

Comprehensive Guide to Interviewing: Preparation, Execution, Follow Up



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*This guide is designed to assist you with the process of
preparing for an interview, impressing potential
employers, and overcoming common yet challenging
interview questions!*



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Introduction

In general, interviews address four areas:

- 1) **Interest** — Is the candidate knowledgeable?
- 2) **Ability** — Can the candidate do the job?
- 3) **Motivation** — Will the candidate do the job?
- 4) **Cultural Fit** — Will the candidate be compatible with the existing team?
- 5) **Overall Presentation:** Out of all the candidates interviewed, who BEST meets these four criteria?



How to Prepare:

Attire

First impressions are critical. Don't take risks with your appearance.

Men

- Suits with a jacket and tie
- Solid colored shirt or non-distracting pattern
- Neatly trimmed facial hair
- Polished shoes

General Guidelines

- Stick to conservative colors (black, navy blue, gray)
- Keep your accessories to a minimum
- Tailoring is key!

Women

- Collared dress shirts/blouses with a jacket
- Slacks/pants or skirts not shorter than two fingers above the knee
- Pumps/closed-toe shoes



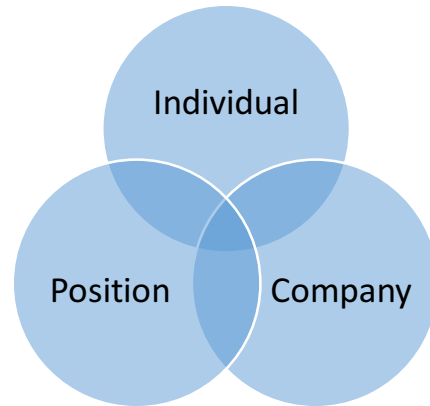
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Research, research, research.

- Use all of your resources to learn about the company. What business are they in? What products/services do they offer? Which ones interest you, and why?
- Research competitors, recent events, and future plans.
- Ask yourself, how do my experiences, both personal and professional, best fit with the characteristic traits that are valued by this position?



Behavioral Interviews

The behavioral interview is used by employers to evaluate a candidate's past experiences and behaviors in order to determine their potential for future success in the company.

The interviewer identifies desired skills and behaviors, then structures open-ended questions and statements to elicit detailed responses. As a candidate, you should be prepared to answer these questions using the “S.T.A.R” method described below:

TIP: A good answer is concise while staying relevant in both tone and applicability to the position. Start by looking over the job description and relating your skills/experiences to the desired characteristics. Write out your answers to as many interview questions as possible, and then select those that you are most comfortable with delivering. Finally, get feedback from at least 2-3 experienced individuals and practice, practice, practice...



The "S.T.A.R." method:

S	Situation	Introduce the situation and background. Relevance is key here. Provide only enough information to familiarize them with the situation.
T	Task	Specifically identify the task or challenge within the situation.
A	Action	Describe your actions and the <u>reasons</u> for taking them. Be sure to highlight personal accomplishment, but keep in mind the good of the team.
R	Results	Explain the results and effects of the accomplishments. Ideally, these should be measurable or quantifiable.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Adaptability

- Tell me about a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.

Analytical Skills & Problem Solving

- Describe a project or situation that best demonstrates your problem solving abilities. What was your role?
- Tell me about a time when you had to review information and make a recommendation. To whom did you make the recommendation? What was your reasoning? What kind of thought process did you go through and why? Was the recommendation accepted? If not, why?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What did you do? What was your thought process? What was the outcome? What do you wish you had done differently?

Communication

- Tell me about a recent successful experience in creating and giving a speech or presentation? How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation? What obstacles or difficulties did you face? How did you deal with them?
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

Goal Setting

- Give me an example of an important goal which you have set and tell me how you reached it. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did you overcome those obstacles?
- Tell me about a goal that you set that you did not reach. What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?

Initiative

- Tell me about a project you initiated. What did you do? What was the outcome? Were you happy with the result?
- What was the best idea you came up with during your professional or college

career? How did you apply it?

- Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? What was the result? What do you wish you had done differently?

Leadership

- Tell me about a project when you had to take the lead or take charge? What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result?
- Describe a leadership role of yours. Why did you commit your time to it? How did you feel about it?
- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? What were the obstacles? How did you handle the situation? What were the reactions of the group members? What was the end result?

Interpersonal Skills

- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it? How did the relationship progress?
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made. How was it received? How did you handle it?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships? Give me examples of how you have made these work for you.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it? What was the outcome? How did you feel about it?

Decision Making

- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Were you happy with the outcome?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision. What obstacles did you face? What did you do?
- What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?

Planning, Organization, & Time Management

- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same

time. How did you handle it? What was the result?

- How do you prioritize projects and tasks when scheduling your time? Give me some examples.
- Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks? Tell me about your action plan.

Teamwork

- Describe a situation where others you were working with disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a classmate or colleague who was not doing their share of the work. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team that did not get along. What happened? What role did you take? What was the result?

Creativity

- When was the last time you thought "outside the box" and how did you do it? Why?
- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way. What was the outcome? Were you happy or satisfied with it?
- Give me an example of when someone brought you a new idea that was odd or unusual. What did you do?

Follow-Up Questions

- What steps did you take?
- What action did you take?
- What happened after that?
- What did you say?
- How did he/she react?
- How did you handle that?
- What was your reaction?
- How did you feel about that?
- What was the outcome/result?
- Were you happy with that outcome/result?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What did you learn from that?
- How did you resolve that?

Wrap Up Questions for the Interviewer

A job interview is a two-way process. The thoughtfulness of your questions indicates your level of interest as well as awareness of how you can attend to the company's needs and services. Employers will determine from questions your level of seriousness you're your understanding of the position you are applying for. Your questions will also show the interviewer what is important to you, how much research you did, how prepared you are (or would be) for a business meeting, your level of maturity, and your intellectual curiosity. Make your questions count.

TIP: Avoid questions that could have been found using a Google search.

General Guidelines:

- Exclude those questions which are unsupportive of this goal.
- Do not ask questions about your needs first, especially during the first interview (i.e. salary, benefits).
- If you are looking for clarification on something, rephrase what you understand followed by your clarifying question to avoid appearing as if you were not listening.
- While you will probably be given the opportunity to ask your questions during the last 8-10 minutes of the interview, you can ask a question at any time if it relates to the discussion you are having.
- Write out your questions as it will help you articulate your thoughts, but simply use them as a reference to jog your memory – do not read them to the interviewer while staring intently at the page.

Sample Questions:

- If you had an ideal candidate, what skills and personal qualities would that person have?
- If I perform well in this position, where could I be in three to five years?
- I understand that it is the nature of the industry and the nature of the job that there are going to be some really intense periods with long days and tight deadlines. Still, could you describe what a typical week or month on the job might be like?
- Was there anything about your job that came as a surprise when you transitioned from college to corporation?
- What do you see in the future for this industry? Where do you see the company in the next 3-5 years?
- How do you rate your competition?
- What are some of the objectives outlined for this position?
- How will this position be evaluated?
- What kind of support does this position receive in terms of people, budget, etc..?
- Tell me about your customers. Describe an ideal customer.
- In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance and what has been the biggest setback?
- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this organization?
- Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
- How would you describe your organization's culture?
- How would you describe your organization's management style?
- Are there any immediate plans for expansion in your organization, either in offices, new market areas or new fields? In what directions are you moving?
- What is management's policy about promotion within the organization?
- How are you responding to the problem of _____ ? (Latest trend, competition, etc...)

How to Tackle the Tough Questions:

Tell me about yourself.

This is essentially your 30 Second Elevator Pitch. Tell the interviewer something unique about yourself. The key is to tie this into the skills and qualities you would bring to their company. Focus on your activities outside of school.

What are your strengths/weaknesses?

Strengths: What are they? Refrain from hesitation and be confident when you describe these qualities. Provide examples of instances where you've used your strengths to contribute in a team environment and how this helps you succeed in the workplace/academic setting. A plus is being able to support your claim with a personal accomplishment such as a scholarship, award, recognition, or promotion.

Weaknesses: These are not your weaknesses. These are your areas for improvement. Show that you have identified these areas and provide examples to show how you are working to improve them.

What do you know about our company?

This is where doing your homework (refer back to page 1) is essential. Although the expectation of what candidates should know about the company will vary across industries, make sure that you know the basic information and can contribute to a conversation regarding these topics:

- What services/products are offered?
- Mission statement/vision
- The leadership team
- Recent news and events
- Which causes does the organization support?

Following Up After an Interview:

Handwritten thank you cards are appreciated and show the interviewer/recruiter that you care. However, emails will accomplish the same goal if composed effectively.

Your goals:

- Thank the individual for their time
- Briefly summarize and restate why you are the best candidate for this position
- Ask any follow up questions you might have

Tips:

- Be genuine and personalize your message
- Recall and allude to something you discussed during the interview

Interview Checklist

Before:

- **Do your research:**
 - Company information
 - Leadership team
 - Recent news
- **Generate “S.T.A.R.” responses to common behavioral questions:**
 - Adaptability
 - Communication
 - Goal setting
 - Decision making
 - Initiative
 - Creativity
 - Leadership
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Planning & organization/time management
 - Analytical skills/problem solving

Schedule a mock interview with a career advisor at Career Services.

Check your interview attire for professionalism.

Verify the time, date, and location of your interview. Do a test drive to the site to know approximately how long your commute will be, accounting for traffic.

Know where to park and where to check-in.

Bring a portfolio (4-5 printed resumes, sample pieces, business cards, and notepad).

Arrive and check-in 15 minutes early to your interview site.

Remember, your interview starts the minute you walk into the building.

Maintain professionalism and greet those around you as you wait.

After:

- Politely and professionally ask for your interviewers' contact information.
- Send a follow-up email or thank you card within 24 hours.