Interview Tips

The following tips are intended to help you feel more confident and prepared during an interview. They offer practical guidance on how to answer questions clearly, present yourself professionally, and make a strong, positive impression. By applying these strategies, you'll be better positioned to communicate your experiences, highlight your strengths, and successfully navigate the interview process.

• Use the STAR method to answer behavioral questions
Structure your responses with Situation, Task, Action, and Result to keep answers focused and relevant. More on STAR from MIT

• Keep responses brief and intentional
Aim for 60 to 90 second answers: long enough to provide meaningful insight, but short enough to stay clear and focused. *While in-depth explanations are good in technical and training environments, etc.* This is where the STAR method can be utilized to keep your answers productive and structured.

• Speak to your learning process, not just outcomes
Interviewers are often just as interested in *how* you approach challenges as they are in the outcome. When responding to questions about problem-solving, or how you learn new concepts, aim to share examples that highlight your adaptability and critical thinking, such as learning a new tool on the job, improving a broken process, or navigating a complex project. Clearly explain what you did, what you learned, and how you applied that learning in future situations.

• Prepare a "failure" story that shows growth
When answering questions about times your performance fell short or you received tough feedback from a manager, choose an example that is honest but low risk. Situations like a missed deadline due to an unrealistic workload or a communication breakdown during training are appropriate. Avoid justifications or explanations, as it can come across as "making excuses". Instead, focus on what you learned from that experience and how it helped you grow, improve your performance, and become a stronger contributor.

• Avoid answering behavioral questions with "I've never been in that situation"
When interviewers ask questions like "Tell me about a time you disagreed with your manager," they're not trying to get you to admit to poor behavior. They want to understand how you handle conflict and communicate in challenging situations. If you don't have a direct example, it's perfectly fine to say something like, "I haven't had any major disagreements with a manager, but if I were in that situation, here's how I would handle it." This still gives the interviewer valuable insight into your thought process without forcing you to make something up or reference an irrelevant situation.

• Aim to reframe: Staying positive when referencing a negative
When interviewers ask why you left a previous job or about challenges you've had with past teammates, it's important to be honest while remaining professional. Speaking negatively about others can leave a poor impression, as interviewers are also evaluating how diplomatic you are when describing past team dynamics. Keep the focus on yourself, including your decisions, growth, and what you learned from the experience. The best practice is to weave in the lessons you took away from the situation. This

approach demonstrates accountability and keeps the focus where it belongs—on who you are and how you handle tough situations.

• Be prepared to answer questions like "What do you know about us?"
Take time to review the company's mission statement, explore their website, and understand the job description and their place in the industry. This shows that you are thoughtful about your career *goals* and genuinely invested in joining their team.

• Don't be afraid to pause
If you're stumped by a tough question, it's perfectly fine to say, "That's a great question, let me think about that for a second."

• Prepare 2–3 questions in advance
Having thoughtful questions ready shows genuine interest and engagement, but it's also an important step for *you* to better understand if the role and company are the right fit. Focus on asking about things like team dynamics, training, certifications, growth opportunities, or what success looks like in the role. Bringing a small notebook is generally considered acceptable, so long as you don't reference it too frequently during the interview.

How to Interpret Interview Questions

Most interviews include a mix of behavioral, situational, and technical questions. Understanding the structure and intent behind these formats can help you feel more prepared and less anxious during the interview process. Below is a breakdown of common question types and the purpose behind each category. While not exhaustive, this list provides a solid foundation for approaching interviews with clarity and confidence.

• Behavioral Questions
Example: "Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult coworker."
These questions are designed to reveal how you communicate and conduct yourself in a professional setting. Interviewers are looking for real-life examples that demonstrate your self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and ability to handle challenges thoughtfully. Your responses should highlight how you manage interpersonal dynamics, show empathy, exercise sound judgment, and contribute to team success. This is also a chance to show that you can take the initiative and learn from past experiences.

• Situational Questions
Example: "What would you do if you were assigned multiple urgent tasks at once?"
These are hypothetical scenarios meant to assess how you would handle challenges or decisions you might face in the role. They test your problem-solving skills, adaptability, and alignment with the company's expectations. Interviewers are not necessarily looking for the perfect answer. They want to see how you think through a situation, whether you know when to ask for help, and how you adjust when things don't go as planned.

• Technical or Skills-Based
Example: "Can you walk me through how you approach diagnosing and solving a technical or mechanical issue in your work?"

Interviewers want to understand your process for handling technical challenges or completing role-specific tasks. As you advance in your career, these questions may become more specific, but their core purpose stays the same. Avoid using too much jargon unless asked about a specific tool or system. Focus on clarity, relevance, and how your skills apply to the role that you are interviewing for.

• Motivational and Cultural Fit
Example: "Why do you want to work here?"
These questions help interviewers understand what motivates you, what kind of environment you thrive in, and whether you align with the company's values and goals. They also offer insight into your social awareness, understanding of the organization, and how the role supports your broader career plans. A strong answer is realistic, thoughtful, and relevant to either the position you're applying for or a potential long-term career path within the company.

• Self-Awareness
Example: "What's your biggest weakness?"
These questions are meant to assess how well you understand your own strengths, weaknesses, and work habits. They also give interviewers a sense of your ability to reflect, grow from challenges, and respond to feedback in a constructive way. The most effective responses include a specific example of a skill or behavior you've actively worked to improve. Choose something that doesn't undermine your core qualifications and focus your answer on outlining the steps you took and the positive outcome that resulted.

• Career Goals and Aspirations
Example: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"
These questions help interviewers understand whether you're looking for more than just a job and if you're thinking about building a career. They're looking for a realistic sense of how this opportunity could support your long-term growth. The most effective answers are practical and sincere, showing that you've thoughtfully considered how the role aligns with your broader goals. Genuine motivation is far more impactful than a polished response that doesn't reflect your true interests.

• Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking
Example: "Describe a time you had to make a decision with limited information."
These questions are designed to evaluate how you approach complex or unfamiliar situations, how you make decisions under pressure, and how you navigate uncertainty. Interviewers want to understand your thought process. Do you take a logical approach, consider different perspectives, and remain calm when faced with challenges? A strong answer shows that you can think critically, adapt when things don't go as planned, and act with confidence even when the path forward isn't completely clear.