

Now that you've secured an interview, you've already convinced the employer that you could be the right person for the job. The interview is your chance to connect with them and determine if the job and company are right for you. While you can't predict every question, preparing for common topics like organizational skills and teamwork, and reflecting on your own experiences, will help. One effective way to show employers that you're the right person for the job is by using the STAR method to tell specific stories and examples of your skills and abilities.

PREPARE EXPERIENCES TO SHARE

When getting ready for your interview, think about past experiences where you used skills applicable to the job for which you are interviewing. Brainstorm three to five stories from work, volunteering, or school related activities that demonstrate how you have the skills needed for the position. During the interview you'll only have to decide which story to tell, rather than think of a new story for each question.

What anecdotes illustrate your strengths, values, characteristics, and experience?

- Situation that involves a change or improvement you're passionate about making?
- Situation that challenged you?
- Action you took to save resources like time or money, or improve systems, processes, or outcomes?
- Situation that involved conflict?
- Situation that involved failure, learning or growth?
 - Employers are typically looking for self-awareness and a commitment to self-improvement and growth. It's best to avoid answering questions about weaknesses with a "strength," like being a perfectionist.
- Situation involving teamwork or leadership?

CRAFTING YOUR PITCH

Your 'elevator' pitch is a short summary of your background and relevant experiences.

- Introduction: Name, education, work experience, strengths, passions, & goals
- Think of 1-2 statements that clearly and concisely describe what inspires/drives you, what you hope to achieve, what differentiates you?
- Include a situation where you solved a problem, overcame an obstacle, or a significant accomplishment you worked hard to achieve
- Who are you as a person? What do you enjoy outside of work? What drives you?

THE STAR METHOD

- **Situation** - First, describe the situation you experienced. Be concise and clear - this is not the focus - but it is important for the employer to understand; simplify if necessary.
- **Task** - Concisely explain a related task, problem, or objective to the situation with which you were faced or had to complete.
- **Action** - This is the most important part of your answer, and you are encouraged to explain and expand. Your response, ideally, can help the employer envision you working for their company.
- **Result** - How did you resolve the situation: what was the result? An excellent strategy is to answer concisely: "That was an example of" or "as a result..."

The STAR method will help keep your answers on topic and be complete. When you prepare, you should spend 60-70% of your response focusing on the Action and Result.

Example Question:

Describe a time when you disagreed with a co-worker; how was that resolved?

Example Answer:

[Situation] "I worked at Macy's last holiday season. I was placed in a team of three to achieve sales goals and increase customer loyalty."

[Task] "Initially, one of the team members and I had different approaches, which led to some tension between us. I was customer-oriented, and they didn't interact much with customers. This resulted in our department not meeting sales goals."

[Action] "I organized a meeting with my manager and co-worker to develop strategies to work better as a team. During the meeting I suggested we provide each other constructive feedback while recognizing and respecting our different perspectives."

[Result] "By understanding each other's styles and approaches, we were able to better support each other. For the next two weeks our team exceeded our sales goal by \$100."

This story could be used to answer a variety of questions!



THREE THINGS TO RESEARCH BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

Yourself

Reflect on your experiences, and be familiar with all aspects of your resume, cover letter, and your application responses. Know the specific details of your relevant experiences.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your values?
- What issues do you care deeply about?
- What unique characteristics do you bring?
- Why do you want to work for this organization in particular?

*Tip: If any of these questions are difficult to answer, try thinking about what a close friend or family member would say about you if asked these questions.

Be prepared to address mistakes, areas for growth and development, or skill gaps

One of the best ways to do this is by stating what you learned from a mistake or failure, or describe steps you're taking to continue learning and developing professionally

Position

Study the job description to pinpoint the set of skills the position requires, and assess how your experiences relate directly to the position.

Employer/Industry

Gather information about the employer (via LinkedIn, the company website, etc.) to help you prepare to answer and ask questions.

- Re-read the job description: Identify key terms and think about how to show you're a good fit.
- Learn about the organization: Understand the company's goals, culture, and any current events or trends possibly affecting the organization.
- Research the interviewer: Check their company profile, LinkedIn, or any published work.
- Prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer
 - What are the daily responsibilities for the position?
 - Can you provide an example of someone who excelled in this position and what made them successful?
 - What diversity, inclusion and cultural competency training does the company provide to their employees?
 - What is your timeline for making a hiring decision?

INTERVIEW TIPS

Phone Interviews

Phone interviews are often used as screening interviews for employers to identify the strongest candidate for virtual or in-person interviews. Do not answer the phone for a potential employer if you are not ready; be in a quiet, comfortable location.

Virtual Interviews

Virtual interviews are more common these days and can be helpful when applying for a job that is far away or remote.

- Test your technology ahead of time to make sure everything is working properly. Make sure to have a backup plan if technology isn't working;
- Limit your distractions. Try to be in a quiet setting where you are alone. Turn your phone to silent and make sure other notification noises on your computer are turned off temporarily.
- Remember to look at the camera and not yourself.

Practicing for an Interview

Meeting with a career advisor, conducting a mock interview, or sitting down with a friend or family to practice are all great ways to prepare. Dressing up for a mock interview will help it feel like a real interview. You can also try recording yourself to help create awareness of nervous habits or speech (for example, saying um frequently, tapping fingers, etc.)

DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Dress in proper attire
- Bring printed copies of your resume, references, and a list of questions to ask the interviewer
- Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing, visualization, or repeating a mantra
- Silence your phone
- Be polite and considerate to all staff members
- Take note of every interviewer's name and get their business card if possible
- Listen to the questions carefully and ask for clarification if anything is unclear before responding

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Promptly Write a Thank You Note
 - Emailed thank-you notes are acceptable, handwritten is preferred; Send one to each person with whom you met; Send a thank you note within 24 hours.
- Consider any difficult questions, and think about how to improve your responses for the future
- Consider how the position could meet your goals and whether the culture seems like a good fit
- If you haven't heard back after the initial hiring timeline, check in with the interviewer once to reaffirm your interest in the positions and ask about a new timeline.

What if I Have to Come Back for Another Interview?

1. Often, questions asked during a second interview are focused on assessing the candidates' understanding of the company and its objectives, and the specific tasks of the position.
2. Be prepared to answer additional behavioral questions. Employers often assume the way you handled previous situations will be similar to the way you'll handle similar situations in the future.

MOCK INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

Four Types of Questions You May be Asked

Every question asked has a reason behind it. Learning to analyze and thoughtfully respond to questions you are asked are important interview skills. This will help you highlight your most relevant experiences. Many of these questions can be answered using the STAR method, especially the behavior questions.

1. General/Open Ended Questions:

"What strengths do you offer?" These questions can be difficult. Focus on what is relevant to the position and use the STAR method to strengthen your answer.

2. Behavior-based Questions:

"Describe a time when...." These questions are based off the theory that past behavior predicts future behavior. The STAR method is key for these questions.

3. Case-study Questions:

The employer may ask you to read and then analyze a scenario. These are designed to see and hear your thought process. Make sure to share aloud how you arrived at a decision, and feel free to ask for more time.

4. Off-the-wall Questions:

Usually asked towards the end to understand your personality and observe your reaction to something unexpected. The best responses tend to be honest and humorous.

Question	Example Response	Objective
What motivates you?	"Making a true difference in the lives of my patients and their families motivates me to strive for excellence in everything I do. I look forward to seeing my patient's reactions when we get a positive outcome that will change their lives forever. That's why I became a nurse and why I'm pursuing a position in pediatrics."	To gauge a candidate's level of self-awareness & assess whether their motivations align well with the role & company overall. Preparation: Try to be as specific as possible & relate your response to the role and/or company's mission. Try answering the following questions as you prepare your response: What did a great day at work look like in a previous job & why? Why did you choose this field/profession? What prompted you to apply for this position when you read the job description?
What are your salary expectations?	"My salary expectation is between \$00,000 and \$00,000, which is the average salary for a candidate with my level of experience in this city. However, I have some flexibility." "Before I answer, I'd like to ask a few more questions to get a better idea of what the position entails. That way, I can provide a more accurate expectation." "I'm currently earning \$00,000. I'd like an increase in compensation but I'm willing to consider other forms of compensation, including paid time off and bonuses, to increase that number."	To make sure your salary expectations are consistent with the amount budgeted for the role. Preparation: Strategies to answer include: research what the typical salary is for the role in your area, provide a salary range, show that you're willing to negotiate for other benefits like flexible schedules, paid time off, or bonuses, or in some cases deflect the question until you know more about the role.

Tell me about yourself & your qualifications

"I've been a bookkeeper for the past three years where I track accounts payable and receivable, as well as oversee payroll. I've been able to find and resolve discrepancies between amounts owed and received, which has ended up saving our company thousands of dollars in underpaid bills. I recently earned my CPA degree and think my experience with bookkeeping and attention to detail would make me a great fit for your open public accountant role."

To learn more about your skills, accomplishments, and why you think you're a good fit for the position.

Preparation:

Focus on clear, concise answers and highlighting your strengths as they relate to the role.

Why do you want to work here?

"This company is always ahead of tech trends and is constantly looking for ways to improve their products, and that sort of innovative thinking really inspires me. I also appreciate how much this company has given back to the community, especially in efforts to produce more eco-friendly products. I'm always looking for ways to lower my own carbon footprint."

To determine whether a candidate took time to research the organization and whether they would be a good fit for the company's culture. Preparation: Research the products/services values, history, and culture of the organization. Mention specific aspects of the company that align with your values and career aspirations.

What interests you about this role?

"The job description mentioned that this role would be responsible for onboarding new employees, as well as compiling and distributing an updated employee handbook. In my current role, I enjoy working with new employees to help them feel welcome and confident in their roles. And I've found that an updated employee handbook can be an excellent resource to help them adapt to company policies, such as rules for hybrid roles, and often helps employees adjust more quickly."

To learn how well a candidate understands the role.

Preparation: Carefully read the job description & relate them to your experience. This can be a great opportunity to highlight specific skills and/or responsibilities you would enjoy.

How do you work under pressure?

"Throughout my career, I've discovered how to embrace working under pressure. I find that routine can make us complacent, so I try to look for challenges that push me to grow. One time, I was supposed to deliver a project to a client in five days. A colleague who was working with another client had the same deadline, but he had to take a leave of absence due to personal reasons. I was asked to take up both projects at the same time. While I felt an initial sense of panic, I came up with a very detailed time management plan and found new ways to boost my efficiency that enabled me to deliver both projects on time."

To assess the candidate's ability to stay calm and think/act rationally under stressful conditions.

Preparation: Focus on using the STAR method to describe a specific scenario you faced and how you calmly handled it & found a solution.

What are your greatest strengths?

"I've always been a natural leader and worked well in a fast-paced environment. I've exceeded my goals every quarter and have been promoted twice in the past five years. I look back at those successes and know that I wouldn't have reached them if I hadn't built and led teams composed of highly skilled and diverse individuals. I'm proud of my ability to get cross-functional groups on the same page. I've also regularly honed my management skills through 360 reviews and candid sessions with my team, and I know continuing to build my leadership skills is something I want from my next role."

To determine what makes you a great candidate Preparation: Identify 1-2 positive attributes to share, back them up with examples, & relate them to the role you're applying for.

What is your greatest weakness?

"I'm naturally an introvert. From my first job out of college, I tend to do well with little supervision and a high degree of independence. After being assigned to a team that needed to give monthly progress updates, I knew I owed it to my teammates and myself to learn how to collaborate better with others. I took a course on improving communication skills and learned how to reach out to my teammates with more confidence, and also how to brush up on presentation skills so that I felt more relaxed when it was my turn to deliver a monthly presentation. I'm never going to be the most vocal person in a meeting but I can definitely contribute to any conversation and be an effective team player."

To determine a candidate's level of self-awareness and interest in continued learning and growth. Preparation: To prepare, identify an actual weakness (not a strength disguised as a weakness) that's honest & professionally relevant, add context, & give a specific example. Then explain how you overcame it or how you're working to overcome it.

What are your future goals?

"I'd like to continue developing my marketing expertise over the next several years. One of the reasons I'm interested in working for a fast-growing startup company is that I'll have the ability to wear many hats and collaborate with a variety of departments. I believe this experience will serve me well in achieving my ultimate goal of someday leading a marketing department."

To determine how long a candidate will stay with the company, gauge their ambition, & their ability to plan ahead.

Why are you leaving your current job?

"While I value the experience I've gained from my current role, there aren't any opportunities for advancement and I'd like to continue challenging myself by taking on more responsibilities."

To determine whether the candidate is being deliberate about the job change.