
INTERVIEW FUNDAMENTALS

Interview Overview

Preparation

- Preparation is the key to a successful interview. Spend time on the company's website and review the 'About Us' and 'Media' portions of the website
- Press Releases are a great way to find out recent news and what they are most proud of. There is usually a paragraph at the end of press releases that gives a concise summary of the company
- Use Glassdoor to look at company reviews, salary, and interview information. Use it to see trends; sometimes only unhappy people post and sometimes they are talking about locations and roles that are different from ones that you are interested in. The information is helpful, but don't let it overwhelm you.
- This research will help you understand their products, values, and place in their industry. You will also be able to recognize current and past challenges. It will help you frame your conversation about your experience and will help you ask meaningful questions

Interview Process

- The interview process may include multiple steps, and it rarely goes as fast as you would hope
- It often starts with a phone screen with someone in the corporate HR department. Be sure that you answer your phone in a professional manner – ask to reschedule an impromptu screen if you are unprepared
- After an initial conversation, you can have multiple in-person interviews with a final hiring manager interview
- Occasionally you might encounter a video interview at the beginning of the process. Dress professionally
- Some companies have you complete an assessment of personality, cognitive ability, or specific job knowledge
- At the end of the process, the company may do a background and reference check. The background check can include employment, criminal, and credit information. Some companies require drug testing and will not hire you if marijuana turns up on your results – even though marijuana is legal in Colorado

Types of Interviews

- You will likely receive a standard or traditional interview with a combination of experience and behavioral questions (see below for examples)
- A less common type of interview is a Case Interview that will require you to come up with solutions for business problems and strategy. These interviews are common for consulting, strategy, and elite finance roles. Brain-teasers are also a possibility
- Finance and Information Systems interviews can involve financial modeling and programming tests that relate directly to the job that you will perform

Types of Interview Questions

- General interview questions will cover your background, experience, and compensation. You will be asked why you left your previous jobs, what your compensation was, etc. These are all questions that you can prepare for
- Behavioral questions will cover what you have done in the past in a specific situation. They can start with a 'Have you ever' or 'Tell me about a time when.' These questions require greater reflection on your part
- Situational questions ask you what you would do in the future in a specific situation

- Behavioral and situational questions are a little more daunting, but with reflection AND practice can be handled very successfully – without being robotic

Know your own background

- Be able to cover each of your positions and your college experience in a **concise and interesting** manner.
- What was your biggest accomplishment? What was your key learning while you were there? Why did you leave? Be able to give a one or two sentence overview that hits the high points of your role

The ‘Essential 3+3’

- When preparing for your interview, write down three reasons you think the company would be a great place to work...then prepare the three reasons why you would be a strong fit for their organization and for the specific position. Dig below the surface a bit for some ‘meaty’ reasons in both directions
- Be able to talk about why you are interested in this specific position and what is most interesting to you about the job responsibilities
- This type of preparation can tell you a lot about your interest in both the company and the job...and it can really set you apart from other candidates in the interview. It will also allow you to ask great questions
- Use our 3+3 Worksheet to help you organize your thoughts. You can find it under ‘Resources’ at business.ucdenver.edu/bcc

Hiring managers pay attention to what you say...and what you don’t say

- If your answers are long or unfocused, they are going to think you will handle projects and their customers in the same way. Listen to the question, breathe, think about how to best answer it, and stay on point
- If you are not sure how much information to share, **ask the interviewer how much information they’d like**
- Approach issues and needs from the hiring manager’s perspective. If it is not obvious what their perspective is, ask them. You should articulate how your experience and knowledge will help the company. Employers are not generally interested in hearing about how the job will help you

You deserve feedback...ask for it

- Ask mid-interview (when appropriate) how your background and experience matches up with what they’re looking for; ask why the last person was successful or unsuccessful
- Address your skills accordingly and ask the interviewer if there are any ‘gaps’ that they are concerned with
- If you wait until the end of the interview to ask, there may not be time to get an answer
- You have to judge the pace and tone of the interview to know if and when it is appropriate to ask questions
- Ask good questions, but don’t ‘grill’ them. Compensation, benefits, and many other questions come later...after you both see this as a real possibility

General Interview Tips

- If it is an in-person interview, make sure you know where you are going; getting lost will look bad and will add to your stress level. Give yourself time for a security sign-in process. Be prompt, not too early and definitely not late
- Make sure you know who you’re interviewing with, their title, address, and role in the process
- Once you get to the interview and are waiting to begin, **turn off your phone**. Turning it to vibrate is a second choice, but can still distract you and the interviewer. Do not jeopardize an interview because of your phone
- If it is a phone interview – be extra sharp and focused. Energy level is important and is more apt to lag on a phone interview than in person
- Phone interviews are not always scheduled – sometimes they happen with no prior warning. Be ready or it might be your last interview with that company. If you are not ready, and it is an impromptu phone screen or interview, ask to reschedule

- Google yourself – you need to know what comes up and if it will make a hiring manager more interested in you...or less. Some things you cannot change, but some things you can. It is good to know if someone with your name shows up as a bank robber...or worse.
- Everyone matters – be nice to every person you encounter, no matter their position or perceived importance
- Dress appropriately—ask, if unsure. Being over-dressed is always better than the alternative. Being well dressed shows respect and that you are serious. Your default interview-wear can be a suit, or pants and a dress shirt; a business dress, suit, or pants and a professional sweater or shirt is fine for women
- Practice answering questions. Make sure answers are concise and interesting. Stay on point...do not drift. Be enthusiastic and confident. Stay positive and be sure that your examples and stories are flattering to you – don't give an example with a horrible ending.
- Answers to behavioral questions can use a CAR Technique – **C – Circumstance** – give a brief description of the situation; **A – Action** – What specific action did you take; and **R – Result** – What recommendations did you make and what was the outcome
- Be observant—check out the environment, the interviewer, and the employees. Could you be happy there; is it the right fit for you?
- Ask about their hiring process and next steps; 'closing' on an interview is just as important as it is with a potential customer. Know what to expect, it will help you in how you follow-up with the company
- Get a business card and follow-up with a hand-written note or, at the very least, an email. Do not procrastinate; do it promptly after the interview. We recommend that you do it that day
- If you're working with a recruiter or a career coach, debrief promptly after your interview. Learn from the experience and write down questions that were difficult for you

Top 10 Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
3. What do you know about our company OR why are you interested in our company?
4. Why should we hire you for this position?
5. Tell me about your previous jobs. (What did you do in each role? What did you learn from working there? Why did you leave?)
6. What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
7. What are you most proud of in one of your jobs (or in college)?
8. Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.
9. Give me an example of a time that you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
10. Tell me about a time when something didn't go well – what happened, and how did you handle it?

Additional Interview Questions

About you

- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
- What motivates you? How do you motivate others?
- What was the last development goal you set for yourself; what did you base this goal on and what was the outcome?
- Describe a situation when a tight deadline was nearing. Did you compromise quality to meet the deadline? If not, how did you meet both?
- Give me an example of when you had to manage or deal with unrealistic expectations.
- How do you handle tasks when you are given little or incomplete information?
- Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for making a mistake.

About your previous positions

- Describe your ideal job and/or boss.
- Tell me about your best boss – tell me about your worst boss.
- What were the best and worst aspects of your previous job?
- What would your former boss or colleagues say about you?
- Of all the positions you've held, which are you most proud of and why?
- Describe the last time you successfully contributed to improving an existing process.

About the new job and company

- Why are you looking for a job?
- What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
- What key attributes do you believe you will bring to our company and this position?
- If we offered you this position and you accepted – how would you approach the first 30 and 90 days?

About Your Management Skills

- Communicating poor performance ratings can be difficult. How have you handled a situation like this with a direct report?
- Describe how you coached two different people to accomplish a comparable task. What similarities and differences were there in your approach?
- How would you describe your management style?

Sample questions *you* might ask during the course of the interview

- What skills do you feel are important in order to be successful in this position?
- Do you think that your last person in this position was successful? What are a couple of key things that led to that outcome (success or failure)?
- Describe the most successful person at your company who is in this role – why do you think they're so successful?
- What's the most critical problem that your team faces in the next quarter (year, etc.)?
- How would you measure my success in the first 60 days?