



INTERVIEW GUIDE



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INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Interviews are an important opportunity for companies to get to know you better and determine whether or not you will be a good fit for the position based on your skills, previous experience, and personality. However, interviews are also an opportunity for YOU to determine whether the company is a match for your career goals and workplace expectations. Interviews can come in many different forms, depending on the stage of the interview process and/or the type of company to which you are applying. Here's an overview of interview types that take place during the interview process:

- **Phone Screen** – phone screens are short interviews that employers use early in the hiring process to screen candidates to see if they meet the basic qualifications and requirements of the position.
- **Phone Interview** – Employers might use phone interviews throughout their interview process, but typically use them in the beginning stages of the hiring process to narrow down the applicant pool to only the people they want to interview in-person or through video call.
- **In-person/on-site Interview** – In-person interviews are a traditional format where you meet with one or more people in the company to answer and ask questions about the position. Sometimes in-person interviews can consist of one meeting, or it can be a full-day company visit with multiple interviews with different employees.
- **Virtual Interview** – Virtual interviews are increasingly more common, and can take place over virtual platforms such as Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams, etc. Similar to in-person interviews, virtual interviews can take place with one or more people,
- **Virtual Self-Recording** – Some companies will have candidates record themselves answering a few questions and then submitting them for review. Oftentimes these recordings are timed, and you have limited chances to re-record your answer (or none at all). Similar to phone screens, these are typically used towards the start of the hiring process to narrow the applicant pool.
- **Case-Style** - Case style interviews are popular with consulting, finance, and similar industries to evaluate a candidate's skills. Sometimes you will be given the case/scenario prior to the interview, and sometimes it will be on the spot. Employers want to see how you react to situations that will likely happen as part of the position.

There are also a variety of types of questions that employers might ask, and often employers will choose a mix of question types during an interview. Here are some common question types:

- **Technical** – Technical interview questions are common in industries such as engineering, computer science, IT, etc. Technical interview questions are used to determine whether a candidate has the desired technical skills/experience for the position.
- **Open-ended** – Employers may ask open-ended questions to better understand your work style and skills. Open-ended questions are an opportunity to share stories about your experiences and qualifications. Open-ended questions might include questions like, "What are your strengths?", "What are your areas for growth?", or "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"
- **Behavioral** – Employers utilize open-ended and behavioral interview questions to get an idea of a candidate's previous actions and behaviors to better understand how they work. Behavioral interview questions often start by asking "Tell me about a time when..." or ask "what is your ideal work environment?"
- **Brain-teaser** – Brain teasers are often used in the final interview stages to assess a candidate's logic, quick-thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Oftentimes the employer is less interested in your answer to the question and more interested in HOW you got your answer.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARATION

Preparation is key to a successful interview. Candidates who have prepared beforehand are often more confident, eloquent, and have more thoughtful answers to questions. When preparing, it is best to focus on three main areas: Researching the organization, preparing and practicing your story you would like to share with employers, and preparing questions to ask the employer.

RESEARCHING THE ORGANIZATION

When researching the company, you will want to learn more about their history, mission, values, and initiatives. Look on their website, their social media pages, YouTube videos, marketing materials, etc. The more knowledge you have of the company and what they do, the better you will be able to demonstrate how you can help move the organization forward. In addition, researching the organization will give you more insight into whether or not they are a good fit for your career goals. Search for recent articles about them in the news, or try and find reviews of their company by past and current employees on platforms such as Glassdoor and Handshake.

NOTE: Research your interviewers if you can. Find them on the company website and/or LinkedIn. Try to get an understanding of their background and experience as a way to prepare for the interview.

PREPARING AND PRACTICING YOUR STORIES

While you won't be able to predict the exact questions an interviewer might ask, you can certainly get a good idea of what they might ask by reviewing the job posting to see what skills they are looking for, and practice giving responses that demonstrates that you have those skills. In fact, the key to a successful interview is good storytelling – sharing more about your experiences, projects, and skills that connect to the role. Here are some tips for preparing your stories to use in an interview:

- Review the job description to see what skills and experiences they are looking for to fill the position (ex: if they're looking for someone with extensive experience in Photoshop, they will likely ask you about your familiarity/experience with the platform)
- Review Questions Employers Ask: p. 2 of interviewing guide
- Make a list of relevant courses, projects, skills, and experiences that you might be able to use as examples
- Prepare (and practice!) responses to the most common interview questions:
 - "Tell me about yourself"
 - "What are your strengths?"
 - "What are your weaknesses?"
 - "Why do you want to work at this company?"

PRACTICE

The best way to ensure that you don't ramble or fail to answer the question is to practice. The CCPD offers two ways to help you practice:

- **Preparing Questions to Ask the Employer** – At the end of the interview, it is important to ask good questions. It is best to come up with these questions during your preparation to show the interviewer that you are interested in the company (see Navigating the Interview for more).

Practice the STAR technique: The STAR technique is useful for behavioral interview questions ("tell me about a time when...") and other questions you might get during the interview. Think of 4-6 situations (depending on the length of the interview) you have been faced with in the past. Vary your examples so they are from all areas of your past (including internships, volunteering, class projects, part-time jobs, school activities, etc.). Describe your stories using the following STAR method. Practice telling the story using the STAR method, but do not memorize them word for word.

- **S – Situation or (T) Task:** Describe a specific situation or task (*i.e.*, "Assigned to a team and team member wasn't pulling their weight.")
- **A – Action:** What action did you take? ("I met with the team member in private and explained the frustration of the rest of the team and asked if there was anything I could do to help.")
- **R – Result:** What happened as a result? What was the outcome? ("We finished our project on time and got a B on the assignment.")

In addition to the studying and practicing part of preparation, you want to make sure that you are well-rested and ready to go for the interview. This means getting a good night's sleep, eating a healthy breakfast, choosing the right outfit, listen to your favorite playlist, etc. Make sure you take the time to do whatever it is you need to do to feel good and ready for the interview.

NAVIGATING THE INTERVIEW

Answering Questions

When answering interview questions, you want to make sure that your answers:

- Are clear – You want to ensure that your answer would make sense to someone who might not have been familiar with the specifics of what you are describing.
- Are concise – avoid rambling! Make sure your answers answer exactly the question being asked, and don't take things in another direction.
- Demonstrate your ability to be successful in the role – you want to use your interview answers to showcase your unique skills and experience and make the case for why you would be the ideal person for the role.

The best way to ensure that you don't ramble or fail to answer the question is to PRACTICE. The CCPD offers two ways to help you practice:

- **Do a Mock Interview with the CCPD** – schedule an appointment with a career advisor to do a mock interview and get feedback.
- **Use Big Interview** – Big Interview is an online resource offered by the CCPD that allows you to learn about interviewing skills practice responding to interview questions at your own pace. The site allows you to record yourself responding to questions, and then you are able to watch it back and see how you did.

NOTE: In the interview, employers should be asking questions to determine whether or not candidates are a good fit for the role/organization. However, there are some questions that hiring managers cannot legally ask and candidates should be aware. Employers cannot ask candidates about the following topics:

- | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|
| • Age or genetic information | • Gender, sex or sexual orientation | • Race, color, or ethnicity |
| • Birthplace, country of origin or citizenship | • Marital status, family, or pregnancy | • Religion |
| • Disability | | |

ASKING QUESTIONS

During the interview there will likely be a point where the interviewer(s) will ask if you have any questions. It is important to ask questions for two reasons. For one, asking thoughtful questions is a way to communicate your interest and emphasize your research and preparation for the position, and thus further impress your employers. Secondly, asking questions gives you the opportunity to get a better idea of whether or not this position/company/team is a good fit for you. Here are some sample questions you might ask at the end of an interview:

- What is the top priority for the person in this position over the next three months?
- What is the biggest challenge in your department?
- What have you enjoyed most about working here?
- How would you describe a typical week/day in this position?
- What are the biggest challenges that someone in this position would face?
- Can you explain the organizational structure? Who would I report to? Who would be on my team?
- How would you describe the company and team culture?
- What will the training for this position look like?
- Where do you see this company/team in the next few years?
- If I am extended a job offer, how soon would you like me to start?
- Can you describe your ideal employee?
- How will my performance be measured? By whom?
- Who is your biggest competitor for your products/ services? How do you differ from your competitor?
- Are there any other questions I can answer for you?
- What are the next steps in the process?

NOTE: Be sure to remember and/or write down the answers employers give you, as you will want to reference them in your Thank You note to demonstrate your interest and engagement in the position.

PRESENT YOUR BEST SELF – BEYOND ANSWERS

- **Body Language:** Be mindful of your body language while interviewing. You want your body language to convey engagement and confidence. This means avoiding things like slouching in the chair, crossing your arms, or tapping your foot on the floor. As best you can, try to sit up straight and keep your hands in your lap.
- **Avoid fillers:** When speaking, avoid filler words/phrases such as “like”, “um”, “uh”, “you know”, etc. It can be hard to eliminate fillers completely, but minimize your use of them as much as you can to convey confidence during your interview. Doing practice interviews beforehand helps with this!
- **Use your manners:** Be respectful and polite to the people you interact with during the interview. Say things like “thank you”, “nice to meet you”, “you’re welcome”, etc.
- **Make eye contact:** During the interview, be sure to make appropriate eye contact. Look at the person/people to whom you are speaking, and avoid looking down, out the window, at the clock, etc. Maintaining good eye contact demonstrates that you are engaged and present in the conversation.

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS 101

- **Cut out background noise and distractions** – If meeting virtually, you want to eliminate anything that could distract from your conversation, such as a loud roommate, a barking dog, or background TV noise.
- **Sit in front of a neutral/distraction-free background** – Depending on your living space, you might not have the perfect, white wall background. However, you can make sure that your background is free of major distractions, such as an unmade bed, inappropriate wall decorations, mess or clutter, or even another person.
- **Check your technology beforehand** – make sure your camera and microphone are working before your meeting to ensure that technical difficulties don’t delay the start of your conversation, and don’t delay your chance of a great first impression!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview is over, you want to follow up and thank people for taking the time to interview you. This emphasizes to the employer your interest in the position, and is good interview etiquette. When writing a Thank You note, here are things to keep in mind:

THANK YOU NOTES

- **Timing:** You should aim to send thank you messages within 24-48 hours of the interview, and should send a message to each person who interviewed you.
- **Subject Line:** Use a meaningful and relevant subject line (ex: Thank You!)
- **Address the recipient correctly:** Address the recipient using "Dear NAME,". If the person uses a title like Mr., Ms., or Dr., use that when addressing them. If the person has introduced themselves to you/communicated with you using primarily their first name, then address them as such.
- **Content:** In your message, you want to thank people for their time, include details/takeaways from your conversation, and remind them of your skills/interest in the position. The message does not have to be long, but should emphasize your engagement in the interview and your interest in the position.
- **Signature:** Use your full name. If including links to your social media pages, make sure they are appropriate to be viewed by the employer. Remove any irrelevant images, quotes, or links.
- **Proofread!** Make sure your email is free of spelling and grammatical errors before sending.

Example:

Dear Jessica,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Systems Specialist position this morning. I enjoyed learning more about XYZ Corporation, and appreciated learning more about the team's innovation and efficiency goals for the next five years. I am confident that my previous experience in systems management and my enthusiasm for the industry will make me a great fit for this role and a valuable addition to the team.

Please let me know if you have any further questions about my candidacy. I look forward to hearing from you about the position.

Thank you again