Interviewing: Overview, Tips and Follow-Up

Successfully managing an interview is key to being selected for the opportunity you want. The interview provides organizations **an opportunity to assess your knowledge and skills,** to get to know your personality and to examine your verbal and nonverbal communication skills. To do your best, prepare and practice.

Types of Interviews

Traditional Interview

This type includes broad questions to determine if you have the skills to perform the position and are a fit for the organization.

- Why did you choose your major?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why do you want to work, research or volunteer here?

Behavioral Interview

These are based on the idea that past behavior is the best indicator of future performance. Many companies use this type of interview. Questions for behavioral interviews usually start with 'Tell me about a time when... .' When answering and preparing for these interviews, follow the STAR format.

Case or Technical Interview

Case interviews are used by consulting companies in various industries as well as banking and financial firms, computer science companies or anywhere you are showing a technical skill in the hiring process. This type of interview tests the candidate's analytical, communication, problem solving and adaptability skills. Case interviews include written cases, business cases and brain teasers.

Interview Formats

In-Person

- This can be one-on-one, with other candidates and/or conducted by a panel of interviewers.
- Arrive at least ten minutes before the scheduled time.
- Body language and other nonverbal indicators are especially important.

Video

- Can be a two-way platform or pre-recorded.
- Same behavior and etiquette as an in-person interview.
- Check your internet connection ahead of time, be in a quiet and well-lit environment, and make sure you will not be disrupted or have distractions in the room.
- Focus on the camera rather than the screen.

Phone

- Typically used as a preliminary interview.
- Have some notes or key points written down for reference, but do not read off a page.
- Ensure you are in a quiet, distraction-free place with strong and clear reception.
- While most nonverbal signals won't come across, a smile will come through in your voice—try to answer the way you would if they could see you.

Interviewing Tips

Tips for Every Interview

- **Practice with friends, family, advisors, etc.** Video interviews can be rehearsed on **StandOut**.

- **Research the expectations for dress.** Dress can range greatly in organizations. You can also reach out to your contact and ask what their standards are. In the absence of this information, err on the side of caution and dress in what would be considered business professional.

- **Research the organization** so you can talk about your connection to or passion for it.

- **Develop an elevator pitch** and memorize the key points for your answers to 'tell us about yourself' questions.

- **Answer questions strategically.** It's ok to pause and gather your thoughts and to ask clarifying questions. Instead of rambling, structure your answers, such as 'Yes, I'd like to mention two examples of that, #1 and #2.'

- **End answers with a confident summary statement.** One of the hardest parts of answering is knowing when to stop talking. Once you've given evidence of your abilities, use a summary statement to finish, e.g., 'So, based on my design experience, I know I could create a great new website for the launch.' Pay attention to names and all components of a question to show you are respectful and thoughtful.

- **Be aware of your body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, speed and eye contact.** Take a second to breathe. Sit up straight, give a firm handshake, make frequent eye contact and smile.

- **Ask two or three of your own questions,** thought of ahead of time, to show your interest in the organization and position.

- **Thank them for their time and consideration** both at the end of the interview and within 24 hours via email.

Second or Multiple Follow-ups

- Always **highlight your skills and ideas and your desire to continue to grow** in the position.

- You will likely meet more employees, managers, partners, etc. with each interview. Do your best to **remember names and leave a lasting positive impression** with each person regardless of their position.

- Recruiters often consider the opinion of all of the people you meet; so **keep these tips in mind for the entire duration of the visit.**

Special Interviews

Case Interviews

Preparation is key to successful case interviews. Candidates who are able to communicate their skills and demonstrate how they logically and creatively think through actual problems are more successful.

Characteristics and Components

- Situation-based interview questions
- No right or wrong answer
- Assessing logical and creative critical-thinking skills

The interview questions can include actual problems that the organization is working/has worked on. For example, you may be asked to analyze a decline in profits for a particular service or resource, identify the cause and recommend solutions to solve the problem.

Purpose

A case interview is an interactive way to test a candidate's knowledge of industry trends, solutions and ways to implement change. Case interviews are most common in business and information technology. They test an individual's ability to use structure, logic and an intelligent approach to solve problems. Although there is generally no correct answer, candidates are expected to ask the interviewer logical questions and make thorough recommendations to solve problems.

Technical Interviews

Preparation is essential in the technical interview process. Candidates who can communicate their technical skill are more successful.

Characteristics and Components

Technical interviews assess a candidate's problem-solving skills, reasoning abilities and technological skills. Components can include:

- At-home coding challenges
- Phone screens
- In-person questions
- Assessments

The questions can include puzzles, trivia, pair-programming and coding problems. For example, you're given a binary tree and two nodes in the tree and asked to find the lowest common ancestor of the two given nodes in O(n) time. To understand the interview process, first assess your technical skills by inventorying your skill set and experiences. Consider:

- What technnology-based courses (i.e. data structures and algorithms) have I taken?
- What relevant class projects or certificates did I complete?
- How do transferable skills I developed through experiential learning (i.e. internships, shadowing, coding boot camps, part-time jobs, hack-a-thon) translate to this position?
- How do I articulate my competencies gained through personal projects or other work?

Knowing Your Strengths

To answer interview questions honestly and make a good impression, you need to **understand yourself** as a person and as an employee, manager, etc.

Self-Evaluation

Try this self-evaluation and consider meeting with our career team to examine your strengths and weaknesses more thoroughly.

- **What types of projects or activities do you thrive at?** Write them down and try to find commonalities between them such as being people-oriented, being hands-on, etc.

- **Reflect on past group tasks you have been involved in.** What was your role? Which ones were your favorite or most successful, and what do they have in common? Do you prefer the leader or follower role?

- **What jobs or volunteer experiences** were exceptionally enjoyable and what made them so? What role did you play in making them great?

- **What type of work environment or atmosphere are you most happy and successful in?** Outdoors? Indoors? Involved? Independent? Urban? Rural?

- **How do you handle stress and pressure?** Do they motivate or burden you?

- **Does change excite and motivate you?** Or do you prefer consistency?

- **How do you best communicate your thoughts, feelings, ideas and questions?** Orally? In writing? One-on-one? In a group? Is this the same for receiving communication?

- **How do you do your best brainstorming?** Alone? With a small or large group? Over time? Short sessions?

- **What is your greatest motivator?** Social growth and connection? Wage? Professional advancement? Community improvement?

- **Do you perform better and feel more comfort** with structure or fluidity?

Interview Follow-Up

Follow up after an interview by sending a **thank you note to those you interviewed with within 24 hours.** You can send an email or a letter through the mail. Email ensures a timely receipt while a letter sent through the mail is more formal.

Sample Follow-Up

Dear _____,

Opening paragraph. Express appreciation for the opportunity. Mention the location and date of the interview or meeting. Make a positive statement about your interest in the organization.

Second paragraph. Emphasize a specific point which will make you stand out in the employer's memory. Supply additional information that was omitted during the interview.

Closing paragraph. Close with additional appreciation. Make a positive statement about your qualifications for the position.

Sincerely,

Communicating with Organizations

Whether you are in an interview, responding to an email or talking on the phone, **keep all communication—verbal and nonverbal—professional.** The relaxed tone used with friends is not the same as professional communication.

Email

- **Include a clear, direct and brief subject line**. Don't make the other person guess what your message is about. The subject line is often the deciding factor whether the email gets read or discarded.

- **Always re-read before sending**. Proofread your emails before sending them to eliminate errors and to check the tone of the email. Give a good impression while clearly communicating the intent of the message.

- **Use a professional email address**. Your email address is part of your professional brand. An unprofessional email address may not make a positive impression on those reviewing your résumé.

- **Say please and thank you.** Using these words in your emails sounds professional and respectful.

- **Be careful with first names**. Err on the side of formality. For example, use Mr., Ms. or Dr. to address someone vs. using first names (until instructed otherwise). You can avoid using the person's name altogether and begin an email with 'Good morning.'

- **Respond in a timely manner**. Responding within 24 hours is proper etiquette, even if you just reply to acknowledge receiving the email and to express you will reply soon.

- **Avoid using too many exclamation marks**. When writing a professional email, don't overuse exclamation marks and bolded words. This can come across as overly eager or inexperienced.

Phone Calls and Voicemail

- **Identify yourself quickly**. Don't leave the other person guessing who it is. State your name and where you are calling from to give context for the phone call.

- **Have an appropriate voicemail**. Your voicemail is often someone's first impression of you—make it professional. It should be easy to understand and appropriate for all callers. State your full name and phone number with a brief message.

- **Be prepared**. Have a notepad and pen ready for notes you might need to jot down. Be ready to ask questions.

- **Slow down**. Since interviewers are unable to read your facial expressions and body language, slow down your vocal pace to allow them to understand exactly what you are saying. Many people speed up when they are nervous; so take a deep breath.

- **Practice ending your phone call**. If it is a phone interview, thank the interviewers for their time and summarize any action you will take after the call.

Nonverbal Communication

You may have perfected your answers to interview questions, but much of the first impression you make will be based on nonverbal communication.

- Make eye contact with the interviewer.

- A firm handshake will exude confidence and capability.

- Sit up straight with feet either flat on the floor or ankles crossed. Lean forward slightly to appear interested and engaged.

- Relax your shoulders.

- Smile and nod while listening.

- Don't cross your arms.

- If you need to do something with your hands, interlock your fingers and hold them loosely in your lap, or hold a pen and a notepad.