

INTERVIEW TIP SHEET

1. Preparation prior to interview

- Organise your clothes for the interview in advance. Dress formally (a suit for both men and women is the norm) and match your clothing to the image of the company. Little details such as a good haircut, no missing buttons or hanging threads may seem minor but they are vital in creating that first impression.
- Assemble any relevant documentation beforehand (qualifications, academic transcript, relevant university assignments etc.).
- Research the company thoroughly using the internet, published material and personal contacts, so that you are able to ask 'intelligent' questions.
- Interviewers usually ask questions about practical examples of past behaviour which help demonstrate your competencies. This is known as Behavioural Interviewing and most companies use this technique. You must be prepared to share examples of achievements, failures and past behaviours and talk about them in detail. Ensure you describe the situation, the action you took and the results of your action and ensure you present your actions in a positive way (See the STAR Method handout).
- Know about the job and what you have to offer. Read the job ad and position description and make a list of essential criteria and skills that they require. Write down a **STAR example** for each of the criteria so you can show how you have demonstrated this skill in your work or study environment.
- Practise answers to interview questions by writing them down in bullet point form. When practising, answer each question out loud so that eventually each answer “rolls off the tongue” so that you sound as articulate and confident as possible. Just ensure that you don't sound too rehearsed.
- Plan your transport to ensure you get there 10 minutes before the scheduled interview so that you have time to read through your notes and gather your thoughts. Be sure to allow for traffic delays.
- Find out how long the interview is expected to last. Do not make appointments immediately following your expected completion time as you don't want to feel rushed.

2. The Initial Stages of the Interview

- Be polite. Show respect to everyone you meet, from the boss to the receptionist.
- You only get one chance to make a first impression. Make it a good one. Smile, make eye contact and use a firm handshake.
- Interviewers frequently use 'small talk' to break the ice. Follow the interviewer's lead, but don't initiate a lot of small talk yourself, as this could make you seem too familiar or too relaxed.

3. The Interview Structure

- No two styles of interviewing are the same but interviewers usually value warmth, honesty, energy, clear communication, brevity, rapport and enthusiasm. Also it is vital to look into the interviewer's eyes.
- Usually the interviewer gets information from you and then tells you about the position. However, the order of the interview will depend on the interviewer themselves. Go with the flow.



4. Nervousness during an interview

- It is completely normal to be anxious during an interview. This energy is positive and can help you give a high energy performance. If, however, you feel your body language is conveying anxiety, it is usually best to mention it. (E.g. 'I haven't had an interview before and I am a little nervous')

5. Finishing the interview

- Prepare relevant questions to ask towards the end of the interview. Remember you must learn as much as you can about the job in order to determine if it is suitable for you. Some good questions include:
What sort of work will I be doing?
What are the key responsibilities of this role?
What are the reporting relationships?
How will my performance be measured?
What is the next step?
What long term career opportunities are available?
- Ask (if you haven't been told) what the process will be after the interview has been completed.
- Give the interviewer a couple of positive statements which link your competencies and experience with those sought for the job. Do not be afraid to reiterate your strengths – as they relate to the role. Be careful to be brief!
- If you are genuinely interested in the role, say so.
- Leave the interviewer with a good impression – smile and shake hands firmly. Do not make the mistake of being overconfident or too relaxed at the end of the interview.

6. Follow up

- Immediately after the interview email the manager or HR person indicating your interest in joining the organisation.
- If you have been asked to send further information, do so quickly and efficiently.

7. Common Traps

- Being too friendly or too casual.
- Not listening to questions carefully and therefore giving inappropriate answers.
- Saying 'we' instead of 'I'. Not referring to your own actions or achievements is very irritating.
- Making very general statements which lack substance.
- Being over enthusiastic.
- Being poorly prepared.
- Slouching, mumbling, speaking slowly and not having eye contact with the interviewer.
- Knowing nothing about the company to whom you are applying.
- Making derogatory remarks.

8. Helpful Hints

- Not all the positions you apply for are right for you. The purpose of the interview is to help you sort out if the 'fit' is right in both a job and cultural sense. You must ask questions which will give you information pertinent to your decision making. The last thing you want on your resume is a short stint in a job to explain to your next employer.
- Remain positive. No matter how you felt the interview went. This might not be the right job for you, but they might have another one coming up.



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

Why did you choose to study your particular course?

Why are you interested in this position?

What do you know about our organisation?

Why would you like to work for our organisation?

What are your strengths? Do you have any weaknesses?

What computer packages are you familiar with and what have you used them for?

Tell me about a time when you had competing demands on your time. How did you prioritise what you should deal with first?

Have you ever missed a deadline? If so, why?

Tell me about a time when you weren't pleased with your performance? What did you do about it?

Can you think of a time when you did more than your job required. i.e. exceeded your manager's or a customer's expectations of you?

Have you ever had to deal with a difficult customer? What was the situation and how did you handle this?

Have you ever had any problems with a colleague/manager? What was the situation and how did you handle this?

Describe one of the highest-pressure situations you have been in and the strategies you used to get through it.

Tell me about a time when you couldn't complete a project/task in the scheduled time. What did you do?

Do you have experience working in teams and what type of people do you like to work with?

Tell me about a time when you have been required to perform as part of a team. What was the situation, what part did you play and what was the outcome of the exercise?

Tell me about your experience working autonomously. How do you motivate yourself?

Tell me about a time when you have had to quickly grasp a new concept or task?



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Tell me about a time when you have picked up an error in your work or somebody else's?

Tell me about a time when you have had to be very accurate in the work that you are doing (at uni or work)?

How do you go about developing rapport with others?

What has been your greatest achievement so far?

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Give me an example of a time when you had to effectively communicate something to others verbally?

Give me an example of a time when you had to effectively communicate something to others in writing?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort? Describe a situation in which you did so.

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

Tell me about a time you have used your creativity to solve a problem.

Tell me about a situation where you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?

Tell me about a time when you found a better way of doing something, which proved to be an improvement on the existing system.

If you saw a co-worker doing something dishonest, would you tell your boss? What would you do about it?

Sometimes we have to bend the truth a little when dealing with people. Can you give me an example of when you have had to bend the truth?

Why should we hire you? What do you think sets you apart from other candidates?



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STAR METHOD

PREPARING FOR A BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW

What is a Behavioural Interview?

Behavioural interviewing is based on the premise that past behaviour is the best indicator of future performance in a similar situation. Behavioural questions are used as an objective and reliable method of comparing candidates and assessing them against the selection criteria. The questions are posed in such a way to draw out behavioural examples that are used to evaluate the presence or absence of a critical skill or attribute and therefore allows the interviewer to determine whether you have the ability to do the job.

Behavioural questions usually begins with a statement like: 'Tell me about a time when...' or 'Can you describe a situation where...'. In your answer you must discuss a situation in which you demonstrated the skills the interviewers are referring to.

When answering behavioural questions, you must give specific examples to show how you behaved in certain situations. When answering these questions, ensure that you describe a situation, what you did and what the result was. The most effective way to answer these questions is with the STAR Method. You can predict the type of behavioural questions that you might be asked in an interview by reading through the position description, highlighting the key skills, and reflecting upon your own experiences in which you demonstrated these skills.

What is the STAR Method?

This is a simple method that assists you in answering behavioural interview questions. When this method is used effectively, employers can hear very clear examples of how you have demonstrated the skills they are seeking. The STAR method involves the following 4 steps:

Situation	Give a brief outline of the situation or setting . Who was involved?
Task	What was your role ? What was required of you?
Action	What did you do? What action did you take? (Use 'I' not 'we'). Explain in sequential steps what your response was to the situation. Show how you used the skills that the employer has asked for in the advertisement Keep the information short- one or two sentences are much better than a long story with unnecessary detail. Explain how you used the skill in each situation.
Result	What was the result ? What feedback did you receive? How did it develop your skills? What did you learn from this situation?

EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS AND POSSIBLE ANSWERS ARE OVERLEAF.



Can you tell me about a time when you have made a suggestion in your workplace that has improved productivity?' (assessing the competency "Initiative")

- Situation** 'Yes – I noticed a number of staff had troubles completing the quality control check at the end of shifts. This affected them but also the next person on the next shift coming into take over that position on the assembly line
- Task** What I did was draft up a checklist form which listed all of the processes in the order that the quality control check should be conducted.
- Action** 'I went to the boss and showed him my suggestion and talked about the way in which it could improve the time taken to conduct the quality control check and the handover process to the next shift.'
- Result** 'The boss was pretty happy with my suggestion and after making a few minor changes he had it typed up and introduced it as a standard form that everybody used. It saves heaps of time for everyone as well as reducing the number of errors.

Tell me about a time when you demonstrated strong time management skills? (assessing the competency "Time Management")

- Situation** Last semester I decided that I wanted to enhance my studies in Accounting by obtaining some work experience.
- Task** I took the initiative to secure work at ABC Accounting Pty Limited. This voluntary work was not a requirement of my course, but I did it to build on the knowledge gained during my studies.
- Action** As preparation for the work experience it was necessary for me to reschedule my classes and reorganise my study timetable. In order to handle the additional workload, I decided to get up half an hour earlier each weekday and to study for an additional two hours each Saturday and Sunday. I listed each study period as a diary appointment, which made it easier for me to arrange commitments around these times. I also ensured that I continued with my work experience even during examination time by negotiating my work schedule with my manager at ABC.
- Result** As a result of my effective time management skills I successfully integrated the work experience into my timetable. The voluntary work gave me valuable practical skills to complement the theoretical knowledge gained in my course. Restructuring my study schedule also enabled me to deal with conflicting priorities whilst ensuring I completed all assignment deadlines to schedule.

Source: Adapted from VU Student Career Development "Using Star for Interviews" handout 2008



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