Actuary Internship Interview Questions

1. **Why did you choose to become an actuary?**

I have heard the rumors of actuaries being introverted people who sit at their own desk and crunch numbers. While I do have an introverted side at times and need that calm environment to get my thoughts together, I also am an extrovert; I love sharing my ideas and hearing others’ ideas and just simply hearing about how my colleagues’ days are going. As an actuary, not only will I get to use analytic thinking that the job requires, but I will also get to communicate with my co-workers and maybe even clients. Also, in high school, one of the reasons I chose to major in statistics was because I loved calculating the probability of events. I did not even know about the actuarial profession until I started visiting colleges, but I think my love for probability will make being an actuary a great fit for me.

1. **Tell me about yourself. TIE IT BACK TO THE COMPANY**

Hi! My name is Shravani Samala and I am a rising Sophomore at Penn State University. I am majoring in Statistics in the actuarial field. Originally, I was in the biostatistics option, but after hearing some experiences that one of my statistics teachers had as a biostatistician, I quickly decided that I no longer wanted to pursue that route. I randomly chose actuarial science and fell in love with what it could mean for my future.

Hi! My name is Shravani Samala and I am a rising Junior at Penn State University. I am majoring in Statistics in the actuarial field. Originally, I was in the biostatistics option, but after hearing some experiences that one of my statistics teachers had as a biostatistician, I quickly decided that I no longer wanted to pursue that route. After speaking with my counselor, she recommended that I try out the actuarial track and I loved the classes I was taking. Throughout my high school years, I worked at Kumon and volunteered as much as I could because not only did I get to help other learn math and reading skills, I believe that being involved in the community can help make its members more productive and happier! These activities really helped me improve my communication, organizational and time management skills because I would always be talking to many different people of all different ages and at Kumon especially I had to keep myself organized and manage my time so that each student was getting the attention they needed. I believe this is very important at a company like Prudential because you value being focused on your customer and respecting one another and having good communication skills can really help you connect with everyone individually. Through your website, I was happy to learn that Prudential has greatly been involved in maintaining racial equity and inclusion at your locations by conducting a day-long racial bias training. I would love to be part of a company whose employees feel that everyone is treated equally and really learn more about what it is like to be an actuary at Prudential.

1. **I see you tutored at Kumon for years! Tell me more about your experience tutoring at Kumon and what you learned from it.**

Of course! So I tutored at Kumon all throughout my high school years. My usual day would include grading papers and teaching. However, on days where the center would be busier than others, I would have to take on multiple roles. For example, one day when we were short staffed, I had to take care of teaching the older and younger kids, grade papers, and check people in and out because there so many kids coming in that day. I also had to come up with new ways to teach younger kids basic math and reading skills because not every child learns the same way. For example, I tutored a young girl who had down syndrome who had a really short attention span. She would finish maybe one line of the page and get distracted, so you had to calmly tell her to keep going. Another young boy could only do long division with my help. This experience taught to be organized and also understand that not everyone learns the same way.

1. **How would you describe an actuary to someone who has no actuarial background?**

I would tell them that an actuary is a person who deals with risk management in insurance and by taking exams, you can move up through the ranks. Actuaries work in the insurance industry, either on the SOA track or the CAS track, and analyze data to make certain cost predictions related to events such as car accidents or injury.

1. **Give an example of a goal you reached and what you did to achieve it.**

In tenth grade, I had to recite a speech that I liked from memory. However, I am deathly afraid of public speaking! My hands get sweaty and my mouth gets dry, and sometimes I even get lightheaded. I decided this was a fear I wanted to improve on. To achieve my bigger goal, I split my task up into smaller goals so that by finishing each part, I felt more accomplished and it reduced my stress. First, to memorize the speech, I had to manage my time wisely so that I was not cramming to memorize the speech a couple of days before. I wrote out flashcards with a couple sentences from the speech so that I could memorize it part by part. I also listened to the speech several times to see how she inflected her voice and if I wanted to do something differently. There was also the fact that I had to get used to performing in front of a large group of people. Luckily I had a great group of friends who helped me through this! I would practice in front of them a couple of times so that I knew that I would have friendly faces to see in the audience. From this experience, I learned that trying to hide your fear can help you push through it. By acting that I was not afraid of being on stage, I was able to actually get through my speech. I also learned that many others have this same phobia and it can only be helped with practice.

1. **Tell me about a time when you made a mistake. What did you do to correct it?**

I remember in middle school, my friend and I were asked to perform the national anthem at a basketball game. So after we set up, I sat down and put up my sheet music. As we .began to play, I realized that the crowd was bigger than expected and I was also thinking about unimportant things such as “is my crush in the audience?” But anyways, by the time I looked back down at my sheet music, I had lost my place in the music. I started fumbling and eventually stopped playing, and unintentionally, I said into the microphone, “wait where am I?” It was so embarrassing that those thirty seconds felt like a lifetime. I could feel everyone’s eyes on me and I felt like I had disappointed them. However, a teacher came over and helped me realize that it was ok. I took a deep breath and thankfully, my friend and I played the song from the beginning and made it through to the end. I think that that was the moment I realized I would embarrass myself a lot in life, but you can learn a lot from them. Although it seems like a trivial mistake, I learned that it was important to keep focused on the task at hand because losing focus can cause projects to go awry.

This summer I was part of an undergraduate research team for Penn State. We met every Monday and Thursday morning for an hour or two to present the work we had all done to each and get feedback on what we should think about doing next. When we first began, I did not think I needed to write down suggestions my professors made because we were just beginning to work and there was not much critiquing going on. However, I later realized that taking notes during the meetings were very important. In one of the meetings, I realized that I had forgotten to do one of the tasks that was asked of me. From then on, I learned that being overly careful is better than missing one of your tasks. Now, I am diligent in taking notes during any kind of meeting because I would rather have more information than necessary than constantly wonder if I am forgetting something.

1. **Provide an example of when you worked with a team to achieve a common goal?**

Last year, I became treasurer of the Statistics Club at Penn State and every Tuesday we have meetings to discuss how the purpose of the next meeting. As executive members, our common goal is to help the members gain more knowledge in what they can do with a degree in statistics. We realized that the only way we can help members is to know what they are looking to get out of this club. So, the team designed multiple surveys and polls to figure out what the members wanted to see the club do. We each brainstormed five – ten ideas of what we think would benefit the members and then asked members to either choose their top and/or write down any ideas they had that they wanted to see happen. After compiling these answers, the executive team learned that club members were really interested in having guest speakers from different companies and also a mock data fest. Now out next goal as a team is to get these events to happen! The key to achieving any common goal is with good communication.

1. **Give an example of how you set goals.**

When I have a goal in mind, I like to first see if I can split it up into smaller parts. Then, I try to assign those “mini-goals” a date so I can complete them before then. For example, last year I was part of the Actuarial Science Club Bootcamp in which we have to attend multiple events, do some simple research papers, and complete technical projects. At first, achieving this goal seemed difficult because I felt that I had so much on my plate already. However, I decided that this was something that would help me figure out if being an actuary was for me. So, I first figured out which of the pre-scheduled meetings I would go to. Then, when looking at my other “mini-goal” which was the write-ups I had to do, I realized that some were simpler than other. So, if I finished those first, I would not only finish some tasks, but also have a sense of accomplishment. Then, I was able to begin working on some of the technical projects assigned and reaching my overall goal did not seem daunting.

1. **Describe a decision you made that wasn't popular, and explain how you handled implementing it.**

Last year, my partner and I were working on our final project for out RStudio class and we could not figure out how to import our data from raw github file or clean it up once it was imported. My partner wanted to immediately ask for help without doing any research. I told him to give me a day because I really wanted to solve this on my own. He was a little upset because he was very stressed with one of his clubs and just wanted to finish the project as soon as possible, but I wanted to use the project as something I could learn from. Fortunately, it took around forty minutes of research to figure out import and clean up the code. I am glad I chose to research because I still remember how to do this task. (save website in a variable and then use read\_csv).

1. **What do you do if you disagree with someone at work?**

Usually I try to explain to them the reasoning behind my decision. For example, in Statistics Club, one of our executive members kept stating that a sentence would be to hard to understand but it was very clear to the other team member what the sentence was saying. At first many of the executive members did not know what to say; however I explained that since it was only for a short video, we did not have time to say elaborate sentences and that if members had any questions they could contact us.

1. **Describe a time when you had to overcome a difficult situation of challenge.**

While I was working it Kumon, I often worked with a young girl who had down syndrome. Most days she was just as attentive as the other kids and got her work done with ease. But on one particular day, she just would not concentrate. What made it worse was that the other tutors working with her were showing frustration and she could see it. This made her upset and she started sobbing in the classroom. I did not want to say anything immediately because I did not know if my voice would sound irritated, but I knew I could not keep her there. Not only were there other students trying to focus, but it probably would make her feel more comfortable to be in a secluded area. So, I took her hand and we both walked to a testing room and I sat with her and waited for her to calk down. I took a couple of deep breaths and asked her why she was so upset. She refused to tell me what was bothering her but in the end, she just needed someone to calm her down and be patient with her. I learned that we can’t always know what other people are thinking, but sometimes they just need someone for support.

1. **How do you motivate others who are falling behind?**

I think we start falling behind when our tasks no longer interest us or appear to get harder. When people start to fall behind when they lose interest, I talk to them about why we started this project in the first place. I ask them why they started this project in the first place? What is its purpose? Is it for a good cause? I feel that once people find the purpose of their task again, it motivates them to get it done! Also, when the task gets harder, I think it is true for many of us that we start to give up hope and begin to doubt ourselves. In this case, if possible, I think that teaming up is a great idea. Personally, I feel that sometimes working on projects alone can be boring, but when you collaborate with people and hear all of the great ideas circulating, it really motivates you.

1. **Please tell me what actuarial life tables are and why they are useful?**

Actuarial life tables are spreadsheets that show the probability that a client will pass away before their next birthday for each age. These tables have very important applications in insurance, especially life insurance, and healthcare.

1. **Give an example of when you had to stay organized or prioritize to meet a tight deadline.**

While I worked at Kumon, we had our busy days and our light days. The days after long holidays would be especially busy because students would not only bring back old homework papers, but they would also bring back new assignments that were given to them to do over break. A couple of years ago after one holiday weekend, I was one of two tutors there. There were so many papers flying everywhere that I had to keep myself organized in order to make sure that the papers ended up where they were supposed to. Therefore, I came up with a system where I would have all of my students folders on the left side of my table, (top for students there today and bottom for students who came on Friday) and new assignments on the top right corner of the table. This system helped me keep everything together and finish grading papers by the end of my shift.

1. **What is a weakness you have?**

One of my biggest weaknesses is that I always put everyone else’s happiness before mine. I used to consider myself a pushover because I would just agree with what everyone else wanted to do. However, I have realized that there is an importance to my opinions as well as collaboration. In cases such as group projects, I feel that I am fall in either of the two extremes: I am tasked with doing the whole project on my own, or I work with individuals who usually have a narrow mindset and do not like hearing other peoples’ ideas. Now, I make sure to vocalize my opinions because I have the right to be heard just like everyone in the group.

1. **What should I know that’s not on your resume?**

Sometimes I consider myself an old soul in the fact that I like doing things in what people might consider “old fashioned” ways. I like knitting and crocheting, I like printing out pictures to put in an album, I like writing letters, I like reading physical books, etc. Not to say that technology hasn’t benefitted us at all, because that would be a gross understatement, but sometimes it is nice to disconnect from the internet and be with people. That’s why I really enjoyed volunteering at the retirement center.

1. **Why should I hire you?**

I think because I am a very social person and can work with many different types of people, I would be a great addition to your team! I am hard working, patient, organized, and although I may fluster myself a little, I get the job done. I really hope that I can gain more knowledge through this internship from the actuaries at your company that will help me in my future career.

1. **How do you deal with difficult people?**

I think open and honest communication is definitely the key to dealing with difficult people. I usually ask them to state their reasoning and then I state mine. This way we can easily see if there are parts of the topic that we agree on. For example, in the beginning of Stat Club, we had to make an introduction video. One of the exec members was being very picky on one sentence she thought did not sound elaborate enough. Everyone else on the exec board knew that the sentence made sense, but the one member just would not let it go. I calmly explained to her that this was only a 1 minute video and we did not have the chance to be as elaborate as we might want to. So, instead I asked her if she could come up with a more condensed version of what she wanted to say and in the end, we all agree on a sentence.

1. **What makes you like numbers? When did you realize you enjoyed math?**

Personally, I’ve always loved both the creative and concrete learning parts of school. I think my job-oriented side of me leans more towards math and science because often I can get concrete answers and won’t second guess myself based on if people will like my creativity. With numbers, there is usually one right answer that you get from formulas and you can work with other to get that one right answer or just compare.

1. **How did you hear about actuarial science?**

The first time I heard the word actuarial science was from my sister who said her friend was majoring in it. I actually thought she said agricultural science, so initially I thought, oh I know what that is. But it wasn’t until I was at a college visit at Arcadia University that I heard what the major actually was. They told me that the major involved taking exams to further your career, using risk management skills, and was a well-compensated field.

1. **Describe a situation in life that portrays your communication skills?**

In the summer of 2020, I took a communications class which was entirely online. We were assigned groups who were complete strangers to work with over video chat every four or five weeks. Usually when I am in a group of strangers, I will be one of the first people to speak and introduce myself because I want everyone to feel comfortable. I try to take on a leadership role until the others realize that the environment, they are in is safe and they can speak freely. This is my favorite part of any conversation because everyone is comfortable, and the conversation no longer feels forced but like I am talking with friends.

1. **What was your least favorite college course?00**

Definitely chemistry! My dad is a chemist, but somehow that love for chemistry did not get passed down. Honestly, the subject just did not interest me, and I did not enjoy the having to memorize certain compounds and elements.

1. **What is your ideal company to work for like?**

An ideal company would be one that is focuses on keeping their clients and employees stress free. This company would also be diverse and accepting of people of all backgrounds. As I stated before, I am both an introvert and an extrovert, so this company would allow me to work by myself as well as talk to my colleagues.

1. **Tell me about a time when you had to work in a group?**

When I was in high school, I worked at a tutoring center called Kumon learning center. Over the holidays, kids would get packets to take if they wished and would bring them back afterwards, so the days after holidays were always super busy. One year, we were short staffed, and I was one of the two tutors working and I realized I needed to step up. That day I tried my best to work with the older kids, then work with the younger kids, walk around, and check kids in and out. In this group dynamic, I had to realize that everyone was doing their best and that I had to do my best to lower mine and everyone else’s stress.

When I volunteered for the Andrew L. Hicks foundation for the Tennis Clinic, it was very important that we all work together because there were many moving parts. Some groups were asked to set up the courts, others were asked to find equipment, and some of us were asked to deal with food deliveries. My sister ran the tennis clinic so I was involved a little in each group, but mostly I helped train the kids. In my section, the group leaders and I had to do some simple tennis activities with the kids as well as come up with some more fun activities so that the kids did not find the clinic boring. Communication was really important, not only because we were making plans together, but also because we needed to regularly check in with the kids.

1. **What are the skills required to become actuarial?**

Based on some of the VEE credits, some skills actuaries should have are economic, statistical, mathematical, financial, and accounting. Actuaries should also have good communication skills and analytical skills.

1. **Explain what are the benefits of working as an actuary?**

Actuaries have a wide variety of fields they can work in, flexible hours, good life and work balance, which is super important to me, and job security.

1. **What is the role of actuary analysts in investment?**

This type of actuary would compare and contrast different places of investment and choose an investment with a minimum amount of risks.

1. **Explain the role of chief actuaries?**

A chief actuary supervises other actuaries in a corporate setting or for the government. They give out assignments and also write reports.

1. **Explain what is actuarial report?**

An actuarial report is a culmination of the actuary’s work. It includes the current and future conditions of a policy and it helps use decide if our customers needs are being met.

1. **Name some of the most common actuarial software used in industry?**

Some common software that has been brought up during many information sessions include RStudio, SAS, Excel, VBA, and Moses.

1. **Explain what is the Casualty Actuarial Society?**

The Casualty Actuarial Society is the side of the actuarial field that works with property and casualty. This would include industries such as car insurance and insurance for natural disasters. Although the first three exams for the SOA and the CAS are the same, the exams we take after determine which track we are on. For the CAS track, there are only one track of exams to take while for SOA there are six.

1. **Mention some of the topics that Actuary should be proficient in?**

An actuary should be proficient in probability, risk management, calculus, and the programming software that the company uses.

1. **Explain what is lognormal distribution in the context to insurance?**

A probability distribution that is used as a model to claim size distribution; it is positively skewed and has a range from zero to infinity.

1. **Explain what does a pension actuary do?**

I believe pensions have something to do with retirement, so a pension actuary probably finds a pension rate that minimizes risks.

1. **What is the role of actuarial assistant in the insurance company?**

An actuarial assistant helps an actuary. They help to organize and compute quantitative data so that actuaries can work with it to evaluate the risk or some event.

1. **Mention what are the responsibilities of a property or casualty actuary?**

A casualty actuary deals with car insurance and property insurance. So, I think casualty actuaries would have to know how effective certain car upgrades are, the age of the driver, and the likelihood of car accidents are in that geographical area. For property, I think the actuary would have to know about weather patterns, for example if the area is prone to natural disasters, and the “life-span” of the property.

1. **Mention the role of Actuary in consulting firm?**

Based on information sessions I’ve been to, the consulting side of being an actuary is more communication based. You talk to your clients directly about the different options they have and your evidence. You offer them advice so that your client gets the proper coverage with minimum risk.

1. Greatest strength:

My ability to work with different types of people. Through different volunteer opportunities and my job, and meeting new people in general, I’ve learned that everyone has unique ways of working, some of which don’t align with how I personally might want to do a project. However, it is important to see where the other person or people are coming from because you can potentially learn new ways of performing a task.

1. Why Prudential?

Although Prudential is a very large organization, I’ve heard from people who’ve been part of the externship, as well as recruiters who came to information sessions say that being part of Prudential is like being part of a family. There are almost, I believe, around 50,000, employees that work for prudential but everyone’s opinions matter. Furthermore, I like that the company is involved in big issues facing the world, such as racial inequality, and are doing different activities to bring awareness and potentially decrease racial inequality in the work place.