

Interviewing

THE THREE R'S

I. RESEARCH Do your homework. Use all your resources to learn more about the employer and the position for which you're interviewing. Go to the organization's website, but don't stop there. Get a 360-degree perspective on the employer by researching a variety of resources, from the Vault online library (available by password through the Career Services website – <http://careers.tufts.edu>) to media sources and professional organizations. Develop an understanding of the organization's mission, culture, and challenges.

II. REFLECT What happens *before* your interview will help determine its outcome. Now that your research has given you more information about an employer, you'll have a better understanding of where you might fit and, most importantly, how you can contribute to the organization's goals.

Reflection is the phase where you develop answers to the following questions that are certain to be asked at some point in an interview:

Why are you interested in this organization? This field? This specific position? And, the query that candidates most often find challenging: "*Why YOU?*" If you've done your homework – and you're sincere about your interest in the position – you'll be prepared to answer these questions and differentiate yourself from your competition.

As you do your research, consider the fundamental goals of interviewing (below). Reflect on these goals and consider how your research will support you in achieving them.

Your Goals:

1. Sell yourself by describing skills and experience that match the job
2. Get information about the position and organization
3. Determine whether the position is right for you

Employer's Goals:

1. Determine whether the candidate can do the job
2. Assess the candidate's 'fit' with a team/organization
3. Sell the organization and position

Before the Interview: A Checklist

Review your resume. Be prepared to discuss *every* bullet point, from internships and employment to coursework and activities.

Assess yourself. Identify strengths and weaknesses, interests, attributes, and skills. Employers are looking for oral and written communication abilities, interpersonal

strengths, creative problem solving, analytical thinking, and experiences that demonstrate both your teamwork and your independence.

Develop career objectives. Employers seek candidates who have carefully considered goals and can connect these goals to *their* position and organization.

Research the employer. Learn its history as well as its current position and future prospects. Begin with the organization's website and proceed to trade journals, professional organizations, and media coverage.

Speak with alumni who work at the organization or in the same industry. (This is called Informational Interviewing.) You can identify these individuals through the Tufts Career Network.

Practice. Practice. Practice. Prepare responses to common interview questions and rehearse to ensure a professional, articulate performance. Likewise, consider questions that you would like to ask the employer to convey your research, interest, and enthusiasm.

Choose your interview outfit. Model it for a friend at least two days ahead. (What if you find a stain or a missing button?) Business attire is appropriate for all interviews, unless you've been instructed differently.

Do a trial run. If the interview is off campus, you may want to take a test drive. Consider unexpected factors: traffic, parking, and money for meters. Check the weather. Learn as much as you can in advance about the nature and format of the interview. Will you meet with a single individual from Human Resources, the hiring manager, and/or potential co-workers? Will there be case work involved (typical of consulting or technical interviews)? The better your preparation, the better your performance.

INTERVIEWING TIPS

Dwelling Hall, 7th Floor, Medford, MA 02155

617.627.3299 * <http://careers.tufts.edu>

III. REHEARSE Develop a script to answer the questions commonly asked by employers. Somewhere between

your brain and your mouth, the most articulate responses can become garbled. Don't wait until your

interview, when the stakes are high, to discover this! *Practice, practice, and practice!*

Develop scripts to respond to typical interview questions and practice OUT LOUD. Do it alone, with a trusted friend, or a

Career Counselor. Attend an interviewing workshop and sign up for a video interview so you can observe yourself on tape. And finally, don't postpone this practice until you've been notified about an interview; you

may not be able to get an appointment and even if you do, you may not have the time to improve, based on a Counselor's

feedback.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW... Jot down the pertinent facts you want to remember about the interview and make

note of questions as preparation for future interviews. Within 1 - 2 days, send a 'thank you' email or type written note to

those who interviewed you. Emphasize your interest in working for the organization and how you can contribute. Use

this as an opportunity to clarify or to mention something you might have overlooked in the interview. If you choose to

correspond through email, ensure that your message is as formal as one you would send via snail mail.

Get off to a good start

◇ Check your appearance and grooming.

◇ Bring extra copies of your resume in a portfolio.

◇ Arrive 10-15 minutes early so you don't appear rushed or hassled.

◇ The interview begins at the moment you cross an employer's threshold, sometimes earlier.

(Candidates tell stories of meeting VIPs – unknowingly – in the parking lot!)

◇ Behave respectfully with everyone you meet, from administrative assistants to managers.

◇ The first 60 seconds create lasting impressions.

Offer a firm handshake, greet the interviewer by name, and don't be lulled by 'small talk.' You're being evaluated from many angles, including informal conversation.

◇ Be aware of your non-verbal communication, especially your eye contact and physical posture.

◇ Display energy and enthusiasm in a way that fits your personal style. Be YOU.

Keep up the momentum

◇ When the recruiter begins discussing the organization or position, ask questions if you need clarification

or want to know more. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job, the requirements, and the challenges. Your questions should highlight your interest and knowledge of the organization and industry.

◇ The interviewer will ask about your qualifications as well as areas where they may have concerns. Be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative (e.g., low GPA, few outside activities, no related work experience).

A low GPA or minimal extracurricular

involvement could have resulted from working for financial support through college. Or, you may not have directly related experience, but can point to an employment history that demonstrates positive qualities.

◇ Never criticize a former employer.

◇ Watch your grammar and enunciation.

Employers want articulate employees.

◇ Never bring up salary or benefits in the first interview.

Conclude with confidence

◇ Final impressions count. As you conclude, the recruiter is assessing your overall performance.

Remain enthusiastic and courteous.

◇ If you're unclear about next steps in the hiring process, ask for clarification. Example:

"When do you expect to be making a decision?"

◇ Shake the recruiter's hand, offer thanks for the opportunity to interview, and request a business card (so you have contact information for your thank you letter).

THE REAL THING: DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Behavioral interviewing is a popular framework for conducting interviews because employers believe it will illustrate how you – as an employee – will function in a new organization. Proponents of behavioral interviewing theorize that ***"the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations."***

Thus, employers will pose a problem or describe a scenario and ask how you would handle it. Likewise, they will ask you (or you are expected to volunteer) similar situations from your own background.

This more probing style of interviewing is expected to demonstrate how you manage challenges, awkward situations, and stress (see sample questions listed under "Behavioral Interviewing").

Many employers have come to view behavioral interviewing as a more reliable predictor of your performance than more traditional inquiries, such as

"Tell me about yourself." In the more traditional approach, you might be asked ***"How would you handle a _____ situation?"***

You might offer the "perfect response," but an employer has no idea if it's a reliable indication of what you would actually do in that set of circumstances. Thus, most interviews

today will involve a combination of the two styles.

To prepare for behavioral interviewing, you should develop a repertoire of examples from all your experiences: employment, internships, and extracurricular activities. Think of it as storytelling. In your repertoire, you'll have stories that exemplify your strengths, achievements, work style, teamwork, initiative. When asked to describe a situation, you simply choose the most appropriate example and adapt to fit the question. The more stories you develop, the better equipped you are for behavioral interviewing.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

As you tell your stories, be prepared for more questions. An employer may want to know the "How" and "Why" of what happened. "***What prompted you to choose that course of action?***" "***How did you handle that obstacle?***" or "***Tell me more about _____.***"

This probing gives depth and detail to an employer's knowledge of you. It's difficult to 'fake it' when you're providing real life examples. And if you haven't figured it out by now, honesty is the best policy. Remember: an employer has access to your references who may be asked to verify the stories you've told.

If you've done your research on the position, the organization, and the industry, you'll have a good grasp of what is needed in an entry level candidate. Knowing this, you can create a list of stories illustrating skills, knowledge, and abilities that position you as someone who meets the job-related needs of a specific employer. For example, if you know the employer requires individuals to work in teams, be ready with stories of your team work. Likewise, if presentation skills are a requisite, polish your description of a class, internship, or service projects where you played a lead role in reporting to a group. The more you can quantify or provide specific details, the more credible your responses.

DON'T FORGET: Employers are interested in how you handle negative or awkward situations (akin to the "***What are your weaknesses?***" question) so make sure you have a few stories that acknowledge how you made the best of a bad situation or managed

to produce a positive outcome.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST

◇ Identify six to eight examples from your past experiences that demonstrate behaviors and skills that

employers typically seek.

◇ Develop stories to describe these examples, emphasizing your achievements and attitude, yet remembering

to include some evidence of struggles or turnarounds.

◇ Diversify your stories. Choose from internships, classes and school projects, volunteering and campus

activities, hobbies, part-time jobs, and other areas that give a 360-degree view of you.

◇ Organize your stories using the STAR model.

The S-T-A-R model offers a useful framework for storytelling and will keep you on track. It will help you

organize your stories to give the “big picture”, get quickly to the point, and make a positive impression. Keep

your story to 3 – 5 minutes and when you conclude, you may want to invite questions from your interviewer

to ensure that you accurately interpreted the question and provided helpful information.

Example: “*Would*

you like to hear more about ____? Or “*Is this information what you were looking for?*”

SITUATION: Briefly describe the background

to give context to your example.

Be specific in identifying a problem or challenge and provide enough detail for an interviewer to ‘get it.’

TASK: Identify the task that you set out to accomplish. This step might reflect your strategy or thinking in coming up with a plan.

RESULTS: What happened? How did the event, project, situation unfold. What did you achieve or learn? How might you do things differently to improve an outcome?

MASTERING BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING WITH THE S-T-A-R MODEL

ACTION: Describe your actions. What did you do specifically?

Which skills did you use?

If you were part of a team, focus on you and the role you played.

S-T-A-R

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

- ◇ Tell me about yourself.
- ◇ Why/how are you qualified for this position?
- ◇ What do you know about our organization? Our products? Services? Competition?
- ◇ Why do you want to work here?
- ◇ What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- ◇ What can you offer us?
- ◇ Why should we hire you rather than another candidate?
- ◇ Define success. Failure.
- ◇ Have you experienced failure? What did you learn?
- ◇ Of which three achievements are you most proud?
- ◇ Who are your role models? Why?
- ◇ What motivates you?
- ◇ Have you had difficulty getting along with a professor (supervisor, co-worker)? Explain.
- ◇ Do you prefer to work independently or with supervision?
- ◇ How do you prioritize your tasks?

YOUR EDUCATION

- ◇ How did you choose your college?
- ◇ Why did you choose your major?
- ◇ Which classes do you like best? Least? Why?
- ◇ Would you change anything about your education?
- ◇ In which campus activities did you participate?
- ◇ Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
- ◇ Did you pay for any portion of your education?

YOUR EXPERIENCE

- ◇ What did you most/least enjoy about your last job or internship?
- ◇ Which skills do you enjoy using?
- ◇ Have you ever spoken before a group of people?
- ◇ Did you work while going to school?
- ◇ Have you ever quit a job? Withdrawn from a course?
- ◇ Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- ◇ How would a former supervisor describe you and your work?

YOUR CAREER GOALS

- ◇ Describe your ideal job.
- ◇ What other types of positions are you considering?
- ◇ Describe your ideal work environment.
- ◇ Where do you want to be in five years?
- ◇ Do you plan to go to graduate school?
- ◇ Would you be willing to relocate?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

- ◇ Describe a project or experience where you worked as part of a team.
- ◇ Discuss a situation where you resolved a conflict.
- ◇ Demonstrate your leadership skills.
- ◇ Tell about a time when you persuaded someone or successfully pitched an idea.
- ◇ Describe a time when you worked under stress and demonstrated your coping skills.
- ◇ Give an example of a situation in which you provided a solution or improved something for an employer.
- ◇ Give me an example of a time when you set and then achieved a specific goal.
- ◇ Describe a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- ◇ Tell me about a time when you had too much to do and how you prioritized your tasks.
- ◇ Share an experience that demonstrates your willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done?
- ◇ Describe the most significant written report that you've completed.
- ◇ Have you ever had to make an unpopular decision? Give an example.
- ◇ What's the best example of how you think logically and use sound judgment?
- ◇ Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the past year.
- ◇ Describe a situation where you failed.
- ◇ Give an example of how you've taken initiative.
- ◇ How have you dealt with a co-worker or subordinate who was incompetent?
- ◇ How have you handled an emotional reaction or personality conflict with someone?
- ◇ Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet.
- ◇ Give an example of an occasion when you used fact-finding skills and analysis.

◇ Describe the most creative presentation or project you've done.

QUESTIONS ASKED BY EMPLOYERS

Before you open your mouth, your appearance speaks for you!

Appearance is of utmost importance in an interview. Your interviewer will develop a visual impression

of you within the first 10 seconds of the interaction. Be aware of your physical appearance. Dress conservatively, and be neat, clean, and tidy. Remember, image is as important as content and that your nonverbal gestures as well as body language add to an interviewer's impression of you.

Dressing for the Job Interview

◇ Wear a classic suit or a simple dress with a jacket. The best choices in suits or jackets are solid colors or conservative prints.

Bold patterns are distracting. Some appropriate colors are navy blue, black, dark green, dark red, burgundy, or gray.

◇ Silky blouses and rayon look dressier than cottons. Choose a conservative neckline and hem.

◇ Avoid wearing clothes that are revealing or trendy. It may be the latest fashion but it will not impress the interviewer.

◇ Choose sheer stockings in a soft neutral color.

◇ Closed toe and moderate height heels are best. Avoid sandals.

◇ Keep jewelry to a minimum.

◇ Fingernails should be trimmed to a reasonable length. The polish color should be neutral.

◇ Minimize perfume as many people are allergic.

◇ Avoid big bags or backpacks. Carry a portfolio and a small handbag.

◇ Be sure all cell phones are off!

◇ Wear a suit or sport jacket with color coordinated trousers.

◇ The color should be neutral or dark—blue, black, gray is best. Stripes, herringbones and small plaids are fine, but avoid bold prints.

◇ A light-colored shirt such as white, ivory, or shades of pale blue, yellow or pink is more conservative than a dark color.

Cotton or cotton blends look more tailored than silky fabrics.

◇ Wear a tie—one accessory that can be creative.

◇ Shoes should be leather—clean and polished. Wear with coordinating colored socks.

◇ Keep jewelry to a minimum. A watch and possibly a ring are all you should wear.

◇ Make sure your nails are trimmed and clean.

◇ Minimize cologne as many people are allergic.

◇ Avoid backpacks; carry a portfolio instead.

◇ Be sure all cell phones are off!

MEN WOMEN

◇ What is the most significant challenge facing this organization? This department?

◇ What kinds of assignments might I expect initially?

◇ How is training provided for new employees?

◇ How much opportunity is there for _____? Fill in the blank with a skill that you want to use (e.g., writing, research)

◇ Which skills and qualities are you looking for in a candidate?

◇ Does this position require more teamwork or more independent work?

◇ What are the department's goals for this year?

◇ What do you like best about working for this company?

◇ How often are performance reviews given?

◇ How would you describe this organization compared to its competitors?

◇ Which characteristics do achievers in this company share?

YOUR TURN: QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK EMPLOYERS

In many career fields, especially Engineering and other technical fields, be prepared to answer questions about coursework, projects, and labs. You may be asked to describe a significant project in detail including the objective and results.

Note that hiring managers will assume you have a general grasp of technical terminology in your field. Your depth of knowledge may be explored with questions such as the following:

TECHNICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

◇ What assumptions did you make?

◇ Why do you think that was a valid assumption?

- ◇ Did your results make sense? Did the experiments match your analysis?
- ◇ If you were to start the project over, what would you do differently?

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

- ◇ *Who's our CEO?*
- ◇ *Tell me a joke.*
- ◇ *What's the last book you read?*
- ◇ *Describe your most creative Halloween costume.*
- ◇ *Tell me about your most awkward moment.*

Some recruiters have favorite questions. These inquiries are designed to observe your processing: the way you think, behave, and respond. Besides doing the research we've recommended (which would give you the CEO's name), you cannot predict all these questions. Stop and think. Respond carefully. Use humor, if it comes naturally.

A case interview is a role playing exercise in which an employer can assess how logically and persuasively

you – a potential consultant - can present a case. The objective is not to see if you get the correct answer but rather to evaluate the process by which you think and arrive at a solution.

The purpose of a case interview is to test you in the following areas:

- ◇ Analytical and logical ability
- ◇ Structure and thought process
- ◇ Tolerance for ambiguity and data overload
- ◇ Poise and communication skills under pressure and in front of a client

COMMON CASE SCENARIOS

Strategy Scenario: Assisting a client who is entering a new market, developing a new product, investigating pricing strategies, developing growth strategies, starting a new business.

Operations Scenario: Helping clients to increase sales, reduce costs, improve bottom lines.

Sample Case Question: How do you price a light bulb that never burns out?

FOUR STEPS TO TAKE WITH EVERY QUESTION:

1. Summarize and re-state the question
2. Verify the objectives
3. Ask clarifying questions
4. Identify and label the case

CONSULTING CASE INTERVIEWS

Adapted with permission from Case In Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation by Marc Cosentino.

KEY GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO CASE QUESTIONS

- ◇ Listen to the problem and take notes
- ◇ Verify objective and ask clarifying questions

- ◇ Think big picture first; think top down
- ◇ Structure the problem
- ◇ Organize your answer and manage your time
- ◇ Be creative and brainstorm
- ◇ Listen to the interviewer's feedback
- ◇ Think out loud (but think first)
- ◇ Bring closure and summarize
- ◇ Demonstrate enthusiasm and a positive attitude
- ◇ Have fun!

WEB SITES FOR CASE INTERVIEW PREPARATION

www.vault.com ■ www.casequestions.com ■ www.wetfeet.com