Look inside for...

- What to expect during an office visit
- Getting prepared for the trip and interviews
- How to handle logistics and expenses

Most companies that recruit on college campuses include an office visit as a major part of the hiring process. The office visit is generally a full day of interviewing and related activities at the company site. After the office visit is completed and an evaluation conducted, an offer may be made.

The office visit is given many names. It can also be referred to as a Super Saturday, second interview, site visit, or company visit. Just as the office visit has many names, it also has a variety of faces. There is no way to describe every aspect of what you can expect in an office visit because employers vary greatly in how they arrange them. The length of the trip, number of people involved, levels of people interviewed, types of tests conducted, and degree of formality can differ from one company to the next.

As a result, this publication focuses upon information that is fairly consistent for most companies. We have tried to present information that will help you understand the nature of the company visit, how to prepare for it, and how to conduct yourself most effectively during the visit.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COMPANY VISIT

The company visit serves two primary purposes:

1. **It allows the company to get a more in-depth assessment of the candidate prior to making an offer.**
   - The company visit is time-consuming and expensive for employers, so they screen a large number of applicants down to a few who are invited to visit. The company visit is generally the last step in the selection process before an offer is made.
   - The company is confident that the candidate who is invited to visit for a day has the technical skills and intelligence to do the job. The company visit becomes their opportunity to confirm that there is a good match between the candidate’s goals and the career opportunity. They also attempt to see that there is a good “chemistry” between the candidate and the company’s culture.

2. **It allows the candidate an opportunity to see the company and some of its people first-hand in order to make a wiser decision, should an offer be made.**
   - The company visit provides the candidate with an opportunity to learn more about the position, the long-term career opportunities, the company’s employees, the company itself, and the local community. The company will usually be doing as much “selling” as evaluating because this is the information the candidate will use in deciding whether to accept or decline an offer. The candidate, like the company, is trying to determine whether or not there is a good fit between the two.
PREPARING FOR THE VISIT

Considering the importance and purpose of the company visit, it is imperative that preparation for the company visit should not be taken lightly since the visit is the final step for most companies in deciding whether to make a job offer.

You should attempt to learn as much about the company as possible. Items of preparation may include:

- Notes taken after the initial campus interview
- Annual report
- Visiting the company’s web site for research purposes and to obtain a better understanding of the corporate culture
- Industry and business publications containing information about the company
- Talking with former students who are now employed by the company
- Talking with current employees in the line of work for which one is interviewing
- Talking to people who have had direct dealing with the company or its products

Preparation enables you to present yourself as being knowledgeable about the company, its products or services, and the career opportunities being discussed. The better prepared you are, the more probable it is that the company will recognize your enthusiasm, drive, motivation, maturity, and thoroughness.

You should use the information obtained to develop insightful questions designed to show interest in the company and the position. These questions demonstrate your thorough preparation for the visit, but should also provide the type of information that will support an informed decision to accept or decline an offer.

Take into consideration the following company characteristics in order to prepare your questions:

- The business in which they operate
- Their mission and long range goals
- Their business philosophy and management style
- The community in which they are located

The questions should be well positioned during the interview process. Recent hires of the company might be asked about training, promotion, performance evaluation, and community life. More experienced interviewers can be asked about corporate culture, long-term plans, company history, and other topics where experience enhances the value of a response. Good questions will cover a wide range of topics including:

- Corporate goals and direction
- Career enhancement
- Market growth opportunities
- Company’s competitive environment
- Research and development
- Evaluation system
- Career paths of recent hires
- Commitment to training
- Community lifestyles

Questions such as: “So what do you all do? or “What are the benefits?” may not seem as insightful to interviewers. These questions demonstrate a lack of knowledge for the key criteria that are being judged during the visit. The first type of question requests information that should have already been researched, and the second reflects an over-emphasis on matters that will be explained at a later time.

While knowledge, good insightful questions, and a sharp business outlook will go a long way toward succeeding in the company visit, a lack of personal preparation can detract from a positive image.

Factors that constitute good personal preparation are as follows:
- Leaving personal problems at home
- Taking appropriate business dress (for the type company involved)
- Having a well-groomed appearance (hair, face, skin, nails, etc.)

These are some areas of personal preparation often overlooked by candidates, yet they are extremely important. Candidates often put themselves at a disadvantage by packing carelessly, leaving for the visit with pressures from school deadlines, etc. All these factors can contribute to a poor company visit.

**ARRANGING THE TRIP**

An invitation to a company visit will usually come from a contact person at the company. This person becomes your source of information on all aspects of the trip. Any questions prior to the trip can be addressed to the contact person.

The majority of company visits are one full day in length. This generally necessitates an overnight stay in the city where the company is located. Travel will be by plane or car, depending upon your preference and the distance involved. Usually trips of more than 200 miles will justify flight. Where railroad connections are reliable, of course, trains may become a means of travel.

In cases where you are flying in, it is a good idea to use a travel agent to handle the flight arrangements. You need only give the agent the desired travel dates and times. The agent will search for the best times, report to you, then book the flight. This is done at no extra cost to you. Some companies are prepared to schedule all the arrangements for the company visit. They will reserve and prepare the hotel room and schedule and pre-pay the flights, but might offer these conveniences only when requested. If the company is not pre-paying the flight, you should have a method of payment for the travel agent. Maintain a record of all transactions as well as receipts for reimbursement purposes.

You should confirm your hotel reservations with the contact person and make sure you know up front how payment should be handled. Arrangements for ground transportation should be discussed with the contact person so you are prepared in advance to handle this part of the trip.

After receiving confirmation of your travel arrangements, you should call or send a note to the contact in the company, confirming reservations and travel plans. It is important that you contact the company regarding travel plans to avoid any last minute mix-ups or confusion. You should get all directions ahead of time. If anything at all is unclear (dates, times, locations) call the contact person prior to departure to clear up the confusion. You should leave knowing how to get from airport to hotel to interview site, and how you will get to the first meeting of the day.

**ARRIVAL**

It is usually a good idea to plan to arrive in the city the night before the company visit and to avoid very late flights or the last flight into the city. This will help avoid the problems that can arise from airline delays, cancellations or related difficulties.

Once in town, go to the hotel to check in. Many hotels have courtesy vans from the airport. In any case, receipts for ground transportation expenditure should be kept for later reimbursement. When checking into the hotel, ask for any messages (the company may have called to leave additional information) and verify any pre-payment agreement. Most hotels will ask to imprint a credit card for any charges not covered by the company.

You may want to consider the following suggestions:
- Schedule a morning wake-up call with the front desk allowing plenty of time to get ready.
- If the initial room is unsatisfactory for any reason, particularly a noisy location, don’t hesitate to ask the hotel to change it.
- Non-smoking rooms are often available for non-smokers.
- Local calls are not free. They often cost anywhere from 25 cents to 75 cents per call.
- Do not bill any long distance calls to the room. Use a calling or credit card.
- Review the bill upon checkout to ensure its accuracy.

**EVENING BEFORE**

Many companies arrange for an employee to meet the candidate for dinner on the evening of arrival. The dinner is designed as an opportunity for you to relax and meet a company representative while getting a casual flavor for the next day’s schedule, the city, and any other pertinent topics.

The dinner companion might be a project manager, your key contact, a recent hire at the company, or a UVA alum. The degree of informality and nature of conversation at dinner can vary but generally it is quite relaxed. Any dinner companion can serve as an evaluator so you should always reflect maturity and professionalism.

To a degree, you are being interviewed during dinner. The dinner host may be evaluating your:

- Social graces
- Manner of speech
- Contemporary ideas/views
- Ability to converse
- Ability to mix business with pleasure
- Maturity

Dress appropriately for a social dinner. It is also advisable to eat moderately, avoid alcoholic beverages (beyond a glass of wine, a beer, or a single drink) ask intelligent, probing questions revolving around a particular topic of discussion, and relax. The dinner is generally very social in nature and you should be yourself while maintaining your professionalism. Leave a wake-up call for morning, use a travel alarm clock, and have a parent or friend call in the morning to make sure you wake up with plenty of time to prepare. No mistake is worse than arriving late.

Check out of the hotel upon leaving for the company site. If this is forgotten it can result in the company being charged for an extra night. Take any baggage with you, as it may be out of the way to return to the hotel at the end of the day.

**INTERVIEW DAY**

The day of the interview is generally a very busy one. It is impossible to write exactly what to expect because different companies set up different types of schedules.

Many companies schedule three to five hour-long interviews with various levels of management in a one-on-one setting. These interviews may, however, be shorter or longer, fewer or more numerous.

Some employers schedule group interviews with four to twelve or more candidates visiting at one time. The candidates engage in some group sessions, and at other times are involved in one-on-one interviews. The group visit is more difficult to arrange but allows the company an opportunity to see each among his peers. It permits the candidate to see some of those who might be part of his training group.
Interviewers have typically scanned your resume and will be familiar with your background. The interviewers attempt to assess your motivation and drive. Each interviewer knows what he is looking for in a candidate and will probe for strengths and weaknesses.

Three or four different people may ask you the same questions during the day, yet you must give as good an answer to the fourth as to the first. This can be tiring, but consistency and a sustained energy level are important.

While most employers are well prepared for your office visit, some employers may not be. Candidates are sometimes called upon to carry the interview with their questions and observations.

In the one-on-one setting, you will speak with department managers and first line supervisors of the area in which the position is available. Additionally, you may meet with a second or third level manager who has had experience in many different areas of the company. Finally, the vice president of human resources or a director level manager may meet with you to round out your exposure to the company’s personnel.

It is probable that an employment manager will conduct a tour of the facility at some time during the day. While this is usually a relaxing tour you should be aware that you are still being interviewed, even in this setting. Anyone you meet for even a few minutes is a potential evaluator. Considering this, you must remain sharp and confident at all times. At no time can you reflect a lack of professionalism and expect a positive response.

**DEPARTURE**

The last meeting of the day will often be with the contact person or personnel manager. This session is to answer any of your final questions, explain follow-up procedures, discuss reimbursement, and take care of any similar details. After the visit you will be directed back to the airport for the flight home. Most companies will structure the day to allow you to leave between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m.

You should be sure that all your questions have been answered prior to leaving. You also need to understand both your own and the company’s responsibility regarding follow-up. These should be discussed during the last session of the day.

You may be extended an offer at the end of your visit. You will not be expected to provide an answer, and it is advisable to remember to evaluate the offer before responding even if you believe you already know how you will respond.

Most interview questions are geared toward assessment of your communication skills, aggressiveness, leadership capabilities, personal skills, and desires as they relate to the position and to your long-term career goals.

In some instances, companies will assign each interviewer a specific quality or skill to probe during the interview. One interviewer will probe for leadership ability, another for analytical ability, still another for communication skills and so on. After the process is complete, all the interviewers will meet to discuss the candidate and a decision will be reached.

In other companies, each interviewer will determine independently the nature of the questions. This approach might appear less coordinated to the candidate. Again, the interviewers will share the impressions they have reached.
SALARY

This is a touchy subject and students are often caught off guard when the topic comes up in an interview. If questioned about salary expectations the candidate can respond in one of two ways:

- Give a broad range: “Given my background and qualifications, my salary range is between 34,000 and 38,000.” The range should be realistic and based upon prior research of starting salaries in the industry and for the position being discussed.

- Sidestep the question: “I’m sure that if you make me an offer it will be commensurate with my qualifications and the current salary structure for your industry.”

You should try to avoid giving an exact figure in response to this question. If pressed on the issue by the interviewer, you will have to respond, but it is best to give a range. In order to provide an informed response, research current salary ranges using the Commerce Placement Report and websites such as www.jobstar.org and www.salary.com

Candidates are often tempted to bring up the salary issue themselves. As a general rule, it is best not to mention salary until the company brings it up. Salary will usually not be a topic of conversation until an offer is made.

TESTING

Some companies test candidates prior to extending offers to visit the company or during the visit itself. This testing may consist of standard mathematical and verbal tests similar to the SAT or ACT, but much briefer. You should be aware that this type of testing may be conducted and should understand that no preparation is possible. You should, however, get plenty of rest the evening before a test.

Some companies administer personality tests. These tests involve numerous questions for which there are no right or wrong answers and candidates should answer them honestly or risk showing very unusual profiles. There is no benefit to trying to “psych out” a personality test.

On occasion, students are asked to complete a work simulation in which the candidates analyze data or perhaps a case provided by the interviewer and offer suggestions or solutions. Students are typically given advance notice when they are expected to complete a work simulation.

A newer form of testing instituted by many companies over the last few years involves drug testing. This encompasses testing for all controlled substances and takes the form of a urine specimen analyzed for appearance of a substance. Candidates should be aware of the possibility that this test may occur and should be advised that failure to submit to a drug test may end further employment consideration.

COMMUNITY

Candidates should also make an effort to learn about the company’s surrounding territory. An office visit is a good time to learn about the community in which you might live.

During the day of the office visit you may question people, particularly those closest to your age, about housing, entertainment, cost of living, and other areas of interest. You may also want to research the city using City Profiles at www.wetfeet.com/cities/home.asp and www.careerplanit.com/new/archives.htm. These websites provide a wide range of information on most cities including links to companies located in the area and to job search sites specific to the area.
EXPENSES AND FOLLOW-UP

Expense handling and reimbursement varies from company to company but nearly all will try to be responsive to your needs. If possible, both for the company interviewing and later travel, it is a good idea to secure a major credit card. This will provide the ability to pay expenses when the need arises and will help to avoid any potentially embarrassing situations.

If a major credit card is not an option, and cash flow is low, many companies are willing to pre-pay expenses. You should never turn down a company visit because your funds are low! By talking to the contact person in the company you may find that they can help. Companies can assist students in ways such as:

- Pre-pay airline tickets and have them waiting at the airport.
- Pre-pay the hotel room.
- Provide cash up front for use by the student in travel.
- Arrange for ground transportation.

Generally, most major expenses (travel and lodging) will either be pre-paid by the company or put on a credit card by the student and reimbursed by the company at a later date. Incidental expenses to be paid by the candidate and reimbursed later may include:

- Parking
- Cab fares
- Business phone calls
- Meals
- Tips

Other incidental expenses fully borne by the candidate include:

- Room service snacks
- Newspapers
- Personal phone calls
- Gifts
- In room movies
- Other personal items

Be sure to collect receipts for expenses. You should also have resources to pay hotel expenses, even when pre-payment is agreed upon.

While not an overriding issue, it is important that you use common sense and good judgment regarding expenses. Companies will see an expense report and receipts after a visit, and usually high expenditures for ordinary items or unnecessary expenditures are generally frowned upon. Meals need not be at a fast-food restaurant, but should be reasonable and items such as expensive wine or appetizers should be avoided. The hotel’s own restaurant is usually a good measure of how much to spend. The company wants you to enjoy the visit but not to be extravagant.
AFTER THE VISIT

Following the visit, send a personal letter of thanks to the key people you met and talked with during the day. While this may not affect the probability of getting an offer, it is a common courtesy and will definitely be remembered if you eventually accept their offer.

Additionally, a letter of thanks to the main contact person is mandatory. If you do not have contact information for some of the company representatives, extend your appreciation to those individuals in the letter to the main contact person. This letter should reaffirm interest in the position, highlight your qualifications one last time or, if applicable, indicate any items of discussion that were not mentioned during the office visit. This short letter should reflect your enthusiasm and highlight your in-depth understanding of the contribution you can make as a member of their team. The letter provides you with one last opportunity to stand out above the competition and position yourself for a potential offer.

Many companies will get back to candidates within two weeks of the actual visit with an offer or rejection. This is an average. While some companies offer the job on the spot, others take up to a month to respond. It is, therefore, a good idea for candidates to find out how long they can expect to wait to hear from the company regarding an employment decision. The candidate should feel free to contact the company to check on delays if the estimated decision date passes with no response.

Finally, candidates are advised never to be afraid to turn down a job offer if, after careful consideration, they consider it not to be right for their future. After all, long-term career satisfaction is the goal of the whole process.