



**ALUMNI**

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

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*The interview is the single most important part of an employer's selection process.*

But there's no need to panic! You are a valuable candidate that might just need guidance on how to effectively package and present your passion and why you are a "fit" for the position.

The pointers in this guide will help you plan, prepare, and practice for a great interview.

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### INTERVIEW FORMATS

**Screening:** Before inviting you to interview, an employer may request that you a part of the "screening process" via phone or video (Skype, Zoom). This a chance for the company to ask pre-qualifying questions and determines whether you should advance to the 1<sup>st</sup> round of interviews.

**One-on-one:** One interviewer – one candidate (you).

**Panel:** Two or more interviewers. Ensure that you are making eye contact with each panelist as you answer their questions.

**Group:** You are interviewed with a group of other candidates. Group interviews are often used by employers to evaluate how you operate in a group setting and your teamwork skills.

**Case:** Commonly used for consulting positions to see and assess your thought process. You are given a complex problem and are asked to formulate a solution under time constraints.

**Technical:** Commonly used in software engineering, computer science, and technology-focused positions. Essentially, it is an interview to assess your technical abilities, usually related to the technical knowledge required for the role and the company you are interviewing for.

**Presentation:** Used by employers to assess your communication and public speaking skills. Usually you are given a specific time allocation (15-20 minutes) so practicing beforehand is key!

**Day-Long (or more):** Over the course of one or more days where candidates will participate in multiple interview segments with different interviewers and, sometimes, varying formats. Depending on the industry/company, this may include interviews over a meal. Ensure that you remain professional utilize proper dining etiquette (see pg. X). Be sure to show up rested and energized to last all day. Especially if you are introverted, use the breaks to sit quietly by yourself and recharge.

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### ACING THE INTERVIEW – A 9 STEP GUIDE

#### BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

##### STEP 1: DO YOUR RESEARCH

In an interview, have you ever been asked the question, "What do you know about our company?" or "Why are you interested in working for our company?" Doing your research BEFORE the interview will give you an opportunity to answer these, and others, more confidently!

Candidates who know the employer's business and the requirements of the position are most likely to make it to the next round of interviews and further... get hired! Research will also help you prepare appropriate points to emphasize and questions to ask.

- **Study the job position carefully** (print or save a copy when you apply just in case it is removed upon selectin candidates for interviews). Come up with examples of how you have demonstrated the skills and qualifications that they are seeking through your past experiences.
- **Visit the company website/social media/LinkedIn** and familiarize yourself with their:
  - Mission Statement
  - Products & Services
  - Location/Size
  - Current News/Announcements
- **Think of ways to connect** your own values, experiences, and skills to demonstrate a fit with their company.
- **Use StandOut**, an effective online tool to practice for your interview beforehand.
- **Visit GlassDoor.com and Indeed.com** to read employee reviews, interview tips, and salary information related to the company and the position.

- **Follow the company** on various social media outlets so that you have an idea of their brand, company culture, and current initiatives.

## STEP 2: SHOWCASE YOURSELF

- Almost every interview has some sort of **“Tell me about yourself”** question embedded within it.
- For this question above, be prepared to introduce yourself and give an overview of your relevant past experiences in approximately three minutes.
  - Include: professional identity and areas of expertise; most recent position; key achievement with #'s, impact, or result; degrees, job titles, and relevant skills; passion for the role/industry
- **Example:** *“I am a student services specialist with expertise in guiding students on their academic journey and ensuring that they are aware of their resources and feel supported on-campus. Most recently, in my role as a Resident Assistant, I have coordinated a range of workshops and professional development activities for my student residents that are seeking career planning mentorship. I am proud of the fact that at the end of last academic year, 98% of my residents, when surveyed, felt that their career path planning has been improved as a result of my leadership. Prior to working at UCR, I served as a retail associate at two major fashion retailers where I was able to gain valuable customer service, communication, and problem-solving skills while working on a team of experts. I am really excited for an opportunity to continue to serve students through career programming and be a part of your team. I greatly admire how your services illuminate the hidden curriculum of planning for your future and that your team focuses on providing these resources to 1<sup>st</sup> generation students.*
- **Review your resume and cover letter** you submitted and be prepared to elaborate on all experiences and skills you indicated.
- **Bring a portfolio** of your work to help you refer to specific experiences that might be intriguing to the interviewers. This is helpful for ALL industries and professions.
- **Brainstorm** your past accomplishments and challenging situations.
- **Be a great storyteller!** Come up with CARR stories that demonstrate that you possess the skills that the position requires (see the CARR method at the end of this chapter).
- **Know your strengths** and how you can relate them to the position.
- **Know one of your primary weaknesses** and how you are managing it.

## STEP 3: PRACTICE

After you have brainstormed talking points in Step 1 & 2, practice your answers to common questions aloud. Crafting your answers through practicing aloud will allow you to articulate them in the way that you intended to.

- See common interview questions on page 5.
- Use [StandOut](#) to video record yourself and watch your recording so you can see how you come across, if you exhibit any distracting verbal fillers or non-verbal cues, and if your responses are too long, too short, or disjointed. **Aim for focused, two to three-minute responses to each question.**
- We encourage you to **set up mock interviews** with a professional, peers, friends and family.

## STEP 4: PREPARE QUESTIONS FOR THEM

Usually, an interview concludes with an opportunity for you to ask questions of the interviewer(s). Be prepared with thoughtful questions in order to prove your preparedness, interest in the position/company, and to help you determine whether this position is a fit for YOU! **Remember: an interview is a 2-way street to determine mutual fit.**

The questions you ask should:

- Be an extension of your research conducted in Step 1.
- Check out the variations of questions here: [Interview Questions You Should Be Asking](#)
- Establish that you are determining whether you could see yourself working there.
- Do not ask questions that you could have easily found online.

- Allow the interviewers to offer their own personal perspectives and career journeys.

### Sample Questions:

- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- Can you show me examples of projects I'd be working on?
- What are the biggest challenges that someone in this position would face?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to?
- What metrics or goals will my performance be evaluated against?
- What are the current goals that the company is focused on, and how does this team work to support hitting those goals?

## STEP 5: DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Business professional attire is generally expected at all interviews unless the employer indicates that business casual attire is acceptable.

Guidelines:

- Clean, free of wrinkles and tears, comfortable fit.
- Suits: Pant and skirt suits are acceptable. Skirts should be knee-length or longer.
- Shirts: Solid or minimal, professional style print. Covers the chest.
- Tie: A conservative pattern or solid color. Not necessary for those who identify as female, but of course, can be worn if preferred.
- Shoes: Close-toed dress shoes in a solid dark or neutral color (depending on industry). Heels or flats are acceptable. Try and not go above a two-inch heel.
- Socks (if wearing a pant suit): Solid dark color or print that matches/compliments the suit.
- Accessories: Minimal and subtle. If you have one, bring a padfolio/portfolio for your resumes, a notepad, and a pen.



## INTERVIEW DAY

### STEP 6: MANAGE YOUR TIME

- Preparing and practicing in advance will allow you to relax the night prior to the interview and get plenty of sleep.
- If you have a morning interview – set out your clothes and materials the night before.
- Give yourself more time than you think you need to get to your interview. Traffic and parking complications are not acceptable excuses for being late. You should check-in to the reception desk/where you are interviewing no more/less than 10-15 minutes early.

### STEP 7: EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE

Use these communication tips to ensure that you are exhibiting respect, confidence in yourself and your work, and enthusiasm for the position:

- Have positive energy – smile!
- Have a firm/intentional handshake.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Follow the interviewer's lead.
- Answer questions fully and concisely (two to three minutes). Be aware of those two/three-fold questions.
- Be conversational! Speak in a relaxed style while still maintaining professionalism. Think about what type of communication style would be expected of you in the role and use that format.
- Check your tone and rate of speech.

- Read and adapt to the interviewers' nonverbal cues and adapt accordingly.
- Avoid verbal fillers such as "like, um, you know".
- Body language appropriation:
  - Open posture
  - Minimal hand gestures
  - Avoid fidgeting (tapping, swiveling, touching face or hair)

At the end of the interview, you will have an opportunity to ask questions of the interviewers:

- After asking your questions, ask about the next steps in the process (Will there be another round of interviews? If so, what format will these interviews be in? When will you be notified about your place in the process? Do they need you to provide a list of references?)
- Collect business cards from all of the interviewers – thank you notes/emails are crucial!
- Take the initiative to shake hands with all of the interviewers and thank them graciously for their time.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### STEP 8: EVALUATE

Reflect on the interview. Write down any interview questions that you can remember and take notes of what you learned, key facts, and the interviewers' names. Use these items to help prepare you if you advance in the interview process AND for writing thank you notes!

### STEP 9: SEND THANK YOU'S

ALWAYS send a thank you card or email to each person on the interview committee within 24 hours of an interview. The thank you serves as professional courtesy that shows your enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to interview for the position. A thoughtful message could help you stand out amongst the other candidates!

- Sent via email or handwritten
- Thank them for their time and interest in meeting with you.
- Reiterate the skills, strengths, and abilities that you can bring to the job.
- Refer to something specific that you discussed or that they specifically mentioned to remind them of your conversation.
- Was your interest deepened after the interview? Share that and why!
- See example of Thank You note on page 6.

## COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about yourself.
2. What is your understanding of the position and why are you interested in it?
3. Why do you want to work for this company/organization/institution/cause?
4. What do you know about our company and what we do?
5. How have your past experiences prepared you for this position?
6. In what significant ways can you add value to our company/team?
7. What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
8. Tell us about a time when... (behavioral)
9. Describe an example of when you showed... (skill/quality)
10. What is your greatest accomplishment?
11. Describe your ideal working environment.
12. What would you do if your colleagues were not doing their part on a project?
13. Walk me through your decision-making process.
14. What kind of qualities do you prefer in a supervisor?
15. How do you feel about working in an environment that is unstructured/has a lot of ambiguity?

16. Why should we hire YOU?
17. What would your past teammates say is the hardest thing about working with you?
18. How would your last supervisor evaluate you?
19. Do you have anything else you would like to share that you have not already communicated to us?
20. Do you have any questions for us?

## HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

### The CARR Method

Past behaviors indicate future performance. Behavioral questions aim to assess a particular skill or quality through an example of how you have handled a similar instance in the past. Behavioral questions usually begin with, “Tell me about a time when...” or “Describe an example of when you...”

*The CARR method will allow you to articulate a thorough and concise response that will holistically address the question and tie the example experience back to the position that you are interviewing for.*

Desired Skillset	Behavioral Question Example
Communication	Tell me about a time when you had to rely on written communication to get your ideas across to your team.
Organization	Tell me about a time when you worked under a tight deadline.
Teamwork	Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.
Leadership	Give me an example of a time when you were leading a project team or group that did not work out as well as you would have liked. What happened? What did you learn?
Initiative	Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?
Decision-Making	Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.
Problem-Solving	Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?

<b>C – Context</b>	Describe the event or situation that you were in. What is the big picture? What problem were you trying to solve/What gap were you attempting to fill?
<b>A – Action</b>	Describe the specific actions you took to complete the task. What did you do after identifying the problem/gap?
<b>R – Result</b>	What was the result of your/your team’s efforts? What came out of your plan of action? What did you learn?
<b>R – Relate</b>	How does this relate to the role that you are interviewing for? What transferrable skills did you gain?

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## THANK YOU LETTER EXAMPLE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

*Thank you for providing me the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the Data Analyst position. I enjoyed speaking with you and the rest of the panel while learning more about [Name of Company] and the [Department or Team]. [Insert something specific that you learned as a result of the interview that made you more interested/excited about the opportunity].*

**Example:** *“Specifically, I appreciate your insight on how the marketing and the development departments partner, and how their relationship impacts both our internal and external stakeholders”.*

*My enthusiasm for the position and interest in working for [Name of Company] were greatly reinforced as a result of my interview. I am confident that my values, academic and professional backgrounds, and skillsets will allow me to add significant value to your team. I believe that I have demonstrated that through [insert a brief recap of an accomplishment or experience that you discussed during the interview].*

*Please feel free to contact me at (555) 555-5555 or by email if you would like me to provide you with any additional information. Thank you again for the interview and your consideration.*

*Sincerely,*

*Sign Name (optional)*

*Print Name*