INTERVIEW PREPARATION STRATEGIES

Congratulations—you’ve been selected to interview, which means you met the job qualifications, and the employer wants to get to know you better! Interviews are conversations which answer for employers whether or not you can do the job, how much you will enjoy the job, and will they enjoy working with you. At the same time, candidates are interviewing the employer to understand the same. Employers utilize several settings and types of interviews to evaluate candidates. Most hiring managers have the philosophy to hire for attitude and to train for skill; therefore, self-confidence, genuine interest, and motivation are key traits employers look for in candidates. Follow this guide which is designed to offer best practices and strategies to ace the interview!

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research employer & review the job description

- Analyze the job description to understand the key skills and qualifications needed to accomplish the job. Once you know what the employer seeks and why, you can best develop interview question responses.
- Review the employer website to discover the mission, core values, product, and service offerings. Consider how you “fit” into the company culture and determine how your values and skills are aligned to the job.
- Look up and scan through the LinkedIn profiles of the hiring manager(s) and individuals with whom you will interview. If you do not have this information, ask the recruiter.
- Use online resources, such as Glassdoor and Vault, for insider information, candidate feedback, and industry insights.
- Read through the CMC’s Salary Negotiations guide to assess salary information. Also review Bureau of Labor Statistics, College Measures Economics Success Metrics, Vault, Glassdoor, Payscale, and/or Salary.com.
- Read the company’s current events, news articles and industry information because interviewers will ask questions around these topics.

Interview Preparation Process

- Research employer and review the job description
- Prepare elevator speech & stories AND practice out loud
- Prepare thoughtful questions
- Dress for success

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Prepare elevator speech & stories AND practice out loud
- Review the *Interview Strategies* guide to prepare for and respond to commonly asked interview questions and interview types.
- Practice your elevator speech and interview response stories **out loud** so your responses sound natural and concise. Schedule a mock interview to receive interview skills feedback.

Prepare thoughtful questions
- Prepare a minimum of 5 questions to ask the employer based on your research. Your questions should help you learn more about the organization’s goals, expectations, and current/future projects. Review the *Interview Strategies* guide for more details.

Dress for success
- Invest in a professional suit. Standard black and navy are considered the most professional.
- Wear the suit and shoes prior to the interview to break them in and help you feel more comfortable.
- Limit your use of perfumes and wear minimal jewelry.

Before the Interview
- Invest in resume paper to print resume and other application materials
- Prepare copies of application materials such as cover letter, writing samples, references/letters of recommendation, and/or examples of your work
- Utilize a portfolio to store resume, pen, business card(s), paper for note taking, and other application materials
- Ensure a good night’s sleep to be at your best and energetic for the interview

THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW
- Eat a healthy breakfast/lunch in advance of your interview.
- Arrive 15 minutes early and turn off cell phone.
- During the greeting process, smile and provide a strong handshake. Maintain eye contact and posture throughout the interview.
- Provide detailed examples of your experiences. Utilize the PARL method for structuring your stories.
- Ask questions to demonstrate interest and to learn more about the organization and the position. Ask for the next steps in the interview process so you are aware of when they will contact you again.
- Ask for business cards for follow-up correspondence.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW
- Email a thank you note within 24 hours of your interview. Recent studies demonstrate that over 80% of applicants send thank you notes after each interview round. Affirm your interest in the position and reference the topics discussed in the email. Let the interviewer know when you will contact them again to check on the status of your interview.
- Maintain a journal and reflect on the experience. Consider areas you performed well and where you could improve. It is very likely you may be asked similar interview questions in the future.
INTERVIEW TYPES

In addition to traditional in-person interviews, you will likely experience phone, web conferencing, video, panel, group, and dining situations throughout the interview process.

Phone, Web Conference, or Video Interview
Employers often utilize phone screens to determine if the applicant meets the minimum requirements and is genuinely interested in the opportunity. Phone interviews are a cost effective way to meet several candidates in a short period of time. The majority of phone interviews are 15-45 minutes in length and include approximately 10-15 questions. The following strategies will help you have a more confident approach during the phone and/or web conference interview.

Phone Interview Strategies
- Schedule the interview for a quiet time and eliminate any background noise.
- Utilize a landline when possible to avoid cell phone connection issues and dropped calls.
- Dress professionally to help you avoid being too casual in your approach.
- The power and tone of your voice are essential. Therefore, stand up while speaking and smile when discussing your accomplishments.
- Demonstrate effective communication skills. Avoid fillers and awkward pauses; ask the employer to repeat or to rephrase challenging questions to allow additional time.

Web Conference or Video Interview Strategies
- Most common platforms utilized are Skype and GoToMeeting.
- Expect a panel of interviewers with your image being broadcasted on a projector-sized screen.
- Avoid wireless connection if possible and test the quality of your webcam prior to the interview.
- Dress professionally.
- No pets in the room because they can become a distraction.
- Look into the camera to simulate eye contact with the interviewer(s). Avoid tendency to focus on the computer screen. You may or may not be able to see every interviewer in the room.
- Utilize a clean, neutral space to eliminate distracting objects located on the wall or behind you.

One-Way Video Interview
More and more companies are turning to video interviews to allow more job seekers and employers to connect earlier in the hiring process. Employers create a series of interview questions, and candidates record their time responses remotely. The advanced video technology then vets verbal and nonverbal communication skills and the quality of candidates’ recorded interview responses so employers can more easily determine who will move to the next round. Prepare for these interviews and apply best practices the same way you would for in-person or other interview types, in addition to the strategies below.

Strategies
- Practice and time responses by audio or video recording to see how you look on video or what you sound like. Use Perfect Interview, a simulated interview experience available to Comets, to gauge your responses. Some one-way video interview tools will immediately move on to the next question once time runs out.
- Be cautious in wearing eyeglasses as these can have reflective glares which can negatively impact your interview.
- Listen to interview questions carefully and be sure to answer each part of the question asked.
- Put a small picture of a person next to the webcam as a friendly reminder to look into the camera.
- Smile and let your personality shine!

**Panel or Group Interview**

Panel and group interviews allow for more than one interview to take place at the same time, where “panel” means the candidate will meet with multiple interviewers, and “group” refers to situations with multiple candidates. Group interviews allow employers to see how you interact with others and work in a team.

**Strategies**

- Engage all members of the audience. Your ability to communicate with everyone in the room is one of the skills being reviewed.
- Get to know your fellow interviewees in the waiting room. Be friendly and play it cool. Employers might be paying attention to how you interact with others—a great way to test your people skills!
- Include the other candidates in the conversation during group interviews, making eye contact with everyone—another great way to demonstrate your confidence and ability to work with others. Do NOT dominate the conversation.
- Listen to the other candidates’ responses and remember—regardless of their experiences and skills—you are still the best candidate. Pay attention to the conversation, and do NOT let their responses make you fade into the background.

**Lunch or Dinner Interview**

Lunch and dinner interviews offer unique engagements outside of the office and should not be mistaken for informal events. The same level of preparation applies as in all other forms of interviewing. Recruiters and interviewers request these interviews to get to know candidates better, see how they multi-task during interviews and determine basic social skills.

**Strategies**

- Approach the lunch interview with the same level of professionalism as in formal interviews.
- Base your ordering decision according to what your interviewer orders. Do not order the most expensive meal, nor is it appropriate to order beer, wine or other alcoholic beverages.
- If the event provides alcoholic beverages, limit yourself to 2 drinks. Another option is to quietly refrain from alcohol consumption.
- Be decisive with your order, as this is something to which the interviewer will pay close attention.
- Food choice is important—do not order messy, smelly or high-maintenance dishes that will distract you from your interview.
- Remember your manners and brush up on table etiquette—do not talk with your mouth full, eat with your mouth open, or rest your elbows on the table. When finished with your meal, be sure to place your fork and knife together in the four o’clock position of your plate and fold your napkin next to your plate.
- Be courteous and friendly with the restaurant staff, even if they mess up your order. Your interviewer is also paying attention to how you interact with others.
BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING – The PARL Method

Behavioral interviewing assumes that your past experiences are good indicators of your future abilities. You’ll be asked to tell stories about your past so that the employer can assess your skills and behavior. The behavioral interview is the most common type of interview so regardless of your industry of interest, you will likely encounter behavioral interview questions. These questions are also known as situational interviews and the questions require you to provide a specific, detailed example of a past experience and demonstrate how you handled the situation.

By having a good understanding the nature of the job and the organization, you can more accurately select examples from your life that have meaning to the employer. The best way to prepare for behavioral questions is to PRACTICE! You want to learn your stories, not just memorize them, so practice makes perfect. Remember though – this is storytelling, so you want your answers to sound natural, not like you’ve rehearsed them before.

The PARL Method

The key is being able to talk about your experiences in such a way that employers can identify your skills and approach to problems. Behavioral questions often begin with “Tell me about a time when you had to...” One way to help organize your answers and experiences is to use the PARL Method, which helps you focus on the most relevant aspects of your experience in a structured way.

P: the PROBLEM or situation (“What happened”)

A: the ACTIONS you took (“What did you do”)

R: the RESULTS or outcomes (“What was the result”)

L: the LEARNING or KNOWLEDGE you gained (“What did you learn? How have you grown as a person?”)

Sample Practice Questions
1. Describe a work situation in which you were not proud of your performance. What did you learn from this?

2. Describe an important goal you set and tell me how you reached it.

3. What is the biggest struggle you’ve experienced in the past 6 months and what did you learn from it?

4. Tell me about a time when you had to motivate yourself to do something you didn’t want to do?

5. When was a time things didn’t go as planned, and how did you handle it?

6. Tell me about a time when you had a conflict and how you resolved it?

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

8. Tell me about a problem that you solved in a unique or unusual way.
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Common Interview Questions
1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you know about our company/organization, and why do you want to work here?
3. Why did you apply for this position?
4. Why should I hire you?
5. Why did you select UT Dallas and your major?
6. Discuss your favorite class.
7. Discuss your most challenging course.
8. What are your career goals?
9. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
10. What motivates you to succeed?
11. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
12. If you were to hire someone for this opportunity, what qualities would you look for?
14. What do you look for in a supervisor?
15. Do you value money or experience?
16. On a scale of 1-10, how proficient are you with MS Office products?
17. Do you have plans to continue your education or attend graduate school?
18. How do you know that our organization is the right place for you?
19. Are you open to travel and/or relocation?
20. What are your minimum salary expectations for this position?

Behavior-Based Interview Questions
1. A fellow employee told you what his/her salary is and wants to know yours. How would you react and what would you do? (situational)
2. Describe a conflict with an employee and how you handled it.
3. Describe a complex problem you solved.
4. Describe a work situation in which you were not proud of your performance. What did you learn from this?
5. Describe an important goal you set and tell me how you reached it.
6. Describe how you have been able to apply something you learned from your degree program to a real-life or work-related situation.
7. Describe a (recent) project in which you failed? What did you learn?
8. Describe a (recent) situation in which you asked for advice/help? Did you use the advice?
9. Describe a (recent) situation in which it took you several tries or approaches before you were able to figure out what was going on.
10. Describe a (recent) situation in which you had to quickly establish your credibility and gain the confidence of others. What did you do?
11. Describe a (recent) situation when you didn’t know who you needed to speak with in an organization to get something done. What did you do?
12. Describe a (recent) situation when you were able to identify a conflict between two individuals and were instrumental in the solution to that conflict.
13. Describe a (recent) situation when you worked in a team environment.
14. Describe a (recent) situation in your last job that you did not handle as well as you might have.
15. Describe a (recent) situation that you just couldn’t handle.
16. Describe a (recent) situation when miscommunication created a problem on the job.
17. Describe a (recent) situation when you were confronted by a difficult problem and how you solved it.
18. Describe a time when you had to take on something very new or different and you had little or no guidance and support in doing so. How did you handle it?
19. Describe a time when you organized a project where your directions were vague?
20. Describe a time when you simplified or clarified a situation by putting your finger on the key issue?
21. Describe a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
22. Describe a time when you accomplished a challenging goal.
23. Describe how you work under pressure. Do you anticipate problems effectively or react to them?
24. Describe how you would handle rude, difficult, or impatient people.
25. Describe a project that has required accuracy and attention to detail.
26. Describe a situation where you have been under pressure and handled it well.
27. Do you feel you can ask for help?
28. Do you feel you can assist others in their jobs?
29. Explain how you overcame a difficult situation.
30. Given a situation when you disagree with your supervisor, how would you deal with it?
31. Has competition had any positive or negative impact on your achievements? How?
32. How do you complete a boring job?
33. Have you prepared and communicated ideas in a formal setting?
34. Tell me about a particularly difficult or awkward conversation you needed to have with someone?
35. Tell me about a significant failure in your life.
36. What role do you take in a group situation? Please give examples.
37. Your supervisor left an assignment in your “inbox” then left town for a week; now you can’t reach him and don’t understand the assignment. What would you do?
38. Your supervisor tells you to do something in a way you know is ineffective; what would you do?
39. You’ve been with your current employer for a very short time. Is this an indication that you’ll be moving a lot throughout your career?
40. You’ve changed jobs quite frequently; what assurances do we have that you’ll stay with us?
41. When were you required to complete a task and you lacked all the necessary information?
42. When have you felt the most successful?
43. Describe a situation when you were the group leader, and your ideas were different from the team’s.
44. Provide an example when you had to make a quick decision.
45. Tell me about a time you effectively delegated tasks within a project.

Critical Thinking & Other Challenging Interview Questions
1. Determine the number of baseballs utilized during a Major League Baseball season.
2. How much would you charge to wash all the windows in downtown Dallas?
3. You have eight balls, one of which is heavier than the others. All the balls appear identical. You have a balance-type scale, and you can perform trials on the balls. What is the minimum number of trials required to determine the heaviest ball?
4. Design an emergency evacuation plan for New York City.
5. How many balls would you fit into this room?
6. Finish this sentence: Successful managers are the ones who....
7. Are you applying for other positions?
8. How would your enemy describe you?
9. What kind of zoo animal are you?
10. Describe your ideal job.
11. Who is your hero and why?

**Interview Questions to Ask a Prospective Employer**

1. Why is this position open? Is this a new position? Was the previous job-holder promoted?
2. How often has this position been filled in the past five to ten years?
3. What has been the primary reason for people leaving?
4. Would you describe the duties of the job please? Or: what is your perception of my daily duties?
5. What are some of the objectives that you would like accomplished in this job?
6. What would you like done differently by the next person who fills this position?
7. What is the biggest challenge for someone new coming into this role?
8. What are the most critical and time consuming aspects of the role?
9. What would this person need to do in order to be declared a “successful hire?”
10. Is there anything unusually demanding about the position that I should know?
11. What is most pressing for your team?
12. What are the key deliverables you would like achieved in the first 30/60/90 days?
13. What are some of the longer-term objectives that you would like to see completed?
14. What do you consider the ideal experience for this job? What characteristics do you most like to find in people working on this assignment? Can you describe the ideal candidate for this job?
15. Could you please describe your management style?
16. In what ways has this organization been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?
17. What significant changes do you see in the near future?
18. What do you like best about working here?
19. How is one judged? What accounts for success?
20. Might this company be sold or acquired?
21. What are the primary results you would like to see this person produce in the near and long term?
22. How do you typically communicate with your team (one on one, email, phone, regular meetings, impromptu meetings, heavy detail, big picture guidance, etc.)?
23. Once you have delegated to your team member, how do you monitor their progress?
24. What kind of support does this position receive in terms of people, finance, etc.?
25. What freedom would I have in determining my work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?
26. Could you show me where and how this position fits into your organization?
27. What are the career path options once someone is successful in this role? What is the expected timeframe for one to be in the role before being considered for their next step?
28. What are the average hours during the regular time period and busy periods? How much can be done remotely?
29. I noticed on your LinkedIn profile you’ve been with [the company] for [x] years—
   a. What about the company gets you excited to come to work every day?
   b. How has the internship program changed over the years?
30. What qualities really make a person successful here?
31. What additional questions do you have for me?
32. What are the next steps, and when will I hear back?
33. May I have your business card so I may follow up?
ACE THE CASE: Case Study Interview Strategies

A case study is most common with business and consulting firms. The employer presents a problem or situation and expects the candidate to thoroughly analyze the situation and provide a recommendation for improvement before a panel of interviewers. It is very likely that the case study will resemble a situation that the employer has previously encountered; therefore, we recommend reviewing the employer website for sample case studies and strategies for responding. Effective communication and analytical skills are being assessed during the case study.

The Career Management Center provides access to Vault, which features consulting firm profiles and guides and resources for learning more about case study strategies and sample questions. The Vault Guide provides information on the top US consulting firms and a new feature added in 2013 also ranks the top firms in Asia and Europe. Rankings are also available based on diversity, prestige, discipline/area, and best to work for.

Case interviews determine the following skills:
- Effective communication
- Analytical thinking and problem solving
- Resourcefulness and initiative
- Confidence and cultural fit
- Self-leadership (how you react in pressure cooker situations)

Case Interview Preparation Strategies
- Stay abreast of industry trends and current events
- Review case interview resources offered by firms to understand their processes
- Create a case team and work through case problems together
- Participate in competitions
- Connect with consultants at your target firms for tips
- Practice math tricks and applying frameworks

Case Interview Process

- Review case
- Diagnose the problem & ask informed questions
- Apply frameworks & make assumptions
- Document process
- Recommend solutions
Top 10 Case Interview Tips

1. Listen carefully to the question and take notes (there are often clues embedded in the question to help you get started). Understand what is being asked of you, and pay attention to your audience.

2. Repeat question to recruiter to ensure you have the information needed for a strong start.

3. Ask 1-2 clarifying questions if necessary – Begin to formulate a hypothesis in your head and test if they are reasonable. While asking these questions, you are buying yourself a few moments to postulate.

4. Structure the problem, i.e., begin to fit the problem into one of the frameworks.

5. Pick a branch to probe. Develop hypotheses, ask for relevant facts, defend/refine hypothesis based on new information, probe further and describe implications you see. *Key Note: if you find yourself running down a rabbit trail of random issues with no end, stop, think and go back up to 30,000 feet to see if you are even in the right ballpark. It is better to discover this halfway into the interview and leave yourself some recovery time, than to discover this when your hour is done.

6. Pick a second branch and so on.

7. Prioritize your response. Support your arguments with your strongest points first.

8. Put it all together. Try to answer overall questions (the big picture) with a reasonable and actionable conclusion.
   - Review where you have been and what you know
   - Clarify what you do not understand, and what, with more time, you would like to know.
   - Solidify and tender your recommendation (where appropriate, as sometimes the interviewer cares less about your recommendation and more about how you get to it.)

9. Demonstrate your ability to adjust your solution. The employer will sometimes provide additional information to lead to an alternative approach. At this time, consider alternative solutions to show your flexibility.

10. Get feedback. Each case is a learning experience, and understanding where you can continuously improve will present you a stronger consultant candidate.

Case Interview Preparation Resources

- Accenture:

- Bain & Co:
• Boston Consulting Group (BCG):

• Deloitte:

• McKinsey:
  o http://www.mckinsey.com/careers/interviewing

• Oliver Wyman:
  o http://www.oliverwyman.com/careers/entry-level/interview-preparation.html#Roleofthecaseinterview

• Case In Point 9: Complete Case Interview Preparation (April 2016) by Marc P. Cosentino
SAMPLE THANK YOU NOTES
(highlighted words should be changed accordingly)

Good afternoon First Name,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about the Staff Accountant position with Company. It was a pleasure speaking with you and I truly enjoyed learning more about the role and the company.

After our conversation, I am confident that my skills, desires, and experiences are a great match for this opportunity. Specifically, I believe my Finance and Accounting experience combined with my technical background will serve well in building efficiency for the company and enable me to become a key contributor in Company's continued growth. I am very enthusiastic about moving forward with the hiring process and the possibility of joining the Company team.

Thank you again and I hope to speak with you in the near future.

Best Regards,
First and Last Name

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Good afternoon First Name,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today about the Staff Accountant position with Company. It was a pleasure speaking with you and I truly enjoyed learning more about the role and the company.

After our conversation, I am confident that my skills, desires, and experiences are a great match for this opportunity. Specifically, I believe my cross-functional communication skills and my supervisory experience will serve well in engaging my colleagues and direct reports as well as implementing process improvements for Company. I am very enthusiastic about moving forward with the hiring process and the possibility of joining the Company team.

Thank you again and I hope to speak with you in the near future.

Best Regards,
First and Last Name
Greetings First Name,

Thank you so much for taking time out of your day to meet with me about the opportunity with Company. Our conversation gave me confidence that my experience at Current Company has provided me with the technical and managerial expertise needed to successfully transition to Company. You all have compiled an intelligent, personable group of people and I would welcome the opportunity to join the team.

Thank you again for your time and for considering me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,
First and Last Name

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Greetings First Name,

Thank you for taking the time yesterday to meet with me about the Staff Accountant position. I appreciate all you had to say about the Company and what you strive to achieve there.

After talking with all of you, I am confident that my work at Current Company has given me the skills and experiences that you are wanting for this role. I have the knowledge, flexibility, and drive to be successful at Company and I am very excited about the possibility of joining the team.

Thank you again for your time and for considering me for the position. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,
First and Last Name