

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

WHY INTERVIEW?

Beyond the resume and cover letter, interviews help employers learn more about how your academic background, skills and experience match the requirements of a job opening. At the same time, employers are evaluating your communication skills and other traits to determine if you will fit with the organizational culture. You, as the interviewee, want to answer the employers' questions competently, smoothly and professionally. You also want to use the interview as a means of learning more about the position and the organization to see if you would be happy and productive in the job. The interview conversation is structured around questions and answers. This handout contains 40 of the most frequently asked interview questions, based on a review of the interview literature. Read the questions and formulate your answers. Good answers are specific and exemplify your strengths. Remember that the interview is the main determinant of whether or not you receive a job offer. Preparation is the key!

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral-based interviewing is designed to reveal more in-depth information than other interviewing styles. Traditional interview questions ask general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

In a traditional job-interview, it is easier to provide a "canned" answer that tells the interviewer what he or she wants to hear. For example, if asked: Tell me about your biggest weakness? You might respond with a carefully practiced statement that turns a negative into a positive: "I am perfectionist and often work too hard to make sure that everything is exactly right." In a behavioral interview, the interviewer will probe for depth and detail. For example, "Tell me about a decision you made that you eventually regretted? As you tell your story, the interview may ask: "What were you thinking at that point?" or "What were the short term and long term consequences of that decision"?

What to expect:

Behavioral-based interview questions generally start with any one of the following phrases:

- Tell me about a time when you...
- Describe a circumstance when you were faced with a problem related to...
- Think about an instance in which you...
- Tell me how you approached a situation where...

When your interview is behavioral-based, you should expect a structured interview with set questions, as opposed to a more casual style of interviewing. The interviewer is probably evaluating you against a profile of desired behaviors considered necessary for success. You will oftentimes receive follow-up questions that probe for more details and attempt to evaluate the consistency of your answers. Many of the questions will have multiple parts, and the interviewer will generally take notes during your answers.

Advantages:

- the point of the question is clear
- researching the job and company can help
- your recent behavior is the focus

Disadvantages:

- missing or inappropriate behaviors are more apparent
- work history and accomplishments may be easier for you to describe than behaviors

- traditional interviews are more spontaneous; in behavioral interviews you have less influence on the agenda

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW?

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and an end, i.e. be ready to describe the situation, including the task at hand, your action, and the outcome or result.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.

The STAR Method

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, and **R**esult of the situation you are describing.

Situation: Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

Task: What goal were you working toward?

Action: Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on YOU. What specific steps did you take and what was your particular contribution? Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you actually did. Use the word "I," not "we" when describing actions.

Result: Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without rambling or including too much information. Oftentimes students have to be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result, such as losing a game or being disappointed by a rejection, can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.

Sample Response (Using STAR Method):

Describe an obstacle you face and discuss how you surmounted it.

Situation (S): Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, *The Review*, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Task (T): My goal was to generate new ideas, materials and incentives that would result in at least a 15% increase in advertisers from the year before.

Action (A): I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of *The Review* circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Result (R): We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent over the same period last year.

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

In preparing for your interview you should:

- ❑ Read the organization's recruiting literature/website.
- ❑ Talk with people employed by the organization or familiar with it, before the interview, if at all possible.
- ❑ Prepare some questions before going to the interview, but be spontaneous enough to ask other questions as they occur to you in the interview.
- ❑ Think what would be helpful for you to know about the position or the employer if you were offered a position there.

Why is it important to research each job opportunity?

- ❑ Find out if the job advertisement and the company that offers it is legitimate.
- ❑ Find information to help you determine whether the company or job is a good fit for you.
- ❑ Find data to help you write targeted resumes and cover letters.
- ❑ Find facts to help you answer interview questions such as: Why do you want to work for this company?

How do I research the job and organization?

- ❑ Visit the organization's web site. If the company in question doesn't have a web site or the web site doesn't seem to match the advertised job, there may be cause for concern. Note the professionalism of the web site. Is there specific contact information? Are jobs and career information actually posted on the site? Lack of pertinent information is a red flag.
- ❑ Use any of the following internet resources:
 - *www.Hoovers.com* - a premiere reference directory
 - *www.Vault.com* - UD students have access through Blue Hen Careers
 - *www.Wetfeet.com* -insights into various companies
 - *www.Businessweek.com*
 - *www.Bloomberg.com*

DISCRIMINATORY QUESTIONS BY EMPLOYERS

According to the criteria established by the U. S. Equal Employment Opportunity Act, there are guidelines that employers need to follow in conducting job interviews:

1. Questions should not be asked to which answers will have a disparate effect in screening out any minorities and/or members of one sex (disqualify a significantly larger percentage of members of a particular group than others).
2. Questions must be job-related; that is, necessary to judge an applicant's competence for the job in question.

In order to comply with these criteria, employers should not ask questions concerning:

- * Marital and Family Status
- * Ancestry, National Origin, Race or Color
- * Religious or Political Affiliation
- * Sex
- * Age (except to establish that the applicant meets minimum age requirements by law)

How Do I Handle Inappropriate Questions?

Most individuals, if they are interviewing with large organizations, will not encounter these inappropriate questions. These personnel offices and their interviewers are well versed in the laws. However, in the event that you are asked a question which seems inappropriate to you, there are several ways to handle the situation:

- ❑ 1st –Deflect the question. Simply state why you are a good candidate for the job and ignore the actual question.
- ❑ 2nd - You can give an honest, assertive, but not contentious reply. Example:

- Interviewer: "Does your spouse mind if you travel?"
- Applicant: "We are completely supportive of each other's career ambitions."
- 3rd - You can give an antagonistic reply such as "That's an illegal question and I don't have to answer it." This, however, will usually end their consideration of you for the position.
- 4th - Your best protection against inappropriate questions is to be prepared to deal with them in advance. Think of how you want to reply or not reply to these questions and practice the responses with a friend, counselor, or a Career Services Center staff member.
- 5th - Consider very carefully whether or not you want to work for such an organization. This interview may be a preview of discrimination you may encounter on the job.
- 6th - If you feel your legal rights have been violated, discuss the situation with a Career Services Center staff member. We can refer you to the appropriate government agency.

FOLLOW UP

After the interview, it is important to write a thank you notes to the interviewer(s) to acknowledge the meeting, reiterate important points you made in the interview, or provide information you forgot to mention. This letter also shows your organization and professionalism. There are several guidelines that you should follow in writing a follow-up letter:

- Type or handwrite the letter (email is acceptable in most cases as long as the letter is "professional.")

The letter should be brief and include the following:

1. Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
 2. State the position for which you are applying.
 3. Mention something from your interview to remind the interviewer who you are.
 4. Describe in one or two sentences why you are the best applicant.
- Mention the names of the people you met at the interview.
 - Send a letter to appropriate individuals you interviewed with (always send to the main interviewer).
 - Keep the letter short, less than one page.
 - Email/Mail the letter within 24 hours of the interview.
 - Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
 - Send a thank you letter for every interview you go on.

Negative Factors and Comments Evaluated During Employment Interviews, Frequently Leading to Rejection

According to recruiters at the University of Delaware and research conducted by Frank S. Endicott at Northwestern University.

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| 1. Poor personal appearance. | 11. Not enough examples for questions. |
| 2. Overbearing-overaggressive-conceited. | 12. Lack of maturity. |
| 3. Inability to express self clearly - poor voice diction, grammar. | 13. Lack of courtesy. |
| 4. Lack of researching the company/organization. | 14. No interest in company or industry. |
| 5. Lack of planning for career, no purpose and goals. | 15. Emphasis on whom individual knows. |
| 6. Lack of interest and enthusiasm. | 16. Intolerant; strong prejudices. |
| 7. Lack of confidence and poise, nervousness. | 17. Lack of appreciation of the value of experience. |
| 8. Over-emphasis on money. | 18. Late to interview without good reason. |
| 9. Unwilling to start at the bottom; expects too much too soon. | 19. Never heard of company. |
| 10. Makes excuses, is evasive, and harps on trouble areas. | 20. Failure to express appreciation for interviewer's time. |
| | 21. Asks no questions about the job. |

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your long and short range goals? How are you preparing to achieve them?
3. What are three of your strengths and weaknesses?
4. What failures have you experienced? What have you learned from your mistakes?
5. What do you think makes a good manager?
6. Why did you leave your past jobs?
7. How did you become interested in this field/industry?
8. Why did you select the University of Delaware?
9. If you could do it all over again, how would you plan your academic studies differently?
10. Assuming that you could do anything you wanted, what would you really like to do in life?
11. How do you determine or evaluate success?
12. Do you have plans for continued study?
13. Tell me about a recent problem and how to solve it.
14. What, if any, extracurricular activities have you participated in? What did you learn from them?
15. What haven't I asked you that I should have asked?
16. Tell me about your leadership experience?

Behavioral Questions

17. Give me an example of how you exercised leadership in a recent situation.
18. Tell me about a time when you were held accountable for a problem that you hadn't caused.
19. Think about the changes you have seen and tell me how you handle change.
20. Tell me about a decision you made recently and how you reached it.
21. Tell me about a time when you were criticized. What was the issue involved, who made the criticism, and how did you handle it?
22. Tell me how you use your communication skills, written and oral.
23. Think about a time you were overwhelmed with a project you were assigned. How did you go about managing your time and organizing the project?
24. Please tell me about a recent team you worked on. What was the outcome? What was your role?
25. Tell me about a time when you were under a great deal of pressure. What was the source of the pressure and what did you do?

Interest in the Organization

26. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organizations for which you hope to work?
27. What do you know about our organization?
28. Do you have a geographic preference? Why?
29. What do you see as the biggest challenge currently facing organizations such as ours?
30. What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?
31. Why did you decide to seek a position with us?
32. What two or three things are important to you in your job?
33. What other fields/organizations are you interviewing with?
34. Describe the ideal job for you following graduation

Why Should I Hire You?

35. How have your education and other experiences prepared you for this position?
36. Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement? Why isn't your GPA higher?
37. Why do you feel we should hire someone with your background?
38. Describe two satisfying accomplishments.
39. What makes you better than the other people I'm seeing today?
40. Describe a contribution you made to the University of Delaware or in your last job.

APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES TO ASK IN THE JOB INTERVIEW

Ask questions that will give you additional information on the organization, the position you are interviewing for, or the services or products that the organization supplies.

Do ask:

1. What would a typical first assignment be?
2. What type of orientation would I have?
3. What type of training programs do you have?
4. What can I expect in terms of job progression in your organization?
5. How often would my performance be reviewed?
6. Are there any new offices or sites being planned?
7. Are there any plans for new goods or services?
8. What percentage of supervisory positions are filled from within the organization?
9. How much travel is normally expected?
10. How do you (the interviewer) like working here?
11. What are you doing in the local community?
12. What are the next steps in the interview process?

Don't ask:

1. About salary or benefits
2. About job pressures, overtime or morale.
3. Questions that are answered in the company literature.
4. Questions about vacation time.

SOURCES:

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Job Hunting for the Utterly Confused, Jason R. Rich

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