

# Interviewing:

## Prepare, Practice, Connect & Follow-Up

### Introduction

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Interviews provide space for a mutual exchange of information between candidates and potential employers and programs. During an interview, candidates are able to help their interviewer(s) better understand who they are and what they can bring to their organization or program. Interviews also provide a space for candidates to learn more about the position/program they are applying for so they can assess 'fit' as well. While interviews can be anxiety-provoking and nerve-racking, there are a number of ways candidates can build confidence and better prepare for interviews. By utilizing this guide you will gain a better sense of how to prepare and practice for interviews so you can establish strong connections during the interviews and appropriately follow-up afterwards.

### Prepare

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- **Research**
  - When preparing for an interview, it is important to do research to get a better understanding of the organization or program you are interviewing with. Doing so enables you to ensure that you can speak of your skills and abilities in a manner that is relevant to the interviewers. Spend some time exploring the internet and connecting with people in your network to:
    - Identify the company's mission, vision, values, awards, and key products/services
    - Determine who are their customers and who are their competitors
    - Find out if they have been in the news recently. If so, for what?
    - Explore what people saying about them on sites like Glassdoor
- **Review**
  - Once you have a better sense of the organization or program you are applying for, take some time to thoroughly:
    - Review the position/program description and identify the skills listed as necessary
    - Review the materials you submitted when you applied to the job
      - What skills and experiences did you highlight?
      - What did you state appealed to you most about the organization and the position?
- **Reflect**
  - Beyond having a solid sense of the company/program and position you are applying for, it is essential to have a solid sense of self and things you need to know to ensure the position is a good fit for you
    - What are your values and goals?
    - Why do you consider the company and position to be a good fit for you and your skillsets?
    - How have your experiences helped you grow personally and professionally?
    - What questions do you still have about the organization and the position?
      - If you truly cannot think of any, remember to still come prepared with a few questions that will help you gain more insight, such as:
        - How would you describe the culture of the company/department?
        - Six months from now, how would you know you hired the right person for the job?
        - How long have you worked for \_\_\_\_\_ and why do you enjoy working here?

## Practice

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- **Addressing the Basics**
  - While it is nearly impossible to know every question an interviewer will ask, there are some questions that are considered fairly standard and basic across most all fields and industries. Taking the time to practice addressing some of the basics can help you feel more comfortable and confident speaking about yourself, your goals and your skillsets during an interview. A few of the questions you will want to be able to answer include:
    - Tell us about yourself and your interest in working for\_\_\_\_\_.
    - What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
    - What are your short and long-term goals? How does this position fit into your 10 year plan?
    - How have your previous experiences prepared you for this position?
    - What do you think it takes to be successful in this job/field?
    - What do you think will be your greatest challenge in this job/field?
- **Behavioral Interview Questions and S.T.A.R. Responses**
  - During an interview, you should be prepared to answer behavioral interview questions. Behavioral interview questions are based on the premise that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. Behavior interview questions often start with statements like, “Describe...”, “Tell us about a time when...”, or “Give us an example of...”.
  - Here are a few samples of behavioral interview questions:
    - Describe a time when it was difficult for you to work with a classmate or co-worker. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
    - Tell us about a team experience you found rewarding.
    - Tell us about a time when you struggled to learn something new.
    - Give us an example of a time when you were unable to meet a deadline. What did you do and how would you handle this situation differently in the future?
  - When providing examples and addressing behavioral interview questions, it is important to provide the interviewer with S.T.A.R. responses. S.T.A.R. responses are comprised of:
    - **S- Situation**
      - Describe the situation; provide the interviewer with context that sets the stage for the example
    - **T- Task**
      - Help the interviewer understand the task at hand, so they have a sense of what you were trying to accomplish
    - **A- Action**
      - Describe the action(s) you took with the situation
    - **R- Results**
      - Describe the outcome of the situation and the result(s) of your action(s)
      - If the results were not positive, discuss what you learned and how you would do things differently in the future
- **Different Types of Interviews**
  - Phone Interviews
    - Phone interviews are typically shorter in length, lasting for as little as 15 or 20 minutes in some cases. They are typically used for screening purposes and they are an important first step in many interview processes
    - When preparing for a phone interview, it is important to remember to:
      - Secure your surrounding so that you are free of distraction and your interviewer(s) do not get distracted by background noise

- Speak clearly and slowly so your interviewer is able to capture what you are saying
- Be enthusiastic and not get discouraged, as with phone interviews people cannot see your face and you cannot see theirs to see how they are reacting to your responses. Because of this, it is important to have a positive, enthusiastic tone and remain confident throughout the interview
- Skype or Video Interviews
  - While not common in all processes, a number of companies now utilize Skype or other video interviews to screen candidates, especially if they are not easily available to come in for a face-to-face interview
  - When preparing for a Skype or video interview, it is important to remember to:
    - Check your user name and ensure it is professional and appropriate
    - Ensure you have a solid internet connection; consider plugging into your internet connection through the Ethernet port if the device you are using has one
    - Secure your surroundings so that you are free of distraction and your interviewer(s) do not get distracted by background noise and activity
    - Pay attention to your attire and the backdrop behind you; Skype and video interviews allow the employer to see you and your surroundings
    - Place the camera and microphone you are using for the interview on a steady surface so that it is not bouncing and moving about during the interview
- Panel Interviews
  - Panel interviews, where the candidate is interviewed by multiple members of the company/hiring committee, are very common. Panel interviews allow companies to gain multiple perspectives on a candidate and help ensure the candidate is a good fit for the team/program
  - When interviewing in this sort of setting it is important to remember to speak to the group and to try to form a connection with all the people who are present
- Group Interviews
  - Group interviews are interviews where there are multiple applicants interviewing with one or more interviewers at the same time. These sorts of interviews are often used to observe group behaviors and to get a sense of how candidates interact with one another and with people in general
  - When participating in a group interview, it is important to have a solid sense of who you are and how you react in new group settings. If you are someone who is typically pretty outgoing and takes the lead, remember to pause at times to ensure others are able to participate and share their perspectives as well. If you are someone who is typically more reserved, ensure that you speak up from time to time so your voice and perspective are heard as well

## **Connect**

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- ***First Impressions***
  - Dress professionally; think: maturity, awake and ready to be here, neat and tidy
  - Arrive 10-15 minutes early to ensure you are in the right place, have a chance to use the restroom and take a few deep breaths before the interview
  - Be pleasant to all who you encounter, as relationship building is key
  - Come prepared; have a few copies of your resume on hand along with your reference sheet, a bottle of water, a notepad and writing utensil
- ***During the Interview***
  - Listen carefully to make sure you hear the entire question so you can address each of its parts
  - Speak clearly and try to be as concise and focused as possible when responding

- Manage your time and pace yourself to ensure you are able to address all of their questions
- Don't let the interviewer phase you; they will need to take notes and write things down in order to capture all the good things you are saying! And don't get discouraged, some people look "mean" or "firm" when they are concentrating and interviewing candidates
- Recovery is key! We all make mistakes from time to time. It is important to move on and not let a mistake impact the rest of the interview
- **Remember to be a S.T.A.R. Interviewer**
  - Make sure to incorporate relevant, detailed examples into your responses. These should tell the interviewer about the Situation, the Task(s) at hand, the Action(s) you took, and the Result(s) of those actions
  - Try to ensure you are responding to what the employer is really asking you; make sure you are addressing the heart of their questions and any underlying concerns they might have
  - Respond honestly and take responsibility for your past actions; it is important to avoid blaming and painting others in a negative way

## Follow-Up

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- **Thank You Letters**
  - After an interview, you should send a thank you note to everyone who played a role in your interview process. As much as possible, each note should be personal and express appreciation for the interviewer's time. Try to share information that shows you listened and be sure to incorporate statements that reaffirm your interest in the position or program
  - Thank you notes should be sent within 24-hours after the interview and can be sent in paper or email form. When deciding between paper notes versus emails, consider the search timeline and also whether or not the company values sustainability and says they prefer electronic correspondence
- **Connect with your References**
  - After an interview, it is important to follow-up with your references to let them know how your search is going and to ensure they know they might be contacted by the company
    - You might want to share a copy of the position description with them so they can speak to your strengths and skillsets in a way that is relevant to the employer
  - Remember to thank your references for their time and willingness to speak on your behalf
  - Positive, or not-so-positive, make sure to follow-up and let them know the results once you have heard back from the company
- **Checking-In and Updating a Company**
  - It is important to remember to be patient and remember that the selection process is truly a process. You might have been the first candidate and they might need more time to make a decision
  - If the interviewer(s) communicated their timeline to you and the deadline has passed, it is okay to check-in with them to see where they are at in the process. It is important to do this sparingly and to be professional when doing so
  - What happens if you are no longer interested in the position or you receive another offer?
    - If you receive another offer, it is okay to check in to see where they are at in their process OR remove yourself from their process. Either way, it is important to be transparent and to ensure you are not being considered further if you are no longer interested
    - The key thing to remember in these situations is the importance of expressing gratitude for their time and consideration, as you never know when you might cross paths with these professionals again! They just might end up being your supervisee, colleague or supervisor down the road