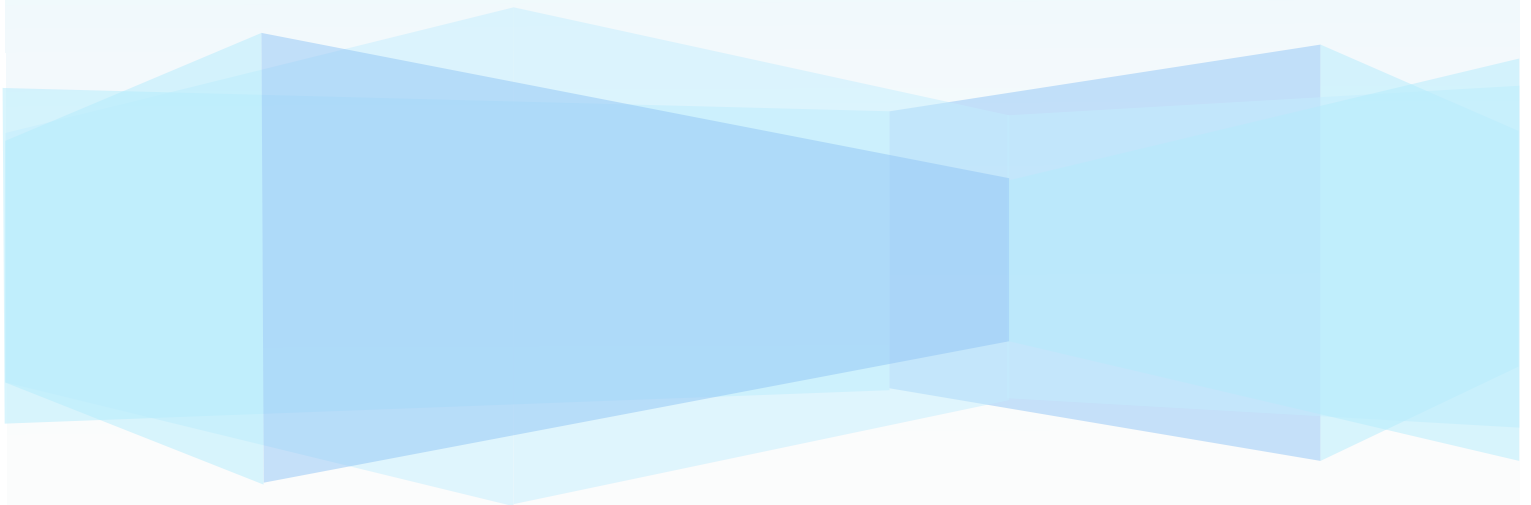


# COMPLETE GUIDE TO INTERVIEWING

Seaver College Career Center  
Pepperdine University

[seaver.pepperdine.edu/careerservices/alumni](http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/careerservices/alumni)



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# The Interview

## PREPARATION

In a successful interview, two things happen. First, the hiring manager receives accurate information about your skills and abilities, as well as your personality and potential fit with the organization. Second, you receive accurate information about the skills and abilities desired by the hiring manager and what a perfect fit with the organization looks like.

As the interviewee, a successful interview is a successful fact finding mission. A successful interview will not necessarily lead to a job offer because a job offer from an organization that is not a good fit for you will not likely lead to positive career development.

With this in mind, to prepare for an interview, you must 1) know the company and job, and 2) know yourself.

### KNOW THE JOB AND THE COMPANY

To understand what a potential fit in the organization looks like, you need to know what the organization or department needs. This is a two-step process.

#### *Know The Company*

First, you must understand something about the organization's mission, vision, and culture. As an applicant, you will want to know whether you are a "mission fit" and "culture fit" and if so, be able to articulate this "fit" in your interview. Collect organizational information from the organization website, annual report, press releases, and your contacts in the company or industry.

#### *Know The Position*

Second, you must understand the open position to which you are applying and what the ideal candidate looks like. Review and study a copy of the job description prior to the interview. Use this job description to anticipate the skills and abilities desired by the hiring manager. To do this, pay special attention to words or phrases that are used more than once. Armed with this information, you'll be able to persuasively relate your experiences and skills to the position.

Lastly, learn about the company's competitors and industry. Research and talk to the company's clients, suppliers, and competition. Get the latest news reports on the company or on local or national news that affects the company.

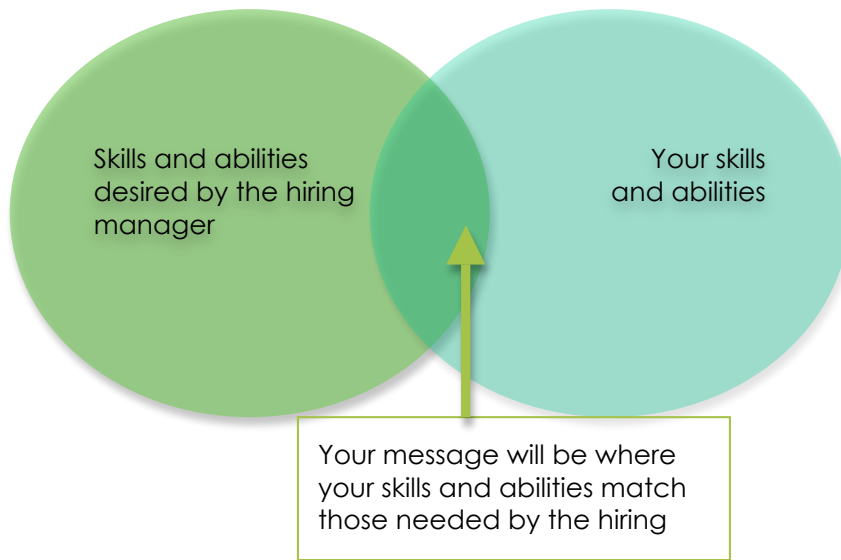
### KNOW YOUR MESSAGE

First, you must engage in self-reflection. Understand what you can offer. Your offering includes all your transferrable skills, abilities, experiences, and personality traits. To best articulate your offering, you must reflect on yourself from a perspective outside your current job and career field.

#### *The Message*

Second, developing your message is the most important step in interview preparation. Your message is the central idea that you communicate to the interviewer. In essence, your message is the alignment of the companies needs and how you can fulfill them.

Review and study this alignment carefully.



## **PRACTICE**

Now that you have a solid foundation in which to enter your interview, begin rehearsing commonly asked interview questions. Evaluate your responses by asking yourself these questions:

- Am I keeping the employer's needs in mind, rather than my own?
  - To do this effectively, you must explain what you can do for them, rather than what you want for yourself
- Do my responses emphasize how my strengths meet the employer's needs?
- Is it clear to the interviewer how my skills and abilities align with those desired by the employer?
- Is it clear to the interviewer how my personality, values, and interest align with those of the organization or department?

Always remember that you are responsible for explicitly communicating your value to the employer. Do not expect employers to assume the best about you if you do not tell them yourself. This does not mean that you should be boastful. Instead, this means that you should simply tell the truth. There will be more about practicing for your interview later.

## **MAKING THE APPOINTMENT**

If you are actively applying to jobs, you may receive a phone call requesting an interview at any time. This is a good reason to practice the following phone etiquette:

- Never pick up the phone unless you're prepared to talk
  - Do not answer if you are in a loud room, near a busy street, in a hurry, at a meal, ect...
- Neutralize your return voice mail greeting with a simple introduction of your name and request, such as "You have reached the voicemail of xxx, please leave a message"

When you do have the chance to schedule an interview appointment, follow these suggestions:

- Request a time that gives you extra travel time from wherever you will be immediately before the interview so that you are not rushed.
- Call back and get directions from a receptionist or secretary, including the best place to park for easy access to the building.
- Be gracious and express your enthusiasm for the appointment

## **THINGS TO BRING**

Be prepared to bring these things with you; however, do not assume that every interviewer will request to see them. It is better to bring these materials and not need them, than the other way around.

- Print 2-6 additional copies of your resumé and cover letter on formal resume paper to bring to the interview.
- Bring 1-2 copies of your portfolio if the position requires specific skills, such as design or writing
- Bring a typed list of references to offer at the end of the interview if it feels right.

- Bring a pen and notepad to take notes about the position, record people's names, as well as write the answers you receive to your questions. Not only does a pen and notepad allow you to record helpful information, but it also demonstrates active listening to the employer.
- Prepare researched questions to ask if the information is not otherwise discussed by the interviewers. You may even type these up and take notes during the meeting (it pays to look well-organized). These questions may be about the company, industry trends, or the position itself.
- Bring your interview preparation notes as a fresh reminder as you wait for the interview. However, do not read or depend on these during the actual interview.

## **PARTICIPATING IN THE INTERVIEW**

### **GROOMING AND HYGIENE**

These recommendations may seem obvious, but they are so important. Review this list carefully and be intentional to address potential problems on interview day.

#### ***Choose Your Pre-Interview Meal Carefully***

Avoid foods that will leave an odor on your breath before an interview. Tuna, coffee, curry, spicy foods, and garlic are common examples. Never consume alcoholic beverages before an interview. Not only will the interviewer smell the beverage, but your performance will not be your best.

#### ***Check Your Bad Breath Before You Leave Home***

Although it is helpful to use a breath mint before the interview if you are concerned about your breath, it is best to thoroughly brush both your teeth and tongue. If you do think you'll eat before the interview, bring your floss with you for a quick clean-up.

#### ***Other Odors***

In addition to food odors, control personal product odors and body odors. The issue of odor control is particularly important in the context of an interview because interviews often occur in small conference rooms.

Many people are sensitive to strong odors coming from perfumes, hair styling products, and lotion; therefore, secure the attention on you and your qualifications by using "unscented" types of these products. Additionally, thoroughly shower and groom yourself prior to an interview to avoid body odors. If you are interviewing after a long day, or are expecting the day to be warm, consider bringing a change of clothes to dress into after you've travelled to the interview location. A quick change can be done in a nearby coffee shop rest room, for example. Don't make the first impression, a sweaty one.

### **ARRIVING AND BEGINNING YOUR INTERVIEW**

The beginning of your interview sets the tone for the next 20 to 90 minutes. Follow these steps to make this period smooth and comfortable:

#### ***Arrive Early***

Be sure to arrive at least fifteen minutes early. This will give you a chance to casually make your way to the interview location, mentally practice your introduction and possibly size up your competition. This time may also be used to relax, count to ten or wipe your hands on a handkerchief to keep them dry. You may also want to go to the restroom and take care of final grooming and hygiene needs.

### **Declaring Your Arrival**

Present yourself for the interview to the reception area approximately ten minutes early. Do not present yourself too early—this can be an inconvenience for the interviewers by putting undue pressure on them, and can give you too much time to sit and get uncomfortable.

The interviewer begins to evaluate you the minute you are identified, so remember that as soon as you arrive to the interview location, you must present yourself to the best of your ability.

### **Meeting the Interviewer(s)**

You are expected to shake the interviewer's hand. Do not be afraid to extend your hand first. This shows assertiveness. Be sure to smile and look at the employer's face while shaking hands. You can set a positive tone by offering a smile that communicates your enthusiasm for the interview and that you're happy to be there. A negative tone is set when your face communicates fear or apathy.

Introduce yourself and say your first and last name clearly and slowly (for example, "Hello, I'm \_\_\_\_\_. Thank you for seeing me.") When the employer gives his or her name, acknowledge it, and try to use it quickly to help yourself remember. (e.g., "It's nice to meet you, Ms./Mr. \_\_\_\_\_.")

Follow the employer's instructions to the interview location and sit where you are instructed. Employers will normally want you to sit in a specific spot—if they don't indicate right away, go ahead and ask.

## **DURING THE INTERVIEW**

### **What to Expect**

There are different types of interviews. The most common is a two-on-one interview. Other types are the one-on-one interview, the screening interview, the lunch interview, the committee interview, the group interview, and the telephone interview. If you are able, find out the type of your interview beforehand. This will eliminate any surprises.

Despite the type of interview the strategy for communicating your message as discussed earlier in this packet is similar. Also similar, are three standard phases in an interview, although interviewers may be only vaguely conscious that they are following this format.

- **Section One: Small Talk.** The first minutes involve handshakes, introductions, repeating names (so not to forget them), and making initial eye contact. It also includes some small talk ("did you have any trouble finding us?", "nice weather"...). You may feel very free to mention something positive you have noticed in your surroundings ("lovely facilities") or about the person ("I've just read your new book"). As in any new social situation, the primary importance is to do some simple ice breaking. Help the interviewer out, acting as you would in a less formal situation.
- **Section Two: You are Interviewed.** Ordinarily, you can tell when this section begins because the interviewer says something to begin focusing on you. A very common question is, "Tell me about yourself". Have a one-minute answer to that question ready, which is delivered naturally and ends by steering the topic back to the position. Keep the primary focus on autobiographical elements that will make you look like a more attractive candidate.

The interviewer will ask you about your work history, personal history, interests, ect. Be ready to give thoughtful answers that relate to your ability to succeed in the

position for the benefit of the company. If you find yourself in a situation where the interviewer does all the talking, don't panic. This is not uncommon when someone is an inexperienced interviewer. If he or she talks for ten minutes or more, nonstop, about the job, themselves, ect., listen politely and interact nonverbally. When a breathing space occurs, ask a question about the position. If the interviewer does tell you about the job, they have done you a favor. Now you can tell them about your qualifications which best fit the job description and goals you have just heard. An inexperienced interviewer who does all the talking won't get to know you without your help.

- **Section Three: You are the Interviewer.** You may ask questions at any time in the interview, but particularly after you feel that the interviewer has gotten to know who you are. Sometimes, the interviewer will say, "Do you have any questions?" At other times, you will bring them up, "May I ask a few questions?" This your opportunity to show your interest in the company and find out more information.

At this point, it is appropriate to ask about the interview process moving forward. This includes questions such as, "What is the next step in the interview process?"; "Are you available in case I have further questions?"; "When will expect to hear from you?"

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### THANK-YOU NOTES

Before you leave the interview, you must get the interviewer's business card or contact info. This will be necessary to follow-up and to send a thank you note. As soon as you get back home—or back to your office—write a thank-you note to the interviewer(s). In it include:

- Express the pleasure you took in the conversation (even if you didn't really enjoy it).
- Say something nice about the company.
- Reiterate anything said about further contact: "I look forward to hearing from you sometime next week."
- Add any brief points you may have neglected in the interview.
- Close with thanks.

Just as it takes little effort to send an email thank you note, this token makes little impact on the receiver. Do not undermine your thorough interview preparation with a weak ending. Instead, take the time to send a hand written note. The token will have a strong impact.

### WHAT IF I DON'T HEAR ANYTHING FROM THEM?

A post-interview silence can be deafening. In some cases, no news is good news, but following an interview, no news is, well, no news. It is important to end the interview by clarifying a specific date by which you should hear from the interviewer.

When this date comes and goes you have a good reason to call. Ask about the status of the decision. And, as always, offer help: "Is there any additional information I can supply that will help you reach a decision?"

If the follow-up call produces no definitive result, conclude by attempting to establish a new decision date.



## Phone or Skype Interviews

These type of "virtual" interviews are becoming more common. As a job seeker, you must have a preparation plan. On the positive note, you don't have to worry about pressing your suit or memorizing your notes. However, it is much more difficult to build rapport and show your personality. Here are some tips to get you started:

### CONDUCT INTERVIEWS FROM A LAND LINE

Cell phones and wireless internet are a boon to modern communication, but the quality is still not the same as that of a land line. In the case of a cell phone, this means you have a greater chance of an static-prone connection, getting distracted by multitasking, and getting interrupted by incoming calls and text messages. Lastly, a land line forces you to stay in a relatively stationary locale.

### CREATE AN OFFICE SPACE

This is especially important in a skype interview. Be mindful of what the interviewer will see behind you, whether it's your un-made bed, wandering cat, or family member watching TV. For both phone and skype interviews, dedicate an area as your office – quiet and free of distraction. This area could be as simple as a card table with a phone and your documents. Conduct your interviews from that "office." Being seated at a desk or table allows you to create an environment similar to an in-person interview.

### HAVE A GLASS OF WATER NEARBY

If your throat is dry or you get a tickle, you can take care of it before it turns into a cough and disrupts the flow of the interview.

### HAVE YOUR NOTES IN FRONT OF YOU

A phone or skype interview is like an open-book test: You can have your research about the company and answers to potential interview questions right in front of you. Try organizing your key information on colored index cards by category so you're not fumbling through papers in the middle of the interview.

### USE PAUSES EFFECTIVELY

Pauses in an interview situation are always difficult, and they can be especially awkward during a phone interview since you can't judge what the interviewer is thinking by his body language. Rather than wondering what the person on the other end of the line is doing (or even if she's still there), use the silence to ask a question. For example, if the interviewer has just asked you about your strengths and your response is met with silence, make that an opportunity to ask a question like "What are the key strengths of your ideal candidate?" This tactic both takes care of the silence and allows you to learn more about the position.

### DON'T MULTITASK

We have grown so accustomed to multitasking; however, it can be counterproductive during a phone interview. Don't check your e-mail or stick a casserole in the oven while you are engaged in a phone interview. Act the same way you would for an in-office interview, and maintain your focus.

### PRACTICE

Record some of your answers to prospective interview questions. Play them back and critique yourself. Are you easy to understand? Are you talking too fast? Is your presentation riddled with long pauses and "ums?" Do you communicate interest and enthusiasm? If necessary, rework your answers and your overall presentation.

## Nervous?

Everyone gets nervous and relaxation methods vary from person to person. Look upon an interview as an experience to learn about the organization and position. This takes the attention off you yourself. And remember, interviewers expect a certain level of nervousness.

### KNOW WHEN TO STOP PREPARING

Many people find it helpful to know when to stop preparing. The process of being interviewed inevitably involves a period of waiting. This is the time when the most intense nervousness attacks. Your mind is racing a mile a minute trying to remember all the things you want to say and do. You're trying to keep your hands from sweating. You want to make sure your hair is not mussed, that your clothes are neat. Your heart is beating at a faster pace than normal. Your blood pressure is probably elevated. Above all, your mind is working overtime, telling you to check all the things you've previously thought of in preparing for the interview – and adding a few more.

Dr. Maxwell Maltz has some things to say about relaxation that are to the point:

Conscious effort inhibits and “jams” the automatic creative mechanism. The reason some people are self-conscious and awkward in social situations is simply that they are too consciously concerned, too anxious, to do the right thing. They are painfully conscious of every move they make. Every action is “thought-out.” Every word spoken is calculated for its effect. We speak of such persons as “inhibited,” and rightly so. But it would be more true were we to say that the “person” is not inhibited; but that the person has “inhibited” his own creative mechanism. If these people could “let go,” stop trying, and give no thought to the matter of their behavior, they could act creatively, spontaneously, and “be themselves.”

In order to relax, you must at some point cease preparing for the interview. As you're waiting for your interview to begin, don't prepare, just breath. As a result, you will be yourself rather than something your mind is telling you should be.

### CONVEYING RELAXED ENERGY (EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT)

The most valuable, positive quality anyone brings to an enterprise is energy – not frenetic, aimless nervousness, but energy in repose. It is what our parents (or grandparents) call poise. Your energy contributes to the tone of the interview. So it is important to exercise poise from the beginning of the interview, beginning with the interview.

- Make eye contact. A meeting of the eyes telegraphs not only honesty and frankness, but also a sense of energy
- Use regular, steady breathing
- Sit (relatively) still. Avoid a rigid posture, but do sit upright, without fidgeting
- Smile
- Practice active listening by nodding to communicate understanding and assent. Avoid nodding too vigorously, however. *Leaning forward in your seat* from time to time to express intensity of interest. Actively engage others.
- Use your hands. Many people are self-conscious about hand gestures. But, if it's natural for you to use your hands as you talk – use them! However, avoid using your hands as nervous energy. This is seen in fidgeting, twirling hair, touching your face, touching jewelry or a tie.

## Dress for Success

### SUIT YOURSELF

Appropriate attire supports your image as a person who takes the interview process seriously and understands the nature of the industry in which you are trying to become employed. So, keep in mind appropriate interview attire will vary between industries. Do some research before you choose what to wear. Above all, your attire must be industry appropriate and should be noticed as being appropriate and well-fitting, but should not take center stage.

#### MEN

- A dark colored, two piece matched suit is always the safest choice. Choose a quality silk tie (solid or pattern) while avoid fashion extremes or character ties. Long sleeved shirts, even in summer and of a conservative color are the best choices. Light blue or white are the safest. Wear dark colored socks and shoes. Tradition suggests that your belt should match your shoes.
- Pay close attention to suit fabric, because others will. Men should choose natural fabrics only, with 100 percent wool as the number-one choice. Even in warm weather, summer-weight wool fabrics look great and hold their shape well.
- Unless your understanding of the prevailing dress code convinces you otherwise, favor conservative cuts. A man with a slender build might look great in a European-cut suit, but most men do better in more generous American cuts.

#### WOMEN

- A dark colored suit is always the safest choice. Pant suits should be creased and tailored, not tight nor flowing. Your skirt length should cover your thighs when seated, despite what is commonly seen on television. A skirt that ends at the knee while standing looks chic and professional. Long skirts are professional as well, just make sure they are narrow enough not to be billowing.
- High slits in skirts are not appropriate. A small, center back slit is best. On a calf length skirt, a slit to the knee to facilitate walking is fine.
- Underneath your suit jacket, wear a tailored blouse in color or small print. Don't show cleavage. Jewelry and accessories should be conservative. Avoid extremes. If your industry is creative, you may have more flexibility.
- Keep makeup conservative and natural. Hosiery should be plain, sheer, and in neutral colors. Avoid high contrast between your suit and hosiery color.

### AIM FOR THE MIDDLE; DRESS UP A NOTCH

Sales professionals in many fields have long advised dressing “a notch above” their customer. For example, instead of cotton, try silk. Rather than jeans, how about khakis? This is a reasonable rule of thumb to follow when choosing a politically effective wardrobe for yourself. Gauge the level of the office “look” and aim just a little bit higher. This way, you accomplish the feat of standing out *and* fitting in.

## 9 SIGNS YOU'RE NOT DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

- You dress for the job you have. If you look like all the other employees at your level, that's how you'll continued to be seen. Dress for the position you want, not the one you have.
- Your shoes aren't polished and in good repair. Those in charge put a lot of stock in the state of a candidate's shoes. Your shoes should always be shiny and well-heeled.
- You dress the same way you did in college. The professional world is a long way from the campus, especially in terms of what's considered acceptable attire. Many offices won't tolerate jeans and T-shirts, no matter how casual the environment. Now's the time to graduate to some more grown-up clothes.
- You have lots of low-quality clothing. Poorly constructed clothing can put the kibosh on a professional image. Better to have less clothing of a higher quality.
- Most of your clothes are stained, wrinkled, or missing buttons. Remember that one little ding will spoil the perfect paint job.
- You follow fashion trends closely. It's annoying, but true: Wearing what's "hot", especially if it's informal or otherwise inappropriate for work, can really bother some bosses. Better to stick with the classic styles that flatter your physique, and express your fashion individuality after hours.
- The only casual clothes you own are sweats and jeans. In this day of casual Fridays, you need to be able to dress the part without sacrificing your professionalism.
- It's been three months since your last haircut. You can't discount the importance of good grooming to your overall appearance. Shaggy hair, dirty nails, and poor personal hygiene will undermine your chances as surely as a missed deadline or bad attitude.
- You can't pull an interview outfit in a hurry. When opportunity knocks, you need to be ready – a problem if nothing in your closet quite mixes or matches with anything else. At the very least, have on hand one ensemble that makes you feel comfortable and confident.

## Answering Common and Not-So Common Interview Questions

The interviewer's primary goal is to get information from you that indicates how well you would fit in his or her organization and more specifically, how well you would perform in the job for which you are being considered. Because it costs money — typically thousands of dollars — every time a company hires a new person, an interviewer can't afford to make mere guesses about how you will put your skills to use for his or her company.

Remember, that in evaluating your responses to all interview questions, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I keeping the employer's needs in mind, rather than my own?

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- To do this effectively, you must explain what you can do for them, rather than what you want for yourself
- Do my responses emphasize how my strengths meet the employer's needs?
- Is it clear to the interviewer how my skills and abilities align with those desired by the employer?
- Is it clear to the interviewer how my personality, values, and interest align with those of the organization or department?

Always remember that you are responsible for explicitly communicating your value to the employer. Do not expect employers to assume the best about you if you do not tell them yourself. This does not mean that you should be boastful. Instead, this means that you should simply tell the truth.

### **INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS: “TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”**

#### ***Why they're used***

This question or a variation of this question is the most common way an interview begins. Note this is not a question, but a request for more information. There are many reasons for this statement – it allows the interviewer to learn about the candidate and his or her level of preparation and relevance to the position.

#### ***How to answer***

This is not a request for your life story. In fact, it is interview code for “Why should I hire you?”. It is wise to create a template for this answer based on your interview preparation. This template will be an outline for your overall message. Think of it like an introductory paragraph – you present an overview for what's to follow. Follow these steps as a basic template or review the more thorough STAR Model in the appendix:

1. I am a (professional/level) \_\_\_\_\_  
*(if you are a recent graduate, emphasize your education here instead)*
2. With expertise/experience in (functions or capabilities) \_\_\_\_\_
3. I have worked for/with (types of organizations/industries) \_\_\_\_\_
4. My strengths include (unique professional qualities) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Particular accomplishments or distinctions (relevant to the position) are \_\_\_\_\_
6. I am interested in this position/organization because \_\_\_\_\_

### **INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS: “WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?”**

#### ***Why they're used***

This is the interviewer's chance to weed out candidates who “just want a job” and have no particular interest in the industry or company. These types of candidates tend to become apathetic employees, poor producers, and short tenures.

#### ***How to answer***

Be prepared to answer this question with a specific response. Your response must speak to 3-5 specific reasons you want to work for the company based on your thorough company and industry research, as well as your self-reflection. If you have trouble coming up with 3-5, then ask yourself whether you should interview with the company at all. In a medical sales interview, you may express your passion for healthcare. In direct marketing, you may express your enthusiasm for working with the particular clients of the firm.

## **POSITIVE QUESTIONS: “WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?”**

### ***Why they’re used***

The response to this question gives the interviewer an easy summary of the best skills and abilities offered by the candidate. So, use this time to make a big impression because a lack luster response indicates that you have little to offer.

### ***How to answer***

Be prepared to answer this question by pre-selecting your strengths that strongly relate to the job and be specific in articulating these strengths by giving examples. Instead of saying “I’m a people person,” say “One of my strengths is that I am effective at working with many different kinds of people. I enjoy getting to know others and contributing to a team environment. [Insert example here]”.

## **BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS**

### ***Why they’re used***

When the interviewer asks for information about your life and/or work experiences, their assumption is that how you handled a situation in the past indicates how you will behave in the future. This approach to interviewing is called “behavioral interviewing,” and it is increasingly popular among employers who believe it enables them to more accurately choose the right person for the job.

### ***How to answer***

Good answers to behavior-based questions are 1) specific, and 2) action oriented.

Concentrate on describing the situation where you were presented with an assignment/situation and responded in a way that brought about some form of resolution. It is okay to reference a situation that you did not handle well and explain how you would or did try to correct your mistake. Here are some sample questions and the correlating skill each one is attempting to assess.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Quality/Skill Assess</b>
Give me a specific example of something you did that helped to build enthusiasm in others.	Leadership skills.
Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?	Stress management skills.
Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?	Decision-making skills.
Give me an example of a time you had to persuade other people to take action. Were you successful?	Leadership skills.
Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?	“People” skills.
Tell me about a time when you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?	Time management skills.

## **NEGATIVE QUESTIONS: “WHAT’S YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS”**

### ***Why they’re used***

Examples of negative questions include “What’s your greatest weakness”, or “What about this position seems most intimidating to you?”. The reason for asking these types of questions is to assess how the interviewer answers, rather than the actual answer itself.

### **How to answer**

In answering these questions, be prepared beforehand. And in your response, be honest in your self-reflection. An insincere response is noticed and not taken seriously. This also hurts your credibility. A good strategy, in contrast to positive questions, is to offer a general response, like “I tend to get caught up in the details”, and follow-up with your awareness of this weakness and how you guard against it.

Generally, as you think about how to answer interview questions, keep in mind you should always accentuate the positive or practice “damage control.” You want to avoid creating a negative impression of your ability to do the job or fit in with the company.

### **Handy Trick**

Another technique to answer the “weakness” question is to cite a weakness that is unrelated to the job, or cite a weakness the interviewer is already aware of (such as breaks in employment, which will be outlined on your resume).

## **CONCLUDING QUESTION: “DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR ME?”**

### **Why they’re used**

This question to many interviewers, is simply a courtesy to clarify any remaining questions for the candidate. To others, this question serves to gauge the candidate's interest and engagement in the interview, the position, company, or the industry.

### **How to answer**

The worst answer to this question, is “No”. This response sends a signal that you don't really care whether you get the job or not. Always have a list of questions specific to the position, company, industry, or hiring timeline prepared. In fact, feel free to write these down and write additional questions as they come into your mind during the interview. An example of question that comes to mind during the interview, may be “You mentioned supervising the support team as part of this role. Can you tell me more about this team?”

In preparing these questions, do not ask questions where the answers are readily available online or elsewhere. An example is asking a publically traded company, “What are your strongest competitors?” This will be outlined clearly in its annual report. In contrast, a more intelligent question is, “Moody's identifies your strongest competitor as xxx due to its recent global expansion. However, your company primarily operates domestically. Are there plans to move globally that would justify this assessment?” Review more sample questions to ask employers in the appendix.

### **Handy Trick**

In formulating your questions, consider the following tips:

- Ask open-ended questions
- Keep the questions short and simple
- Use inclusive (“we”) language
- Ask questions the interview can answer comfortably
- Avoid questions with obvious answers
- Avoid “Why” questions
- Avoid veiled threats
- Avoid questions that hint of desperation
- Avoid asking questions that focus on what the company can do for you

## **OTHER TIPS WHEN ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Answer specific questions specifically.
- Don't worry about thinking for a few seconds before you answer.



- Assume that every question is asked for a purpose.
- Don't respond to a serious question with a flip joke.
- Never talk against a former employer. If you must discuss a bad situation with a former employer, do so dispassionately.
- When a question is asked which brings up a bad situation with an employer or co-worker, answer the question in a way that shows that you accept responsibility for the situation. Make "I" statements. Even if you don't feel responsible for the problem, this type of answer will place you in the best light and protect you against a bad reference check. Most interviewers will not risk hiring someone they perceive as a potentially disagreeable or difficult-to-get-along-with person.
- Honesty consists of truth, consistency and candor.
- An undiscovered lie will haunt you. A discovered lie will destroy your credibility.
- Silence by the interviewer is generally an imposition of stress. Silence by the interviewee is a manifestation of confidence.
- Don't retract your answers in the face of silence.
- Don't mutter in the face of silence. Don't fidget through silence.
- If invited to breakfast, lunch, dinner or drinks, keep your guard up. You are still being evaluated--particularly for social behaviors and how you may represent the company outside the office



## Appendix

### **Recommended Web Sites**

[glassdoor.com/Interview/index.htm](http://glassdoor.com/Interview/index.htm)

Glassdoor is a free career community where anyone can find and anonymously share an inside look at jobs, companies, and interview experiences. Get tips from other users about preparing for your next interview in a particular company and/or position.

[jobsearchintelligence.com/](http://jobsearchintelligence.com/)

Job Search Intelligence is your salary data resource, delivered via the most intuitive salary calculators. Salary data sets are updated monthly, while program accuracy is the order of the day.

[investmentbankinginterviewprep.blogspot.com/](http://investmentbankinginterviewprep.blogspot.com/)

A popular blog dedicated to landing a job in investment banking by perfecting the interview.

## Using the STAR Model to Answer “Tell Me About Yourself”

- 1. Spend about 1-2 hours writing down your top five work or personal experiences.** These experiences should follow this format - situation/task, action, result (STAR). What was the situation, what did you do, and what happened?
- 2. Narrow each down to a paragraph.** Think about the STAR format on a 100 point scoring pie: Only about 15-20 points should go to the "situation" with about 40 points going to your actions and 30-35 points on the results.
- 3. Think about the themes that come across.** Are you all about growth, customer focus, sales excellence, product innovation, etc. and how do the themes come through? How do your experiences reflect a recurring theme?
- 4. Pick your top themes.** What are the top 1-2 things you want the interviewer to remember about you? When you have finished answering the question, the interviewer should know clearly what these top 2 things are.
- 5. Put it together.** A good way to finalize this is to use the word-count feature on your word processor. At 150 words per minute, you should not use much more than 350 words for your pitch. You'll generally want to start with undergrad, unless that was a very long time ago. Quickly move past undergrad and launch into your work history, keeping in mind that you want to highlight your top 3-5 experiences and not every last thing you did in each job. Keep your education and work history to 75% of your time. Save the last moments for why XYZ company and what your future goals are. These goals should match the new position and/or the opportunities at this company.

Bonus: Apply this to your resume

**Further, in the body of your resume' each work experience in the resume should start with a short Elevator Pitch summary following the STAR model, discussed above.** Then put the traditional bulleted activities and tasks you performed (Again with benefits, results or savings to the company where possible, or the individual bulleted tasked can clearly detail the "A" actions you performed to get the results described in the STAR model summary.)

### **Questions to Ask Employers**

1. What distinguishes your company/organization from your competition?
2. What is your company's/organization's management style? What is your [my potential immediate supervisor's] management style?
3. What do you like best about working for this company/organization?
4. What don't you like about working for this company/organization?
5. What are the best qualifications a candidate should possess for this particular position?
6. What additional duties and responsibilities are connected with this job?
7. What are your expectations of the person who is hired for this position?
8. What do you consider to be the most challenging aspect of this job?
9. Describe a typical workday one might expect performing this job.
10. How will my performance be evaluated?
11. What is the single largest challenge facing your staff/department right now?
12. How did this position become available?
13. What is the next step in your job selection process?
14. Do you need any additional information from me?
15. When will you be making your decision concerning this position?
16. When can I expect to hear from you about filling this position?
17. May I have your business card?

## 100 Commonly Asked Interview Questions

### Toughest Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What three words would you use to describe yourself?
3. What motivates you?
4. What interest you about this job/company?
5. What is your greatest weakness?
6. What is your greatest strength?
7. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
8. Tell me about a conflict you've had with a boss or co-worker.

3<sup>step</sup>

process to answer ANY question:

1. Identify what's *really* being asked
2. Present solid facts that highlight your positive qualities
3. Provide clear examples to support your claim

### Other Common Questions

1. What experience or individual has had the greatest influence on you?
2. Tell me about an event that has had a great impact on your life.
3. What is the most useful criticism you received and who was it from?
4. What would you change about yourself?
5. Which decisions are easiest for you to make and which are the most difficult?
6. What is the most important decision you've made in the past year? How did you go about making the decision?
7. What is the greatest obstacle you've overcome in the past year? How did you go about overcoming it?
8. What are your long-term goals? What are your short-term goals?
9. How do you set goals? Do you meet them?
10. Tell me about a time when you showed initiative or that demonstrates your abilities as a self-starter.
11. What is important to you in a job?
12. Tell me about your "dream job."
13. Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
14. What qualities do you look for in a work environment / supervisor / co-worker?
15. What kind of supervisor gets the best work performance from you?
16. Your supervisor gives you specific instructions on how to complete a task/handle a situation. You disagree. What would happen?
17. We've all had to do things that we really did not want to do. What task have you been assigned that you really did not want to do? How long did you take before beginning work on it? How did you go about performing it? How long did it take you to finish it?
18. How do you handle disappointment?
19. How do you handle stress?
20. How do you handle anger? Frustration?
21. Tell me about the person you've had the hardest time getting along with. Tell me about the time they irritated you the most. How did you respond?
22. Have you ever had a disagreement with a professor or supervisor? Who was it with? What was it about? What was the outcome?
23. Tell me about a time when you were trusted with confidential information.
24. Tell me about a time when you had to discuss something difficult with someone. What did you say?
25. When did you first become interested in our company? What have you found most appealing?

26. What do you find attractive about a career in \_\_\_\_? When did you first consider this career? What else are you considering?
27. Have you, or anyone you know, ever purchased anything from our company? What product(s) or service(s)?
28. Do you think that grades should be considered by employers? Why or why not? How were your grades in school? What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your ability? Why or why not?
29. What was the greatest opposition you've faced in getting a project accomplished? What was the obstacle? How did you overcome it?
30. Tell me why you selected \_\_\_\_ as a major. What other majors did you consider? What factors did you consider?
31. What jobs have you enjoyed the most? Least? Why? What did you learn?
32. Which responsibilities or functions of your previous job(s) did you enjoy the most? Least?
33. What new things did you have to learn in your last job? What was the toughest to learn? What did you do to learn it?
34. What was the hardest job you've ever had? Why did you consider it hard? Did you enjoy it? Why?
35. How do the words 'leadership' and 'assistant' go together?
36. Tell me about your most successful leadership experience.
37. Tell me about your least successful leadership experience.
38. Define 'teamwork'.
39. Tell about your most successful team experience.
40. Tell about your least successful team experience.
41. What impact have you had on other people, organizations, or events? Describe what you did. Why did you do that? How did that impact the person, organization or group?
42. What is the most creative method you've used to motivate people? Describe the situation. How did you convince them?
43. Tell me about the last time you had to convince someone to be on your team. What approach did you take? What did you tell them?
44. Tell me about the last time you had to convince someone to do things your way. What was the situation? How did you convince them?
45. How do you organize yourself? What organizational processes have you found useful?
46. What tools do you use to keep yourself organized? How far out do you plan?
47. Do you keep a "To Do" list? What is on top right now? What is at the bottom? When do you think you will get to it?
48. Tell me how you plan your week. What tools do you use? How far out do you plan? What things do you take into consideration? How do you decide what to do first?
49. Tell me about the busiest rush you've been through recently. How long did it last? Describe a particularly heavy day that sticks out in your mind. Why was it busy?
50. Tell me about a time when you were under pressure to accomplish a task in a short period of time. What was the task? How much time were you given? How did you feel while you were doing it?
51. Tell me about the last time an unexpected change caused you to alter your plans. When and how did you learn about the change? What was the first thing you did? What was the outcome?
52. Hypothetical: You have been saving for a new car for two years. You now have \$6000.00 in your piggy bank and you are planning to purchase the car this weekend. Last night someone broke into your apartment and stole your piggy bank...What happens now?
53. How many gas stations are there in the U.S.A.?



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