

CAREER TOOLKIT



BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS OVERVIEW

Behavioral questions ask the interviewee to provide examples and results of actions from their career. For example, you might be asked, “Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult situation.” To best address these questions, develop strong examples prior to the interview that relate to the position description, and use the BARE method (as shown below) to structure your answers.

You should also understand what skills and qualities employers are looking for as they select candidates to join their teams. You will use the job description as a guide to the **specific skills and qualifications required for the role**, but you should also be aware of the **skills that employers generally value in their employees**.

Based on research from the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the Graduate Management Admission Council Corporate Recruiters Survey, employers place considerable weight on the following career competencies:

Professionalism, Communication, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Technology, Leadership, Equity & Inclusion, and Career & Self-Development. Communication skills encompass cross-cultural competency as well as active listening. In-demand technical skills change over time, so be sure to know which are valued in the industry and role you are targeting.

As you prepare your behavioral interview responses, it is important to practice them in a mock interview and on your own prior to the interview.

Behavioral questions help an interviewer predict future performance based on past successes and behaviors. Your answers should be based on competencies and applicability for the specific position in question. Your roadmap for preparation should be the job description, informational conversations, GlassDoor.com as well as an understanding of the career-ready competencies discussed above.

TIP

WHEN PRACTICING YOUR ANSWERS, ALWAYS PRACTICE THEM OUT LOUD, NOT IN YOUR HEAD. RESEARCH INDICATES GREATER EFFICACY PRACTICING ANYTHING SPOKEN WHEN YOU HEAR YOUR OWN WORDS, MUCH LIKE WHEN YOU PRACTICE SPEAKING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR RESPONSES

One of the smartest approaches to preparing for every interview is to *deconstruct the job posting*.

Review the position description and:

1. Determine which requirements are your strong suit, and how you will add value;
2. Be prepared to discuss your shortcomings, and how you will compensate; and
3. Decide which combination of skills and experience would make your contributions unique.

Customize your answers for each situation to ensure you are addressing the needs of the position.

B-A-R-E METHOD

Addressing behavior-based interview questions: **B =Background**. Set up briefly the stage/context of the situation; **A=Action**. What literally did you do? **R =Result**. What was the result or intended result of your actions? **E = Employer**. Why is this story relevant to the employer?

B BACKGROUND	A ACTION	R RESULT	E EMPLOYER
Last semester I was on a team with five classmates to work on a project. After the first few meetings, we realized one member frequently arrived to meetings late or not at all.	I approached this team member directly to talk about expectations and missing meeting. I also asked if there was anything I could do to help him meet those commitments.	The team member admitted lack of good time management skills. I offered to send him day-of reminders and he was never late or missed another meeting again.	I go out of my way to bring out the best in others. It's a common career theme for me and gives me confidence I will enjoy and fit in with your highly team-oriented environment.

BEHAVIORAL QUESTION EXAMPLES

- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a directive from your manager.
- Tell me about a time when you went above and beyond work expectations to get a job done well.
- Please describe an example of a leadership experience.

Below are sample questions broken into categories that MBA students should expect in an interview. You will not get all of these questions, but it is highly likely you will get one or two from many of the categories, depending on the role for which you are interviewing. If you prepare a few answers for each of the categories, you should be in good shape. Abraham Lincoln once said, "If I had 8 hours to cut down a tree, I would spend 6 hours sharpening my axe." His words of wisdom definitely apply to interview preparation.

TEAMWORK

Questions relate to ability to work with other peers, other units, and/or senior management to accomplish organizational goals.

Please remember not to go into too much technical detail of a shared task or project. The question is about collaboration and communication with others, and your answer should focus on how you demonstrated teamwork.

- Describe a time when you got involved in teamwork which needed to be done but which was not one of your responsibilities or work requirements.
- What have been two major contributions you have made to the effectiveness of your team in the last year? What was the result of these contributions?
- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
- Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your professor's or supervisor's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
- Tell of a time when you worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or guide others to a compromise.

ANALYSIS & CRITICAL THINKING

Please remember not to go into too much technical detail in your answer. The question is about your analytical thought process and how you approached the problem.

- Give an example of a problem or project that required you to integrate and analyze information from a number of different sources.
- What's the most analytically challenging problem you've had to solve in the past year or so?
- Describe a situation which illustrates your ability to identify central or underlying issues in complex situations or problems.
- Can you give an example of when you analyzed financial information and made a recommendation which provided a cost savings?
- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example(s) of how you have done this.
- Recall a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose. What was the nature of the problem? How did you handle the situation? How did that make you feel?

ADAPTABILITY

- How was your transition from college to your first job? What challenges did you face in adapting and how did you overcome them?

- Tell of some situations in which you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?
- Describe a time when you had to adapt quickly to an unfamiliar or unpredictable situation.
- Give an example of when you had to adjust quickly to a change in order to achieve objectives.
- Describe a time when you had to work with unclear goals or changing priorities. How did you approach the situation?
- Describe a time when you were confronted with an unfamiliar or unpredictable situation which threatened to impact the effectiveness of your team.

PROFESSIONALISM & DRIVE

- Describe a time when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- Give an example of your interaction with a new client; or discuss what you view as key elements in making a successful presentation to leadership.
- What are your standards of success in school? What have you done to meet those standards?

INITIATIVE

- Describe a project or idea that was implemented or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a specific situation in which you had a creative idea or solution and discuss the specific result. Choose a story in which your boss reacted positively.

PLANNING & ORGANIZING

- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you changed any processes, functions, or methods of doing work in your job so that you were more effectively able to complete your tasks.
- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? Give examples.

You need to assure the interviewer of your decision-making skills, and your ability to prioritize the payback, values, and importance to the organization. Consider the interviewer's need to understand your capacity to make compromises between quality and productivity, risks and rewards, etc. Give an example of a specific situation and the result.

- Describe a time in school when you had many projects or assignments due at the same time. What steps did you take to get them all done?

COMMUNICATION

- 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.
- What has been your experience in giving presentations to small or large groups? What has been your most successful experience in speech making?

CUSTOMER SERVICE ORIENTATION

- Tell of the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle. Be specific and tell what you did and what the outcome was.

SENSITIVITY & INCLUSION

- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
- Describe a situation where you found team members not contributing to a project or discussion. What did you do to include their input?
- Have you been in a situation when all people were not treated equitably? How did you handle it?

TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Questions relate to level of understanding and ability to apply it.

- 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.
- Tell about a time you mentored colleagues on a new technology or convinced your manager that a new technology was necessary to drive success.

- What key technical skills do you have that are relevant to this role, and how have you used them effectively in a past job? When in the past did you have to update your technical skills to be able to achieve an optimal solution? How did you accomplish that?

LEADERSHIP

Even if you have not worked in an official leadership position, think about a situation when you showed leadership skills, such as taking the initiative, guiding, and/or convincing others to buy in. Again, it is not about the specific details of the situation but about how you approached the team or individual, how you engaged with them to make them finally follow your advice or idea.

- Describe a time when circumstances were difficult and you had to motivate your team to achieve specific objectives.
- How would you deal with a team member who was under performing?
- How do you make your team members feel valued? Can you give an example of when you have done this?
- It is often said that a leader must “walk the talk.” Please give an example of how you have led your team by example.
- What makes you an effective manager?

Incorporate both your organizational effectiveness, people management, and staff development skills. Think of specific examples to demonstrate your effectiveness and make sure you mention results.

DECISION MAKING

- Tell me about a difficult decision you have made.

The interviewer is asking this question to learn about your problem-solving and interpersonal skills as well as your values. The decision you mention should be work-related, not personal. Remember to include your awareness of the impact of your decision on the organization and the people with whom you worked. Give enough details to allow the interviewer to understand the complexity of the situation, the options available, and why you made your decision. Select a decision you feel led to a successful outcome.

- How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time? (How did you determine what was important and the order in which you would get each task done?)

You need to assure the interviewer of your decision-making skills and your ability to prioritize the payback, values, and importance to the organization. Consider the interviewer's need to understand your capacity to make compromises between quality and productivity, risks and rewards, etc. Give an example of a specific situation and the result.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your manager. (What was the nature of the disagreement and what did you do about it?)

Be careful how you respond to this question. It is appropriate to discuss disagreements as long as they were handled professionally. Look for a win-win situation. If your manager did not change his/her approach, show how, after voicing your concern, you were a team player and supported management's position.

- Describe a time on a job when you made a mistake. (What did you do about it, and what did you learn?)

Do not highlight serious mistakes. This is not a time to be brutally honest. Show how you corrected your mistake, learned from it, and never repeated it again. Make sure you have thought of a mistake - nobody is perfect. Lack of a mistake could seem vain. Do not choose a recent mistake, but one you did at the beginning of your career.

- Discuss your professional development goals. How do you make time to accomplish them? Can you give examples from your past when you have participated in professional development at your company or through an external resource?