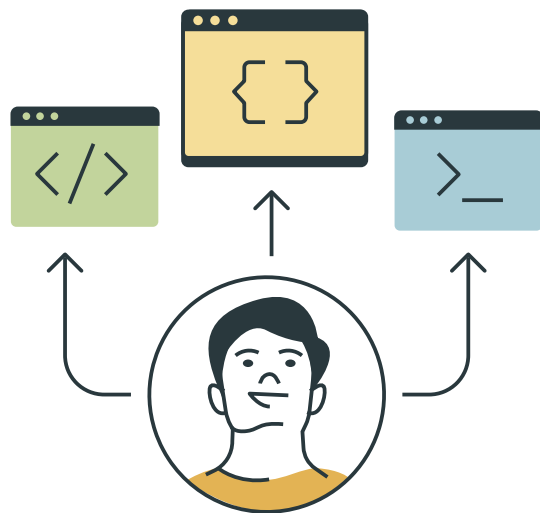


# Interviewing across borders

A guide for global software engineers to land a job with a US startup





This guide is for global software engineers seeking to enter the US market and level-up their careers with a fast-growing Silicon Valley startup. With actionable tips and time-tested advice from engineering leaders, it will cover what hiring managers look for, how to cultivate a strong skill set, communicate effectively, develop an eye-catching resume and of course, nail the interview.

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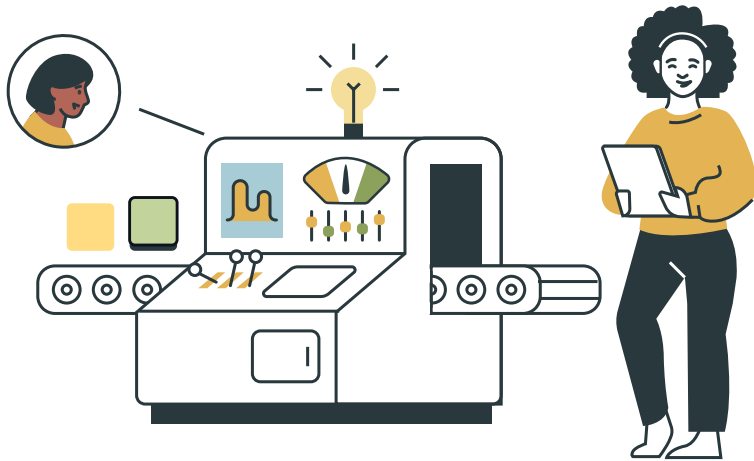
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# Introduction

Are you ready to transition to your next role? Job transitions are a great opportunity to step back and consider what matters to you. Whether that's a bigger technical challenge, a higher salary, or a new industry, many US-based startups offer a chance to grow your career, without relocating.

However, if interviewing across borders is new for you, it can feel intimidating. This guide offers a roadmap to landing your dream gig, with actionable tips and insights from Terminal's expert recruiters and engineering leaders at top Silicon Valley startups. From developing the right skillset, to creating a stand-out resume and acing your interview, we'll help you take your career to the next level.



**Take a leap of faith. You can work with any company in the US or the world if you have the right skill set. It has nothing to do with the place you live."**

**Arnoldo Montaña**  
Frontend Developer at EasyKnock

# Stand out from the crowd

Learn what type of candidates Silicon Valley startups are looking for, and develop the best possible application to attract a recruiter's attention and get in the door.



## Cultivate communication skills, not just code

Companies are looking for a range of candidates – both in terms of years of experience and stack. “At Terminal, some of our clients are looking for senior software engineers who could collaborate in Backend, Frontend and even a little in mobile development,” says Liliana Carbono, a technical recruiter at Terminal. “On the other hand, we also have positions with clients who are looking for an expert in only Android development, or a pure Backend developer and such.”

In addition to technical skills, soft skills matter too. “We look for someone who would be a culture add,” says Diego Sicilia, Talent Acquisition Specialist with Terminal. “This is someone who has those soft skills that will help you own and build products, such as cross-department collaboration skills. What we’re expecting to see is a great combination of technical and soft skills.”

## 3 things the CTO of Bonfire Interactive looks for in candidates

When hiring engineers, Alex Millar, CTO of Bonfire Interactive, says he looks for baseline technical skills and strengths in three key areas:

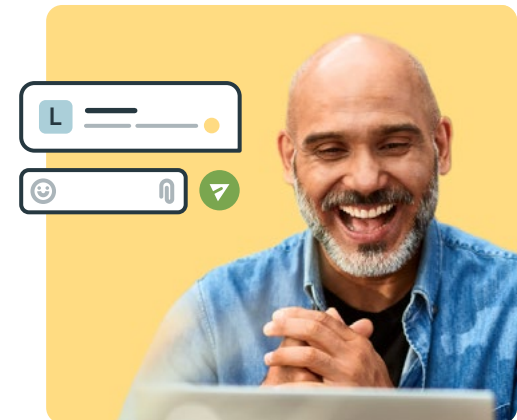
**Grit:** “Are you going to persevere, dig down, and tackle a problem?”

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**Intelligence:** “This is not knowledge and knowing everything, but rather do you have the capacity for learning things and picking things up quickly?”

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**Communication:** “This is multi-faceted. It’s not just speaking. It’s listening skills, it’s writing. Are you able to understand and integrate what I’m asking with your own experience and formulate a response so we can have a discussion – as opposed to just regurgitating something on your resume or giving a canned response.”



# Understand expectations

If you're planning to interview for a US-based company, first understand the expectations for that role. For example, at Terminal, all of our roles with US-based tech startups require business proficiency with English. That said, if you have intermediate English skills, and you can communicate about your experiences and projects, that might be enough. A willingness to learn and improve fluency and vocabulary is important, according to the Terminal Talent Team. From there you can improve your English proficiency by working with Canada or US-based teammates.

"Communication is important but doesn't always mean verbal or pronunciation," says Henry Shi, Co-founder at SnapCommerce. "We look for those who can clearly articulate what they mean – ideas and perspectives. We look for folks that are entrepreneurial – people who have a habit of owning outcomes, getting things done and having a bias for action."



## Just starting out in engineering? Take these steps to prepare

- 1 Research frameworks/libraries and programming languages that are most requested by the types of US companies you're interested in. For instance, if you work on the front-end, focus on the React framework.
- 2 Build cross-collaboration experience. Hiring managers will want to see specific projects where you have partnered with others, such as product managers or QA.
- 3 Get hands-on experience. If you're newly graduated, consider seeking out a few Hackathons you can join to gain cross-collaboration experience. This will help potential employers feel comfortable you have some real-world coding chops.



## Do you need a computer science degree to get a software engineer job in the US?

A degree isn't critical if you'd like to work for a US startup, according to our Talent Team. When they review applicants, they're looking for experience in building an application, exposure to a programming language, and experience with computer science fundamentals.

"Recently, I worked with a person who previously was a food chemical engineer," says Terminal Talent Acquisition Specialist Diego Sicilia. "She had years of experience working at a brewery until she made the leap to work as a software engineer. She had around three years of experience working at small product development companies, which helped her land a job with an awesome client."

# Build a compelling resume

Your resume is the first impression you make with a potential employer. Not only should it be clear and easy to parse, but it should present you in the best possible light. That said, we know it can be difficult to encapsulate many years of experiences in a concise, impactful way. Consider these tips as you create or optimize your application package.

## Cover the basics

Include your contact information (name, address, email) right up at the top. It's also helpful to include a title that sums up your core skill set, such as "iOS Engineer" or "Full Stack Engineer."

## Experience vs. education

If you have a wealth of experience under your belt, you'll want to lead with your past roles, starting with the most recent. It's also good form to include a bulleted list of languages or frameworks you're skilled in, such as Java, Swift, etc.

For newly graduated students or junior developers, you'll want to start with your education such as the engineering school you attended. Hackathons, relevant courses and Github projects can help replace professional experience as well.

## Showcase achievements, not just what you did

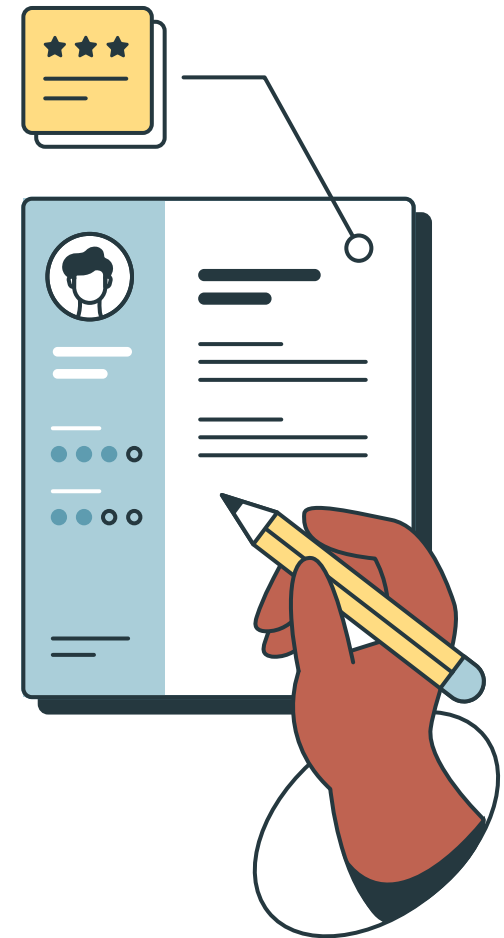
Many people have a tendency to list things they've done such as "Built X feature." Take it a step further and communicate what that feature or project contributed to the team or company, such as 'Helped decrease fraudulent logins with implementation of new auth feature' or 'Optimized engineering team productivity with the development of a new automated process.'

## Go beyond technical skills

A great engineer is skilled beyond coding, and can work cross-functionally with other engineers, product teams and others. Make sure to include these types of experiences, such as 'Mentored other engineers on a weekly basis' or 'Served as primary liaison with the product manager, ensuring tight communication between product and development.'

## Keep it short and succinct, but it doesn't have to be one page

Telling your story effectively is more important than keeping it to one page. That said, our team recommends to keep it as brief as possible. More than two pages probably isn't necessary.





# The 3 resume reviewers – and how to speak to them

“My #1 tip is to approach creating the resume through different perspectives,” says Terminal Talent Acquisition Specialist Diego Sicilia. “There are three resume reviewers, and you have to take them all into account: recruiter, engineering manager/person from the technical side, and the ATS – the applicant tracking system that pulls in your data and helps recruiters do things easier.”

## Applicant tracking system



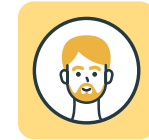
Make the layout easy for the ATS to parse the information in your resume. For example, it may be better to use a one-column format rather than two. And use keywords that can flag you as a fit for the role, such as programming languages that are included in the job description.

## The recruiter



A recruiter needs to know if you're a fit in 30 seconds. Write out your experience, including applications and tech stacks you've used. Offer a blurb on each company you've worked for, and bullet out your part specifically, such as “worked on payments products for our ecommerce site.” List results and note the production environment.

## The manager



This person wants to see the business impact as a whole. The detail under each position is for this person. Include metrics, which are critical to showing the success of your work. This shows you were connected to the priorities of the business, and you've helped build a product with those considerations in mind.

**“The mindset used to be: what can you do and how fast you can develop it? But now we’re moving toward a product-first mindset. Hiring managers want to see your ability to transform business needs into actionable items. Communicate how you worked with a business stakeholder or product manager, helped translate between engineering and product, introduced new ideas and made recommendations.”**



**Diego Sicilia**  
Talent Acquisition Specialist, Terminal

#### **Include side projects or other interests**

Maybe you’re obsessed with Machine Learning. Maybe you just want to communicate how much you love Star Trek. Feel free to throw in a short section on “interests” that showcase you as a person beyond your existing technical skillset. It’s also a good idea to include side projects you’ve worked on that highlight your coding or entrepreneurial experience.

#### **Include a cover letter**

The cover letter is the first thing the hiring manager reads when reviewing a candidate’s profile. Be concise with details on your experience, your strengths and what you are looking for. For example, are you a front-end developer with 5 years of experience? Lead with the basics and then describe the technology you’ve been working with the past few years, what you’re looking for in your next role, your favorite projects and how you’ve helped companies scale.

#### **Proofread**

Would you ship code that hadn’t been reviewed? Of course not. In fact, code review is a standard part of the development process. Treat your resume the same. Pro tip: Read it out loud to catch any errors or typos. And, enlist your friends or family to review as well.

# Mastering the remote interview

Good news! Your application was selected and you were asked to interview. Engineering interviews can include any number of steps, such as meeting with a hiring manager, talking with a CTO or VP of Engineering, and completing a panel and technical assessment with fellow developers. While this can be daunting, you can put your best foot forward by following these tips.





### Research the company

Spend time looking into the company's product and mission. Dig in to understand the architecture/ tech stack, and the company's growth over time. Find out what stage they are in and the problems they're trying to solve. Go a step further using LinkedIn to review company leadership, engineering team size, and anything else you can find out to give you context.

This nuanced understanding shows the interviewer that you are specifically interested in working with their team as well as invested in finding a role that fits your strengths. (After all, an interview is just as much about finding what's right for you as it is what's right for them.)

### Ask questions

Use your call with the recruiter to gather insights. They are your ally. Ask them to tell you more about the people on the panel, their areas of focus, and any details on the assessment process.



**It's considered a strength when you influence the interview process so that you're evaluating the company as they evaluate you.**

**Asif Makhani**  
CTO, Handshake

# 5 questions to ask during your interview



1

**Explain to me the day-to-day. In a sprint, how do you create requirements?**

*This will give you details about how fast-paced the company is. Or perhaps they are a quality-first company and they don't launch into production very quickly.*

2

**What is the structure of the engineering and product teams?**

*This will give you an idea of who you would work with on a regular basis and the company's style of cross-collaboration.*

3

**What's on your product roadmap for the next few quarters?**

*While they may not be able to share all the details it will give you an idea how they think about product development.*

4

**Do you offer any learning and development programs?**

*This shows you're engaging with your discipline and interested in improving and learning new skills. And it's also helpful for you to know how invested the companies is in developing their employees.*

5

**How do you handle career pathing for engineers?**

*It's important they're able to speak to development pathways and are committed to helping you excel.*

### Showcase your remote work effectiveness

Leaders often look for a higher degree of proactivity when hiring remote-first. “You have to go a little further in taking initiative when you’re on a remote team to make a difference,” says Duncan McDowell, VP of Engineering at Bungalow. “I look to understand if they know the balance of figuring something out themselves versus asking a question. Do they ask themselves if they are finding that balance correctly?” As a candidate, it can be good to share workplace examples that highlight how you’ve figured out a problem on your own or leverage digital resources and connections to do so.

### Make a list of accomplishments

Sure, you know your work history. But, it can be hard to come up with good examples on the fly. Make a list of a few projects or accomplishments you can speak to and include examples of how you problem-solved or worked with others to succeed.

### Don’t skip on the follow-up

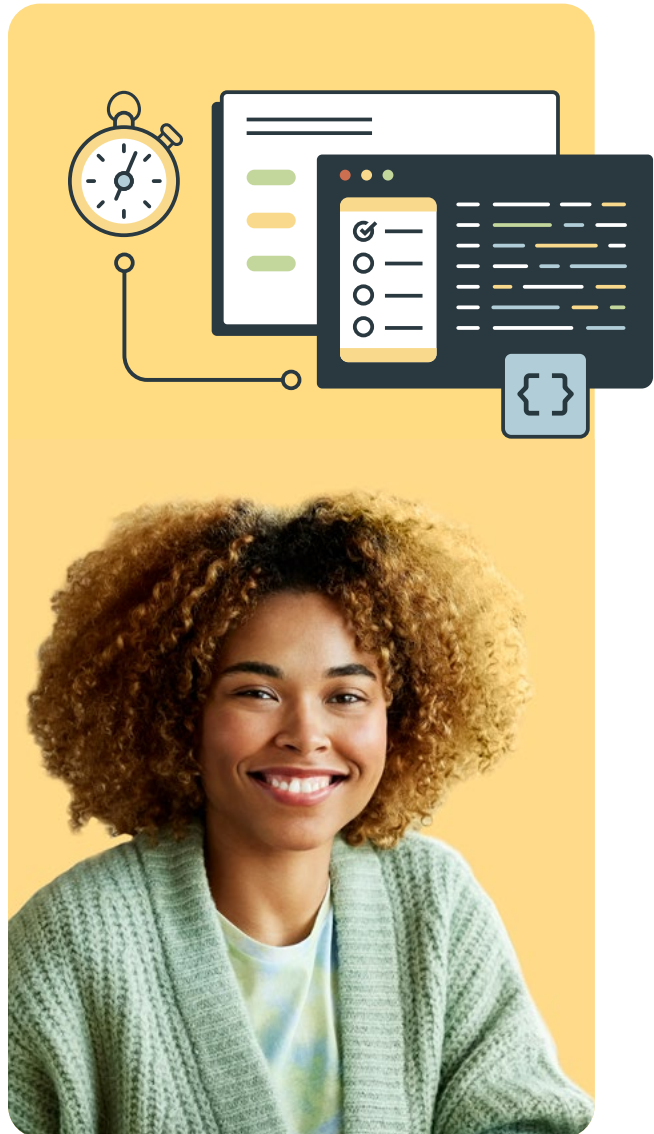
“If you can show proactivity through the hiring process as a candidate, you’re one step ahead,” says McDowell. He recommends sending a thank you email that includes items talked about in the conversation. There’s also an opportunity to ask the hiring manager how it went.

“About two or three years ago I had a candidate coming through the process who we decided not to move forward. The

primary reason was that previous technical skill didn’t align with the stack we had or where the tech was headed. We provided that feedback to him and wished him the best. He came back 3 months later and said, ‘I took your feedback, here’s what I’ve done, I’ve filled your concerns and I think I can be a productive member of the team.’

“If you don’t get feedback, ask for feedback,” Alex Millar, CTO of Bonfire Interactive, adds.





## Technical assessments: What to consider

Technical assessments are critical for leaders to understand if you have the skills you're interviewing for – but it can also be the most intimidating part of the hiring process. Comprising hiring panels, live whiteboarding and remote coding challenges, these assessments are essential to prepare for right. Here's a few tips to set yourself up for success:

### For a live assessment:

#### Take a practice test

HackerRank and other tools offer practice coding exercises that allow you to refresh your coding skills. Even better, enlist a fellow engineer to help run you through a sample coding exercise so you have the pressure of someone else on the call.

#### Practice code outside of your normal test environment

The Muse offers this pro-tip: "Practice writing code with no autocomplete, no

fancy key bindings, no dual-screen setup and no custom dotfile aliases." It's often the case that you'll be working in a simplified Integrated Development Environment, they point out, so prepare for that up front.

#### Ask clarifying questions before you dive in

Along with understanding your actual skillset, interviewers want to understand how you address a problem and gather information to solve it. Ask several questions at the beginning and continue the collaborative cross-talk throughout your exercise.

#### Talk through your process

Don't be afraid to walk them through your thinking as you go. Often it's less about getting to the exact right outcome and more about how you work and problem-solve as an engineer.

#### Own what you don't know

"Be clear about what you know and what you don't," recommends Interview Kickstart. "For example, if you don't know the syntax of a function, you point that out to the interviewer, make reasonable assumptions and move on."

## For a take home assignment:

Take-home tests are more representative of day to day work, and it's what our clients choose to use at Terminal.

### Skim the project prior to starting

It's easy to dive right into working on a code-based project but it's better to pause and invest a lot of time to think about your approach prior to working on optimizations. Look at the requirements the customer has. Put all of these on a list and prioritize.

### Research tools that someone else developed for this specific problem

This works like an extension – it's easier to pull it in instead of writing for a half hour. Go to google, or research on Stack Overflow to look at specific parts of your take-home. Then, it's time to concentrate and spend time on the challenge.

### Focus on communication

Most of the time there will be a show-and-tell session where you walk through your approach and why you decided to do things a certain way. It's known as a code review. It's critical that you don't assume everything will be super clear just because you're the one who did it. Pretend you have never seen the code in your life. Think about what will be the first doubt or first question someone would ask about. Look at it with a new set of eyes, and prepare to address these.

### Follow-up

After your take home or live challenge, you can always reach out and follow-up with additional thoughts or questions. Understanding your thought process is a huge part of what interviewers are looking for in working with you.





# Take the first step towards your next opportunity

There are so many fast-growing US companies who are looking for talented engineers – by preparing well for the interview, you're sure to land an incredible role. We hope the tips in this guide will help you stand out from the crowd and master the interview process.

Ready to get started? Terminal connects you to full-time, fully remote engineering roles with innovative US companies. Create a profile to see exclusive opportunities and find your dream job.

