

## Interview Skills Guide

The main purpose of an interview is to sell yourself to a company/organization and convince them that they should hire you. As a candidate you are a salesperson, selling the most valuable product... **YOU!** Therefore, it is necessary for you to be as prepared as possible, because **preparation is the key to a successful interview!**

The four main things you should make sure you do before setting foot into an interview room are to **know yourself (resume included), know the company, get a good night's rest, and practice answers to possible interview questions with yourself, friends, roommates, etc.**

### Purpose of the Interview

1. On-campus: Used as a screening device.
2. End result with an office visit or no further interest.
3. Off-campus: Can be a combination of first and second interview.

### Goals of the Interviewer

1. To promote the organization (goodwill) and attract the best possible candidates.
2. To gather information about the candidate.
3. To assess how well the candidate's qualifications match the job requirements.
4. To determine whether the candidate will fit in with the organization and other employees (core values and culture).
5. Provide the candidate with information.

### Goals of the Candidate(s)

1. To obtain information about the job and the organization.
2. To determine whether the job is suitable for you and whether you want the job.
3. To communicate important information about yourself.
4. To favorably impress the employer for further interviews and an office visit.

### What the Recruiter Looks for in Candidates

1. A lot of facts in a short period of time.
2. If the candidate is dressed appropriately for the interview.
3. What the candidate wants to do and has done and might do- if the candidate seems interested in the company.

Summary evaluation of the candidate (intellectual capacity and ability to use it; how candidate relates to other people and leadership capabilities; past experiences and effectiveness of performance; how candidate compares with others within the organization; what the candidate has done well and not so well; strengths/weakness; candidate's understanding of the job and organization; any technical competencies; and enthusiasm/communications/self-confidence.

# Types of Interviews

There are many different types of interviews including stress, case, problem-solving, written, situational, and behavioral-based interviews; however, the most common type of interview that **undergraduate candidates** encounter are Behavioral-Based Interviews.

**Stress Interview:** is where the employer lines up a bunch of interviewers (one at a time or en masse) whose mission is to intimidate you. The ostensible purpose of this interview: to find out how you handle the stress.

**Case Interview:** is a scenario-based problem solving activity that enables firms to assess a candidate along multiple dimensions. Some examples of case interviews include resume based cases, brain teasers or puzzles.

**Problem-Solving Interview:** examines a specific problem, conflict, or issue that is unacceptable to the interviewee and to explore various possible resolutions. The goal of the problem-solving interview is to foster critical and independent thinking.

**Written Interview:** is where you may be asked to write out responses to questions or scenarios. This will test your abilities to communicate in a written format.

**Situational Interview:** is a series of predetermined, hypothetical, job-related questions, the responses to which are evaluated against a set of example answers.

## Behavioral-Based Interview Strategies

Understanding how to excel in this interview environment is becoming a crucial job-hunting skill. **The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10 percent predictive.**

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 “Tell me about yourself.” The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

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.

Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate’s experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant’s potential for success. The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge; skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position. For example, some of the characteristics that an employer may look for include:

- Critical thinking
- Being a self-starter
- Willingness to learn
- Willingness to travel
- Self-confidence
- Teamwork
- Professionalism

*As a candidate, you should be equipped to answer the questions thoroughly. Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills that the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. Researching the company and talking to people who work there will enable you to zero in on the kinds of behaviors the company wants.*

The employer then structures questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if the candidate possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: “Tell me about a

time...”or “Describe a situation...” Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

### **How to Prepare for Behavioral-Based Interviews**

The best way to prepare is to arm yourself with a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions. Despite the many possible behavioral questions, you can get some idea of what to expect by looking at web sites.

## Opening the Interview

### **REMEMBER THE INTERVIEW STARTS THE MOMENT YOU ARRIVE IN THE LOBBY!**

In the first few minutes of any interview, typically you will make a presentation introducing yourself. Essentially, this will be an extended version of your 30 second elevator speech...answering the age old question “tell me about yourself”. The best way to respond is with a brief and concise introduction touching on the following key points:

#### **Who Are You?**

What makes you interesting? Include a unique point that can connect you to a current activity, to the interviewer or the position. Feel free to talk about your hobbies and interests during this time.

#### **Educational Background**

BBA or B.Acc., any honors, awards, significant activities/involvement that makes you stand out and applies specifically to the position for which you are interviewing or why you chose that field of study.

#### **Work Experience/Internships**

Talk about work/internship experience in general and how it relates to the position for which you are interviewing for and touch on major accomplishments.

#### **Why Do You Want to Work Here?**

Emphasize why you chose the specific company, show enthusiasm about the organization and position as well as emphasize what you have to offer the organization and how your skills make you a good fit for the position.

When the interviewer begins asking about your resume and/or asking general interview questions, it's time to sell yourself. The interviewer will also be asking questions to pull out certain skills. . Be sure to emphasize how the skills and experience you have fit with the position you're interviewing for. For example, if you are answering a question on how you get along well with people, try to tie in examples of teamwork you have done. You should express why YOU are the best candidate for the job through well thought-out answers. See the sample interview questions in this handout for a guide on *Questions a Recruiter Might Ask*.

## How to Prepare

### **The Five P's: “Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance”**

Know what you have to offer, what will be expected of you, and how to make a good impression are all part of proper preparation to help you have effective interviews. Consider the following tips.

1. UNDERSTAND AND BE ABLE TO EXPRESS HOW YOU CAN SATISFY THE ORGANIZATION'S NEEDS
  - **Know the organization.** Review the company's website or company literature that can easily be obtained from the company upon request.
  - **Familiarize yourself with the industry or field.** Explore similar or comparable organizations so that you have a background against which to compare the organization with whom you are interviewing.

- **Know the position for which you are interviewing.** If you're not sure, don't be afraid to ask before going on the interview. You can't have a great interview if you don't know about the position for which you're interviewing.
- **Recognize what is important to you;** articulate your interests. Think about your skills and strengths that are *relevant to the position*. Be able to demonstrate how all of these will help you to be an asset to the company.

## 2. ANTICIPATE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

- **Prepare** for open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about yourself."
- **Clarify and be able to explain what skills you've developed** through the professional work experience, class projects, extracurricular activities, or volunteer work. Be able to describe how these skills are of value to the company and especially the position.
- **Consider developing a short autobiography** to assist you in examining what you've enjoyed doing and what has given you a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.
- Use this autobiography to help gather your thoughts so that you might answer more comfortably those seemingly tough interview questions.

## 3. RESPOND CONCISELY, PRECISELY, AND SUCCINCTLY

- **Listen carefully to questions and maintain eye contact** with your interviewer.
- **Efficiently answer the interview's questions.** They will be observing how effectively you handle data.
- **Avoid ambiguous or long-winded replies to questions.** Don't bore your interviewer.
- Be able to **discuss qualities you have that will assist you in reaching your goals.** If you specify "management" as a goal, be prepared to explain what that means to you and how you may reach the goal. Be wary of being too vague or being too much of a "generalist."
- **Expect to discuss short and long-term goals.** Interviewers prefer goal-directed candidates.

## 4. SHOW GENUINE INTEREST IN THE ORGANIZATION AND THE INTERVIEWER. ASK PERCEPTIVE, THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS THAT REFLECT ON CAREER GROWTH, TRAINING, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Diversity of assignments; description of a "typical day;" major responsibilities.
- Extent of interaction with other professionals.
- **Avoid ambiguous, long-winded replies to questions.** Don't bore your interviewer.

## 5. FOLLOW-UP ON THE INTERVIEWS

- Know the name, address, title, and telephone number of the interviewer. Ask for a business card at the end of the interview.
- Write a short note or letter of appreciation for the interview. Send any additional information requested.
- Evaluate your "performance" in preparation for your next interview.

## Closing the Interview

The conclusion of the interview can be very important. You are being evaluated until the recruiter escorts you out the door. When a recruiter asks if there is anything else you would like to add, this is a great time to emphasize a point or just express to the interviewer how interested you are in this opportunity. Asking for the job at the end of the interview is a key move which many students unfortunately do not make. By restating your interest or by asking when you should expect to hear from the recruiter, you demonstrate that you sincerely want this job. Don't be afraid to ask the recruiter questions at the end of the interview either. See the sample interview questions in this handout for a guide on *What Questions Should I Ask?*. And remember...the interview is **NOT** over until you send a thank you letter! See the "Letter Writing Guide" for assistance with writing a thank you letter.

# Important Do's and Don'ts

## Do's:

- Research the employer and know general information about the company (products or services, history of the company, annual report, website, etc.)
- Be familiar with the position, the skills/qualifications needed for success
- Know the culture and core values of the company
- Know the interview format (on-campus format) or off-campus format (agenda for the day).
  - On-campus (about 30-45 minutes: Introduction, Background Candidate, Questions to Company, Close).
  - Off-campus (half to full day); some may start with an evening event the night before.
- Role-play the interview with a peer or in front of a mirror
- Practice speaking with confidence
- Prepare questions to ask about during the interview
- Practice questions and answers
- Examine your appearance and dress appropriately/professionally (See "What to Wear" Handouts). Ask if unsure on an office visit. Campus is always professional attire unless told otherwise.
- Watch out for perfume (recommended is none); make-up and jewelry.
- Bring additional copies of your resume, pen and pad
- ARRIVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES EARLY
- Exhibit confidence and enthusiasm for the job
- Greet interviewer with surname and a firm handshake
- Smile and maintain eye contact
- Listen carefully and seek clarification if needed
- Be prepared to answer the question "how much salary would you need or looking for?"
- Send a thank you note to those who took time out of their schedule to interview you (See "Cover Letters and Other Business Correspondence" Handout)

## Don'ts:

- DO NOT be late...arrive at least 10 minutes before the interview
- DO NOT be too brief...yet DO NOT be too wordy. Again, know the STAR format (Situation=Tasks-Actions=Results).
- DO NOT criticize former employers
- MONEY Question: DO NOT ask anything about salary, benefits or geographical location. This must be started by the interviewer. You can ask anything once an offer is on the table.
- DO NOT be afraid to ask at the end of the interview, "Is there any additional information that I can provide that will help you make your decision?"
- DO NOT leave the interview without knowing what the next step is in the interview process or when you should hear something from the company.

# Sample Interview Questions

## Sample Questions a Recruiter Might Ask

1. Tell me about yourself
2. Walk me through your resume
3. Why did you leave your last position? **or** Why are you looking to leave your current position?
4. Tell me the highlights of each period of employment you have had and why you left the organization?
5. Why are you interested in this position?
6. How well do you know the job description?
7. Where do you see adding value within company?
8. What other companies are you interviewing with or considering?
9. What do you know about us? **or** What do you like about us?
10. What do you know about our culture?
11. Tell me about your career goals. What are you looking for?
12. What are your short and long term goals?
13. Do you have leadership experience managing a project? Give an example.
14. Give me an example of how you have used practical knowledge to solve a technical problem.
15. Name a time where you were in a difficult situation and tell me what you did?
16. Give me an example of how you persuaded another person or group of people to do something you wanted them to do.
17. Tell me about a complex problem/situation you have faced and how you handled it?
18. Tell me about a goal you had to set; that you had to push hard to achieve; how did you achieve it?
19. Describe a creative/innovative idea that you produced which led to a significant contribution to the success of an activity or project.
20. Which do you prefer and why? A matrix organization or any other type of organization.
21. Where do you see opportunities to further improve yourself?
22. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
23. What is the biggest mistake you have made in a business setting?
24. What motivates you?
25. Do you speak any languages outside of English? If so how fluently?
26. Do you multi-task? Give me an example?
27. Are you comfortable working in a fast-paced environment?
28. Do you work well under pressure?
29. Explain how you rate your work ethics?
30. What questions do you have for me?

## Example questions that you can ask the employer...

1. What attracted you to this organization?
2. What do you consider to be the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
3. What are the prospects for advancement? If I do a good job, what is a logical next step?
4. What does the company do for advancing the skills of its employees?
5. Can you tell me a little bit about the people with whom I would be working with?
6. What specific skills from this person would make the direct supervisor's life easier?
7. What are the major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?
8. What are the organization's three most important goals?
9. How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
10. What kinds of formal strategic planning systems, if any, are in place?
11. What are the success factors that will tell you if the decision to bring me on board was the right one?
12. Before I leave, is there anything else you need to know concerning my ability to do this job?
13. What is the ideal profile of the person(s) that would do well in this position?
14. What are you not looking for in the person(s) you bring into this position(s)?
15. What's the next step in the process?

**Note: NEVER ask questions regarding salary, benefits or geographic location!**

# Using the STAR Technique to Answer Interview Questions

When answering behavioral questions, the STAR Technique is a simple way of putting your answers together in a concise, yet not too brief nor too wordy format.

<b>Situation</b>	Give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome.
<b>Task</b>	Describe the tasks involved in that situation.
<b>Action</b>	Talk out the various actions in the situation's tasks. Describe the action <b>you took</b> . Keep the focus on you, even if you are describing a group project, describe what <b>you did</b> – not the team. Don't tell them what you might do - <b>tell what you did</b>
<b>Results</b>	What results followed due to <b>your action</b> ? What did <b>you accomplish</b> ... what were the <b>results</b> ...how did the company benefit.

**Use examples from internships, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience – anything really – as examples of your past behavior.** Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to negative situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or – better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of our life.
- Use fairly recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. We recommend you give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples using the STAR Technique.



## Post-Interview Self-Evaluation Questions

After the interview has been completed, ask yourself these important questions...

- Did I make a professional first impression?
- Was my handshake firm at the start of the interview?
- Did I maintain good eye contact?
- Did I express myself well by talking clearly and correctly?
- Did I express interest and enthusiasm for the job?
- Did I demonstrate knowledge of the company and the industry in general?
- Did I present my abilities and qualifications in terms of the requirements for this job?
- Did I thank the interviewer and find out what the next steps in the process were?
- Did I ask for the job?
- Did I get the interviewer's business card or contact information?
- Did I promptly send a thank you note/letter?