

Best Practices for Research Assistant Interviews

Prepare like a pro before the meeting

You want to make a good first impression, which means you should prepare logistics for the day of the meeting. Have your outfit and any items you want to bring ready ahead of time. You want to dress to impress, professionally and presentable.

Plan ahead of time and confirm the exact location for the meeting. If in person, make sure you have enough time to travel to the interview site. This gives you time to settle in, get used to the environment, and calm any nerves before meeting the interviewer.

Know Yourself and the Role

In preparing for your interview, you want to **make sure you are ready to talk about anything included in your application.** Rather than repeating what is on your resume, be ready to explain your research, including the areas you are exploring, the techniques used, and any implications of your study. This is also a great opportunity to share your story. Consider experiences and goals that have led you to where you are in your academic career – and why this role and organization may be the right fit for you. Take time to learn about the company, including the position for which you applied. Think about learning about your interviewer, if possible. This action will help you ask thoughtful questions and tailor your responses in a way that connects with your audience.

Provide Relevant Information and Experience

Hiring managers mainly want to know two things. Firstly, can you perform the job? Secondly, how will your skills align and integrate with the team? When responding to these types of questions, tailor your relevant skills and experience to the position. For example, if you are applying for a research position, try to weave in stories/examples of working on a research project, summer internship, or a thesis project. **Help the hiring manager envision what it may be like to have you on their team** by providing examples in a very similar setting or project.

Pre-screen interview versus lab interview

At The Rockefeller University, preliminary interviews may be scheduled with a member of the talent team within Human Resources. This discussion is different from the interview you may have with the department/lab. Hence, your preparation should vary slightly. **For a preliminary interview,** you want to be prepared to share information, such as **why you are interested in the position.** Be prepared to **discuss your relevant experience, your interests, and career goals.** Reflect on why this position will contribute to your future goals. Discuss your strengths and developmental goals (*areas of improvement).

For a department/lab interview, research the department, including **reading laboratory research papers, and review team members who may work there.** This information allows you to integrate knowledge and a genuine interest in the department/lab, while aligning your skills to the work performed within the team.

Follow the S.T.A.R. technique when answering competency-based or behavioral questions, such as “Describe a time when you had to persuade a colleague to see things your way.”

Situation: Describe the ***situation*** and context for the event. You may also want to provide some background for additional context.

Task: Then, you discuss your role in that situation and any ***tasks***/goals you needed to achieve.

Action: Your next step involves describing what ***action*** you took to handle the situation or perform the task. It’s critical that you demonstrate your workplace skills, focusing on your contributions.

Result: The last element describes the ***results*** of your actions. Highlight any positive outcomes, lessons learned, or benefits to the project.

Tips for a Virtual Interview

- **Virtual interviews require some extra preparation- especially when it comes to technology.** Choose a quiet, well-lit area with minimal disruptions. Ensure your internet connection, camera, and microphone are working properly. Give yourself time to **log in early and test your setup**. Taking care of these details in advance will help you stay focused during the interview and make a strong impression.
- **Dress professionally (even for a virtual discussion).** Aim for a polished, put-together look, similar to what you would wear to an in-person meeting. Dressing the part shows respect for the process, while **helping get into the right mindset, feeling more focused and confident**.
- It’s important to angle the camera properly so you are clearly visible.
- Be sure to maintain good eye contact to show you are attentive to the interviewer.
- While it may be slightly harder to read a person’s body language through a video discussion, aim to express yourself, considering the volume of your voice, tone, facial expressions, and body language.



SCIENCE FOR THE BENEFIT OF HUMANITY

Best Practices: Interview Tips

- **Present your best self.** You want to make a good first impression. Make sure you present yourself in the best way possible. **Be confident, comfortable, enthusiastic, articulate, and on time.** Show up on camera the same professional way as you would for an in-person meeting.
- **Express your enthusiasm for the role and organization!** This can be done using your tone of voice, body language, and through the thoughtful questions you have for the interviewer.
- Be a good storyteller. This can help make your interview more engaging and memorable. **Use real examples to show your skills. Focus on situations, your actions, and the outcomes.** Clear, authentic stories help interviewers understand how you think and work. This may help them envision why you would be a great addition to their team.
- Review and understand your application. This includes the resume/CV and cover letter you submitted. **Be prepared to answer questions about what you submitted.** You should not be stumped if you are asked to go into more details on anything listed on your resume and cover letter.
- Do not strive to be perfect. **Understanding your strengths and being honest about the areas you are working to improve is a strong attribute.** Approach questions regarding your areas of growth with confidence. Share the actions you are taking to continue developing skills and overcoming challenges. This highlights self-awareness to an interviewer and acknowledges your eagerness to learn and grow. These are qualities employers truly value.
- Take your time to thoughtfully respond to questions. It is acceptable to ask for some more time to think about your response, or to return to the question later in the interview.
- **Always ask questions!** This shows a genuine interest in the position and highlights your attention to the discussion.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Ask a trusted person to conduct a “mock interview” and ask for feedback. This exercise helps ease nerves and grow more comfortable answering questions before the interview. Try recording yourself if practicing with someone is not possible. Answer possible interview questions and observe your responses and your body language. This helps you understand how you may come across, including the tone of voice, mannerisms, and body language. Then, adjust accordingly.
- At the end of the interview, it’s a good idea to **ask about the next steps in the hiring process.** Consider sending a thank-you note (at least within 24 hours). It’s a simple way to express appreciation, while reinforcing your interest in the position.
- Remember, **an interview is a chance to showcase to an employer that you are the ideal candidate for the job, as well as figuring out if the job is the right match for you!** Be prepared with questions to help you understand what it would be like to work there. Ask about organization culture, team dynamics, mentorship, communication preferences, and day-to-day expectations. Getting a sense of the environment and how the team works will help you decide if the role truly aligns with your values, career objectives, goals, and working style.