

KNOW WHY PEOPLE FAIL,  
LEARN HOW TO SUCCEED

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# CRACKING JOB INTERVIEWS

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PRACTICAL TIPS *and* A PROVEN FRAMEWORK *with*  
LOTS OF REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

LESSONS LEARNED FROM JOB INTERVIEWS WITH

IBM

GOOGLE

MICROSOFT

AMAZON

AIRBUS

STARTUPS

& MANY OTHERS

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ABM Junaed

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# ABOUT ABM JUNAED

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Junaed is a passionate professional and the author of the "Cracking Job Interviews" book. He holds a Master's Degree in Informatics from TU Munich, one of the best universities for computer science. During and after his academic journey, he started working as a software engineer in several countries and companies, including Airbus, IBM, and others.

As an ever-evolving individual who likes to expand his knowledge and field of action, Junaed never ceases to pursue new learning opportunities. Driven by this mindset, he has acquired multiple certifications in Kubernetes, IBM cloud, AWS, and Spring framework - a popular Java framework.

During his career, he has learned valuable lessons that he wishes to share with others, whether they have just started their career or need to advance it. That is why he is always on the hunt for ways to spread his knowledge on career growth and mistakes, software engineering best practices, and more subjects.

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# COPYRIGHT

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1. My Story

The year 2013. Microsoft invited me to a job interview for an intern software engineer. At that time, I was regularly participating in many programming contests, solved a lot of algorithm and data structure problems, so I was very confident to get that position.

I was expecting some coding challenges and crack the interview by solving those challenges. Surprisingly, there was no coding challenge in the beginning, rather various HR, behavioral and technical questions I faced. I felt impatient in my mind, but didn't expose that. Finally, there was a logical problem and I nailed that.

After the interview, I was certain that I will not get that position and got a rejection email as expected. The failure didn't stop there, it continued.

I failed job interviews many times, even if I had all the necessary skills! That made me frustrated, as I didn't know the reason of my failure! I emailed the interviewers to know the reason, but

you know, every time you ask them and they give a templated reply with some bla bla...

I was not able to work on the projects, technologies I wanted to work on!

But I didn't stop there, I started analyzing my failures, I started playing the interviews in my head and remembered what I said. I put myself in the position of the interviewer.

I felt that there were better ways to answer during the interviews.

I talked with experienced friends, started reading articles, reading books on various soft skills, started thinking myself what answer I would have expected if I were the interviewer?

As a result, I created my own framework, my own tips, guidelines to do better at the job interviews. Then I never looked back, I cracked through almost all the job interviews afterwards including some big names, IBM, Mercedes Benz, AWS...

Moral of my story:

- You will only fail if you don't take any step
- "Failure is the pillar of success", this is not just a saying, it is true.
- Analyze your failure, talk with other people and improve yourself

- Your attitude matters a lot

Have fun and find the new you after reading this book!

## 1.2. Components of doing well in a Job Interview

Doing well in a job interview is not one thing.

It is a combination of various things. E.g., doing well in:

- HR screening interview
- Technical/core skill-related interviews
- Behavioral interviews
- Salary negotiation in the right way
- Proving soft skills
- Asking good questions
- Identifying what is important and demonstrating that you have those
- Presenting yourself in the right way

There are other factors as well, e.g., applying at the right time, luck, and so on. But the above list is the most important in my view.

You don't have to have everything from the above list, but the more you have, the better.

Moreover, something is important for an established company but may not be important for a startup. Something is important for the 1st hire but not for the 10th hire; the priority of skills is different. E.g., if I have a startup, I will hire someone who can get the work done as soon as possible. If I have an established company with various employees, I will hire someone who can work with the existing team and follow the company's values, industry standards, etc.

Read the chapter [What do interviewers look for while hiring?](#) to know which skills you should demonstrate during the interview.

## 2. WHAT DO INTERVIEWERS LOOK FOR WHILE HIRING?

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Every candidate should know which qualities are essential for the job they are applying. This will help to take better preparation and do much better in the interview.

### ***Misconception I had***

I thought that the interviewer will ask me questions and I will get the job by answering correctly to those questions. I was wrong!

### ***Correct approach***

You should know which qualities and skill-set are essential for the job.

Then throughout the interview process, show that you have those qualities by telling your previous experiences.

As you progress through this book, you will learn various techniques from me.

Let's look at some qualities you should show during an interview. Some qualities are expected in general, some qualities are expected from mid or senior-level candidates, and some other qualities are expected from the freshers.

## 2.1. Everyone should have these qualities

There are some general qualities which both freshers and experienced candidates should have. Let's look at those qualities.

### 2.1.1. Technical or core skill set for this job

Suppose you are being interviewed for a marketing position. In that case, the interviewer will try to understand whether you have the skills needed for this marketing job and to what extent you have those skills. In the section [Core skills](#) of the chapter [Preparation](#), I have shown how to find out the required core skills from a job description.

### 2.1.2. Soft skills

The interviewer also tries to understand your soft skills, for example, leadership, communication, and teamwork skills. These are the most important soft skills, but the position you are applying for might need other soft skills.

E.g., leadership is expected in more senior-level candidates. But skills like communication and teamwork are expected from both freshers and experienced candidates.

In the section [Soft skills](#) of the chapter [Preparation](#), I have shown how to find out the required core skills from a job description.

### 2.1.3. Cultural fit

First, what is cultural fit? Let's see some examples.

Suppose the job you have applied for requires working with minimal supervision, and you have to make a lot of decisions by yourself. If your working style requires a lot of input from your manager, then you are not a good cultural fit for this job.

Another example is a customer-facing job, where you must be very friendly, show empathy, and care for customers. So, if you don't have these qualities, you are not a good cultural fit for this position.

### 2.1.4. Motivation

If you fail to show correct motivation, then there is a high chance that you won't get the job, doesn't matter how talented you are! In the chapter [Show Correct Motivation](#), I have discussed why motivation is so important from the employer's perspective and how you can show the right motivation.

### 2.1.5. Confidence

Once, an interviewer asked me,

*"Mr. Junaed, are you confident to do this job?"*



I said, "Yes."

But **I was not looking into his eyes**, and my **voice didn't sound** confident enough. Guess what?

I didn't get the job!

So, please don't make the same mistake I did! **Show confidence in your voice, body language, and face.**

If you are not confident, you will take much time to do some tasks; you will always take a lot of time to make decisions, thus increasing the turnaround time. So, it is important to be confident. Confidence also helps to take calculated risks when necessary; as you know, failure is also a part of success.

## 2.1.6. Depth of knowledge

It means how much you know about a particular topic. If you're being interviewed for a sales position, then they would try to understand how much depth of knowledge you have about sales. If you're being interviewed for a software engineering position, then they would try to understand how much depth of knowledge you have about software engineering.

Okay, if you are a fresher, then this deep knowledge is not necessary.

But how can you show that you have deep knowledge of your core topic? For example, you can show any of the following

points:

- You have done certification
- You have worked a lot in that area
- You solved some critical problems in your past/current job
- You have generated a lot of revenue with your work

## 2.1.7. Breadth of knowledge

You don't need to be an expert in everything, and no one can be an expert in everything.

But broaden your horizon; it is important to have a general understanding of various topics.

E.g., if you are a Java Developer, then also try to understand:

- How CI/CD works
- How your business unit works
- How your Scrum master or product owner thinks/works
- Which tools are used for running the server, and how the Operations team generally work
- Which software is used for vulnerability detection and finding security threats
- How features are prioritized for the customer
- How marketing and sales team work

Because these will help you:

- to work collaboratively with other members of the team/company
- to understand the pain point of other members of the company
- And you will also get more chances to lead the team.

## 2.1.8. Quick learner

Are you a quick learner? When you join a company, there are many things to learn.

Technology changes, working style changes, new tools come in, and you must adapt yourself. You have to learn new things, so the interviewer also tries to understand whether you are a quick learner or not.

## 2.1.9. Problem-solving ability

*It has two aspects:*

### **1. What is your thought process?**

The interviewer tries to understand your thought process:

- How do you logically find the root cause of a problem?
- How do you logically solve a problem?
- Can you find different solutions and figure out the pros and cons?

- Can you choose the right solution based on the current situation?



Think out loud During the interview to show your thought process

#### THINKING OUT LOUD

Many people think silently, which is wrong; because the interviewer can't see your thought process unless you talk out loud.

When the interviewer gives me a problem, I think out loud. I tell the problem loudly; then I tell loudly what I am thinking to find a solution. This approach helps the interviewer to see my thought process.

#### Example of thinking out loud

Suppose the interviewer gave me a problem to solve. Then I say,

"Let me tell the problem in my own words so we can see whether we are on the same page or not. The problem is [*I rephrase the problem in my own words*].

Now let me think. To solve this problem, I can do [ I tell what can be done to reach the solution ]. This solution has the benefits [ I tell some benefits of this solution ], and cons [ I tell some cons of this solution ]. Or, I can do [I tell another solution approach if necessary ].

Based on our context, solution one will be a better choice."

Since I explain the logic step by step, the interviewer can easily understand my thought process.

## **2. Mentality, or attitude to solve any problem which comes to your path**

You can face problems with customers, with colleagues, with the company, with the product, and in many different dimensions. Do you have the ability to solve those problems?

Are you calm and relaxed when faced with obstacles? Do you have the motivation to take on challenges?



I show my motivation by saying that,

"I like to take on challenges and solve problems which come on my path."

When I answer a question, I keep these in mind:

- Instead of just answering, I show motivation and confidence in my face and voice
- Instead of saying simply yes/no, I talk more about the topic to show my depth and breadth of knowledge on that topic

## **2.2. Freshers and Junior candidates should show these qualities**

Dear Freshers and Junior candidates, you should show the following qualities:

### 2.2.1. Having the basic knowledge

Since you are coming as a fresh graduate and have little or no working experience, you don't have a deep knowledge of what is being used in the industry, right?

But you should have basic knowledge of what you will be working on.

If you want to work in sales, you should know the basics of sales. Similarly, you should know the basics of Java programming language if you are being interviewed for a Java software engineering position.

### 2.2.2. Quick learner

Since you are new in the industry, now you must learn a lot of new stuff. The faster you can learn, the more productive you will be.

I say something following to show that I am a quick learner and enjoy learning:

"I know things change very fast, I am a quick learner, and I enjoy learning new stuff."

### 2.2.3. Good cultural fit

I have already discussed it [here](#).

## 2.2.4. Trainable

Are you trainable? Since you haven't worked much before, you have to undergo a lot of training. They will teach you a lot of things. Remember, some people are not trainable, which means they don't want to learn new things or they learn very slowly. So, if you are the one who wants to learn and can learn quickly, you are already a good candidate.

## 2.2.5. Communicate properly

Can you communicate properly? Since you are a new hire, you have to learn many things. You have to ask a lot of questions. You have to communicate with a lot of people. So communication skill is very important.

## 2.2.6. Motivated

I have written a chapter [Show Correct Motivation](#), regarding why correct motivation is important and how you can show your motivation during an interview.

## 2.2.7. Confident

I have already discussed it [before](#).

## 2.2.8. Basic problem-solving skills

I have already discussed it [before](#).

## 2.2.9. Good working styles: e.g., flexible,

## organized

Are you flexible? Are you organized? Since you are a new hire, it's better to show that you're flexible, your working time is flexible, the task they will give you, you are flexible to do those stuff. It is also important to organize your work and manage time.

## 2.3. What do interviewers look for in Mid/Senior candidates?

### Senior candidate

A senior/experienced candidate is the 'Engine' of the team.

Without the engine, the car can't move forward; similarly, the team can't move forward without a senior or experienced person.

If you think of yourself as a senior candidate, then think about these questions:

- Do you have the qualities to be the 'Engine'?

You have to show that you have the capabilities to move the team forward, to move the company forward, and to move the product forward.

- Can your employer depend on you?



Your employer wants to give you the responsibility of the project and expects that you will deliver it on time.

## Mid-level candidate

A mid-level candidate is the future 'Senior' candidate and more than a fresher.

If you think of yourself as a senior candidate, then think about these questions:

- Are you capable of being the 'future engine' of the team?

You have to show that you have a handful of experience. You are no more a fresher, you know a lot of stuff, and you have the hunger to be the next senior employee of this company.

**Both senior and mid-level candidates should show the following traits** to be successful in the interview:

### 2.3.1. Leadership

Give examples from your experience when you led a team to solve a problem or succeed on a project.

You don't need to have the experience to lead the whole team.

For example, suppose you lead while implementing some features or took the initiative to solve a customer problem. In

that case, that's also leadership, and you can tell that example in the interview.

### 2.3.2. Work independently

Can you work with minimal supervision?

When you are a senior or mid-level employee, you must figure out many things without your manager or employer's supervision. You have to figure out the correct solution on your own.

### 2.3.3. Understand the business

Do you understand how the business works, what the customer wants, and how the company generates money?

A big difference between a senior person and a not-so-senior person is that senior members understand the business needs. They know how the business generates money. As a result, they can choose the correct solution. Some solutions could be very fancy, which is very interesting for you. Still, those may not be very good for the company. For example, your company is using a software, and there is something new in the market. The junior employee tends to jump on the new thing; on the other hand, the senior employee takes a step back and asks, "How will the new software solve our customers' problems in a better way?".

Only then will you understand if you need to switch to the new technology and the benefits it will bring to the business.

If removing the old tech will take a lot of time, but the benefit will be minimal, "senior" people will stay with the "old" technology. They will also think about the long run. If the "old" tech makes them fall behind the business, they will propose a roadmap to slowly and gradually retire the old tech and replace it with the new tech.

But, the junior person often says that switching to the new tech will be very easy! But after a couple of days, they find out that a lot of knowledge is missing, new tech has its bugs, and that causes a lot of disruption to the business. And they have to deal with unhappy customers, angry bosses, etc.

Senior people can sense these things early on, so they don't 'jump in' to the new tech; they evaluate and make a roadmap.

**Tips:** During the interview, I tell the interviewer about different situations where I did choose 'tech A' instead of 'tech B' because it was better for the business in the long run.

## 2.3.4. Working style: Organized, proactive

*Proactive:* When you see any problem, you will immediately bring that up,

Examples of being proactive

"Hey, we are having this problem. We are falling behind the market and have to catch up."

Or, "I made a mistake; let's inform the team so we can take quick action to minimize the damage."

Or, "With our current architecture, our software will not work during the next marketing campaign; let's discuss with the team to solve this."

That means you proactively give suggestions, bring up new ideas, find the problems, try to solve those problems, and so on.

*Organized:* A senior person should know how to handle work pressure, prioritize tasks, organize, and avoid being in a messy state!

In the end, you don't have to have all the qualities from this list.

But the more you have, the better chance you have.

### **Tips:**

When you go to the interview for a mid or senior-level position, try to show that you have these capabilities.

Prepare some examples from your past experiences. **Examples will help your interviewer to understand your ability.**

Keep the following points in mind:

- Have you shown some leadership qualities in your current or previous job?
- Have you demonstrated problem-solving ability in your current or last position?
- Or did you suggest removing some roadblocks to the business?
- Think about your skills and qualities and prepare examples so the interviewer can easily understand you.
- Show that you understand the business.

## 2.4. Situation based expectations

### *Startups vs. Large corporate*

Startups usually want someone who can do various types of work. Sometimes you have to do something outside of your core responsibilities. They might also want you to stay late from time to time in the office.

On the other hand, large corporations usually have a set of responsibilities. So, if you are a person who wants very structured work responsibilities or are not willing to be flexible, then you might find it hard to get a job in a startup, but it might be a good fit for a large corporate.

### *1st hire vs. 1000th hire*

For the 1st hire, the company needs someone who has done similar work before and can quickly finish the tasks, because the highest priority is to enter the market as fast as possible.

But, when a company hires the 1000th employee, that means the company is already established. Now the company needs someone who can learn fast, can work together with others, and fit into the team.

### *Short-term project/freelancer vs. long-running project*

In the long-term project, things change. So I will need someone who can adapt to changes. But I will need someone with all the skills to finish the project very fast for short-term projects.

## Summary

- Know the important qualities based on your expertise and take preparation accordingly

# 3. HIRING PROCESS

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A typical hiring process looks like this:

- The company needs a new employee. There could be several reasons for that:
  - Someone is leaving the team
  - The team is growing
  - There will be a new team
- The company announces the vacancy
- Candidates apply
- HR scans the CV using software
- HR takes screening interviews of the candidates
- HR creates a short list
- HR forwards the CVs of the short list to the hiring manager/team lead to verify if the profile really matches
- Interview is arranged with those short-listed candidates
- Hiring committee members discuss whom to hire
- An offer is made to the candidate

- After a successful negotiation, hiring is done

Sometimes, you will see that the hiring is stopped in the middle because the company has decided to stop hiring. I have seen a couple of times that the hiring is stopped after taking a couple of interviews. Once I saw that a new colleague was hired for our team, he came to the office and met the team. Unfortunately, then the company decided to stop hiring, and he was fired! Very unfortunate!

Sometimes, there is no specific decision on hiring. Still, the HR department post jobs and take screening interviews or collects CVs to have some candidates in the pipeline in case there is a hiring decision; only big companies do these things, as per my knowledge.

There are also external head hunters. They scan through the job boards and contact the company's HR department. They offer the company that they will find a suitable candidate for the position. They will take a percentage, e.g., 20% of the first year's salary of the candidate if a candidate is hired. The external head hunter signs a contract with the company, starts searching for good matches on LinkedIn and other platforms, and sends them cold messages. A lot of good candidates are not actively applying for jobs; these head hunters directly contact with talents and encourage them to apply for that job; indeed, if you apply and get



the job, then he will get a commission. I get a lot of messages from headhunters on LinkedIn and Xing.

By the way, discussing the hiring process is not the purpose of this book, but if you know the process, it will help you see the bigger picture and prepare better.

## 4. JUNAED'S FRAMEWORK TO ACE ALMOST ANY JOB INTERVIEW

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Junaed's Framework is a step-by-step guide that will help you Ace any job interview. It's simple, it's proven, and it works!

Here's how it works:

My Framework has five ingredients.



*Figure 1. Junaed's framework to do well in a job interview*

In the following chapters, you will find the details of my framework, so keep reading!

## 5. PREPARATION

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A job description can list many skills, but not all are important for the position, so it is important to find out what skills are necessary for the job. Finding out which skills are most important will help you to prepare well.

### 5.1. Experience matrix

Create your experience matrix, it will help you to prepare for the job interview.

#### Exercise: Experience Matrix

Project name	Your role	What you did/implemented	What you improved	Technical/core skills you acquired	Mistakes you made, and your learnings	Soft skills you acquired	Domain name

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Figure 2. Experience matrix

## 5.2. Sort out important skills in 3 dimensions

First, sort out the required skills into three different dimensions from the job description, these are:

1. Core skills
2. Soft skills
3. Domain knowledge

## Interview Preparation: Find out the important skills and Show your competence

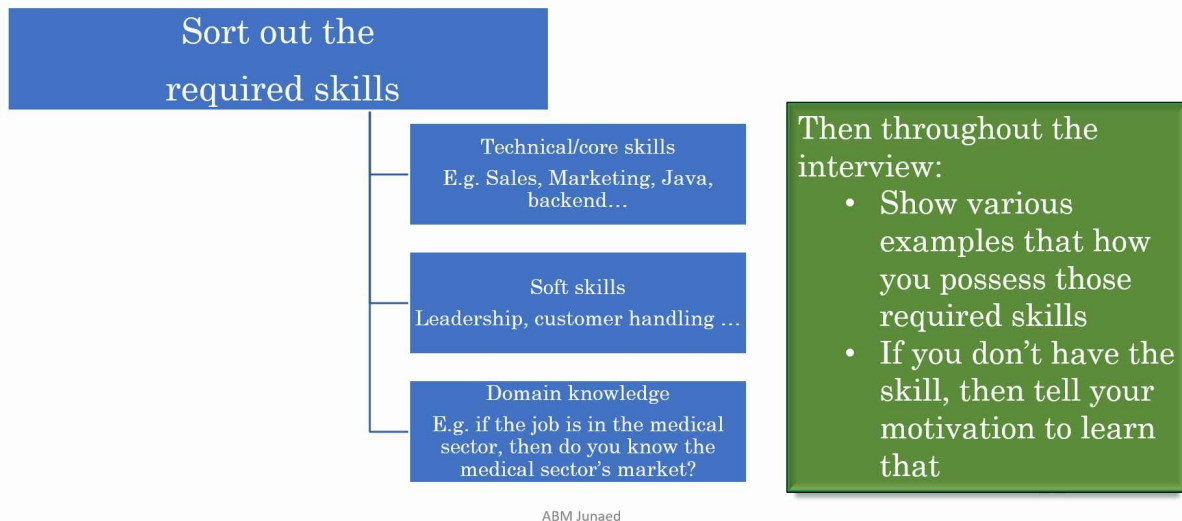


Figure 3. Sort out skills in 3 dimensions

Let's see details with examples in the following sections.

### 5.2.1. Core skills

Core skills are the skills that are central to the position you are applying for. For example, if you apply for a software engineering position, then the core skills are coding, knowing a programming language, database skills, and so on.

Let's take an example. Below is a screenshot from a job description; it is mainly for a cloud software engineering position, but don't worry if you are not a software engineer. The main idea is to show how you can sort out the required skills.

## Your Role and Responsibilities

### Job Description

IBM's Cloud Platform Services has an exciting opportunity for a **Cloud Software Engineer (f/m/x)** in our **IBM Cloud Platform engineering team**. This team is developing and operating IBM Cloud Platform services to build a public cloud for cloud native software developers. Our services are based on open-source technologies like Grafana, Prometheus, Cloud Foundry (PaaS), Apache OpenWhisk, Kubernetes (IaaS), KNative.

We're evolving quickly, and you'll have the opportunity to influence that evolution. As a cloud native developer for IBM Cloud, you'll be at the heart of implementing the next wave of IBM Cloud Developer services capabilities and contribute to open-source projects.

### Responsibilities

In the role as Cloud Software Engineer (f/m/x), you will

- Work on every facet of a key platform service — from the earliest stage of product architecture, design and development to deployment, troubleshooting, and performance analysis – to ensure a reliable quality product in production.
- Implement production ready features ~~and experiences for IBM Cloud Platform~~, but also develop internal observability tools to understand the health of our platform.
- Work in an Agile environment, developing software components for continuous delivery.

Needs unit test,  
integrations test, end-  
to-end test

Figure 4. Find out core skills from the job description

I have underlined the required core skills using green color. The job description mentions that you have to implement production-ready features, which need writing different tests, e.g., unit tests, integration tests, end-to-end tests.

List the skills in a document

Now, write down the skills in a paper/ notepad or word document, whatever you prefer.

*Listing 1. List of the core skills*

Core skills/Technical skills: Kubernetes (IaaS), KNative, Grafana, Prometheus, Cloud Foundry (PaaS), Apache OpenWhisk, performance analysis, unit test, integration test

## 5.2.2. Soft skills



Usually, you don't see the soft skills mentioned explicitly in the job description. You have to find out by yourself.

Go through the job description to find out which soft skills are necessary there, e.g., leadership, customer handling, teamwork, mentoring, etc.

Below is a *Responsibilities* section from a job description; let's take it as an example to find out the needed soft skills for this job.



## Responsibilities

In the role as Cloud Software Engineer (f/m/x), you will

- Work on every facet of a key platform service — from the earliest stage of product architecture, design and development to deployment, troubleshooting, and performance analysis – to ensure a reliable quality product in production. Needs **communication** skill
- Implement production ready features and experiences for IBM Cloud Platform, but also develop internal observability tools to understand the health of our platform. Needs **Teamwork**
- Work in an Agile environment, developing software components for continuous delivery.
- Follow and promote best practices including pair programming, test driven development (TDD) and automation of daily routine in test, deployment and production.
- Participate in periodic on-call rotation in a 24x7 environment.
- Operate the Cloud service you develop in collaboration with the whole team (DevOps).

Figure 5. Find out soft skills from the job description

The job description mentions:

“*working from the earliest stage of the product*”.

To do so, you need excellent **communication skills**. Good communication skills are essential for this job because regular communication will be with the client, project leads, architects, and other stack holders during the project stage.

Amazing, right? The job description didn't mention communication skills, but we have uncovered that by analyzing the job description.

It also mentions:

“ *troubleshooting.*

To troubleshoot a problem, you have to be proactive to find the cause and find out a solution. You will need to talk with other team members; maybe you will also need to speak with other teams as well, which leads to **teamwork**.

So, we have found another required soft skill, i.e., team player.

List the skills in a document

Now, write down the skills we have found in a paper/ notepad or word document, whatever you prefer.

*Listing 2. List of the soft skills required for this job*

Soft skills: communication, team player

### 5.2.3. Domain knowledge

Let's look at the following job description and try to find out the domain of the job.

## Your Role and Responsibilities

### Job Description

IBM's Cloud Platform Services has an exciting opportunity for a **Cloud Software Engineer (f/m/x)** in our IBM Cloud Platform engineering team. This team is developing and operating IBM Cloud Platform services to build a public cloud for cloud native software developers. Our services are based on open-source technologies like Grafana, Prometheus, Cloud Foundry (PaaS), Apache OpenWhisk, Kubernetes (IaaS), KNative.

We're evolving quickly, and you'll have the opportunity to influence that evolution. As a cloud native developer for IBM Cloud, you'll be at the heart of implementing the next wave of IBM Cloud Developer services capabilities and contribute to open-source projects.

*Figure 6. Find out the domain from the job description*

I have marked the domain knowledge in the image; since the job is for the Cloud area, one domain is cloud. Another domain I found is open source.

List the skills in a document

Now, write down the skills in a paper/ notepad or word document, whatever you prefer.

*Listing 3. List of the domains for this job*

Domain knowledge: Cloud, open-source

## 5.3. Prioritize the skills and prepare examples

Let's look at those three dimensions we have figured out.

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Technical skills: Kubernetes (IaaS), KNative, Grafana, Prometheus, Cloud Foundry (PaaS), Apache OpenWhisk, performance analysis, unit test, integration test

Soft skills: communication, team player,

Domain knowledge: Cloud, open-source

### 5.3.1. Prioritize the skills

Not all the skills are essential for the job, and during the interview, you won't have much time to discuss all the skills.

- Try to figure out which technical skills are critical. For example, performance analysis could be very, very important.

Similarly, try to figure out which other skills are essential.

### 5.3.2. Prepare your examples

- During the interview, you should try to convince the interviewer that you have these skills.
- Write down your experiences for the important skills you have figured out in the last step. Do you have working experience with those? Did you do any courses/training? Did you read any good books on that topic? You can add those to your example of experience.

Take the example of performance analysis. Show that you have done some performance analysis. For instance, I can tell that,

"I did a performance analysis of our software. I used tools [ tell the name of the tools you used ]; I generated a high load on the system and monitored how it behaves. My findings are [ tell your findings ]. "

If I have worked with open-source, I'd tell them that. On the contrary, if I haven't worked with open source yet, but I am motivated to do so, I'll tell them,

"I haven't worked with open-source before, but I'm very motivated to work with open-source technologies."

## 5.4. No experience?

Suppose I have applied for a company that works in the medical industry. However, I have never worked in the medical sector.

Then I will show my motivation to work in the medical industry. I could say the following to my motivation,

I went to the hospital couple of times. I know the sufferings of the patients; I can feel them. I would be very happy if I could work in this medical sector and make a positive impact. That's why I have applied for this position.

Take another example.

If I want to work on Machine Learning, but have no working experience, I might say:

I want to grow, and I am highly interested in working with machine learning as this will be the next big thing that will significantly impact our planet. Moreover, I am doing some side projects in my free time to learn more about machine learning."

## 5.5. Summary

- Read through the job description and figure out the required skills
- Some skills are not explicitly mentioned in the job description; you have to find out yourself
- Divide the required skills into three different dimensions: technical skills, soft skills, and domain knowledge
- Rank the skills which are mostly needed
- Prepare your example for those skills
- If you don't have the skill, then tell your motivation behind learning that skill

## 6. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

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You should build your persona during the job interview. You should also prove that you are a good match for this position. "Tell Me About Yourself" is the best place to do self-promotion and build your persona.

### 6.1. A Big Mistake

When the interviewer says, "Please tell me about yourself," many people mention only their name, where they are coming from, and where they have studied. This information is very basic, and the interviewer already knows from your CV. So, that's wasting an opportunity.

### 6.2. Topics you should cover

Usually, the first real question asked during an interview is, "Please tell me about yourself," or "Please introduce yourself."

You should do the following:

- Don't just tell your name, where you studied and this type of basic information

- Tell in a way so that it matches the job description
- Tell your impact on the team, on the project, on the company
- Tell your achievements
- You can also tell those which are not mentioned in the Job description.

These extra qualifications will make you more competitive!

Suppose you are being interviewed for a marketing position. You do a lot of social media marketing, but you have also written some good blog posts before.

If your employer needs a new blog post, they can ask for your help. Or if their blog writer is sick or has a lot of work pressure, they can ask you, "Hey, could you please help us write a blog?".

So, during the hiring decision, they will discuss that they are hiring you for one position. Still, you can also contribute sometimes in other situations, which will make you more competitive than other candidates.

- Show the [breadth of your knowledge](#).
- Show the [depth of your knowledge](#).

### 6.3. My example: This is how I tell about myself



**I utilize almost 10 minutes to tell about myself.** That's because I have a lot of experience. But those who are fresher or mid-level might not have that much experience. But you should talk about yourself, maybe for five minutes, even if you are a fresher.

Here is how I tell about myself; take this as an example; I have also shared a [template for the freshers](#) and a [template for the experienced](#) candidates later in this chapter.

My template for "Tell me about yourself"

- I have finished my MSc from TU Munich (I start by mentioning my highest degree)
- Then I started working for a company named ....
- Then, I describe a project which shows my skillset related to this job
  - If the project was very complex, tell the complex parts of the project.
  - e.g.: real-time position data, voice call feature, complex features in the front end, android app real-time sync between many devices, complex microservice-based backend
- The project was developed for 10+ years, with a lot of message passing, MQTT, JMS, collision avoidance system, booking system, resource management, accounting, offline data storage, and syncing like firebase database
- My role was: mainly backend, sometimes with frontend and

## Android development

- I solved these problems/ implemented these features/worked with these parts ...
  - An access control system, resource management system, communication between backend and android app with messaging, android services ...
- I improved the architecture of the software
- I used microservice, saga pattern, CQRS pattern<sup>[1]</sup>. I also mention the reasons for using these patterns, e.g., what was the problem before using these patterns, and how these patterns solved those problems.



### Emphasize if you worked with a complex system

Improving the architecture and working with complex architecture show that I am a senior engineer. So, if you have worked with something complex or significant, then mention that.



### Choose your words carefully

Be careful about the difference between **building** a *complex system* and **working with** a *complex system*. A candidate mentioned in his CV that he wants to **build** a *complex system*, and his CV was rejected because our job is to **simplify**, not to make things *complex*, but **working with** or **working on** a complex system is okay. So, choose your word carefully. Otherwise, the interviewer might get the wrong message!

- I have solved some critical bugs

- I did some hotfixes in the live/production system (Working with a production system needs some skill and shows that I can handle pressure)
- Reduced cloud cost by x% (companies always love it if you can cut costs; or can save time by making the process simpler)
- I attended customer meetings, understood their problems, and provided solutions
- Above are the impacts I had on the project.
- Some soft skills I acquired:
  - Communication: I worked with people from different backgrounds, countries, and cultures, so I know how to interact and effectively communicate with people.
  - Teamwork
  - Leadership
  - Mentoring
- My achievements (e.g., I led the team to deploy our system with a tight deadline, generated revenue of X dollar, ...)
- I used these technologies [ I mention the name of the technologies I used ]

Then I move to another project and follow the above pattern.

## 6.4. Template for freshers

Many times, freshers ask, "How can I tell about myself? I'm just a fresher. I don't have enough experience!"

No worries. Below is a template for freshers. Focus on that.  
Template for the freshers

- Tell about your highest degree. If you had an excellent grade, then you can also mention that.
- Tell about one project which you did at University/college
  - Describe the project in a few sentences.



Make sure the interviewer can understand your description. You can describe the project to your friend who doesn't know about the project to see if your explanation is understandable.

- Your role in the project
- What you did in the project
- What did you learn from the project
- Tell something which is used in real life
  - E.g., you can tell that "I learned PowerPoint, I learned how to present in front of a lot of people, I used GIT; I used design pattern; CI/CD pipeline; docker; Camtasia ...
- What cool, advanced things you did. You might think that

you did fundamental stuff as a student but mention the challenges or difficulties you faced. Those might look easy from an experienced candidate's point of view, but you are being interviewed for a fresher or junior position.

- What technical things have you learned? E.g., "I learned how to use Linux, I learned how to use MySQL."
- What Soft skills have you acquired?
- Technologies you used

Repeat the above template for the next project.

## Exercise

Now create a "Tell me about yourself" using the above points.

### **Tips:**

- Focus on the skills which are asked in the job description
- Try to speak at least 5 minutes

## 6.5. Template for experienced

I have seen a lot of experienced candidates who can't tell about themselves eloquently. Use the following template:

- Start with your highest degree if that is relevant
- How many years have you been working in the industry

- If you have worked for a lot of companies, then you can mention the last two companies or only some projects which show your competence, or some big companies whose names will have a big impact on the interview or projects which match this job.
  - Project: Tell about the project
    - If the project is complex, tell the complex parts. In a complex project, you can learn a lot simply by hearing how others solved their problems, and you can grow much more than working on simple projects.
    - If the project is not complex, then tell a few lines about the project
    - Your role and responsibility
    - What cool, advanced things you did
    - Which technologies you used
    - What did you improve
    - Your impact
    - Your achievements
    - Soft skills
  - Something else you did on the company/org level, not only at the project level

Use the above template for the next company or project.

## **Tips:**

- Focus on the position you are interviewing for. E.g., for SW Dev position you can focus on the highly scalable architecture, clean code, design patterns, code review, automated testing, microservice etc.
- Emphasize those skills more which are mentioned in the job description
- I tell about myself for almost 10 minutes

## 6.6. Tips to well prepare

Follow these tips to prepare for this "Tell me about yourself."

1. Create your template and fill it in.
2. Rehearse and record in your camera.
3. Watch the video, find the mistakes and do it again.

## 6.7. One tip for the experts

Sometimes the job description is vague, some common sentences are there, and many skills are mentioned. So you don't know what to focus on during the "tell me about yourself" part. In that case, first, I ask them to give me more context about the job.

E.g., I say, "I can tell a lot about myself, but if you introduce the team and the project and what you need at first, then I can focus

only on those, which will help all of us to focus and keep within time."

Sometimes I already know more about the job from the 1st phone interview in more detail; then, I don't ask that. But remember, to talk in this manner, you have to have a lot of confidence. You might feel uncomfortable if you are not very experienced in facing job interviews.



**1** By the way, you don't have to know what SAGA or CQRS are; these are something related to microservice; for now, focus on "how" I tell myself.

## 7. DISCUSS

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**Once, I got feedback from a recruiter.**

*Recruiter:* The interviewer said that Mr. Junaed is a very good listener.

*Me:* Is that positive or negative feedback?

*Recruiter:* It could be both; not sure.

**Needless to say, I didn't get the job.**

Later I analyzed what happened. I have also analyzed some of the rejections I got. The findings were amazing; I uncovered some valuable lessons.



I have figured out that I should discuss with the interviewer, and through this discussion, I can show that I am a good match. But how? We will learn that in this chapter.

### 7.1. A big misconception

Many people think it is the interviewer's responsibility to find out the candidate's potential! Early in my career, I thought the interviewer will ask me some questions, and I will get the job by

correctly answering those questions. That's why I listened to the interviewer most of the time and talked only when I was asked some questions.

### *Correct approach*

But, the truth is, I have to demonstrate to the interviewer how awesome I am for this position. **I have to do my marketing.** To do so, I need to go into discussion mode with the interviewer, find out what they need and show that I can deliver what they need.

## 7.2. Purpose of the discussion

### 1. **To know which skills are essential for this job**

Sometimes, the job description is vague. Sometimes, the job description mentions a lot of skills, and no one can have all of those skills!

However, some skills are so crucial that you are a good match if you have those skills.

Sometimes the employer also doesn't know that some skills are essential for this job. Still, with the discussion, you can uncover their actual pain points and show your skills to solve their problems. You may think, how an employer doesn't know all the required skills! Well, I will show you in the next section.

## **2. To show that you have the required skills**

Once you have figured out the important skills, show that you possess those skills using various examples.

## **3. To demonstrate your soft skills, e.g., communication, thinking ability, teamwork, etc.**

Then you can show that you can do discussion, you can think, you can communicate, and you can work with people. These are very important in a job; in real life, and you will have many discussions with people. You have to think about different solution approaches. You have to work together with people. Through the discussion, you can show you have those skills.

## **4. To know more about the company and your future colleagues**

Suppose you join a team/company/project which is not aligned with your career trajectory. In that case, joining them can hamper your career. I ask various types of questions to the interviewer, which I will show you next. And based on his answers, I can understand whether the company, the project, or the team matches my career trajectory.

## **5. To interview the interviewer**

I interview my interviewer and try to understand the following things:

- His work style
- His team's working style
- How smart are they
- What is the project about
- What will be my role in the project
- Will I get a chance to work with smart people and move my career forward or not
- Do they care about human beings or have a toxic culture?

These are very important to know. Eight hours a day, you will be working with them. That means you will spend one-third of your time there. So you have to find out whether you will enjoy working with them.

## 6. Will they assign me something which I won't want to do?

*Listing 4. Through discussion, I avoided accepting a wrong job*

Once I was interviewed for a DevOps position, I was very excited. The project and team were also very good. But after further discussion, I uncovered that I have to do some IT administrative work two days per week. I didn't want to do those things, as those are not aligned with my career trajectory, and I don't enjoy doing those kinds of stuff. Luckily, I did enough discussion to uncover that.

So, through discussion, you can find out if there is something you don't like to do and how much time you have to do those in your daily work. Then you can decide to join or reject if you get an offer.

## 7.3. Powerful questions to drive the discussion

I drive the discussion by asking some questions. Based on the interviewer's response, I craft my answer.

**The questions you can use are below.**

### 7.3.1. "Which technology/tool/software do you use every day?"

Interviewer: We use XYZ tools/software/technology.

If you know any of those, tell them:

"That's fantastic; I also use that for project X." Or, "I have used that in one of my projects. I have learned ...".

If you haven't used that, but know the use of it, then you can reply:

"I heard about it; it is used for { tell the use}. It gives some benefit like { tell the benefits}. I am very excited to work with this technology/software".

If there is another competitor tool, I ask them why they are using it, not the other one. E.g.,

I: By the way, why are you using Jenkins, not Teamcity? Are you facing any problems with Jenkins, or what benefits are you getting?

### 7.3.2. "What will be my core responsibilities?"

Suppose the interviewer said,

“ *"Our team is very young, and we want to stabilize the team. We have a lot of critical bugs in our system, and our architecture is not so good, and many users are facing a lot of issues."*



**Now, I will try to derive what he needs from his answer.**

He said *"the team is very young, and he wants to stabilize the team."*

That means he needs someone who can guide the team. You are a strong candidate if you have any experience in mentoring or leading a team.

Since I have that experience, I will answer

"Looks like you want someone who can lead the team from the front, and I have that experience; I will enjoy doing this here as well. I have also solved critical architectural issues and made the

software more scalable. I think I will be able to help here as well."

He has also mentioned, *"The users are facing many problems, and the software has many bugs"*.

That means the architecture is not good, and their coding standard is not good. So, making good architecture, investigating user problems, and proposing a sustainable architecture; will be critical for this job. If you have those experiences, this is the time to tell them. E.g.,

I: "Wonderful, that means you need someone who can investigate customers' problems, investigate the architecture and propose a robust architecture for the software. That's what I am doing in my current role. I have solved some critical architectural issues and made the software more scalable. I think I will be able to help here as well. "

### 7.3.3. Which problems are you facing now with your product?

Sometimes the interviewer also doesn't know which things are very important; you have to open their eyes.

Once, after hearing the problems, I proposed to my interviewer to adopt canary deployment, some microservice patterns, and move to Kubernetes. And they didn't know that they needed



canary deployment, some particular microservice patterns, and Kubernetes.

During the interview, they came to know about these from me. Guess what? They offered me the job. So, here, I'm trying to find out what is important for them and to show them I have those skills.

### 7.3.4. How is the team structure?

Through this, you can identify the opportunity for you. For example, if they say, "We have a team of six members, and we don't have a team leader right now."

Then you have an opportunity to be the next team lead. You can be the next team lead if you join the team and show some leadership skills. Or you can help the next team lead to move the project forward. You can tell that,

*“ I help our team-lead a lot in my current position, and I share his responsibility when he is on vacation or if he has a lot of work pressure. Since you don't have a team lead currently, I can take over that position. Or if I join the team, I will greatly help the new team-lead. I am already doing it, and I enjoy it.”*

### 7.3.5. Please tell me about other team members, their roles, and the team structure

This question will help you know what the other team members are doing, how their roles are structured, and how you can fit into the team.

### 7.3.6. What challenges are you facing now?

It will help you to identify their problems or challenges and demonstrate that you can help to solve the problems.

And here's one very interesting point: if they're having a problem and you tell them the solution directly, they might not hire you because you already solved that problem. Instead, you can tell them how you have the right experience to solve the problem they're facing right now.

Here is an example. I'm a software engineer, so I'm giving an example from software engineering.

Suppose that they tell you that their most challenging problem is when more than 1,000 people use the software, the software is not stable. That means they have a scalability problem.

Then you can tell them,

*“You're having a scalability problem. I designed and architected highly scalable software and know*

*how to do that."*

And you can give some example that you had a software that maybe only 100 people could use. Then you refactored the software and added a lot of features. Then, 10000 people can use the same software.



So the idea is:

- You have to find out what the challenge is.
- Then show them you have the strength or ability to solve the challenges.
  - For example, if they tell you they need someone who can guide the team, then you can focus on your leadership skills, mentoring skills, depth of knowledge, and breadth of knowledge.

## 7.4. How to drive the discussion towards your strength

Suppose you are giving an interview for a social media marketing position, but social media marketing is vast. It can mean Facebook marketing; it can be LinkedIn marketing. And there are different areas you have to work in social media marketing. Some areas of social media marketing are your strength, and some are not your strong areas. For example, you excel at creating social media posts. However, there are some areas where you are not so strong; suppose that infographics are not your strength.

Now drive the discussion towards your strength. Tell that you have excellent writing skills. Tell them some of your writing success stories. For example, did you write some blog posts or some tweets, and many people read your posts? Did you fine-tune some words, and did it give more traction? Did your post generate a lot of sales? These are some examples of success stories.

On the other hand, since infographics are not your strength, if the discussion goes into that area, you will not have enough things to tell about yourself, and you will not look so good during the interview. But if you can drive the discussion towards your strong point, then you have a lot of things to tell about yourself and to show your competence.

You might ask me, "Are you saying to hide the weaknesses?"

No, not at all!

Here is how I communicated my weakness

During one of my interviews, I heard that they work with Golang. I told them that I was still learning Golang. Still, I know some other languages and am interested in learning Golang. Since logic, way of thinking, and problem-solving ability are the most important, learning a new language that is interesting to me is just a matter of time. And I got that job!

So, I wanted to make it clear that if they hire me and find out that I need three months to learn the new programming language and

related frameworks, they can't excuse to fire me.



So, find your strength and drive the discussion towards your strength. **And since you also know your weakness, please work on the weak points to be a better version of yourself.**

## 7.5. Use this loop during the discussion

During this interview, use this loop to do the discussion.

1. **Know** more about the position. Use [these powerful questions](#) I have shown before to know:
  - more about the position
  - the core responsibilities of this position
  - the super important skills needed for this job
2. Then **drive** the conversation towards your strength. If the discussion goes towards something which is your weak point or where you are not so good, then you don't have much to show your competence.
3. **Convince** the interviewer that you are the person they are looking for by using various examples of your previous work and data. Demonstrate that you have the skills which are most important for this job.
4. Show your **motivation**

- for the company
- for the project
- Or for the challenges they're facing.

If you can't show your motivation, then it doesn't matter how talented you are. The interviewer might think you will not stay with them for a long time if you're not motivated. So, if you're motivated for this job, don't forget to show your motivation.

## 7.6. How to Stop the Interviewer and How Not to

Usually, don't stop the interviewer in the middle of his talk; let him finish, then he will give you a chance to speak. However, if you see that the interviewer got the wrong impression and you want to stop him, then politely say: "**May I?**"

Example of stopping the interviewer

Interviewer: "So, from your CV, I see that you haven't worked in a leadership position, but"

Here I see that he got the wrong impression, so I want to stop him.

I (immediately and politely): **May I?**

Interviewer: Yes, please.

I: In project A, in Company B, I led the part of the team; I did ...

Then I describe what I did in the leadership position.



**This "*May I?*" is very important during an interview. Install it in your head!**

## 7.7. Summary

- Ask good questions to find out what matters for the hiring decision.
- Show that you have those qualities with some examples.
- Even better, if you could show them, you can solve some of their pressing problems.
- Find out more about the day-to-day job and the team; so you can decide if this job is right for you.

## 8. THE QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

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### A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will ask you: *"Do you have any questions?"*

Many people say, "No, I don't have any questions," or they ask some simple questions.

But, this is a huge opportunity to prove yourself further, remove their confusion about yourself and learn more about themselves. So, You should prepare some good questions.

### 8.1. Prove yourself and Know more about them

The purposes of asking these questions are:

- Show your competence and remove the confusion of the interviewer!
- To find out some important qualifications required for this job and to show that you have those skills
- To show that you are motivated
- To decide if you want to join this company if you get an offer!



## 8.2. Powerful questions and how to use those

### 8.2.1. Question 1

**Which three skills/qualities are most important for this role?**

Benefits of this question:

You can show that you have the required qualities!

Let's see an example conversation.

*I:* Which three skills/qualities are most important for this role?

*Interviewer:* "Communication," "Teamwork," and "Work with minimal supervision."

*I:* You mentioned some very good points

Then I will tell some past events/experiences where I have shown these qualities.

For communication, I might say,

"Good, clear, and timely communication is very important. Once I had some problems in our project, and our team was falling behind the delivery date. I talked with the stakeholders and teammates and finally found a way to overcome the problem. My early communication saved us a lot of trouble in the future.

For teamwork, I might say,

**"We fail as a team, or we win as a team;** this is not a one-man show. I worked with many different people from different

countries. I work with different teams, e.g., finance team, ops team, management, customers, etc., and I work collaboratively."

#### SUMMARY:

So, show that you have those qualities with some examples. But keep it short. Otherwise, you will run out of time.

## 8.2.2. Question 2

**What is the most pressing/ challenging problem you are facing now?**

Benefits of this question:

You can show that you have the right motivation (and skills)!

Let's see some scenarios.

*Scenario: When you know the solution or the direction of the solution*

In this case, give some abstract ideas

Let's see an example

Interviewer: We are facing problems with our cloud solutions.

I might say: "Everything from a single cloud provider is not the best; some providers are good at something, others are good at something else. Maybe, you can use multi-cloud, use serverless, etc. **But I can propose a much better solution if I think further.**"

*Scenario: When you don't know the solution*

In this case, show your motivation to work on this problem.

Let's see how to answer if you don't know the solution

I: It is a very interesting problem; I would love to work on it (show your motivation). I will learn a lot; I like challenges.

*Scenario: When you have the expertise*

Show you confidence and emphasize that your expertise can solve their problems.

Interviewer: We are facing some problems with our team, the team is not stable, and we don't have expertise in some fields.

I: I believe that I have a lot of experience; if I join the team, I will be able to stabilize the team (it shows confidence).

Summary:

Know about their problem and tell them:

- How can you solve their problems
- Or you are interested in working on those problems

### 8.2.3. Question 3

**What is your best memory in this company?/ What do you like about the company, and what could be improved in your opinion?**

Benefits of this question:

- You can learn the good parts and not-so-good parts of this company
- Later you can decide if you will join the company or not

## 8.2.4. Question 4

**Where do you see the company in the next three years?**

Benefits of this question:

- You can know if this company is a good choice for you in the long run
- Is there a high chance that you get fired after some time?
- Whether the business is going well or not
- Are they making profits?
- Are they planning to grow?

Let's see an examples conversation

Interviewer: "We are growing; we are selling to more customers. We want to expand our business."

I: "Are you already profitable or in investing phase?"

Interviewer: "We are on our way to profit; we are investing now."

From this answer, you know that the company is not yet profitable, which means they might shut down or downsize the team in the near future! If they downsize, you will be in danger as a new employee.

So, my next question will be:

"So, what is your plan if the sales don't go as planned this year? Do you have enough investment to run for the next 1-2 years?"

I will also ask him:

"And as you said that you want to grow the business, what does it mean to open the business in new countries? Do you have a plan to hire more members for the team?"

From his answers, I will try to understand how the business is going on. This information will help me to make a decision if I get a job offer from this company. However, if I am desperate to get a job (may be I have no job right now, or I want to change my current job asap), then this information might be helpful for me, but the interviewer will see that I can think of company's growth, which is a very good sign of a candidate.

## 8.2.5. Question 5

**Do you have any further questions about me?**

Benefits of this question:

- You can remove any doubt they have

I usually don't ask this, but if they show any doubt about you, then you will get the chance to remove their doubt for the last time!

Let's see an example:

*Interviewer: Have you ever worked as a team lead?*

This question indicates that the interviewer is not convinced about my leadership skill.

So, I will tell him a past example where I led the whole team, or led some part of the team, or some features of the project at least.

## 8.3. Summary



Don't say that you have no questions, ask some good questions



- I have shown a couple of sample questions, but feel free to prepare more questions as per your need



- Ask some questions where you can reemphasize your capabilities

- Ask some questions where you can know more about them

## 9. SHOW CORRECT MOTIVATION

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Once a candidate did really well in the job interview. Yet, he failed to get the job because he failed to show his motivation!

I know a lot of you also did very well in the interview but was rejected! You had no clue! Now you know the reason of many of your failures!

### 9.1. Importance of correct motivation

Money is a motivation, but this is not the right motivation from your employer's perspective. If your only motivation is money, you will leave this company for a higher salary in the near future! It will bring a big hassle for the company if you leave after a short time. Because your employer will need to go through the whole hiring process, i.e., advertising, screening, interviewing, etc. That will cost a lot of money and time and slow down the project. On the other hand, if you are motivated for this position or the project, there is a high chance that you will remain with the company for a long time.

Moreover, you can give your best output if you are motivated. That's why HR wants to see your motivation.



They try to understand:

- Do you like the company?
- Do you like the project?
- Do you like the working culture of the team?

## 9.2. How to show your motivation



Never tell a lie, don't show false motivation if you are not really motivated for this position. Be honest during the interview and in your life!

- Find out more about the company/project/challenges they are facing. I have already shown in the [Discuss](#) chapter and [The Questions To Ask At the End of the Interview](#) chapter regarding how to find out more information. Then you can utilize those information to show you motivation.
- If you liked the project, you should tell **why** you liked the project.

For example, you can say something following:

"I like this position because the project is very challenging, and I have many opportunities to grow."

"I am highly motivated for this project because it is very important for the world."

- If you liked the company, then tell that. It is better if you can tell why to like the company.

For example:

"I like this company because you have a great mission. It will have a big impact on the industry".



Showing motivation *only* for the company is not good because they are hiring you for a project. It isn't easy to give the highest output if you are not motivated for the project. So, show your motivation for the project as well.



Don't say that you are motivated because they pay well! Motivated for money means leaving soon if another company offers you more money! We work for money, but money is not the ultimate thing, job satisfaction, company culture, learning opportunity, colleagues, and many other things are also important, right?

# 10. INTERVIEW STEPS: WHAT HAPPENS IN A JOB INTERVIEW

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You have a better chance to do well in a job interview if you know what happens in a job interview. Let's see the steps of the job interview process.

There are usually two steps in a job interview.

## *HR screening interview*

Here HR will call you and will try to understand if you are a good fit for the position or not.

## *Final interview*

Here the main focus will be on your technical/core skills, HR and behavioral interviews.



Some interviews might have more or less steps as well.

Some big companies might have more steps instead of these two steps. For example, they might have some online tasks before the

HR screening interview. Many tech companies use platforms like Hackerrank to give some online programming challenges.

Some companies might have additional 'phone interviews', where you will do a task online and the interviewer will watch it live. For example, some tech companies conduct 'Phone interviews,' where you have to do coding challenges in front of the interviewer.

Sometimes the final interview can have multiple parts, where you will have multiple sessions with different interviewers. You might have some extra HR interviews as well

But usually, there are mainly two steps or two segments. One is the screening part; another is the final interviewer part.

Sometimes you might have only one final interview, no screening interview; e.g., the company is in a hurry, or someone referred you. In those cases, they may call you directly to the final interview. Once, I had an offer from a company with very short notice. They wanted to hire someone because they had a lot of work pressure. They did not have much time to go through HR screening etc. They had only one interview with me.

Let's discuss the interview steps in detail in the following chapters.

# 11. HR SCREENING INTERVIEW

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Let's discuss the HR screening interview in detail.

## 11.1. Purpose of the HR screening interview

- Are you a good match? Do you have the required core skills?
  - It is about understanding if you are a good match for this company and for this project. Because if you are not a good match, the company will waste money and time by inviting you to the next interview rounds. Because the following interviews will be with higher-level managers/senior members of the company, and so on, they are usually very busy. That's why HR takes a screening interview to understand if you are a good match for this company.
- Are you a Cultural match?
  - Will you be able to work with the company and existing team members?
- Do you have the required soft skills?
  - These HR people are very experienced and take a lot of interviews. They will observe your attitude and how you

reply to questions. After talking with you for a couple of minutes, they will understand whether you will fit the position.

They have already read your CV and thought that you might be a good match for the next steps. This time they will directly talk to you and will possibly see you via video call to understand you.

- Are you motivated enough for this company, for this project?
  - For example, if you are skilled, you're a good cultural match for the team. Still, maybe you are not motivated by this company and this project. What would happen after joining the company? You might leave the company after a couple of months. In that case, the company has to find a new employee, which will cost them a lot of time and money. That's why they would try to understand if you are highly motivated.

## 11.2. Steps of the HR Screening interview

Now, let's look at what happens during the HR screening interview.

### 11.2.1. HR emails/calls to schedule an interview date

They will give some probable dates for the screening interview.

Some tips

- **Try to accept the earliest possible date:**

Here is why I try to accept the earliest date. It happened a couple of times that I was interviewed, and they scheduled the following interviews. Still, after some time, I got an email that they had hired someone else. The reason is that another person started the interview before me and finished the final interview, this company liked that candidate, but he got an offer from another company. So he told this company, "hey, I need a decision from you. Otherwise, I will accept the other offer." So this company couldn't wait to finish my interview, so they offered that candidate, hired him, and canceled my interview. That's why I try to take the earliest possible date.

**Sometimes, it is better to take a later date.** What if this is a coding interview and I need some time for preparation? It is usually not a big problem for tech giants because they have a couple of open positions. In that case, I take a date after some time, e.g., after two-three weeks, to give me some time for preparation. But for smaller companies, I tend to take the earliest possible date. But if you think it's a challenging coding interview and you need some time in that case, try to take it later.

- **Always keep the phone open; enable roaming if you are outside of the country**

I have a friend who applied for a job in Germany. Then he went to the USA for a vacation trip. Fortunately, he turned on his roaming at that time and got a call from HR for an interview.

So, make sure you are available by turning on your phone or enabling roaming when necessary. Otherwise, you might miss an opportunity if HR calls you and can't reach you.

- **Talk politely** When you receive a phone call, talk politely. Some people receive the call, and they speak very harshly. They say, "Hey! Hello, who are you?"

Don't talk like that. Talk very politely. You can tell your name, e.g.,

"Hello, I'm Junaed speaking," and just wait, and they will tell you who they are. So speak politely with a soft and friendly voice.

## 11.2.2. Phone/ Video call with HR

They will call you on the scheduled date. It can be a Skype call/Video call, or it could be a phone call.

Let's see some more information and tips for this:

- **Dress up**

How should you dress if it is a video call? I was very confused at the beginning of my video interviews.



So the dress-up depends on the position and the country you are being interviewed for. I'm a software engineer. For my interviews in Germany, I wear a very casual dress. In the winter, I wear only hoodies. In the summertime, I wear only a shirt, maybe a white shirt or a blue shirt, but no fancy multicolored dress.

Suppose you're being interviewed for a sales position or a marketing position. In that case, you might want to wear a coat, .i.e being more formal.

So you should decide based on your position. But always wearing a formal dress is not a bad option, even if you are a software engineer.



When in confusion, I wear a formal dress. Moreover, for face-to-face interviews, I wear a shirt and a coat.

So, the dress-up expectation can vary from country to country and from role to role.

- Duration

The duration is usually 30 minutes, but it depends. Sometimes it goes longer; sometimes, it goes shorter.

- Take notes

Always keep a pen and paper with you to take some notes, e.g. write down the team size, the working hour, which skills are mainly required, what they are looking for, the next steps of the interview, and other information you might need in the next interviews. So keep a pen and paper with you and take some notes. You can also write on your computer. It depends on you, but the main point is to take notes.

### 11.2.3. HR describes the job

Then HR will briefly tell about the project and the company. Some HR doesn't do that; they directly tell that *"I am [ name of the HR ] from the company [ company name ]. How are you doing today?... You have applied for the job on ..."*

#### Screening process

Now will be the real discussion on your skillset to determine if you are a good match.

- Usually, the 1st question is: Tell Me About Yourself

Some people only tell their names and so on. That's a huge mistake. In short, you should tell about yourself in a way so that HR understands that you are the perfect match for this position. So prepare well to tell about yourself.



Read the chapter [Tell Me About Yourself](#) to take preparation.

- One must Question for the experienced candidates :

**"Why do you want to leave your current company?"** If you are an experienced candidate, you will almost always face this question:

So get prepared for this. Maybe you are looking for growth opportunities with more challenges.

Here is an example answer

I am working in my current company for the last X years. I have learned a lot. Now I feel that I am not growing much. That's why I am looking for new challenges and growth opportunities.



Never blame your current company or blame your current colleagues. Don't say, "The project is very bad. I don't like the project. I don't like those colleagues."

- One must Question for the freshers: + **"Tell me about a project or the most challenging problem you have solved in your university."** If you are a fresher, you will almost always face this question.

You should be prepared to tell one or two projects of your university and what challenges you had there.

Some freshers think that, "I did some small projects in the university, which are not ready for industry. What should I tell?"

Listen to me; HR knows that you are a fresher. You are coming from the university, and you did some small projects. But the important thing is, what did you learn from there?

Talk about your learning, impact, and achievements. Here is an example:

I learned how to find solutions. I searched a lot on the internet, and I found which one was the best.

I learned how to work in a team. I learned how to give presentations.

I learned how to talk with my teachers and take requirements. In real life, customers will give the requirements. In my case, my teacher gave me the requirements.

I brought new ideas to the project. I learned new technologies."

Example for marketing or sales or management position

"I have arranged workshops on [ ... ].

I arranged a seminar on the topic [ topic name ] and invited

speakers from other universities and industries.

I worked as a volunteer for [ what you did as a volunteer ]."

Then you can tell the challenges you faced, e.g.,

"It was difficult to manage the time besides studies, but I arranged the seminar successfully."

In real life, you will have deadlines and time pressure. So this example of arranging a seminar within a deadline and besides studies show that you can handle deadlines and work pressure, which is very important for your job.

So, don't hesitate to talk about the things you did in university.

#### 11.2.4. What is your expected salary?

Then they will ask about your expected salary. It's a very tricky question. But why do they ask this question? Because they want to understand if your salary range is within their budget. For example, if their budget is a maximum of 50k, and you are asking for 80k, then HR will understand that there's no point moving forward because that will cost both of your time. Because in the following interview rounds, they might give you some tasks, some interviews with higher management, and so on. And if the salary doesn't match your expectations, that's a waste of your time.

But, if they don't ask this question, you can also ask them what the salary range for this job is. Then you will know whether moving forward will be a good idea. But, if you are a fresher and are being interviewed for your first job, I do not suggest you to ask this question. Because you need the confidence to ask these types of questions, and if you can't ask with a proper voice, that might sound greedy, and HR will think that you are only looking for money.

### **How to answer?**

- Try not to tell your expected salary
- Ask their range
- If they force you to tell the expected salary, then **give a wide range**
- **Don't give an exact digit during the phone screening**

Here is an example conversation regarding salary expectation

*“ HR: What is your expected salary?”*

*“ I: I have started looking for a job and am still in the process. The salary will depend on many factors, e.g., the team, the project, my responsibilities, growth opportunities, etc.”*

If the office is in a city where I don't live in, then I also say that,

*“ I also need to research the living cost in this city, since currently, I am living in another town. So, it would be helpful if you could tell me the salary range.*

From my experience, most of the time, HR will tell you the salary range.

*“ HR: Our range is 60k-70k, depending on the candidate's experience. Does it match your expectation?*

*“ I: Thanks for letting me know the range. Yes, it resonates well.*

But, sometimes, HR could give pressure to hear from you.

*“ HR: Our salary range varies greatly based on the position. What is your expectation?*

I give a wide range if they give that kind of pressure.

“ I: My expectation is 50k-80k.



The tip is, don't give an exact digit during the phone screening. Give a wide range so that if you like the company and if they want to hire you, then you can have the negotiation possibility.

But what if you gave a fixed digit or a shorter range?

No problem, you can still negotiate for a higher salary during the final negotiation like this,

"I told the HR during the 1st phone interview that my expectation is 50k, but things have changed. I did some more research on what the market offers with someone on my level and I have also received other offers, so now my expectation is [tell your new expectation]. I will be happy to hear what are your thoughts. "



Read the [chapter on salary negotiation](#) to learn the art of salary negotiation.

## More tips for the Screening interview

- Motivation



Show your motivation and enthusiasm. Throughout the screening interview, show that you are highly motivated.

Your voice tone matters. Talk with a voice tone that sounds very motivating.

And also, throughout the interview, mention that you are very excited to work for this company. You are very excited to work on this project. It sounds like a very challenging project, and you are very motivated.

- Team player
  - Tell that you are a good team player; you help people. You help colleagues, and you communicate with colleagues in an excellent manner.
- Quick learner
  - Tell that you are a quick learner! If you're a fresher, you can tell that in the university, you have learned a lot of things quickly because you've had a lot of coursework. You had a lot of projects, and in a very short time, you had to deliver many things, the exams, the projects, and so on, and some volunteer activities. And you know how to tackle that. And you are a very quick learner.

You can also mention which things you have learned in your current job.

- Problem solver
  - Tell that you can go the extra miles to solve the problems of the business

# 12. FINAL INTERVIEW

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Let's see what happens during the final interview. Most of the time, the final interview is conducted on-site, not online.

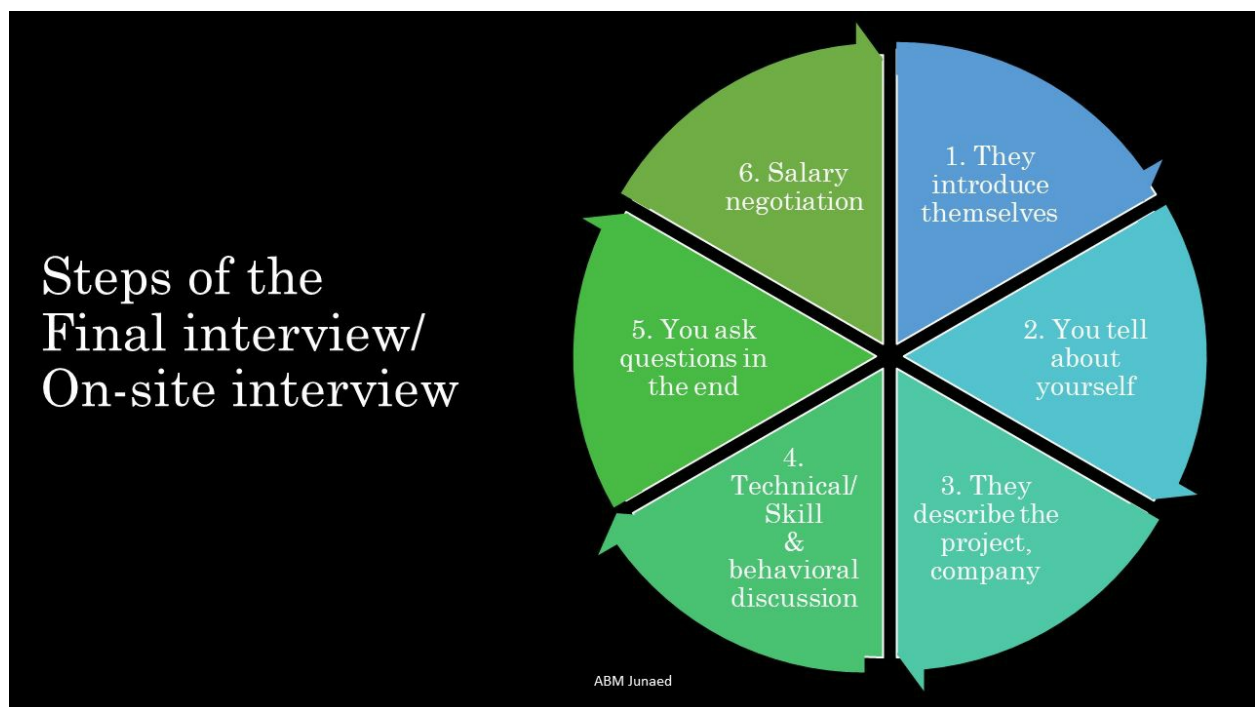


Figure 7. Steps of the Final interview/ On-site interview

## 12.1. Steps of the final interview

### 12.1.1. They introduce themselves

First, your interviewers will introduce themselves.

There could be only one interviewer, or there could be multiple interviewers. They will shortly tell their names, what they do, and their position in the company.

### **If you forget their names?**

Most often, I forget the names. Well, if you forget their names and positions, don't get stressed about it. Sometimes, what helps is that the recruiter sends an email before the job interview to let you know the name of the people who will be on the interview board. In that case, you can search for them on *LinkedIn* or in *XING* and learn more about them. In that way, you will be less nervous during the interview. If you forget their names, don't try to call them by their names. Just look at them and talk, e.g., "You said you had a question for me."

You can see the names on Skype or Microsoft Team if it were an online interview. So, it's a bit easier in an online interview, but in a face-to-face interview, if you forget the name, no problem. Just look at their face and give the answer or ask them questions.

## **12.1.2. Tell me about yourself**

Then they will ask you, "Tell us about yourself."

Some people only tell their names and so on. That's a huge opportunity loss. In short, you should tell me about yourself in a way so that HR understands that you are the perfect match for this position. So prepare well for the "Tell me about yourself."



Read the chapter [Tell Me About Yourself](#) to take preparation. There you will find an example regarding how do I tell about myself, a template for freshers and another template for the experienced candidates.

### 12.1.3. They describe the project

Then they will describe the project and the company so you can know more about the job.



Take notes of important information

When they describe those things, take some notes because you will need that information later on. But let them know that you are taking some notes. Otherwise, when you look down on your keyboard or if you are writing with pen and paper, they might feel awkward.

So tell them, "I'm taking some notes with my pen and paper. So you will see that I'm putting my head down sometimes."

Or, if you type on the keyboard like me, you can say: "I'm typing on my keyboard and taking some notes, which means you might hear the sound of my keyboard. Sometimes, I'll look at the keyboard, not at you; please don't take that as disrespect."

But take very little time to write the notes. Otherwise, if you take a lot of time, you might miss some important information, and they have to pause. Also, tell them, "You don't have to pause or wait for me. If I need some pause, I will tell you. Otherwise, please keep talking. Keep asking questions. I'm taking my notes in parallel."

## 12.1.4. Technical/ Core Skill & behavioral discussion

Then they will discuss and ask various questions to see your technical/core skills. They will ask you questions to discover how you behave in certain situations, also known as the behavioral interview.

### **Goals of this phase:**

- They try to understand your technical depth and breadth
- Do you match with their team culture and company culture?



They ask "Questions" based on your CV. So, don't write anything in the CV that you can't remember!

### **Open-ended questions**

Usually, your interviewer will ask various open-ended questions. E.g.,

“ *What did you do in that project? What was your role?*

The open-ended questions are your chance to show your skill set! Read the section [Open ended questions](#) to learn more.

## **Discussion**

This is the perfect place to ask various questions to the interviewer, discuss with him and demonstrate your skillset. Read the chapter [Discuss](#) to know more details.

## **Exercise**

- Write some questions you can ask during the discussion phase of the interview. I have already listed and described some questions in the section [Powerful questions to drive the discussion](#)
- Go through your CV. Is there anything in the CV that you can't remember how/what you did? Either try to remember, otherwise remove those from your CV
- Create your experience matrix; you can follow the section [Experience matrix](#)

### 12.1.5. You ask questions in the end

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will ask you: *"Do you have any questions?"*

Many people say, "No, I don't have any questions," or they ask some simple questions.

But, this is a huge opportunity to prove yourself further, remove their confusion about yourself and learn more about themselves. Read the section [Powerful questions and how to use those](#) for more details.

### 12.1.6. Salary negotiation

Most of the time, salary negotiation will be during the final interview. However, once the company sent me a draft contract with a salary without negotiating with me, I had to ask them to raise the salary. Another time, HR invited me to a separate interview and did the salary negotiation. Read the chapter [Salary Negotiation](#) to learn the art of salary negotiation.

Usually, these are the main steps of the final interview. However, as I said earlier, these can happen on the same day, or maybe they might have another day for the salary negotiations or the behavioral and HR interview.



# 13. SALARY NEGOTIATION

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Let's see the art of salary negotiation.

## 13.1. Mistakes I made

### 13.1.1. Mistake 1

The interviewer offered me a salary.

I didn't negotiate.

Later, I learned that another person with much less experience than me joined with the same salary at a junior position!

So, I could have easily negotiated for a higher salary! My mistake was I didn't negotiate for a higher salary; I accepted their very first offer!

**So, today what would I do differently?**

*“ I would negotiate!*

### 13.1.2. Mistake 2

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Interviewer: What is your salary expectation?

I: I don't have any number in mind. How much do you offer for this position?

Interviewer: We offer X.

I: Can you offer X+Y? Interviewer: Ow, you just said you don't have any number in mind.

I looked foolish at that time.

I didn't get the job. One of my friends got the job, and I know I had much better skills than him for that position. Because that was a web development job, I had working experience with web development which he didn't have.

I think that mistake during the negotiation failed me.

**So, today what would I do differently?**

I would follow any of the two examples below:

### **Example 1**

When he said,

*“Ow, you have just mentioned that you don't have any number in mind.”*

The better answer would be,

I: The salary you said just now, I already get more than that. I liked the project and your challenges, and the job interests me.

Here is one thing I would like to discuss with you. I need the compensation to be competitive. That's why I am asking if you could make a better offer.

## Example 2

When he said,

“ *We offer*  
*X.* ”

Then I could have said:

"Thanks for letting me know. I will think and come back to you."

Then next day or after one day, I would email him/call him and tell him,

"I liked the project and your challenges; the job interests me. Here is one thing I would like to discuss with you.

I thought about the salary, but I can think forward if you can offer  $x+y$ . Please let me know what you think."

## 13.1.3. The Unknowns while Salary negotiation

- I don't know what is going on
- Is there a better candidate than me who wanted less salary?
- What is their budget?



- I don't want to tell them how much salary I want until they offer me.
- If they give me pressure, I give a wide range, e.g., 50k-80k, which should fall into their budget and allows me to negotiate later on.
- Once they make an offer, I know there is more on the table because the initial offer is always lower than what they can pay maximum.

## 13.2. When will they ask about your expected salary?

Two places it can happen.

### 13.2.1. 1. HR Screening Interview

Here, negotiation doesn't happen; HR wants to know if you are within their budget. Instead of telling my expectation, I ask about their range. If they pressure you, give a wide range, e.g., 50k-80k. Read the chapter on HR screening interviews to know more detail

### 13.2.2. 2. Final interview

Here generally, one of the below scenarios can happen:

Scenario 1: They want to know your expectation

- Ask them what they want to offer
- If they give pressure to tell your expectation, then give a short range. E.g, 50k-60k. And tell, depending on bonus, other

facilities, and responsibilities, my expectation is between 50k-60k

- Or, you can tell that you can't give a concrete number because you are waiting for some other offers. So, it will be helpful if they can tell how much they want to pay

Scenario 2: They offer a salary

They will offer the salary and try to sell this, i.e., they will try to convince you that this is an excellent package and you should accept.

*Interviewer: We are glad to offer you X thousand, with a 5% optional performance bonus.*

**Here he is not asking me any questions, but the implicit question is, "Do you want to join with the package? Or do you want more?"**

Here is how I typically answer: *"Thanks for your offer."*

Then I go into negotiating mode. Read on this in the following sections.

### 13.3. When they offer what you wanted or more than your expectation

Sometimes, they even might offer more than you wanted.

*Hey, you wanted 50k, but we are offering 60k.*

### 13.3.1. Scenario 1: If you have already decided to join there:

Maybe you don't have any job, or for some reason, you want to take this offer anyway, then say,

"Thanks a lot for the offer. I am gladly accepting it."

### 13.3.2. Scenario 2: If you haven't yet decided to join there:

Maybe you are waiting for some other offers.

Then ask for more time.

Keep reading; in one of the following sections, I have described how to ask for more time.

## 13.4. Negotiating

If you have decided to negotiate, then keep reading!

Once they make an offer, they will tell the salary.

They can also ask what your salary expectation is. If this is the HR screening interview, then you should keep it open, as I have shown in the HR screening interview chapter.



if this is the final interview, you should be prepared to tell a concrete expectation.



They don't offer their highest at first. So, salary is (always) negotiable.

### 13.5. When you are nervous

Salary negotiation could be a tense situation if this is your 1st job or if you don't have much experience with negotiation.

In that case, avoiding negotiation is better than doing anything silly.

For example:

*“ I: "Salary is not the highest priority for me.  
Growth is the most important factor for me.  
How much do you want to offer?"*

*“ Interviewer: "We want to offer you  
..."*

Now you know their offer. At this point, you can negotiate or accept the offer; it is up to you.

If you want to negotiate:

- Please remember that you have already said that salary is not your highest priority, as you were feeling nervous. So, don't drag too much
- If you want to negotiate, follow the next sections

## 13.6. Remove your fear

The first thing for negotiating a salary offer is to remove your fear. Many people fear that others will call them greedy if they negotiate. But don't be afraid, because you can always negotiate.

Why? Because the interviewer knows that candidates usually negotiate, they don't offer you the highest salary the 1st time.

At least 5K to 10K, you can negotiate depending on the position and country.

The bottom line is they don't offer you the highest salary in the first place because they know candidates negotiate. So don't be afraid that people will think you are greedy or something like that. Just negotiate politely. But how do you negotiate? See the following sections.

## 13.7. Negotiation steps



### Tips

- The 1st question you should ask: "Is the salary negotiable?"
- Don't start negotiating without asking this question!



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### 13.7.1. Steps:

1. First, mention what you bring to the table. E.g.

- Your skill set
- Your Experience
- Your motivation
- You are a quick learner
- You are considering to stay in this job for a long period of time as it matches with your carrier trajectory

2. Then ask politely:

“ *"Given all of those, is it possible to increase the salary by X thousand?"*

#### **Here is an example:**

Here is an example

"I've done similar work before, and I know a lot about the things you need. I have the required skill set, which means I'll be more efficient and effective.

I'm highly motivated by the challenges you are facing, and I'm highly motivated to work on this challenging project and move it forward.

Most importantly, I am a quick learner. Technology changes and requirement changes, and I can learn quickly to adapt to the need.

Also, I have been considering this position for a long time as it matches my interest.

Given all of these, is it possible to increase the salary by X thousand?"



#### Tips

- Research and find the amount you want before coming to the final interview
- Prepare your script.
- Then practice it a couple of times

### 13.7.2. When you need more time

Maybe you are waiting for offers from other companies, or you know that your current employer will make a counteroffer if they hear that you are leaving.

I usually respond like this when I need more time:

*“ Thanks for the offer. I need time because I am waiting for other offers. I will then sit with my family and decide on the offers.”*

## **Tips:**

Be straight and transparent.

### **If they give pressure to accept now?**

If you want this job, then accept. *"Thanks for your offer. I gladly accept."* If you want to see other offers/talk with family, then tell clearly:

*"I need time, and I will come back soon."* Tell them approximately when you will come back to them.

## **Template**

You can use the following template for example:

I am almost done with the process, I got a couple of other offers, and now I have to decide.

You are looking for someone to work as a [title of the job] on [the skills/technologies they need].

I am very interested in [the skills and tech stack they need. E.g., Java programming, Kubernetes, highly scalable and reliable system]. I think I have a lot of possibilities to learn and to make an impact on [company name].

I loved the position. I liked you as a manager as well.

I have a couple of offers in hand, and I will discuss with my family which one will be better for me.

I am not only looking for a salary but also for my growth, learning opportunities, and team; everything matters.

But some other offers are very strong.

Maybe this weekend, or before the weekend, I will discuss it with my family and think.

I will come back to you approximately on next [tell the date].

## 13.8. Not only money, but you can also negotiate many other things

Sometimes, the company might not want to spend more money. Still, they can provide additional benefits because if they increase the salary, they have to give you some cash. Sometimes, they don't

want to burn the money because they have some budget limitations.

So, here is a list of other benefits you can ask for:

### *More vacation days*

Some examples:

“ *"If increasing the salary is not possible, can we work on the vacations? Can you give me five more*

*days of vacation? In that case, I'll be more refreshed; I'll be more energetic. So that would be beneficial for the company."*

#### *Membership for gym*

They can give you a membership to the gym. Sometimes, companies have contracts with some gyms or fitness clubs, and they can offer a discount to their employees. The company's benefit is that you will be active and fit, improving your performance. So the company might be interested in investing in the employees' fitness.

#### *Profit sharing*

They can also give you profit sharing. You will give your best output to make the company more profitable. So it's a win-win situation for you and the company.

#### *Learning budget/subscription to a learning platform*

They can also provide you with a learning budget. It helps you to grow. It allows you to learn new stuff and be up to date with the market. It also benefits the company because if the employee is up to date and is learning new stuff, he can bring new things on board for the company. So it's also a win-win situation.

#### *Less/ no probation period*

#### *More home office*

You can also ask for more home office.

Above are some examples; indeed, you can be creative with this list regarding your needs!



### Tips

While creating this list, two things are essential:

- If it doesn't cost them money or cost them a minimal amount of money, they will probably accept it
- If it gives them benefits, they will probably accept it. E.g., if they give you a learning budget and you read some good books, it will boost your knowledge and eventually will help the company.



**Don't throw everything at once!**



Identify your top 2-3 which you want to negotiate. Go one by one.

Example of negotiating other things

I: "I have a couple of things to discuss. Should I go forward?"

Interviewer: "Yes, please."

I: "I have four things to discuss. These include more vacation days, profit sharing, home office, and a learning budget. I will tell

you my wishes, then you, please tell me which are possible and we can discuss them.

The first thing is vacation days. Will it be possible to give more vacation days?"

Interviewer: "Sorry, we have the same amount of vacation days for everyone." I; "Ok, that's fair. Then I have three more wishes.

I would like to have profit sharing."

Interviewer: ...

I: "My next topic is the home office. Commuting kills a lot of time because the company is far away from my home, and I have to take my children to school in the morning. I want to do home office three days/week. That will allow me to come to the office for two days and have in-person meetings with colleagues, socialize, and more time with family, and save energy."

Above I gave a sample, hope it helps.

**As shown, choose your top 1-4 and discuss those.**

## 13.9. Summary

- You can negotiate many things other than money
- But don't throw everything at them; talk about your 1-4 top priorities.

# 14. MISTAKES YOU SHOULD AVOID

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Let's see five mistakes many people make during an interview, and we should avoid these mistakes.

## 14.1. Mistake #1: Non-convincing "Tell me about yourself"

To tell about yourself in a proper way is so important that I have created a separate chapter on this topic. Read that chapter [here](#).

## 14.2. Mistake # 2: Not knowing about the product of the company

Your interviewer might ask you,

*“What do you know about us?/ What do you know about our product?/ What do you know about the company?”*

In that case, you should be able to say one or two sentences about their business or their product.



## *TIPS*

Use the following tips to prepare for this:

- Go to their website and **read their home page**. Most of the time, you can find what they do on the homepage.
- Read their "About Us" page and take notes on one or two products.
- You don't have to waste a lot of time preparing for this.
- If you can tell one or two lines about the company and the product, that's enough.

## 14.3. Mistake #3: Not asking clarifying questions before solving a problem

During the interview, the interviewer might give you some problems to solve. At first see the purpose of giving such a problem:

- To see how you approach a problem
- Can you think logically and systematically?
- Do you have the required skillset for this job?

Now let's see some examples how you can ask clarifying questions.

Suppose you are being interviewed for a sales position and consider the following scenario.

Interviewer: "How will you sell this pen?"

**The 1st step is, ask clarification questions; don't tell what you will do without clarifying.**

For example, don't say at first that, "I will do marketing."

Rather, ask them, "Who is your target customer? What type of pen is it? Is this pen a gel pen, or is it a ballpoint pen? Are you in the initial investment stage, and you don't mind losing some money, or you're already established in the market?"

Based on the answers of your questions, you can plan a marketing strategy.

Let's see another example where you are attending a software engineering interview.

Interviewer: "How will you add two numbers?"

Don't just take two integers and add the numbers. Ask, "How big could the numbers be? Are these floating points or integers?"

The danger of solving the wrong problem if you don't ask clarifying questions

If you don't ask clarifying questions, interviewer will think that you will jump to start your tasks straightway without properly understanding the tasks. When you solve real-life problems, you must first collect all the facts. First, clarify the problem. Then try to solve the problem. If you cannot clarify the problem, you might be solving a wrong problem or problem you've not been

asked to solve. That will cost a lot of time and money for the company. So before solving a problem, you must clarify the actual problem. And you have to think about different solutions.

#### 14.4. Mistake #4: Not using "I" while describing what you did in a project.

For example, you can use "we" in an interview to describe something you alone did not make. If you work in a team, you can use, "We did that." That's fine. **The problem is that many people use "we" to be polite.** Even if they did something exclusively, they say, "We did that. My team did that." **But in that case, the interviewer doesn't get a clear picture about yourself,** what you are capable of or where your strength is. However, it is very important for the interviewer to know your strengths and what you can do.

Be honest

So you should tell them, "I did that. I know well about this part." You should show your competence.

On the other hand, "be honest." Don't say something which you did not do. In a big project, you'd never do everything alone. If you do everything alone, there is no point in having a team. So something your teammates did, something you did.

You should clearly specify

- what you did
- what was your role/position and responsibility

For example,

"I was a software engineer. My responsibility was in the backend development. I have implemented microservices and fixed a lot of bugs. I did a lot of hotfixes and did the deployment. I worked in monitoring and logging as well."

So, I'll say what I did, so the interviewer can understand what I'm capable of.

## 14.5. Mistake #5: Not discussing when the interviewer challenges you

Suppose you told the interviewer how you have solved a problem in your current job, and the interviewer may ask you why you solved it this way.

An example where interviewer is challenging you

Interviewer: "You could have solved it in another way more efficiently. Why did you choose this solution, which is not efficient?"

**If they challenge you in the interview, don't humiliate yourself.** Don't say, "Yeah, you're right. I was wrong. I don't have that knowledge."

Rather, accept their challenge by saying, "You're right. There are many other ways to do the task." Then state why you solved the problem in that way.

**What was your thought process?** Provide the reasons behind your solution.

Here is an example from a software product

Maybe you developed a software that only a few people can use simultaneously. If 100 people try to use it simultaneously, then the software crashes. If I did a design like that, I'll say, "Look, my customer wanted to go very fast in the market and see if they could have some users. I would have needed more time to make the software more scalable so that hundreds of people could use it simultaneously. That means, if I used that additional time and the customer could not find any user, then the whole time and money are wasted. On the other hand, if they could find users with the first version which only few people can use simultaneously, then they could come back to me later and ask to make it more scalable. **That's why we added enough quality and made a fast prototype to go fast into the market.**"

So, all I mean is you should tell your thinking pattern and why you chose that solution.

Difference between challenge and help

Suppose you are in a coding interview. The interviewer can say, "Is it possible to do that in another way? Maybe you can do ...". In

this scenario, he is trying to help you to find a better solution.

But challenging or trying to know your thinking process happens when they ask about your past project, e.g., "Why you used this architecture in your last project? This architecture makes the system hard to change."

This is a challenge of what you did in the past, or he is trying to see your knowledge depth, or he is trying to understand your thought process.

**So these are the five mistakes. Don't make these mistakes during the interview.**

# 15. ANSWER QUESTIONS IN THE RIGHT WAY

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## 15.1. Understand the 'hidden' question

Here is an example.

Interviewer: Have you worked with bash?

(Note: Here you can replace bash with any other software/skill.  
E.g., Have you worked with Powerpoint?/ Have you led a team?)

This question actually means that,

- Look, we need someone who knows bash
- But, from your CV, I am not convinced that you have worked with bash.

Once you understand the hidden question, you can answer it better.

Now there could be two scenarios:

1. You have used it already or something similar

2. Or, you haven't worked with it at all.

Let's see how to answer the question in those two scenarios.

### **Scenario 1: You haven't worked with it, but you worked with something similar**

Then you can say:

Hi, I haven't worked with bash, as I work on windows, but I have worked a lot with PowerShell; it is a very good cmd for windows; you can automate tasks, write scripts, etc.

- So, I don't think it will be difficult for me to switch to bash if needed
- Since I like to use cmd, write scripts, and know all the concepts

So, this is the template of the answer:

- Tell what alternative you have used
- Where you have used that alternative
- Tell that you won't take much time to learn the tool they are using because you already know an alternative
- Tell that you are interested to learn it

### **Scenario 2: You haven't worked with something similar at all**



For our above example, let's say you have neither worked with bash nor something similar. Then you can say:

Look, I haven't worked with bash, but I am very interested to learn it,

- As it helps to automate tasks, and can save a lot of time!
- I believe I can learn it very quickly if I get the chance

## Summary

Don't just say, 'No, I didn't work with it.' Rather, do these:

- Find some similar experiences and tell that.
- Or, show your motivation to learn it quickly

## 15.2. Open ended questions

There are broadly two types of questions during an interview:

1. The interviewer will ask some questions to see my skill set. Here you can't tell much; you can only give straightforward answers.
2. Some questions will be open-ended.

*Listing 5. Example of an open-ended question*

Interviewer: What do you think about technology 'A'?

## VARIOUS WAYS OF ANSWERING THE ABOVE QUESTION

**General answer:** I find technology 'A' very promising.

**Better answer:**

- I used technology 'A' in different projects; I used it for [ places where I used this ].
- I think the benefits of using it [ mention the benefits of this technology ]
- I think it also brings some problems with it, e.g., it doesn't work well on ...
- Some alternatives are ...,
- So I have to choose carefully when to use 'A', and when not.

**These open-ended questions are my chance:**

- To show my knowledge depth, knowledge breadth
- To show my soft skills, e.g., leadership, communication etc.

**Template to answer open-ended questions**

- Describe the project in short
- Describe your role
- Mention the technologies you used which are related to this job
- Describe what you learned, what you did
- If you have already filled the [Experience matrix](#), then it will be helpful at this point

**Some examples of open-ended questions**

- What did you do in that project?
- What was your role in that project?

### 15.3. Show your soft skills.

There are a lot of things to do in a project. Not only IMPLEMENTING a feature

- There are bugs, discussions with colleagues, client meetings, etc. So, you have to keep a lot of things in your head
- You have to discuss different solutions with your colleagues; they will propose one, and you will propose another

So, tell every role you played:

- Implementing features
- Fixing critical bugs
- Mentoring teammates
- Customer meetings
- Reducing costs
- Leadership skills

### 15.4. How did you solve this problem?

They might ask from your CV: how did you solve this problem in this project?

This is a big opportunity to **"Show your growth, learnings, and ability to think."**

### 15.4.1. Common approach

Most people just tell how they solved it.

Then the problems are:

- If there is a better solution, the interviewer might think you don't know the better solution.
- He also won't know how you think or make decisions.

### 15.4.2. Better approach

- So, tell them the possible solutions you had
- Which solution did you choose and why

Here is a template I use:

- There were a couple of solutions in hand
- Let's start with the solution approach I took
- I solved it by doing ...
- This gave me the benefits of (tell him the benefits). However, there were some drawbacks to this solution (tell the disadvantages shortly, if you can remember. Otherwise I skip the drawbacks)
- I had other options to solve it, e.g. (tell the other solution

approach briefly)

- But, this had the problem of (tell him the problems)
- Based on our requirements (money/time/user's need), we choose the 1st option

Here is an example of the above template:

"I had two ways to solve this. One is better in terms of performance; another was performant enough for the 1st iteration and faster to implement. So, we asked the customer what was important to them.

The customer said it was important to go to the market first, then optimize if needed. So you did choose the solution which is faster to implement. Then we can optimize in the next iterations if needed. But then the customer said that they didn't need to optimize because the performance was ok for them."

This example shows that:

- You can think about the cost-effectiveness
- Based on the customer's budget, you can propose a solution
- You understand the budget.

All the above 3 are traits of an expert/senior candidate who can lead. This will give you more edge in the salary negotiation as well.

If you are a junior candidate, you can tell which technology and techniques you learned, e.g., I have learned microservices, I learned load balancing, etc.

## 15.5. Summary

- Don't only answer with yes/no
- tell them more about what you did, what you learned, etc.
- Show that you can think logically
- Show you soft skills, e.g., communication, discussion, leadership, etc.

# 16. BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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## 16.1. Purpose of the behavioral questions

The interviewer mostly tries to understand the following things:

- How do you behave in certain situations?
- Will the current employees be happy to work with you?
- To know more about your soft skills
- Pressure handling, communication, teamwork, mindset, helpful, mentoring, thought process ...
- To know more about your technical skills
- Employer knows which skills are required for this job and tries to understand whether you have those soft and technical skills.
- Do you fit culturally?
- E.g. Knowledge sharing, mentoring, helping others

## 16.2. A framework for answering behavioral questions

There's a method or framework you can use to answer behavioral questions. It's called Star: **ST-AR/AR**, and it is a well know framework. Let's see more about this framework.

### 16.2.1. ST - Situation, Task

S means the situation. What was the situation/problem? When, where, and what?

Then comes T. T means task. What was the task? What was your responsibility?

### 16.2.2. A - Action

Then comes A. A is for action. What action did you take?

### 16.2.3. R - Result

Then comes R. R means result. What was the result? What was the outcome? Can you include any data to support your claim?

### 16.2.4. A - Alternative action

The second A in the framework means alternative action. You have already taken action to solve the problem. What alternative could you have done there?

### 16.2.5. R - Alternative result

Finally, the second R in the framework means alternative results. What would have been the result of this alternative action?



## 16.3. How to identify behavioral questions

Now, let us see how we can identify the behavioral questions.

Usually, behavioral questions start with phrases like

- **"Tell me a situation when..."**,
- **"Tell me when something happened..."**,
- **"Tell me what you would have done in that situation."**

They'll ask you questions like that. But in my opinion, many technical or knowledge-based questions are behavioral questions. For example, *what did you do in that project? What did you learn from the project? Do you know about this technology?*

All these look like technical questions, and these are technical questions.

But in my opinion, these are also behavioral questions; because they try to understand how you behave in certain situations.

How do you use your knowledge under certain situations and so on?

## 16.4. Example of Behavioral Question and Answer

Here I will use this behavioral question as an example to show how I answer the behavioral questions.

**Question:** Tell me a situation when you took on something significant outside your responsibility

**Answer:**

- S: *In my head, I think:* What was the situation? When, where, and what?

Then I answer something like the following:

- I was working as a software engineer in the development team
- We had an operation team who had to answer if something was not working in the live system. They had to investigate and find out the root cause.
- Once, no one was able to log in to the system.
- I saw that the operation team was doing some SQL queries, reading the logs, and trying to find the root cause.
- That took them a lot of time
- T: Task. *In my head, I think:* What was my responsibility?

Then I answer something like the following:

- I was a software engineer. My job was to write the code, but it was not my responsibility to watch for the live system and provide an answer to the customers immediately.
- Operation team was responsible for that.

- A: Action: *In my head, I think:* What were the specific steps I took? Then I answer something like the following:
  - I wanted to help the operations team
  - I have automated the process so that they can call an API and find the root cause
- R: Result: *In my head, I think:* What results did I get? Can I include any data to support this?

Then I answer something like the following:

- The operations team was delighted; my API saved them a lot of time
- It made the customer happy as they could find the actual problem and fix the problem very quickly

# 17. FOLLOW UP AFTER THE JOB INTERVIEW

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During the interview, I ask them approximately when I might hear back from them. If that approximate time is over, I will send a follow-up email like this.

Sample follow-up email

Hi Dear...,

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk on [date]. Learning more about [Your Company] and the team was a pleasure.

You are looking for someone who worked with/can do [mention some skills they need].

My experiences on [mention couple of experiences which align with the job] align perfectly with what your team is looking for.

**I found [Write a couple of points about what you liked about the company/project/team] very exciting for me.**

Best regards,

Name

Thanks for reading the book. Stay connected with me on  
LinkedIn [www.linkedin.com/in/abmjunaed/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/abmjunaed/)

For more tips, join my newsletter [Pragmatic Career](#)