

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE: How to Sell While You Tell

The thought of an interview—whether a job, a program, or a scholarship—makes most people’s palms sweat, heart rate rise, and breathing to become shallow. Other bodily functions can be affected by interview nerves, too. Knowing how to prepare, what questions to expect, how to practice your answers, what to wear, and what to bring will increase your interviewing competence and therefore your interviewing confidence. That is why we have written this interview guide.

WHAT INTERVIEW QUESTION DO YOU FEAR MOST?

Having interviewed hundreds of individuals and coached hundreds of individuals on interviewing skills, we can say most assuredly that a barrier that sinks most job candidates is not facing their fears before an interview and leaving the interview to chance. So right now, as you read this guide, think about the interview question that you fear most. Write it down here:

Now, look at and think about the question, and begin formulating an answer to that daunting question. Keep working on your answer until it is complete. Take time to refine your answer; really refine your answer here:

And there you are. You have solved a big interview barrier. By addressing your fear, you free yourself to focus on preparing for the interview rather than being afraid which is holding you down and back.

WHAT ARE EMPLOYERS REALLY LOOKING FOR IN A NUTSHELL?

An interview is a structured time for a recruiter to gather information about three key areas:

- Can you do the job?
- Will you do and excel in the job?
- Do you fit in?

What do each of these questions mean?

Can you do the job? = Do you have the skills, talents, and experience to competently perform the duties and expectations of the job?

Will you excel in the job? = Do you have a passion for this type of work? Are you willing to do the less glamorous parts of the job? Are you willing to work overtime, weekends, or nights? Do you have that special “something extra” to bring to the job that sets you apart from the others?

Do you fit in = Do your values align with company’s values? Do you fit with the culture? Do you fit with the other people in the organization?

QUESTIONS YOU’LL LIKELY BE ASKED

A wonderful way to prepare for an interview is to practice so you are comfortable responding to questions about your background, skills, and experiences.

A terrific tool, in addition to this guide, is [Big Interview](#). You can log onto it with your university ID. There you will find a huge array of questions for any major, as well as additional useful tips. You can also record your responses to re-watch later and assess your responses, too.

Here are key interview questions you will be asked:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How did you hear about this position?
3. Why do you want to work for our company?
4. Why do you want this job?
5. Why should we hire you?
6. What can you bring to our company?
7. What is your greatest strength?
8. What do you consider your weakness?
9. What is your greatest personal achievement?
10. What did/do you like least about x job?
11. What are you looking for in a new position?
12. What type of work environment do you prefer?
13. What is your work style?
14. What is your management style?
15. How would your boss and coworkers describe you?
16. Imagine that you do not have a great relationship with your colleague, but you both are put in a group to complete a task. How would you deal with the situation?
17. How do you deal with tough situations?
18. What do you like to do outside of work?
19. How do you prioritize work?
20. What are you most passionate about?
21. What motivates you?
22. What are your pet peeves?
23. How do you like being managed?
24. Do you consider yourself successful?
25. What is your dream job?
26. What other companies are you interviewing with?
27. What makes you unique?
28. What should I know that is not on your resume?
29. What would your first 30, 60, or 90 days look like in this role?
30. What are your salary expectations?
31. What do you think you could do differently?
32. When can you start?
33. Are you willing to relocate?
34. How many tennis balls can you fit into a limousine?

35. If you were an animal, what would you want to be?
36. Sell me this pen.
37. What else would you like us to know about you?

Additional Questions for Those with Extensive Work Experience

38. Why are you leaving your current job?
39. Why were you terminated?
40. Why is there a gap in your employment?
41. Why have you changed career paths?
42. What is your current salary?

Even though the above list of interview questions might seem overwhelming, preparation is the key to your success.

In addition, refresh your memory by researching your company's website for goals, values, structure, and important take-outs. Most certainly, you have done it already while tailoring your resume and cover letter, but it will not hurt to look through the important points one more time before your interview. You should also look over your resume to refresh your memory of important dates and other details.

The first questions asked by interviewers are typically icebreakers; so, do not fear when the hiring manager asks you to tell something about yourself. There is nothing tricky in such sort of questions: the interviewer just wants to start the conversation and learn something about you and your personality. However, to make the beginning smooth, you can apply a couple of simple rules:

- Keep your answer to this sort of question in under 30 seconds.
- It is appropriate to mention how you chose UToledo, interests, and hobbies, but keep intimate matters, such as family issues, out of the conversation.

BE PREPARED FOR BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

In behavioral questions, the hiring manager will address a specific situation that happened (or might have happened) to you and how you acted. Use the STAR method always to respond to behavioral interview questions.

Behavioral interview questions usually start with phrases like:

- Tell me about a time when ...
- What do you do when ...
- Have you ever ...
- Give me an example of ...
- Describe a time when ...

If you hear one of these statements at the start of a question, you are hearing a behavioral question. Here are examples of full behavioral questions:

1. Tell me about a challenge you faced at work and how you dealt with it.
2. Tell me about a time you helped a colleague by training or mentoring them.
3. Tell me about a time you demonstrated leadership skills in a tough situation.
4. Tell me time you disagreed with a decision that was made at work.
5. Tell me about a time you made a mistake.
6. Tell me about a time you failed.
7. Tell me about a time you had to work with a difficult coworker or employee.
8. Tell me about the time you achieved more than you expected.
9. Tell me about a time when you had to learn a skill to be able to complete a task. How did you handle the situation?

USE THE STAR METHOD FOR RESPONDING TO BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When asked a behavioral interview question, use the STAR interview method to reply with your answer.

How to Use the STAR Method

The STAR method does more than help you meaningfully describe your skills to the interviewer. It gives the interviewer a chance to “see you at work.”

For example, if your answer to a question is, “I raised revenue,” that is great, but it does not mean much. You need to explain how you raised revenue and what that meant for the company. Doing this gives the interviewer more information about you, your skills, and how you approach and solve problems.

Situation

Start with the situation by explaining where you were and what the project/task at hand was and why you were in the situation. Your example could be a situation at work, volunteering, or even in a group project for a class.

Explain the barriers you faced. What was standing between you and your goal? Why was it a barrier? It does not have to be negative to be a barrier. For example, you could say:

I saw attendance at our monthly events was down for the last two months, and I wanted to change that direction.

Task

Describe your specific tasks. Explain what you were responsible for or explain what the goal was.

As an event coordinator, I needed to motivate my other group members to leverage our individual and group social media accounts to market the upcoming events.

Action

Talk about what you did to achieve the goal. What actions did you take? However, describing your actions is not as simple as, "I worked hard." Be specific about what you did.

I presented our declining numbers to my teammates for the previous six months. We then created marketing campaigns that educated our membership on the benefits of our events. This messaging aligned with our membership recruitment strategy too.

You are giving the interviewer specific, concrete examples of the actions you took that helped achieve your goal.

If you are describing a group situation, explain how your individual contributions helped the group achieve its goal without taking credit for everything. This can be tricky. But, if you remember that you are describing how your contributions helped support other members and allowed the group to achieve its goals, you will demonstrate that you are a team player.

Result

What were the results of your actions? Again, it is not the simple answer of, “I increased attendance.” Go in-depth about the results, how they impacted the company, and what you learned from the entire process.

Because of our collective marketing, our attendance increased the following four months thereafter by 25 to 30%. After gathering feedback from our attendees about what marketing pieces were most effective, we were able to create future campaigns taking that information into account.

Common STAR Method Mistakes

Sounds doable, right? Here is more detail about how to craft your answer: a) who, what, where, and when of the situation, b) what you did and why you did what you did, and c) what was the result or what did you accomplish?

But be careful—the STAR method is not always as easy as it sounds. There are some mistakes you need to watch out for when using the STAR method.

Forcing a Situation to Fit

In practicing the STAR method, you should recall and refine examples of success that you can use in your upcoming interviews.

However, do not fall prey to applying your examples to behavioral questions that do not align with your examples. It is tempting to use one of your practice answers and hope for the best.

But, instead of demonstrating to the interviewer that you have a solid answer, it shows, instead, that you are not listening and do not really have the experience and skills that they want.

It is better to say something like, *Well, I have never encountered that before. But, if I had, here is what I would do...*, then use the STAR method to explain how you would deal with it, using examples of what you have done in similar situations.

No Preparation

There is no way to know what an interviewer will ask ahead of time. While you can research common interview questions (and even answers), the truth is, you never know what is going to come up. That does not mean you

should not prepare for behavioral questions. And it does not mean you cannot, either.

To be a successful interviewee, create a document where you have written different STAR stories for several interview questions. We suggest that you think of all the possible behavioral questions that you could be asked in an interview and write down a bulleted list of answers for each question.

The simple act of thinking about what stories fit where will help you develop a STAR-based answer that is specific for every question you might encounter during an interview.

BEHAVIORAL METHOD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND SAMPLE STAR ANSWERS

Let us look at two example interview questions and answers using the STAR method.

Sample Behavioral Question 1:

Tell me about a time when you experienced conflict on the team and how did you resolve it.

Situation

I was tasked with implementing a new project management system when I was at the xxx-company last year. This meant I had to coordinate the tasks and goals across several teams. Unfortunately, there was an ongoing conflict between two of the team leaders who were going to have to work closely on this project.

Task

I started by creating the timeline, then figuring out when those two people would work together to accomplish joint tasks.

Action

I met with each of them individually to explain that they would be working together and asked how I could help to make the situation work smoothly. As a result of those meetings, I was asked to sit in on all their project meetings as a neutral third party and provide feedback. I was also copied on

every written communication to ensure things were handled professionally and appropriately.

Result

There were a few times when friction was a problem. But, because I was involved from day one and acted as a neutral third party, we were able to finish the project on time. Projects that were completed on time increased 10% during Q1 and Q2 this year.

Sample Behavioral Question 2:

Tell me about the time you when you completed a project on a tight timeline.

Situation

I was given a project when I was working as an xxx that was due in two months. I put that date on my calendar in red but set the due date for a week early.

Task

Then, I worked backward, figuring out what needed to be done by which date and marking those on my calendar.

Action

Once the dates were clearly established, I started working on the project. But, as I worked, if I saw I was ahead or behind, I adjusted the remaining due dates accordingly. That included the final due date.

Result

By pushing my final due date up a week, I built in time for the unexpected such as that I misjudged how much time a specific task was going to take. Or it could be that there is a work emergency that pulls somebody from the project, or somebody gets sick. But by my having a “false” due date, it gave me extra time to complete the project. The result was that the project was completed ahead of schedule.

Shine like a STAR

The STAR method will make a positive impression on the interviewer. Describing your experiences and skills in an in-depth and meaningful way helps paint a picture of how well you can do the job—which in turn will lead to a job offer.

QUESTIONS THAT YOU SHOULD ASK

An interview is a two-way street. Just as the employer is trying to ascertain your ability to do the job, your willingness to do the job, and if you fit in, you too should reflect on these questions. Is this what you want to do and where you want to do it?

Here are questions to review to help you develop your list of questions to ask an interviewer.

1. Can you elaborate on the day-to-day responsibilities this job entails?

This is a good question to ask the hiring manager. The answer will be important for you to take into consideration as you determine whether this job is the right fit for you.

2. What are the attributes of someone who would succeed in this role?

Ask this question to the hiring manager or others on the interview panel who you might work with if you accept the job. Their answers will quickly give you an idea of the qualities they hope to see in the person they hire.

3. What is the most important thing I could do to help within the first 30 to 60 days of employment?

With this question, you are highlighting your desire and ability to contribute from day one. It is a good one to ask of the hiring manager.

4. What are some of the challenges you have seen people in this role or on this team encounter?

During your interviews, you want to get a clear-eyed view of what this job is like – why it is hard and rewarding at the same time. Getting your interviewers' perspectives on potential hurdles will give you a holistic picture.

5. If I were in this job, how would my performance be measured?

In your interview with the hiring manager, ask this question to get more specific about how you can succeed in this job. The answer to this question will be helpful to you even if you do not get the job – you may be able to use the insights they share to identify new areas of professional development.

What does the career path for this role look like?

Another one for the hiring manager. This question can signal your interest in growing at this company.

6. What other functions or departments does this teamwork with most often?
What are the characteristics of a successful collaboration?

This is an important question of whether the company you are interviewing with is a large or mid-sized business. Knowing how to collaborate will be a crucial part of your ability to do the job.

7. What does your job look like day-to-day and how would you anticipate working with the person in this role?

This is a good one for your prospective colleagues, but it can also work for the hiring manager. Their answers will give you a sense of their priorities.

More questions to consider asking your interviewer about the job:

9. What would my first week at work look like?
10. How does this role contribute to your organization's success?
11. Can you tell me about the team I would be working with?
12. Tell me about the culture of the organization?
13. What are examples of the organization's values demonstrated by the people within the organization?

Questions Not to Ask in an Interview

There are some questions that you should avoid asking since they will not present you in a positive light.

- What does this company do? (Do your research ahead of time!)
- If I get the job, when can I take time off for vacation? (Wait until you get the offer to mention prior commitments.)
- Can I change my schedule if I get the job? (If you need to figure out the logistics of managing your schedule, do not mention it now.)
- Did I get the job? (Don't be impatient. They will let you know.)

ALTERNATE INTERVIEW FORMATS TO PREPARE FOR

Up to this point, we have covered everything for the traditional, in-person interview as we know it. However, as the modern world changes rapidly, and new forms of communication emerge, this influences the entire job search process.

The information we have provided above applies to any type of interview and can be easily used for the interview disregarding its format. The tips below, however, are targeted specifically at phone, virtual, and pre-recorded interviews. It is best if you learn in advance which type of interview you will have.

Phone Interview

Phone interviews are quite common as an introductory screening of the candidate before they get invited for an in-person appointment. The questions are general and typically discuss the details of the information you provided in your resume.

- Obviously, be ready to pick up your phone at the appointed time and answer the call. Take your phone off the silent mode.
- Talk in a quiet place. A loud public gathering or on the bus are not the best choice.
- Make sure that you are not distracted by other people or things you need to do; you should stay focused on the interview at hand.

Virtual Interview

Since the pandemic, virtual interviewing has become extremely popular. It utilizes video-conferencing applications, such as Zoom, Skype, WebEx, Teams, etc., and frequently replaces face-to-face ones. Nonetheless, you need to take some extra steps to prepare:

- Check your equipment. Test the sound of your microphone and how your camera works.
- Install, or check for updates on the application that you are going to use to connect with the company. You should do it in advance, so you do not get interrupted when the interview starts. Besides, the old versions might be incompatible.

- Log-in well ahead of time—for similar reasons. You will not want to be late for your virtual interview because your laptop suddenly decided to update.
- Ensure a stable internet connection to run the videoconference application. If your answers are wobbly or get constantly cut off, that will leave a negative impression on the interviewer.
- Mute and unmute yourself when necessary, following internet etiquette. If you leave your microphone constantly on, the noise can distract other speakers.
- Settle in a quiet space and minimize the surrounding noise (such as TV, phone, open windows, children, pets). Turn off the notifications of your computer and other devices.

Tip: Did you know that you can request a quiet room at the Carson Library for your virtual interview? Just be sure to [book it in advance](#).

- Choose a neutral background and good light that is directed to your face. Do not sit with your back turned to the window, or you will appear as an indistinct silhouette.
- Even though it is a virtual interview, you still need to dress appropriately and watch your body language.

Pre-Recorded Interview

This type of interview is not as common but can be utilized by big corporations with a lot of candidates. You will receive a set of questions and instructions to record yourself answering them. In addition to the pieces of advice for the virtual interview, remember:

- You will be given a limited amount of time for each question, for instance, 60 seconds. Watch your time and do your best to fit into the specified limits. If it happens through the company website, you will see a timer.
- Some companies allow us to re-watch and a redo of answers; some do not. If you are lucky and a re-record is allowed, then use this opportunity.
- Practice answering questions in advance, and you will be a pro.

FINAL POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN INTERVIEWING

Schedule Your Interview Carefully

When scheduling your interview, make sure you have enough time to get to and from your interview if you have classes or work that day. If you are coming right from class, mention that to your interviewer. If necessary, ask your professor or boss if you can leave a few minutes early to get to your interview on time.

Have the Interviewer's Contact Info Handy

Although it is important to give yourself enough travel time, in a college environment it is likely to encounter unforeseen obstacles—class runs late, a professor wants to talk to you, or a test runs over the allocated time. If something beyond your control happens and you find that you are running late, it is good to have your interviewer's contact information on hand so you can notify him or her.

Dress Appropriately

When you have an 8 a.m. class, on an ordinary day, you might roll out of bed and head to class in your pajamas. But if you have a 10 a.m. interview, be sure to plan accordingly. Even if it means wearing your interview clothes to class, make sure you look professional and put together for your interview. If you must go to your interview straight from class with your backpack, a nice outfit will balance that out.

Bring a Copy of Your Resume and Cover Letter

Bringing a print-out of your resume and cover letter is a great move. It does not hurt to have extra copies because you may be interviewing more than one person. Bring a list of references to share with the interviewer upon request. Also, consider bringing a copy of your transcript as well if you are interviewing for an academic-related position and your grades are an asset. All these documents show that you have planning skills.

Remember That Your Interview Starts as Soon as You Arrive

Keep in mind that your first impression is the most important one, and it starts even before you approach your interviewer—as soon as you are on the company’s territory. Be polite with every employee you meet, including secretaries, interns, and janitors, and behave appropriately. Do not talk loudly on your phone while in the waiting area, and certainly do not litter.

Turn Your Phone on Silent

Even if you get away with texting in class, your interview is not a place to sneak in a few texts. Also, if your phone is constantly beeping or ringing during your interview, it creates a very distracting environment and reflects poorly on you. So, make it a priority to turn your phone silent and stow it away in your bag or pocket during your interview.

Stow Your Headphones Before You Enter

Although you might be dying to catch the end of your favorite song, put your device away before you walk into your interview. You want the focus to be on you as a prospective intern or employee, and not on any distractions.

Do Not Bring Food or Drink

Plan and grab a snack before or after your interview because it is not professional to eat during your interview. This applies to drinks, too—even if you are running on two hours of sleep, finish (or throw out) your coffee before your interview. Check for food in your teeth. For that matter check your nose, too.

Do Not Bring Friends

Always go to your interview alone, so do not bring your friends or your significant other. If your parents are around, do not bring them either. If someone gives you a ride to the interview site, have them wait in the car or go and grab a coffee.

Be Polite, Professional, and Attentive

Greet your interviewer kindly and confidently. Be active and engaged during the interview process, even if you feel not up to par. Sit up straight and make eye

contact. Introduce yourself with confidence and start the interview off on a positive note.

Take Notes

It is appropriate to take notes since the interview is always a double-sided roadway. Very briefly write down the names of people who interview you, as well as pieces of information that you find important and would like to keep in mind. Remember that you will have a chance to ask questions of your own at the end of the interview – do not dismiss this opportunity and build it on the information you gathered.

Know Your Availability (If Job Hours are Varied)

Employers know that college students have busy schedules, so it is important to have an idea of your availability, such as how many hours per week you can work, if you can work weekends, and if you will be available during summer semesters or breaks. If you can, bring a copy of your class schedule or write when you are available, so you are not scrambling to remember during your interview.

Be Upfront About When You Can Work

On a similar note to availability, once you know when it is feasible for you to work, be honest with your employer. You do not want to end up taking on more hours than you can handle, inconveniencing both yourself and your employer. Be honest with your interviewer about when you can work, and if your availability is not the right fit for the employer, it is better to know that as soon as possible so you can look for other positions.

Always Send a Thank-You Note Afterward

Although you should thank your interviewer in person for taking the time to interview you, it is a great idea to send a thank you email as well. In addition to being good manners, taking the time to follow up reiterates your interest in the position. Be sure to express your enthusiasm for the job, if it is still an attractive opportunity for you, and briefly summarize how it is a good fit.

For example, you might write, "Thank you for taking time to interview me yesterday for the position as an advertising intern. I am excited about the

possibility of working with your organization where I can contribute with my strong writing, editing, and organizational skills."

A Final Word

After your interview, it is vitally important that you assess your interview performance. Here are three questions to consider:

- 1. What did I do well in my interview?**
- 2. What did not go well?**
- 3. What can I do to prepare myself better for my next interview?**

Proactively develop yourself and your career through continual personal and professional awareness and evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses. This competency of Career and Self-Development will serve you well as you continue navigate career opportunities and networking to build relationships both inside and outside of organizations.