Preparing for an Interview: About Behavioral Interviewing

Most interviews will include some if not all behavioral questions. The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral-based interviewing is touted as providing a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interview questions ask you general questions such as "Why should we hire you?" The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what s/he wants to hear. Even if you are asked situational questions that start "How would you handle XYZ situation?" you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would?

In a behavioral interview, however, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a behavioral story, the behavioral interviewer typically will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer will probe further for more depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." If you've told a story that's anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

The behavioral job interview … uses questions that probe specific past behaviors, such as: "tell me about a time where you confronted an unexpected problem," "tell me about an experience when you failed to achieve a goal," and "give me a specific example of a time when you managed several projects at once." Job-seekers prepare for these interviews by recalling scenarios that fit the various types of behavioral interviewing questions. Expect interviewers to have several follow-up questions and probe for details. Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success.

Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: "Tell about a time…" or "Describe a situation…"

Responses should follow the STAR format:

- **S**ituation: the situation or problem that needed solved
- **T**ask: the tasks/responsibilities for the situation or problem
- **A**ctions: what the student specifically did to address the situation or problem
- **R**esult: the outcomes (quantitative and/or qualitative)

The best way to prepare is to think of examples that answer situations that employers will want to know about you. Consider the areas of communication, teamwork, technology, leadership, critical thinking, professionalism, equity & inclusion, and self-development.

Sample Behavioral Interviewing Questions

- Describe a time when you had to … use your written communication skills to get an important point across.

- Sometimes it's easy to get in over your head… Describe a situation where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.

- Give me an example of a time when you … set a goal for yourself and successfully pursued it.

- Give me an example of a time you had to … make an important decision... How did you make the decision?

- Tell me about a time when you had to … deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?

- Describe a situation that required … a number of things to be done at the same time. … How did you handle it? What was the result?

- Tell me about a time you … came up with an innovative solution to a problem.

- Describe a time when you … exhibited teamwork.

- Describe a specific problem you solved for your employer or professor.

- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?

- Give an example of when you had to … work with someone who was difficult to get along with.

- Tell me about a time you … went above and beyond to get a job done.

- Give me an example of … how you managed multiple priorities.

- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused?

- Tell me about a time when you … failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

- Can you give me an example of your team-leadership skills?

- Tell me about a time you had to … handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?

- Provide an example that convinces me that you can … adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.

- Describe a situation where … others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas… What did you do?

- Describe a project or idea that was implemented or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.

- Tell of a time when … your active listening skills really paid off for you - maybe a time when other people missed the key idea being expressed.