

Interview Guide: What to Expect During an Interview & How to Prepare

3 Phases of an Interview	Tips for Success	Sample Questions
Introduction	<p>The Introduction is the phase when small talk happens. It is the time to make a first impression.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make eye contact • Turn off your phone • Smile • Be positive and upbeat 	<p>The types of questions that may be asked during this phase seem simple but can be difficult to answer well.</p> <p><i>Tell me about yourself.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider three points to answer this question. You can highlight your experiences that are most relevant, tell about a key strength, and even one personal item of interest that may make you memorable. • “I’m an upcoming graduate of USCB with a degree in business and I interned with XYZ company last summer. This position helped me understand how much I like working in sales. I enjoy meeting new people and can communicate complex ideas in a straightforward way. I developed this skill because I am the oldest of three and I often helped my siblings with their homework when we were younger.” <p><i>Why did you choose your major?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important to avoid vague and cliché answers to this question. You want to be enthusiastic about your major selection and show that you gave some thought about selecting it. • “I chose to major in communication studies because I have always enjoyed communicating through different avenues. For example, I enjoy face-to-face conversations, but realize that it is important to summarize them in written form to avoid any misunderstandings. During my summer internship, I also developed a knack for marketing products through social media posts that were eye catching and witty.” <p><i>Why do you want to work for this company?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The employer wants to make sure that you took the time to research the company above and beyond the position description. It’s important to research company websites and LinkedIn profiles. You will want to demonstrate that you found a connection with the company’s philosophy. • “I was first drawn to the position description because it seemed like such a good fit for my interests and skills. When I researched your company further, I was excited to learn about your commitment to environmental concerns and to giving back to your community. I like corporate values that not only look at the bottom line, but also at how to be a good corporate citizen.” <p><i>What are your strengths/weaknesses?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You should always focus first on your strengths. It isn’t necessary to go over every weakness you have, either. Rather focus on a key strength and one weakness. Give an example of how you use the strength and an example of how you compensate for or have overcome the weakness. • “I actually enjoy making Excel spreadsheets to forecast my sales. I like to make them dynamic so that the formulas help me make changes in real time which helps me set my goals. As I mentioned, I enjoy face-to-face conversations and meeting people. While this helps me build relationships, I sometimes spend too much time in conversations. I have learned to set an appointment schedule so that I know exactly how much time I have with each client. This keeps me focused and intentional with my interactions.”
Body	<p>This is the part of the interview when you will get behavioral based questions, or questions that ask for specific examples of work experiences. It is important to have thought about your key accomplishments that you will want to share before the interview. The interviewer is trying to understand how well you will meet their needs and gauge your verbal communication skills.</p>	<p>Behavioral based questions ask you to tell “your stories.” Remember a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is important to give complete information with examples so that the interviewer can easily understand your skills and talents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always describe the situation by giving important background information. • Then describe the challenge you faced or problem you were asked to solve. • Move on to elaborate on the specific actions you took to solve the problem and then end your answer by giving the results. <p><i>Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “During my sophomore year, I was the Spirit Chair for my sorority. One of my main assignments was to design and plan the build for a homecoming parade float. • Our goal was to design a first-place parade float to gain maximum points towards the end-of-year top sorority on campus award. • Previously, the sorority waited until the last minute to come up with the design which did not give a lot of time to plan the build. I started planning over the summer so that I knew exactly what the float would look like and what supplies were needed. I also created a day-by-day schedule so that I knew how to assign tasks when members arrived to help build each day. • In the end, we not only won first place, but we all had fun building the float and everyone felt their time was well spent because there were clearly assigned tasks to be accomplished. <p>(Each bullet point walks through describing the situation, the challenge, the actions taken, and the results.)</p>
Close	<p>The closing provides an opportunity for you to ask questions of the interviewer and to summarize why you are the candidate to hire. It is also a good time to ask about next steps in the hiring process</p>	<p>During the closing, the interviewer typically asks if you have questions. It is important to have questions to ask! You want to avoid questions about benefits. You should ask at least three open ended questions. The examples below can help you plan your questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you like about working for this company? • What are the challenges associated with working here? • What advice would you give a new college graduate entering this company? • What are you looking for in the ideal candidate? <p>Questions like these give you a chance to summarize how you fit the ideal candidates qualifications, how you can rise to the challenges of the job, and to thank the interviewer for their time with you and the advice offered.</p> <p>It is okay to say that you are very excited about the position and that you hope you will be able to continue to conversation asking what the you can expect moving forward in the hiring process.</p>

Competency Based Behavioral Interview Questions

Competency*	Definition	Questions
LEADERSHIP	Recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a time when you helped a group capitalize on everyone's strengths. Tell me about a time when you delegated work to others. How did you decide what to delegate to different individuals? Give an example of a time when the result of listening to a team member resulted in solving a problem or achieving a goal.
COMMUNICATION	Clearly and effectively exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tell me about a time when you effectively communicated something difficult to a supervisor. Describe the most effective written document, report, or presentation you completed. What made it effective and why are you particularly proud of it? Tell me about a time when you had to "sell" an idea to your peers or co-workers. How did you do it, and did they "buy" it?
TECHNOLOGY	Understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a challenge you had in solving a technical problem. How did you solve it, and how did you know what software or tools you needed? Tell me about a time when you sought out the opportunity to learn a new technical skill or program to do your work? How did you become proficient using it? Describe a situation when you had to trouble shoot a technology problem.
TEAMWORK	Build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give an example of how you build and maintain professional relationships. Tell me about a time when you worked on a team. What was your role and how did you ensure you met your commitments to the team? Tell me about a time when building successful relationships was difficult. What strategies did you employ and what was the result?
CRITICAL THINKING	Identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe a time when you made a suggestion to improve the work in an organization/company, etc. Tell me about a time when you were particularly effective at prioritizing tasks and completing a project on schedule. Describe a time when you came up with a creative or innovative solution/idea/project/report to a problem.
PROFESSIONALISM	Knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community or workplace.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have you done to become better qualified for your career? Tell me about a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it and looking back, would you do anything differently? Give me a time when you took initiative and went above and beyond. What was the outcome?
EQUITY & INCLUSION	Demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in anti-racist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give a specific example of how you helped create an environment where differences are valued, encouraged, and supported. Describe when you initiated a connection with someone from another culture and/or background from you. Have you noticed or changed policies in your work culture that were restricting some groups from fairly advancing?

Resource: NACE Competencies

FOR INTERVIEW PRACTICE, USE



Scan below to use this USCB resource!



The S.T.A.R. Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions*

Tell me about a time you went above and beyond to get something done.

	This chart walks you through how to answer a question like the one above.		
S	Situation	Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?	There was an evening shift at the "Burger Joint" when all but three of the staff called in sick. It was a busy Friday night because there was a football game.
T	Task	Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?	I was the most senior person on staff, so it was up to me to devise a plan that allowed the three of us to handle the volume of customers in the most efficient way possible.
A	Action	Elaborate your specific actions. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?	I came up with a plan that had each of us handling more than one job during the peak shift. I was primarily at the front register and was the back-up when the other two team members got behind.
R	Results	Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify	It took a little longer to get the orders out, but we were intentional about explaining why and most people were understanding. We were tired after the rush but felt good about our work. When the owner found out what we did, she was very appreciative.

Resource: <http://www.RightAttitudes.com>

"Tell Me about Yourself"

This statement often begins an interview. It can be very difficult to navigate because it is so open ended. While there are many ways to approach this question, consider developing your answer according to your Clifton Strengths.

List the top three of your five strengths and identify how you use them when to do things like solving problems, accomplishing tasks, planning activities, or implementing ideas. In general, identify times that you have best used your strengths. Use the example below as your guide to developing a strength-based answer to this statement. Create your own spreadsheet to complete this exercise.

Strength	Short Definition of My Strength	Activity	How I Used My Strength
<i>Individualization</i>	<i>Have a gift for figuring out how different people can work together productively.</i>	<i>Working on a Class Project</i>	<i>When working on a group project for a class, I am consistently the person who listens for and recognizes the talents and interests of the individual members. As a result, I am instrumental when identifying the roles each of us will play in the group and the activities we will be responsible for as an individual. When people work from their natural interests and aptitudes, then the results for the entire group project are generally successful.</i>
<i>Relator</i>	<i>Find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.</i>	<i>Planning a Fund-Raising Event for a Charity</i>	<i>As the philanthropy chair for my sorority, I excelled at planning fund-raising events that required all our members to participate. I established a monetary goal for each individual event and set up committees such that everyone involved was integral to achieving the goal. We exceeded our goals in three of the four fundraising events I managed and met our goal in the other.</i>
<i>Maximizer</i>	<i>Focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. Seek to transform something strong into something superb.</i>	<i>Serving as Sorority President</i>	<i>When I accepted the office of sorority president, we had a strong academic reputation on campus. However, as a result of working with the scholarship chair to have each member set individual academic stretch goals, our chapter was recognized as the top academic performer on the national level for our sorority and received an award at the Grand Convention.</i>

To answer, "Tell me about yourself," you can draw from the observations above. See how the example below does this.

"I have the ability to look for individual talents and interests when working on a team so that tasks and responsibilities can be assigned accordingly and this results in a much better outcome than if I did not pay attention to these details. I also have learned that setting group and individual goals when leading teams results in outcomes that exceed expectations. I naturally am driven to maximize results through individual accomplishments, and I enhanced these strengths through the leadership positions I held on campus."

After offering this opening statement, you can then go into details about your experiences as noted in the third column above and use the S.T.A.R. method on the opposite side of this insert to explain all your accomplishments.

What to Wear to an Interview

Most of the time it is safest to dress in business formal attire. The example of someone not wearing a tie is not business formal, but it is an acceptable business casual or gender neutral option.



Need something to wear to an interview, but your budget is tight?

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Photo from California State University, Fullerton Career Center