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A Primer on Interviews

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A Solving for Why Guide

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FORWARD

In my career, I have helped many people successfully shape their interview strategies. In the end, it's not about being able to answer interview questions. It's about your presence and poise, which comes once you understand yourself, your unique strengths, and your message.

Many people have told me that the main benefit of reading this material and reflecting on their stories and anecdotes is a greater sense of understanding of themselves that goes beyond interview preparation. When you are comfortable in your own skin, you will naturally be more attractive.

I encourage you to take this opportunity as you prepare for your interview to connect with your authentic self through the prompts in the primer document. Best of luck in your interview!

Thank you to Amy Cain whose editing helped to make this primer better!





About Interviews

The Role of the Interview

The interview can be a source of anxiety and stress for job seekers, but it can also be a great opportunity for learning and connection. It's all about the way you look at it and can go a long way in setting the tone of the interview itself. While you could look at the interview as yet another instance where you're being judged and evaluated, you could also choose to see the positive in that you have been selected to be interviewed because they saw something in you. It is indeed an opportunity for you to communicate your strengths and your ability, as well as an opportunity to learn about a job position or future

career and connect with a potential future colleague in your field.

You might be afraid that you're not the most qualified candidate or you might be nervous that you don't have as much experience as others applying for the position. Do not dwell on fears and negative self-talk; you still got the interview. Just getting to the point where you are having a face to face interview with a prospective employer is a big deal! You are now sitting with a person who may not know you well, and this is a chance to create a new relationship.

Acing Your Interview

Your performance in an interview overall is a product of your preparation (getting to know your core message intimately) as well as your willingness (and courage) to engage the interviewer. There is an element of interpersonal dynamics involved that is never entirely predictable. Sometimes you will have a bad day. You may be fully prepared and ready to go, but the interviewer may be having a bad day. Sometimes you will get an interviewer who doesn't actually know HOW to interview (it happens!). If you feel that an interview didn't go quite the way that you had hoped, shake it off. Don't focus on things outside of your control.

Instead, focus on your preparation and be committed to engaging with the interviewer. If you do these two things, you will most likely be very successful in your interviews. Don't ever forget that the best candidates are not necessarily going to be the ones that land the job... It's the best INTERVIEWEE that will land the job! This guide will teach you how to become the best interviewee that the interviewer speaks to.

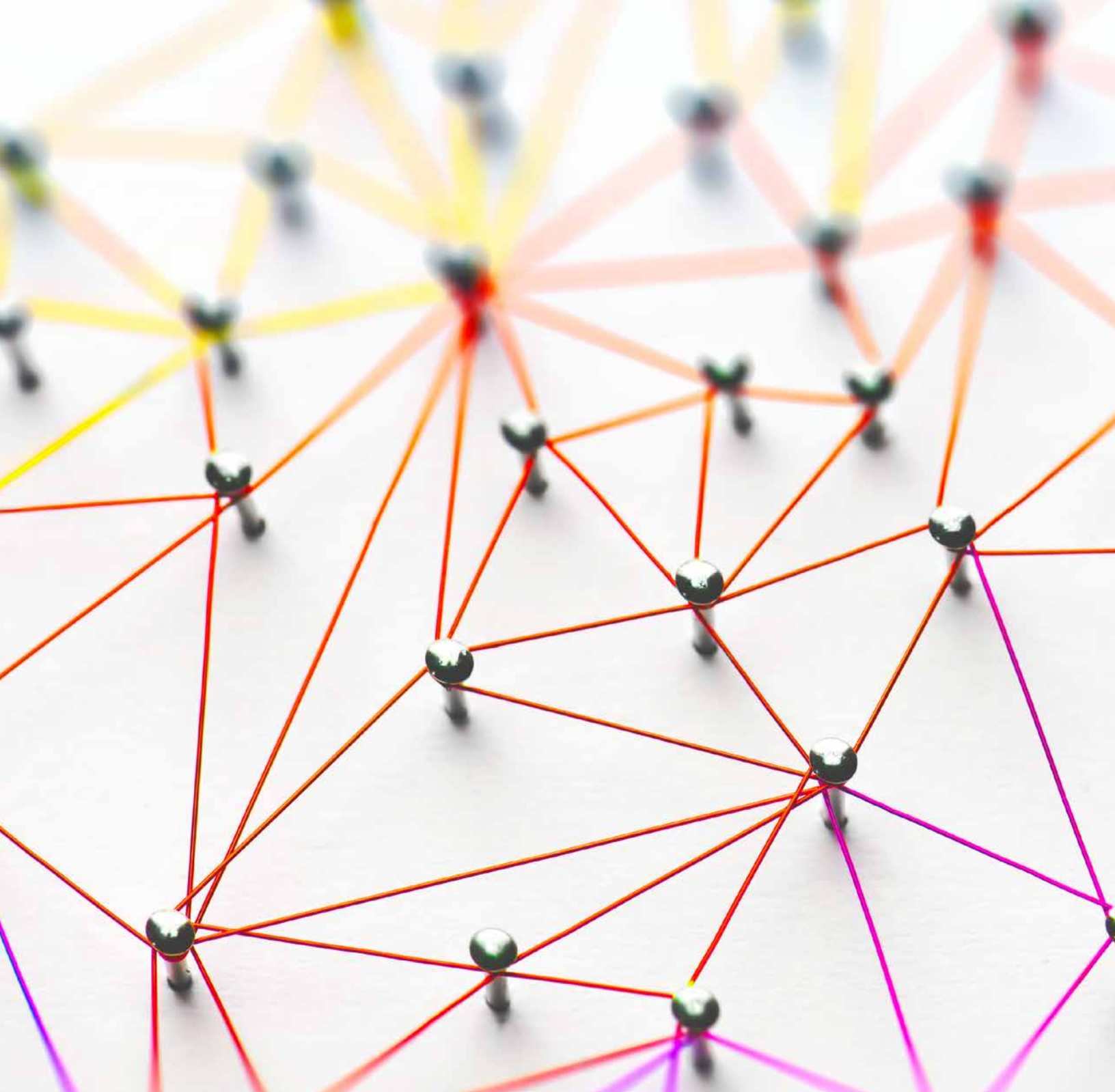
Preparing for Your Interview

You've spent many years invested in your career and education. You don't want to "wing it" when it comes to preparing for an interview. It's hard to get to this point where they invite you in for an interview, so make sure you prepare sufficiently for this very important meeting with a prospective employer. Make the preparation you put in to interviewing reflective of the preparation you have put in to the process it took to get to this point - you've sent out a ton of applications and finally you got called in for an interview!

After a quick pat on the back for landing an interview, you need to begin earnest preparation for the actual interview itself. First, everybody gets a little nervous and scared about an interview. The work you put into preparing for any interview you will be "high-yield" time and will help open opportunities to you and hopefully even land you your dream job (not to mention that the ability to interview well is a skill that you will need for the rest of your life because you never know when you might make a career/job change).

The goal of this guide is to help make the interview process less mysterious and make your preparation more efficient. The key to success and confidence in an interview is in your preparation!





The Big Picture

Let's say that you are at a party. Someone who you don't know comes up to you and starts a conversation with you. How long does it take before you form a distinct impression of that person? 30 minutes? No way. More like one minute. (often even shorter) That's a very important insight when it comes to understanding the process of forming an opinion of someone, interview or otherwise.

Yes, you will need to prepare your answers to potential interview questions, but don't neglect an even more important part of the interview, which is around the intangibles of interpersonal interactions.

People will form an impression of you within seconds of seeing you for the first time, and you want this impression to be a positive one!



Your ENERGY

Have you ever noticed that when you're happy and you talk with someone who is down, that it begins to drag you down over time? You want to escape. (Likewise, when you talk to someone who is in a more positive state than you, that it begins to lift you?) Your state of being is being communicated to other people constantly. In the party example earlier, that is what you are picking up on as you talk to the other person. It's not really about the words, but about the energy and the state. So, as you walk into an interview, observe your state. Take steps to boost it before you walk into your interview. Get good sleep the night before. Maintain focus on good thoughts. Meditate.

Try to be upbeat and positive. Don't complain about the weather or the terrible traffic on the way to the interview. Try to avoid intentionally bringing up negative issues or topics. Don't ruminate in your head about how to answer questions... that will just put you in an anxious state, which will be "communicated." You don't have to come up with instant answers. It's perfectly fine to think for a couple seconds before you answer a question or respond. Ask questions if you didn't understand what the interviewer stated. Make eye contact and gestures of acknowledgment when appropriate, such as nodding your head or smiling. You want to make sure that the interviewer knows you are interested and engaged with the interview process.



Finding COMMONALITY

An interview is subjective by nature. Whether you did well in an interview is dependent on how well the people in the interview connected. It's often the case that the best interviews are when the interviewer and candidate deviated off the interview template and engaged in an energetic discussion on a side topic that is of mutual interest.

on the person or in the person's surrounding (desk, bookshelf, pictures) which you can make connecting comments towards.

What you want to achieve is a conversational tone where the interviewer and candidate are having a fun interaction. The easiest way to achieve the conversational tone is to establish a sense of commonality. Within the interview, don't hesitate to ask questions and make observations which may serve as a basis to discover commonality with the interviewer. Another technique is to notice something

The interviewer wants to know that you're interested and engaged. A great way to let them know that you're truly interested is by asking relevant questions. We'll discuss the best types of questions to ask later in this Primer, but you want to make sure you find some sort of common ground with the interviewer. Make them feel connected to you in some way. Remember that the interviewer is not only evaluating you based on the responses you give during your interview, but also on the rapport that you were able to establish with them during the interview.



Telling Your AUTHENTIC STORIES

What is the best way to ensure success in an interview? Tell a lot of stories! Human beings are wired to listen to stories. One of the most common errors that candidates make is the failure to tell stories. After interviewing many candidates sometimes over multiple days, interviewers often remember the candidates who could tell the best stories.

is not the impression you want to give. Think through how you would answer possible interview questions and come up with authentic stories that convey the message and answer you would like to send.

Yes, you need to think through your answers to multiple interview questions, but you don't want to memorize your answers. Memorized answers will come across as contrived and robotic, and that

Candidates should come to their interview armed with plenty of examples (in the form of stories) that he or she is be ready to share. The main strategy about answering interview questions is through examples and stories.

The Big Picture (Your Preparation)

For the three aspects of interviewing (Energy, Commonality, and Stories), use the space below to consider how you will incorporate these into your upcoming interviews.



ENERGY

What are three things I will do to prepare for high energy during the interview?



COMMONALITY

What are three ways I will try to establish commonality with the interviewer?



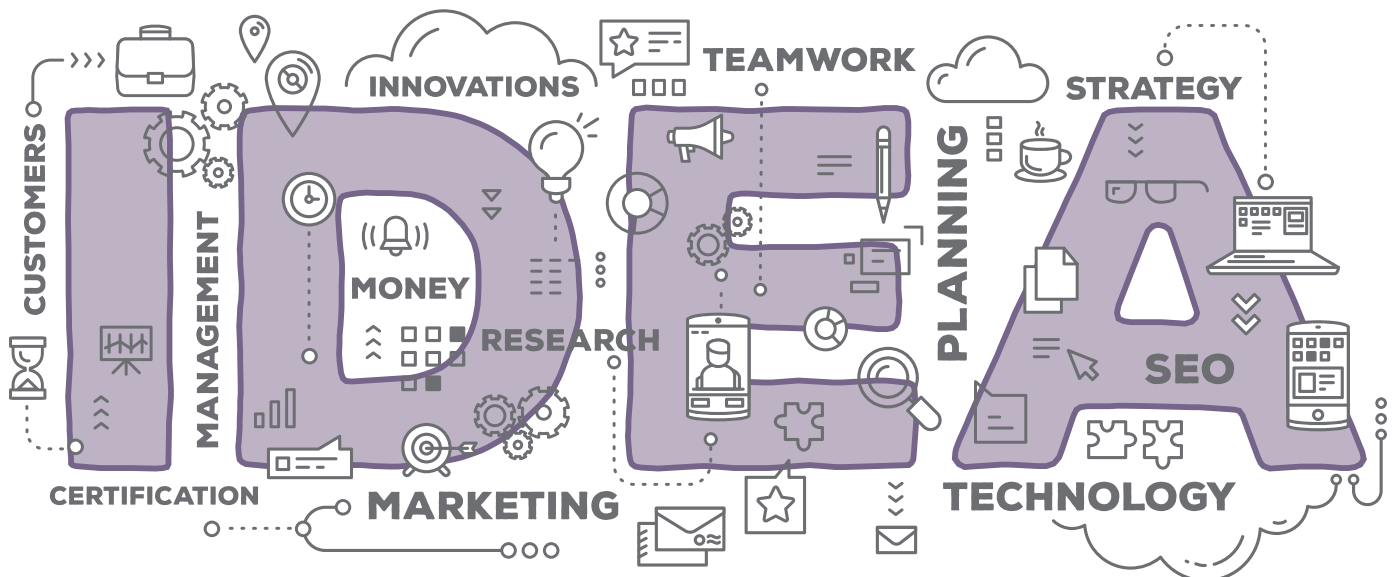
AUTHENTIC STORIES

What are three stories relevant to the interview which are unique to me?

The Core Message & Branding

The interview is like a press conference. Reporters can ask many different questions, but it is important for the speaker to know the key points that he or she wants to make. Rather than playing “defense” where one is just answering the interviewer’s questions, the candidate is looking to play “offense,” looking for opportunities to insert his or her core message through the questions that are posed by the interviewer. The main point for the candidate to communicate during an interview is not to say that he or she is qualified, but to convey how the candidate is unique among the other candidates. **You want to point out how you are uniquely qualified for this position, and why the interviewer should hire you instead of the other candidates they’ve been talking to.**

Try to put yourself in the interviewer’s shoes. You must understand another person’s perspective before you’re able to sway or influence that person’s opinions. What type of person is the interviewer looking for to fill this position? You want to be the solution to the problem the interviewer is trying to solve. The interviewer obviously has a position at the organization that they need filled (the problem) and you are hoping to be the candidate that gets to fill the position (the solution). Listen for clues from the interviewer about what unsatisfied needs or issues are present at the organization and try to determine how YOU could solve them.



What the interviewer is looking for

While the interviewer may ask many questions, he or she is really trying to get at three underlying questions:

1. Does this job candidate know what the organization is about?
2. Will he or she excel at the job?
3. Will he or she make people around him or her better?

Knowing these three underlying questions will allow you to make the case at the root of what the interviewer is looking for. The last thing that a business wants is to bring on people who can't play well with others or require a lot of hand-holding.

Direction, Competence, and Likeability

The three underlying questions in the previous page correspond to three themes of: Direction, Competence, Likeability. In the following page, there are three statements under “Direction,” “Competence,” and “Likeability,” respectively, which represent the case you are making about your candidacy for this particular job position. While you are answering many different questions, you are really addressing these nine statements:

DIRECTION

1. I know where I’m going professionally.
2. I’m aligned with something I care about.
3. I have a mature and strategic perspective on my career.

COMPETENCE

4. I am a smart person.
5. I can carry out the main tasks of the job competently.
6. I am resourceful and I get things done.

LIKEABILITY

7. You’ll enjoy working with me.
8. I work well with others.
9. I am a good citizen and am willing to contribute to the common good.

Knowing your signature strengths

How are you unique? Who are you when you are at your best? Relative to other candidates, where do you excel? Think of three adjectives that describe your uniqueness. Those are your “signature strengths.” That’s what you would bring to this particular job role; that’s why they should choose you instead of the other candidates that they’re talking to.

Think of examples (stories) to back up each adjective. During the interview, always be looking to interject these signature strengths into your interview response. Remember, you are trying to sell yourself and help the interviewer see why you’re the best fit for this position. You will have to make yourself stand out (in a good way) from the multitude of other candidates that the interviewer will be speaking to.

Your Core Message & Branding (Your Preparation)

For each of the three statements under “Direction,” “Competence,” and “Likeability,” think about how you would make the case for yourself in the affirmative for each statement.

DIRECTION

I know where I'm going professionally.

I'm aligned with something I care about.

I have a mature and strategic perspective on my career.

Does he/she know what this organization is about?

COMPETENCE

I am a smart person.

I can carry out the main tasks of the job competently.

I am resourceful and I get things done.

Will he/she excel at the job?

LIKEABILITY

You'll enjoy working with me.

I work well with others.

I am a good citizen and am willing to contribute to the common good

Will he/she make people around him/her better?

Signature Strengths: What are three adjectives to describe you at your best? How might others describe the best things about you? In the space below, reflect on your three signature strengths and their supporting examples.

My Signature Strength #1:

My Signature Strength #2:

My Signature Strength #3:

First Impressions, Grooming, & Etiquette

Before we continue with talking about interviews in general

Let's discuss appropriate behavior if the interviewer takes you to lunch or dinner or some type of meal in a social setting. This would be a time where first impressions, grooming, and small talk are put into action and you want to put your best foot forward.

Handling Yourself Socially

Sometimes you're invited to lunch or dinner with the interviewer and perhaps people within the department that you're applying to. This lunch or dinner is a part of the interview and it is one place where people begin to form impressions. In these lunches/dinners, be prepared to talk a little "shop" mixed in with some personal perspectives.



A Few Tips

- **Be inclusive.** When talking, include the other people sitting at the table in your conversation. Don't talk only to the main interviewer. Be friendly and conversational with everyone at your table or social circle.
- **It's not about the food.** Eat sparingly and drink sparingly. Don't make it look like you haven't eaten for 10 days. The food is just a prop for good conversation. Alcohol should be consumed in moderation, if at all. Watch what the other members of your group are doing and take their lead.
- **Ideas for table conversation.**
 - Complimentary observation about the location or food
 - Something about an interesting current event... "Did you hear about...?" (not politics please!)
 - "This reminds me of a time when...(something interesting that happened to you in the past)"
- **Have a few questions ready.** Sometime during the conversation, you will likely find yourself talking one-on-one with one of the main interviewers or decision makers. Have a few questions ready for that person. (Please see "Questions for the Interviewer" section on page 18 for ideas.)
- **Make sure you have done the research on the organization you are interviewing with.** You need to know what type of organization it is, how long they've been in existence, how big the organization is, if they're privately or publicly held, how their business is doing, etc. Try to find out the organization's competitors and any major trends/problems/issues going on in the industry that might be currently affecting them. You never want to go into an interview without having prepared yourself as much as possible on the specifics of the actual organization you will be talking to.

The Interview Format

Most interviews are “fit” interviews. During a fit interview, you should be prepared to tell convincing and vivid stories about yourself. The questions will focus around your background, your current career intent, and your behavioral characteristics. The key to doing well during these interviews is to develop a coherent story which synthesizes aspects of your past and behavioral characteristics to justify your current career direction. Be prepared to support claims you make about yourself in the form of examples. Certain fit interviews may also include a few technical questions.

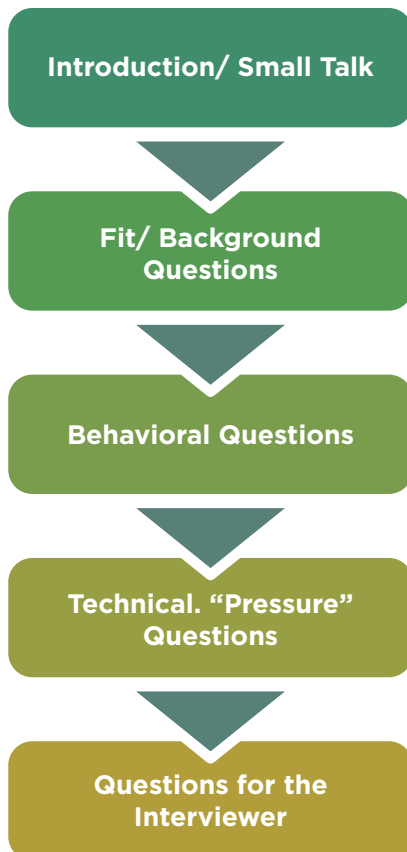
The Standard Interview Format

Conventional interviews are between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews will typically begin with a few minutes of small talk and pleasantries. Make sure to be conversational and don't sound rehearsed or robotic. Smile every now and then.

After the initial small talk, the interviewer will tend to ask fit questions which focus on the candidate's motivations and reasons for applying for the particular position at this organization.

From there, questions tend to shift towards behavioral questions aimed at understanding the candidate's traits and personal character and to ascertain if the candidate is a good fit for this job. The interview may also contain some technical questions, and you should have questions pre-prepared that you want to ask the interviewer. Keep in mind that you may even be asked to come back and take a personality test or some sort of qualifying exam for the position.

Lastly, remember that you are “interviewing” the organization as well. You need to decide if this is the place you can see yourself coming to work everyday. The interview is the time where you make the assessment of whether or not you would enjoy working at this particular place. If you actually do want the job and want to work for the organization, don't be afraid that at some point in the interview process, to actually state your fit and desire for the job.



Small Talk & The First Impression

First Impressions Matter

Although job candidates spend plenty of time preparing responses to likely interview questions, many neglect this “hidden” but significant side of the interview. The first impression is a function of three main factors: dress/grooming, positive energy, and initial small talk.

A Note About Dress and Grooming

Interview convention dictates that candidates be “clean and well-groomed.” (Although this is old-fashioned advice, many people who may be interviewing you are old.) Men should have a conservative hair style and no facial hair (mustache, beard) if possible. (Note: beards are becoming more acceptable. If you have one, keep it well-groomed.) Women should have a neat hairstyle. Unless otherwise noted, all interviews are conducted in business formal attire. Your suit should fit well and should be wrinkle-free. Men should avoid jewelry other than a watch and a conservative ring. Women have more leeway with respect to jewelry; typically, stud earrings, necklaces, rings (on hands), and watches are acceptable. Make sure your shoes are polished and that your whole outfit looks “put together” neatly. This is not the time to be making bold fashion statements. You want to look professional and polished, so it’s best to err on the conservative side.

The Role of Small Talk

During the first few minutes of the interview, the interviewer is likely to engage you in small talk. The goal of small talk is to develop a conversational flow for the rest of the interview. Save the long, prepared interview responses for later and engage in lighter conversation during the first few minutes of the interview. During the small talk phase, closely observe the interviewer and attune to the energy and posture of the interviewer. You want to build a connection to the interviewer. When responding to small talk questions, always put in extra information so that the interviewer has opportunities to follow up and keep the conversation going. Also, notice the environment of the interviewer, you can comment on objects such as pictures or books which may serve as ways to build commonality and rapport.

Avoid bringing up any controversial topics. Try to put a positive spin on any topics that come up. While you’re talking, watch the interviewer to determine if they’re giving any nonverbal clues that you should be picking up on. Small talk is going to be a part of any interview. If you are uncomfortable with small talk, then you need to push yourself to try to start light small talk conversations with anyone you run into. Try talking to people in the line at the grocery store, the bank, or in a waiting room. The more you practice the art of small talk, the more confident you will feel in your ability to chit chat with the interviewer.

Keep in mind throughout the interview process that YOU control how much you disclose at any given time. Remember that anything you say can lead to a follow-up question or comment that might probe deeper into a topic you brought up. Only share information in an interview if it will further your candidacy. Never lie, but you don’t have to willingly bring up detrimental information or step into a landmine that you placed yourself. You control what you share with the interviewer. Make sure what you share is positive and will further enhance the probability of you getting asked for another interview and eventually being offered the job.

Small Talk (Your Preparation)

Ways I plan to engage in small talk with the interviewer



Recognizing Question Types

Thousands of questions, but only 3 types

Although there may be thousands of different questions, there are only three types of questions. There are fit questions which seek to assess your motivation and professional direction. There are behavioral questions which seek to assess your character and personality. Then there are technical questions which seek to assess your knowledge and ability within a certain discipline.

Is it better to review hundreds of questions and how to answer each of them, or is it better to recognize the question type and answer the question appropriate to the question type? I think you'll find the latter approach to be more time-efficient and cohesive towards your core messaging. Remember the press conference analogy and know the message you wish to deliver.

3 types of questions

Your job in answering questions during the interview is to recognize which of the three types of questions it is and use the right method to answer them, while reinforcing your core message. The three types of questions and the general approach to answer each question type are summarized in the table below:

	Example	What it's trying to assess	How to approach
FIT QUESTIONS	Why are you applying for this job?	Whether you have a well-thought out reason for your professional choices	Know your narrative, communicate your narrative focusing on the "why"
BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS	How do you handle difficult people?	What kind of person are you, and how you will respond to job-related situations	Know your strengths, tell anecdotes in the Context-Action-Result format
TECHNICAL QUESTIONS	What is the biggest challenge facing our industry?	Whether you have the background knowledge and whether you can think and communicate clearly	Do your background research, be prepared to hold a thoughtful discussion on a topic



FIT Questions

After some small talk, the interview will tend to transition towards a more formal line of questions. Often, the interviewer will begin by asking the candidate, “Tell me about yourself.” The interviewer could also ask about the candidate’s motivation to go to work at this particular organization or in this particular field or why the interviewer studied their particular field in school. These “fit” questions will tend to occur during the early part of the interview. (Note: For unstructured interviews, the interviewer might remain in “small talk” mode for the entire interview. You will still want to interject your message within the conversational small talk.)

What They’re Trying to Assess

The interviewer is trying to understand the candidate’s maturity regarding choosing a professional path. Does the candidate have a well-considered reason for making the choices which have led him or her to be interviewing here today? Also, the interviewer is trying to get a sense of whether the candidate really wants to work at their organization. The interviewer knows that a lot of time (as well as money and resources) will be spent training you and getting you up to speed for the position that they’re trying to fill, and they want to know whether you intend to be in this position long-term and if you would be a good fit.

Potential Questions

- “Tell me about yourself”
- “Why did you choose to study (your course of study)”?
- “Why did you study (your degree) in college?”
- “Why do you think this position would be a good fit for you?”
- “What is your career goal?”
- “Tell me about (something on your resume/CV).”
- “What are your interests outside of work?”
- “If you won the lottery and didn’t have to work anymore, what would you do?”

General Strategies

All job candidates should prepare an overarching narrative (~ 3 minutes long), which is referred to as the “odyssey” which covers their professional journey from their past, present, to the future. The end of the odyssey should tie in to why the candidate would be a good fit at the organization that he or she is interviewing with. The odyssey encompasses many of the sub-narratives such as the reason for going into your particular field of study and why you want to work at this particular place in this particular job position.

However, one can only highlight a few key points in a 3-minute odyssey. So, pick only 2 or 3 things per phase (past, present, future). Don’t go on to “list” activities. It’s more important to talk about the “why” of decisions and actions more than to go into the “what” of activities in your odyssey. When encountering the first fit question, look to tell your odyssey to lay out the overall narrative of your career and what got you to this point.

Your odyssey answer needs to be 3 minutes or less. It is important that you retain your interviewer’s attention and not drone on. Be careful to not put out too much information (TMI) if it’s not necessary.

FIT Questions (Your Preparation)

In the space below, construct the key elements of your odyssey. There are three phases of the odyssey, and each phase should take about a minute of response time. Then reflect on questions related to sub-narratives such as “Why this particular job position?”

- What were your interests as a kid?
- Most formative experience?
- Who do you most admire?
- Why this industry?

- What do you think of your school or current employer?
- Why did you decide to do something on your CV or resume?

- Why this organization?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
- Describe your dream job.

← PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE →
<p>Three unique and memorable things about your past which shaped the person you are now. (values & strengths)</p>	<p>Three significant things you have done or are doing in your current role or study: activities / accomplishments / leadership. (focus on the why and not just on listing)</p>	<p>Discuss why you want this particular position. Discuss your future goals. Discuss the attractiveness of this particular company.</p>
<p>Why did you choose to study/work in this field?</p>	<p>Why do you want to work at this organization in this job position?</p>	<p>How do you see your career progressing here?</p>
<p>What do you love to talk about?</p>	<p>What activities are meaningful to you?</p>	<p>What do you hope to accomplish?</p>



Behavioral Questions

Most interview questions are behavioral questions. They come in many shapes and sizes, but they all are trying to understand your character traits. The last thing the interviewer wants to do is hire you, invest a lot of time and resources into training you, and then discover that you were never a good fit for this particular position anyway.

What They're Trying to Assess

Each job has a set of traits that organizations are seeking in candidates for the particular position that they're trying to fill. Such traits may include leadership, integrity, analytical ability, creativity, and so on. Interviewers use behavioral questions to assess the candidate's aptitude in a set of traits. No matter what the form of the question, figure out what trait or characteristic of you that question is trying to assess, and respond using your prepared examples.

You want to convey that you would be a great team player in this organization. Some characteristics of good team players are that they are optimistic even in tough situations, they play fair, and they accept responsibility for problems or issues that they cause. Good team players are also able to give compliments to other team members when needed as well as offer constructive criticism when needed. When you are asked to describe situations or scenarios, think "win-win." Make sure that you never identify a scenario or situation that would cause the interviewer to think that you might potentially be the problem. Don't be negative!

Potential Questions

- "What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?"
- "What makes you different from the other candidates I'll see today?"
- "Tell me about a time when you faced an ethical dilemma."
- "What is the biggest mistake you have made?"
- "What was the hardest decision you've ever had to make?"
- "Tell me about a difficult encounter you've had in school or a previous job. How did you handle it?"
- "How would your former classmates/colleagues describe you?"
- "What kind of people frustrate you?"
- "Who do you admire? Why?"
- "What do you think is more important, intelligence or hard work?"
- "Describe a time when you had to convince someone to your point of view."

General Strategies

A well-told anecdote (about 2-minutes long) in the Context-Action-Result (CAR) format makes for the most effective response to behavioral questions. As part of your preparation for behavioral questions, you should develop and rehearse a number of examples in the CAR format that you can draw upon during the interview. We recommend that you prepare at least 10 to 15 examples in various situations (adversity, leadership, teamwork, etc.). You should pay particular attention to anecdotes relating to your signature strengths and try to work those anecdotes into your responses to behavioral questions.

The Context-Action-Result format (~2 minutes long)

Context What was the problem or situation?	Action What did you do?	Result What Happened? What did you learn?

Behavioral Questions (Your Preparation)

Take an inventory of the examples you can cite relating to the traits listed on the left-hand column. Develop each example into an anecdote in the CAR format. Be sure to have the majority of the anecdotes be relevant to professional situations.

	ANECDOTE #1	ANECDOTE #2
STRENGTH		
WEAKNESS	What is the opposite of your strength?	What is the opposite of your strength?
CREATIVITY		
CONFLICT		
TEAMWORK		
LEADERSHIP		
CRISIS		
FUN		
ANALYSIS		
ETHICS		
SETBACK		

Think Also About:

My favorite book / author	My favorite TV show	My favorite movie
My favorite hobby	My favorite place	My favorite food
A person I admire	A Joke you can tell	Your personal hashtag (#)



Technical & Pressure Questions

Technical questions test the relevant knowledge of the candidate and/or the ability of the candidate to use the appropriate analytical processes for a given situation. Although fit and behavioral questions will be the bulk of the questions, it is often the technical questions which lead to the most interesting conversations during an interview. These questions are generally presented as a discussion on a relevant topic within the field of study or the industry in general. The questions could also be posed as scenarios where you will need to talk through an issue (e.g. what you would do if such and such happened) through a disciplined, logical framework. If there are items on your resume/CV which are technical in nature, you should also be prepared to describe the process of that activity through a technical lens (e.g. research).

(Note: technical questions are rare, but if you integrate a technical answer into your interview by showing your engagement and thoughtfulness about a professionally relevant topic, this is a nice way to distinguish yourself.)

What They're Trying to Assess

Through technical questions, the interviewer can get a sense of whether the candidate is interested in, thinks like, and talks like "one of us." Each field of study or industry has a set of issues that only people in that particular field of study or industry understand, and a lingo that only insiders use. This is your chance to show that you belong. Unlike fit or behavioral questions which are softer, technical questions call upon you to demonstrate your knowledge and your ability to think through an issue.

Potential Questions

Many interviews don't even include formal technical questions. However, you should be prepared to "talk shop" about issues relevant to the particular industry or company where you're applying.

- "What do you think about (relevant field of study/industry specific topic)?"
- "Describe what you did for (something on your resume/CV)."
- "What technical aspect about our organization most interests you? Why?"
- "If you encountered the following scenario, talk me through what you would do?"
- "If you wanted to know more about (a topic) how would you go about finding out more?"
- "Tell me a joke."

General Strategies

What is most fascinating to you about things going on in your particular field of study or industry? What can you talk endlessly about? Interviewers want to see that there are things in your field of study that you are passionate about. Try to work those topics of interest into the conversation. You will need to identify what they are and do some background research to be able to hold a conversation on them. If you are asked a formal technical question (e.g. a scenario question), think about the logical frameworks of thinking for your particular field of study/industry and answer using those frameworks in a structured way.

Technical & Pressure Questions (Your Preparation)

Preparing for technical questions requires research into relevant topics related to your field of study, the industry this organization is in, and, the particular organization and position that you are applying to.

Notes & Research On Current Events

- Know what's going on in this industry and your field of study
- What topics/developments in the industry are most fascinating to you?
- Think about your opinions on key issues

Notes & Research On Organization

- Know the key initiatives of the organization
- Know about key leaders of the organization
- Know or inquire about the key initiatives of the department in the organization

Notes & Research On Scenarios

- Crisis scenario
- Technical issues scenario
- Analytical scenario



QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER

At the end of the interview, the interviewer may ask whether you have questions for him or her. Make sure you ask some thoughtful questions because asking questions shows your interest and engagement. Never leave without asking at least a question or two! Try to avoid questions that are easily researched, that may put the interviewer or organization in a negative light, or that are purely logistical in nature (e.g. parking, vacation, etc.). Rather, ask questions that show an engagement and interest with the job itself. Also, it may be good to begin by asking questions of the interviewer about his or her own experiences and opinions. How long have they worked at this particular organization? What do they like most about working there? Even though the most common time to ask your questions is at the end of the interview, it is often good to sprinkle questions within the body of the interview to create a conversational tone.

What They're Trying to Assess

They are trying to gauge your level of interest in them. So, a thoughtful question that shows investment of time conveys a positive interest (as well as the maturity of your thought processes). However, don't just ask clever questions for the sake of asking clever questions. The thoughtfulness/cleverness needs to be balanced with the fact that you should be genuinely interested in the answers themselves. Also, asking thoughtful questions in a timely manner shows social acuity and gives the interview better conversational tone and flow.

Potential Questions (For the Interviewer)

It is often easier to begin questions by engaging the interviewer's own experiences and opinions. Avoid questions which may put the interviewer or the company in a negative light.

- "How long have you been with (the organization)?"
- "What do you like best about working at (the organization)?"
- "What do you notice about the type of people that tend to succeed at (the organization)?"
- "What are the key initiatives in the particular department I'd be working?"
- "I'm curious about your opinion on (current hot topic in your industry)"
- "I was really interested to know more about (initiative of the organization or relevant topic in the industry)?"

General Strategies

You should prepare some questions to have in your "back pocket" and be prepared to ask at least three questions during the interview. The questions are typically aligned with: the background of the interviewer, the company you're applying to, or topics within your particular field that are applicable to the position you're seeking. You don't have to wait until the end of the interview to ask questions. You should also feel free to ask spontaneous questions about topics which are of mutual interest during the body of the interview.

QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER (Your Preparation)

For the three categories of questions for the interviewer below, prepare three questions that you might ask. Find opportunities to ask some of these questions, and feel free to ask questions spontaneously based on the situation.

Questions Relating To The Background Of The Interviewer:

Questions Relating To The Organization/Unit:

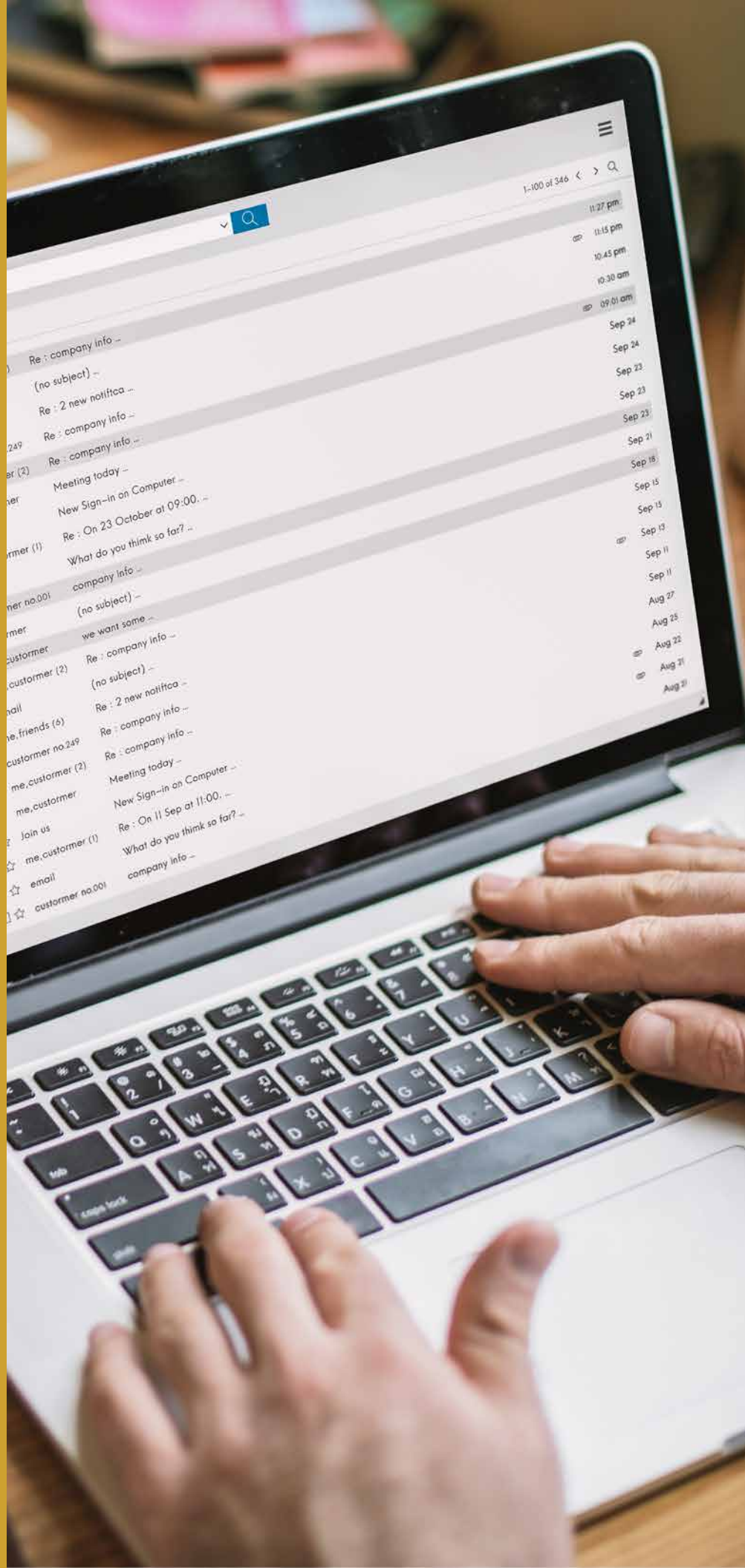
Questions Relating To The Industry:

After the Interview

Send genuine communication (email) of appreciation

After your interview, you're probably wondering whether you should follow up with either an email or a hand-written note. Yes, it is good practice to do that. At the same time, realize that interviewers may be receiving many similar notes from other candidates and may not have the time to respond. Don't worry if they don't respond.

If you do decide to follow up, an email is most likely fine. You can still send written notes, and that was more common practice back when, but these days, it is not required. In writing the notes, don't send form letters. Readers know when they are receiving spam. Take the time to customize the note. The note doesn't have to be long, but express something authentic about the organization that you are interested in or something you had discussed of common interest during the interview.



YOUR INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

Good preparation is the key to acing your interview. As you are planning your interview, look at the list below. Have you done the following things?

- Do you have a good interview outfit? (Are you sure? Did someone with good “fashion sense” approve?)
- Do you have your “core message” developed? (page 8)
- Have you done your homework to research the organization, unit, and interviewer (if possible)(Page 19)?
- Have you thought about what small talk you might make? (Page 11)
- Do you have a well-rehearsed 3-minute Odyssey? (Page 14)
- Do you have 10+ well-prepared anecdotes to answer behavioral questions? (Page 17)
- Do you know what’s going on in the field/industry? (Page 19)
- Do you have at least 3 well-considered questions for the interviewer? (Page 21)
- Have you rehearsed the interview with someone? 5 times?
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

“One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation.”
-Arthur Ashe
