
INTERVIEWING GUIDE

WHAT TO DO BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER

Employers interview candidates to determine who will be the best fit for the role. It is also an opportunity for candidates to learn more about the job and organization. The goal of an interview is to get a job offer. Therefore, it is important to prepare and practice for this chance to make a lasting impression. Use the resources in this guide to prepare for the interviewing process.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research

- Check out the organization’s website and LinkedIn page to identify recent news, research, strategic planning, marketing, or other company information.
- It may also be useful to research the person(s) interviewing you. You may discover their research/area of focus, common interests, or other points of discussion for the interview.

Review

- Review your resume and cover letter – the interview may be weeks after you submitted the application.
- Think about your career goals and how this opportunity connects to those goals. Be sure that you can clearly articulate *why* you want this role.
- Be able to provide concrete examples of the skills, experiences, and accomplishments that make you qualified for the role.

Practice

- Review the **job description** to identify the qualifications and skills that the employer is seeking – they will ask questions about these skills.
- Sign up for a **mock interview** with a career counselor. Log-in to [Handshake](#) to view the schedule.
- Attend a **workshop** to learn interviewing tips. View the ‘Events’ calendar in [Handshake](#) for details.
- Look up the company and position on [Glassdoor.com](#) to search thousands of user submitted interview questions.
- Use **Interview Stream** to do a self-guided mock interview or review an interview tutorial: <http://gwu.interviewstream.com/home/>

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- **Behavioral**
These interviews consist of questions about the candidate’s previous experiences and personality. The interviewer uses examples from the past to assess how the candidate might fit with the current role. See **page 4** for strategies on how to answer common behavioral questions.
- **Case Style**
Case style interviews consist of questions to assess a candidate’s analytical thinking and problem-solving ability. These scenario-based questions are modeled after real business issues. For more information about case style interviews and preparation tips, review the [Vault Guide to the Case Interview](#) (access through Handshake resources).

▪ Technical

Technical or “whiteboard” interviews allow the employer to assess a candidate’s knowledge by having them solve a problem. The candidate can demonstrate both problem-solving and communication skills as they work out a solution. Utilize the resources below to prepare for technical interviews:

• Workshops

Search the ‘Events’ calendar in [Handshake](#) to find a workshop called **Mastering the Technical Interview**. An employer or alumni speaker will share useful strategies for technical interviews.

• Articles

- The Muse - <https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-ace-your-technical-interview>
- The Balance - <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/top-technical-interview-questions-2061227>
- SkillCrush - <https://skillcrush.com/2016/03/29/rock-your-next-whiteboard-test/>

• Practice Websites

- Coding for Interviews - <http://codingforinterviews.com/practice>
- HackerRank - <https://www.hackerrank.com/programming-interview-questions>
- Codementor - <https://www.codementor.io/>

▪ Phone/Video

These are typically screening or first-round interviews that are generally shorter than an in-person interview. Keep the following tips in mind for phone or video interviews:

- Try to use a landline or Ethernet connection as mobile phones and Wi-Fi may drop out during the call. Get familiar with the features of the video tool (Skype, Zoom, etc.) so that you can avoid technical difficulties.
- Find a quiet room where you will not be interrupted and arrive 10 minutes early. For video calls, choose a space that has good lighting and doesn’t have a distracting background.
- Print out copies of your resume, cover letter, and the job description to refer to while on the call. Write down the number of the interviewer in case you get disconnected.
- For video calls, dress for an in-person interview. Keep in mind that some clothing details may not look good on screen.
- Write down and use the name of the interviewer(s) to help create a more personal connection.
- Pause a second or two longer than you normally would before answering a question to make sure the interviewer has stopped speaking.
- At the end of the interview, mention that you would appreciate the opportunity to meet in person. This is not too forward and will convey your interest and enthusiasm.

ATTIRE

Dressing appropriately for the interview shows that you are taking the opportunity seriously. Business professional attire is typically appropriate for interviews, while business casual attire is what you are more likely to wear day-to-day on the job. Ask a career services staff member or the recruiter if you have questions.

Business Professional

- Suit jacket with matching pants, dress, or skirt in neutral colors (black, navy blue, grey)
- Dress shirt with collar and tie
- Dress shoes or comfortable heels (closed toe)

Business Casual

- Khakis or dress pants
- Casual skirt or dress
- Collared shirt or blouse
- Dress shoes, loafers, or flats (closed toe)

PROFESSIONAL ATTIRE TIPS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Style hair neatly and away from the face if possible ✓ Choose modest accessories that do not distract ✓ Press or iron your clothes ✓ Bring a portfolio or plain folder to hold extra copies of your resume, a pen, and paper for notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Avoid heavy fragrances (cologne or perfume) ✗ Do not wear heels above 3 inches or shoes that are difficult to walk in ✗ Reconsider clothing that is too tight, low cut, or uncomfortable to move in |
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DURING THE INTERVIEW

Arriving

- Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes before the interview is supposed to start. Look up the location ahead of time and determine how you will arrive. Allow time for travel delays.
- From the moment you enter the building be polite and courteous to each person you meet – the receptionist to the CEO. You never know who may play a role in deciding who gets a job offer.
- Turn off your cell phone, throw out any food or drinks you may have brought with you, and ask if there is a place to store bulky items (coats, backpacks).

Body Language

- Always address each employer with a firm handshake, looking them in the eye, and introduce yourself using your first and last name.
- Make sure to sit up straight, maintain good eye contact with the employer, and give the appearance of being engaged in the conversation.
- If you tend to fidget, clasp your hands together in your lap or plant both feet firmly on the ground.
- A warm smile goes a long way!

Be Engaged

- Listen to the interviewer. Make sure that you answer the actual question being asked and have confidence in your answer.
- Don't be afraid of a little silence – take your time to provide thoughtful responses.

Ask Questions

- Ask questions so the interview feels more like a conversation and so you can demonstrate your interest.

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any new products (or services) in the development stage? ▪ Is your company involved in the community? ▪ What do you and/or your employees like best about working for this company? ▪ How would you describe the management style in this organization? ▪ What are some of the first assignments I might expect? ▪ What is the typical career path for someone in this position? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe a typical day on the job. ▪ How often are performance reviews given? How is performance measured? ▪ What are some of the qualities you are looking for in the ideal candidate? ▪ What characteristics do successful employees in this company share? ▪ What are the opportunities for professional growth? ▪ How would you describe the organization's culture? |
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HOW TO ANSWER COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The key to doing well in an interview is to incorporate elements of storytelling – catch the listener’s attention with a relevant example that also demonstrates your strengths. If your answers are too long, confusing, or unrelated to the question, you will lose their interest. Be thoughtful and make sure that you are clearly communicating the qualities the interviewer is seeking.

Question	Purpose	Answer
Tell Me About Yourself	The purpose of this question is to remind the interviewer of your background and help them understand how your experiences fit into a cohesive story.	Give a brief summary that highlights and connects the relevant aspects of your education, skills, and personality. Do not list all of the things you have done or read directly from your resume.
Why Do You Want This Job?	The employer is trying to assess the candidate’s level of engagement. They want to hire someone who will be interested in working with them.	Give a strong answer by providing specific reasons you are interested in the industry, company, and that job. Incorporate what you learned from the research you did on the organization.
Strengths & Weaknesses	Questions regarding strengths and weaknesses are to assess a candidate’s level of self-awareness. Employer’s want to build a strong team and need to know how each person will fit in.	Share honestly about your abilities. This shows maturity and confidence. If you are having trouble thinking of qualities, ask a friend who knows you well or refer back to previous work evaluations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengths – Prepare a list of 5 strengths and a brief example of each. Look at the job posting to determine what skills and qualities are relevant. ▪ Weakness – Think of 1 or 2 areas for improvement that you feel comfortable sharing and an example of how you are trying to improve in that area. Do not avoid the answering the question; employers want to hire genuine people, not perfectionists!
What Are Your Long Term Career Goals?	Employers want to know if the current job will align with your career path. They want to hire employees who will be engaged in the work.	Consider how the current job will prepare you for the future. Even if you are unsure about what your plans will be, share what you hope to learn from the job or how it will help you grow.
“Tell me about a time when...” “Give an example of...”	The purpose of these questions is to learn about your past experiences and how they have prepared you for the current job.	You can give a strong answer by connecting your past experience to the current job you are interviewing for. Whenever you are asked to provide an example of particular skill, use the STAR method on page 5 to structure your answer.

STAR METHOD FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS

QUESTION: *Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team to complete a project.*

SITUATION	What was going on?	Give a brief description of the situation in order to provide context for your story: timeframe, location, key people involved.	<i>Last semester, I worked on a research team of four students to submit a proposal for the SEAS R&D Showcase. The goal was to use technology to address an environmental need caused by climate change.</i>
TASK	What was your responsibility or challenge?	Keep your answer focused by identifying your responsibility within the situation.	<i>Each team was required to submit a video and poster presentation with a demonstration. We had one month to prepare and decided to assign each person a different part. I volunteered to work on the video.</i>
ACTION	What did you do?	Provide statements about the actions you took to address the challenge. Focus on what your actual role was, don't refer to a generic solution or what someone else might do.	<i>I suggested that we draft an outline of the important parts of the project so that it would be consistent across the video, poster, and presentation. I created a Google Document with the video script where everyone could make comments and I made a schedule for recording so that everyone could participate.</i>
RESULT	What was the outcome?	Don't forget to provide a concrete outcome that resulted from your actions. Consider both quantitative and qualitative results and try to give a result that reflects well on you.	<i>Although everyone had busy schedules we were able to use our meeting time efficiently to address questions and prepare for the presentation. The judges commented that our presentation was well organized, and we received second place in the competition.</i>

SAMPLE BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Communication

- Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
- Do you listen? Give an example of when you did or when you didn't listen.
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a client? How?
- What do you do if you disagree with your boss?

Time Management

- When you worked on multiple projects, how did you prioritize?
- Tell me about a time you worked effectively under pressure or a tight deadline.
- Have you been in a situation where you didn't have enough work to do?

Problem Solving

- Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Describe a time you took initiative to respond to a challenge.
- Have you ever made a mistake? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time you had to adjust your plans or change them all together.

Decision Making

- Did you ever make a risky decision? Why? How did you handle it?
- Did you ever postpone making a decision? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make an unpopular decision.
- Would you make the same decision again? Why or why not?

Teamwork & Leadership

- Give an example of how you've worked on a team.
- Have you had to convince someone to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Share an example of how you were able to motivate employees or co-workers.

Achievements

- Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
- What is your greatest accomplishment? Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Next Steps

Before you leave, ask your interviewer for their business card so that you can send a thank you note. Also ask about next steps. *Will there be any follow up interviews? What's the timeline for a final decision?*

Reflect

After leaving the interview, write down some notes about what was discussed. Include any questions that you have about the job or organization that you may want to follow up on later. Also note if there were any questions that you felt unprepared for or found especially challenging. These may be questions to practice for future interviews.

Thank You Note

Within 24 hours of your interview send a brief thank you note via email. Make sure the language is formal and reaffirms your interest in the job by including something you discussed during the interview. You may also send a handwritten note in addition to the email but this is not required.