

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Most employers will supplement standard questions with behavioral interview questions. These questions attempt to

assess your past experiences as predictors of your future behaviors and potential for success in a position.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall fairly recent situations (typically no further back than 2 years) that show behaviors or actions relevant to

the job or field. Think of situations where you demonstrated many relevant skills – it's easy to determine the

skills the employer will ask you about, because they are typically included in the job description. Situations can

come from academics, work experience, activities, sports, community service, leadership roles, internships,

summer jobs, etc.

- Prepare short descriptions of each situation focusing on your role in the situation. The employer is not interested

in what your team member did. Be ready to give explicit details if asked.

- Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Be ready to describe the situation, your action, and

the outcome or result (see the STAR format below).

- Remember that the outcome or result should reflect positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).

- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. A skilled 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.

Using the STAR Format to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

In telling stories or giving examples of what you have done and specific skills and qualifications you have used or

developed, divide stories into four parts. This will keep you focused and will allow you to be more concise. The four

parts can be described by the acronym, STAR:

SITUATION: What was the situation? What problems or challenges was I facing?

When did this situation occur? Where did this situation occur?

TASK: What needed to be done? How did I need to be involved?

ACTION: What did I do specifically? When part of a team, what was my role?

What did I put my energy into?

RESULTS: What were the outcomes? What were the unintended outcomes?

What did I learn? What would I do differently next time?

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Tell me about a time when you had to persuade others to understand and appreciate your point of view.

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- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.

- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills.

- Give me an example of an important goal that you set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation that you have had to complete.

- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations, and environments.

- Describe a major accomplishment.

- Tell me about a challenge you've faced in one of your leadership roles and how you overcame that challenge.

- Describe a time when you failed to live up to your expectations for yourself.

- Tell me about a time when you were unsuccessful in juggling multiple projects and priorities.

ROLE PLAY QUESTIONS

These are rare, but in some cases the interviewer may present a specific situation and give you a few minutes to

prepare for your role as the person holding the position for which you are interviewing. In a typical scenario, the

interviewer will play a client, customer or fellow employee. (For example, Teach for America always has a role play

that often involves dealing with an irate parent, a difficult principal, challenging student, etc.) These role plays

expect you to get “in character” and demonstrate how you would act in a given situation.

CASE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Case interviews are used almost exclusively by management consulting firms. They are active problem-solving

exercises, where typically the interviewer will ask the candidate to solve an actual business problem faced by the

organization. Some case interviews are known as “brain teasers” where the problem or question is one that has no

easy answer:

- How many disposable diapers were used in the US last year?
- How many manhole covers are there in Manhattan?
- How many jelly beans does it take to fill a 747?
- How many passengers fly out of the Philadelphia International Airport each day?

Case interviews allow you to demonstrate key analytical skills, critical thinking and your approach to a complex

problem. Although there are typically no “right” answers, the interviewer will be assessing your problem-solving

skills, creativity, quantitative analysis, conceptual analysis, industry knowledge, results orientation, and interpersonal skills.

General Tips for Acing the Case

- Remain calm. Don't get flustered or give up.
- Expect a specific brain-teaser or business problem with a minimal amount of data.
- Ask probing questions to gain more information. Ask for help if you get stuck.
- Think out loud.... your thought pattern is almost as important as your answer.
- Brush up on basic math and economics (doing analysis without a calculator gets you bonus points for some organizations; other organizations require that you do all calculations without a calculator).
- Take notes; feel free to create visual aids like graphs and charts.
- Realize that you will have to make some assumptions and that you should state these assumptions in explaining your answer.
- Concentrate on demonstrating a logical thought process rather than trying to get a "right answer."

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- Reach a conclusion. Synthesize your thoughts concisely and develop a recommendation.
- Practice case interviews in advance. Contact Career Services for recommended resources (we have several case interview practice texts in the Career Library) and to schedule a mock case interview.

TECHNICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These questions are common in applied fields like engineering, science, economics and computer science. They

attempt to assess your skill level and knowledge in a specific area. Skill sets can include those you have developed

through your coursework, work experience or activities. Examples include language skills and technical skills like

computer programming. In some cases you may be provided with a whiteboard and markers to work through a

problem set as part of your interview. Don't try to "fake" a response – similar to a case, feel free to ask the

interviewer for more data and make the process of solving the problem an interactive one, if the interviewer allows.

If you're presented with a problem with subject matter outside your knowledge base, ask questions and feel free to

admit you're not familiar with the topic. Sometimes interviewers use this type of interview to test the extent and

depth of your knowledge.

Communication Tips

Non-verbal Communication:

We communicate a great deal about ourselves through nonverbal expression. It is important to be aware of what

your non-verbal behavior (eye contact, posture, facial expressions, gestures, and handshake) communicates to the

interviewer. Take advantage of Career Services' digitally recorded mock interviews to assess your non-verbal

communication.

Verbal Communication:

- Be articulate and specific in your answers. Don't just claim you have "excellent interpersonal skills" – provide

specific examples of how you have used these skills in your academics, experience, activities or community

service.

- Make sure that you answer the question that is asked! Nervous candidates often begin preparing an answer

before completely understanding the question. Listen carefully and ask the interviewer to repeat the question if

necessary.

- Relate your answers to the position you are interviewing for and the skills the employer is seeking.

- Be organized about what you want to say; avoid rambling. A key signal that you've started rambling is when the

interviewer drops eye contact or starts looking for their next question. If you find yourself rambling or off-topic,

try to quickly conclude and feel free to ask, "Did I fully answer your question"?

- Avoid saying anything negative about anyone (especially past employers). Employers see this as a warning sign

that candidates can't take responsibility for their own actions and outcomes.

- Be honest and be yourself. If you have to pretend you're someone you're not to get the job, you're searching in

the wrong field or with the wrong employer.

Helpful Interview Tips

- Map out travel beforehand and plan to arrive early. There is no excuse that sounds good for being late.
- Be well-groomed and dressed appropriately for the profession. Smile and have a firm handshake.
- Bring extra copies of your resume, paper, pen, interviewer's name, a list of references, and a portfolio (Career

Services has portfolios you can borrow and the Bookstore sells them).

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- Speak clearly. Don't ramble with your responses. Be concise yet thorough in your answers.
- Be honest in responding to questions. If you have a special situation or areas that you find difficult to discuss,

seek the advice of the staff in Career Services. We can guide you in ways to handle difficult questions.

- Think of questions to ask the interviewer and follow up with questions as the interview progresses. This allows

you to learn more about the organization and conveys your interest.

- At the end of the interview, you may want to provide a summary statement by restating your interest, skills, and

whatever seems appropriate. Also ask about the next step in the process and the timeline.

- Make sure to send a thank you letter or email to each person you interviewed with, reiterating your interest in

the position and strengths. Learn from each of your interviews. Take a few minutes to write down everything

that you wish to remember about the interview, from general impressions to specific questions, while it's fresh in

your mind.