each person from the company at least once throughout the night. Also make small talk with the other recruits. **You don't want the company to think you're in "competition" with the others.** They want to know you can build rapport with your peers while still keeping the goal in mind. This is similar to how it will be in your first year as you compete for a top rating and bonus.

# Pre-Interview Social (continued)

Another thing to remember is that you **MUST speak with employees other than just the partners**. The managers, seniors, and associates need to feel like you're interested in them too. While the partners have the power to hire you, a critical comment from any lower level employee could be a deciding favor. Here are some great topics to discuss at the pre-interview social:

- ✓ Clients worked on
- ✓ Length at the firm
- ✓ University
- ✓ Hometown
- ✓ Family
- ✓ CPA status and when it was achieved

Be prepared to be tired and bored. You may be lucky and have a great show of employees at the event, but regardless, you need to be enthusiastic and ready for conversation. Here are some **common pitfalls** at the pre-interview social:

- ✓ Drank too much alcohol
- ✓ Didn't show up
- ✓ "Hit on" fellow recruits
- ✓ Arrived late
- ✓ Only spoke to the partners and not to HR and other staff
- ✓ Arrived in inappropriate attire

# Office Visit

## The On-Site Interview, aka “Office Visit”

I remember many years ago when I was at a bowling alley social with PwC and the recruiter told me I was invited in the next week for an “office visit.” At the time, I thought, *nice, I’ll get to see where they work and get a tour of the office.* However, **that is not what an office visit entails.** A campus interview is typically the first step in the interview process. If this goes well, you will be invited to a follow-up interview in the office of the firm. I didn’t know the truth about this interview until the day before I went, at which time I was rushed to get prepared for the daunting two-day experience of the **office visit.**

These interviews are typically with actual Big 4 staff, not recruiters. You will likely speak with both a **mid-level employee (senior associate or manager) and a senior manager or partner.** These interviews are designed to measure your skill set and the likelihood of your success at the firm.

# Office Visit (continued...)

Impressing the auditors is different than impressing the HR department. These people have been where you are and know firsthand what is in store for you. Because of this, they will be looking for a specific set of skills and qualities. In order to be successful in these interviews, it will be necessary for you to show them that you possess the following:

- Critical listening and communication
- Ambition
- Personality
- Presentation (foreshadowing for how you will present yourself in front of clients)

Before we look at how you can successfully showcase these traits, let's talk about the typical structure of an office visit.

# Office Visit (continued...)

## The Office Visit Interviews

These interviews can be intimidating. As previously noted, you may be meeting with multiple partners and you will definitely be doing **at least two, if not four or five interviews**. You need to be well rested and ready to endure. Many people are mentally prepared for the interviews but don't realize that you may also have to meet with HR and attend a post-interview lunch with staff and seniors. You need to be prepared for whatever they throw your way.

The dress is **business professional** - for men that means a tie. For women, you can wear a dress, but a suit is recommended (pencil skirt or pant suit is fine). Refer to the "Appropriate Attire" section for more details. Bring extra copies of your resume and a portfolio if you have one.

# Office Visit (continued...)

There are many tricks for being successful in the accounting industry, as you will soon see. One of the most important skills is critical listening and communication. The majority of the work you do with the accounting firms will involve intense interaction with the firm's clients. You will interview staff, discuss projects with your audit team, and present your findings both formally and informally to your superiors. This interview is a good place to **show your communication skills** and display what you have to offer future clients.

**Be ready to answer all the questions they have for you and be prepared with tons of questions to ask them.**

You want to ask different questions to each interviewer, whether he or she is a manager, partner, HR representative, or someone with whom you just eat lunch. Now get ready, we're about to go through the exact questions you will be asked in accounting Interviews.

# Questions They Ask

Here are the top questions you can expect to be asked and tips on how to best answer them. I have also included a long list of other questions you may be asked during the process so **BE PREPARED!**

## Why do you want to work at <insert firm name>?

Recruiters will want to understand your level of commitment to the company. The worst thing for them is to invest a great deal of time and effort into you, only to have you go off to a competitor or, even worse, a different field all together (repeat after me: “I’m not interested in a career in finance.”). Even if the company isn’t your first choice, still be prepared with reasons why you want to work for *this* company:

- Commitment to community service
- Clients in the area (if you know them)
- All the great things you have heard from past interns in university
- The international opportunities they have for employees
- The great training programs you have heard about

# Questions They Ask (continued...)

You should know why you want to work for the firm. This reason is different for everyone. Just answer honestly and sincerely and you will be off to a great start. The more you can customize it for the specific company the better. **And, as long as you don't say that it is for the big paycheck, you're golden!**

## 2) Is <insert firm name> your first choice?

If you are actively pursuing other Big 4 or regional companies, keep this information to yourself. While you are there you are Mr. PwC or Mr. D&T, etc. You may be tempted to bait the interviewer by making yourself seem impressive that you've interviewed with some of the others, but they are more likely to take this as a sign that you are not committed. Find a reason why that specific firm stands out to you. However, if they ask if you're interviewing with other companies, you can be honest. Let them simply know that you have an interview coming up or one that has already occurred.

# Questions They Ask (continued...)

## 3) Are you certain that <insert city> is the office you want to work for?

The recruiting structure of most companies is setup on a regional basis. For example, the recruiter who you are interviewing with may have a territory for which he or she is responsible. It is likely that the recruiter will ask you which office you are hoping to work in.

Before my interview with PwC, I was discussing with an accounting firm alumnus that I was considering both the New York City office as well as an office in a smaller city. "That's good for you," he said, "if you want to cut your chance of getting the job in half."

It turns out that my interviewer was only responsible for hiring for a handful of small regional offices and not the NYC office. Had I told him that I was considering the NY office he would have been unable to hire me no matter how good I was.

# Questions They Ask (continued...)

At best, I could have only hoped that he'd forward my resume to another recruiter and start the whole interviewing process over again. In conclusion, know where you want to work and make sure you are in front of the right interviewer. As a general rule, the safest place to say you want to work is in the city where you attend University.

Most likely the recruiter is responsible for that city and has the connections in that city. Then, once you're an intern or starting full-time and have the offers secured, you can ask to be moved to another office.

**You are MUCH more likely to get the position in another office if the local office has already offered you a position.**

# Questions They Ask (continued...)

## 4) Tell me a little bit about yourself.

This may very well be the first question that you are asked. It is a good idea to have a succinct, confident response to this question. Compose a response that will take you 30 seconds to deliver. Write it down, then repeat and memorize it. This will be your “elevator pitch” about yourself. Follow this format:

- Where you are from
- What year you are in University
- What job/campus leadership roles you currently hold
- Why you are interested in working for this company and how you found out about the position

**\*\*REMEMBER TO BE PERSONABLE\*\* Here's an example (next page):**

# Questions They Ask (continued...)

**Example:** *“My name is Joe Smith and I’m originally from Hartford, Connecticut. I’m currently a senior at the University of Connecticut and will be graduating with an accounting degree in May. I have been interested in accounting as far back as high school. I first wanted to be a doctor, so I took as many advanced placement science classes as I could. On a whim I also signed up for a college-level accounting class.*

*Every day I would suffer through the science classes and then the accounting class just seemed to come so naturally. It was then that I realized that accounting is the path for me. My goal is to work for Deloitte in the Hartford office after graduation. I have learned so much about Deloitte from the on-campus meetings I’ve attended and also from speaking with (insert name), who was a past intern. I am very excited to be here today and to have to opportunity to speak with you.”*

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# Questions They Ask (continued...)

Mentioning someone else who already worked at the company associates you with that person. If you're friends with, or even associated with that person, in their eyes, you're that much more likely to fit in with the company's culture.

Don't explain the degree to which you know the person, just display there is a relationship by casually mentioning they speak very highly of the firm and have given you a lot of insight into the company.

## **5) Describe a situation in which you felt challenged. How did you handle it?**

The key to answering this question is twofold. First, you must identify an actual situation in which you were challenged. Do not be tempted to pretend that you have never been challenged or discuss a situation where others around you were challenged and you were not. Everyone is challenged at times, so think of a time you were.

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**[thebeancounter.com/course](https://thebeancounter.com/course)**

If you have any questions so that I can better help you obtain your goals, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [andrew@thebeancounter.org](mailto:andrew@thebeancounter.org).

You can also follow me on twitter @andrewargue.

Thank you!

Andrew Argue &  
The Bean Counter Team