Preparing for a Behavioral Interview

The interview is the single most important part of the job/internship process. Your written resume and cover letter have done their job in securing you an interview, but now it’s about utilizing your verbal communication skills. It’s important to thoroughly prepare for an interview and have a strong understanding of the company and position prior to meeting. Below you will find a series of steps to follow as you prepare for your behavioral interviews. (Please see our other resources if you are preparing for a technical or case interview.)

Find Out Who Is Conducting the Interview

When you are called to schedule your interview, be sure to ask who you will be interviewing with. Get the interviewers name and job title, and write it down along with the date, time, and location of your interview. Once you have the interviewer’s information, find out what you can about them: Search for them on LinkedIn, Google the interviewer’s name, and look on the company’s website.

Do Your Homework - Review the Job Description and Research the Company

Employers expect you to know about their organization and industry. Chances are high that they will ask you questions designed to test whether or not you did your homework.

- Review the company’s website and any literature you have, know the latest "news" about the company. UT Library databases, such as Factiva, Reference USA, and Business Journals and the Book of Lists can help you conduct this research.
- Talk to other students who have interned or worked with the company, find out if you know anyone currently employed at the company and speak to them.
- Generate insightful questions to ask the interviewer about the company based on what you've read and heard. Don’t just ask questions for the sake of asking them – make them count!
- Stay away from questions that can be answered based off of the company's website- instead ask detailed, in-depth questions that get at the culture of the company, the work being done and the position's responsibilities.

Identify the Skills, Projects and Characteristics You Want To Communicate

Review your resume to make sure you are prepared to answer any questions pertaining to its content.

- Think about your skills and how you can showcase them.
- Identify which experiences you want to feature and tailor them to the job description.
- Come up with at least six to eight experiences that demonstrate your skills and personal characteristics.

Create Your PARL Stories

The PARL method is the ultimate way to successfully answer example based interview questions. PARL stands for Problem, Action, Result, Learn. After you’ve familiarized yourself with the PARL method, we suggest that you identify six to eight examples where you demonstrated behaviors and skills that the employer is seeking based on their job description.
Think of examples that will showcase your top selling points and ability to learn from difficult situations.
- Half of your examples should be positive, such as accomplishments, goals and results.
- The other half should be situations that started out negatively, but either ended positively or clearly communicate how you “made lemonade out of lemons”.
- Vary your examples; don’t take them all from just one area of your life or from one experience.
- Use fairly recent examples, which showcase you can do the job.
- Your stories should be no longer than one to two minutes each.

Select Your Interview Outfit

During the job search process, first impressions are critical. Remember, you are marketing a product -- yourself -- to a potential employer, and the first thing the employer sees when greeting you is your attire. Your outfit should be appropriate to the occasion and should not overshadow you. The employer should remember your positive attributes, not what you were wearing.

How should you dress? Dressing conservatively is the safest route. Investigate your prospective employer and match your outfit to the company culture. An important caveat: if the company is known for its casual environment, dress one degree more formal than the norm. If t-shirts and jeans are standard; dress business casual. Remember you are making a first impression and trying to LAND THE JOB. Everyone else at the company has a job and already passed the test -- you need to earn the right to be casual in the future. If you overdress (which is rare, but can happen) or underdress (the more likely scenario), the potential employer may feel that you don’t care enough about the job to take the time to learn about the company’s culture and dress appropriately.

Check out the Professional Dress Guide!

Practice and Become Mentally Prepared

Practice will help you reduce interview anxiety, improve your interview skills and, in many cases, gain important feedback about how you interview. It will also help you sharpen your verbal communication skills—which are extremely important. According to a Society of Human Resource Management survey, poor communication skills were the number one turn-off for hiring managers.

- Review this list of common behavioral interview questions to prepare.
- Set up a mock interview with a Career Design Center Career Coach.
  - During your mock interview, the Career Coach will ask you a series of questions that will mimic the questions you may be asked during an interview; you will then be given feedback on your answers, mannerisms, and communication styles.
  - Mock interviews can help you improve your presentation skills, receive feedback and suggestions, and hone your interviewing skills to help you get that all important job/internship offer.
  - Wear your interview outfit to the mock interview so the Career Coach can evaluate if it is appropriate.
- Practice in the mirror, or with a friend or relative.