

Informational Interview Report



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Company Overview	2
Job Description	3-4
Work Environment	4-5
Preparation and How to land the Interview	5
Compensation and Benefits	6
Advice	7
Conclusion	7

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to give readers insight about the life of a software engineer at Amazon and the role in general. It will cover a variety of topics to inform the reader about the position, responsibilities and relevant information about the company. My personal purpose of this report is to conduct job exploration and assess my progress towards my goals after graduation. In order to conduct my research and analysis, I interviewed Yousef Herwees, a software engineer at Amazon.

About Me

My name is Hammad. I am senior at UC Davis majoring in Computer Science with a Minor in Economics. Throughout my tenure in college, I have interned at TechSoup and AT&T and have participated in research with professors and graduate students at UC Davis. After graduation, I plan to pursue a job in software engineering, product management or starting my own technology company. In order to further understand my potential career path, I interviewed Yousef Herwees.

About Yousef

Yousef graduated from UC Davis with his B.S in Computer Science and a Minor in Statistics in 2017. He now works at Amazon in Santa Clara as a full-time Software Engineer.

Amazon: Company Overview

[Amazon.com, Inc](#) is an American electronic commerce and cloud computing company based in Seattle, Washington, that was founded by Jeff Bezos on July 5, 1994. The tech giant is the largest Internet retailer in the world as measured by revenue and market capitalization, and second largest after Alibaba Group in terms of total sales.^[3] The amazon.com website started as an online bookstore and later diversified to sell video downloads/streaming, MP3 downloads/streaming, audiobook downloads/streaming, software, video games, electronics, apparel, furniture, food, toys, and jewelry. The company also produces consumer electronics—Kindle e-readers, Fire tablets, Fire TV, and Echo—and is the world's largest provider of cloud infrastructure services (IaaS and PaaS). Amazon also sells certain low-end products under its in-house brand AmazonBasics ([Wiki source](#)).



Job Description


[From Amazon Job Site](#)

“At Amazon, we hire the best minds in technology to innovate, build and break things for the benefit of our customers. That intense focus on customers is why we are one of the world’s most beloved brands – it’s part of our company DNA.

Our challenges are big - impacting millions of customers, sellers and developers, and countless products – and our path is not always easy. Doing the right thing rarely is. So we’re selective about who joins us on this journey. There’s a certain kind of person who takes on the challenges of software development at Amazon – someone excited by the idea of owning; people who like to build new platforms, features and services from scratch, developers who can manage the ambiguity and pace of a company whose ship cycles are measured in weeks, not years.

Amazon is a place where builders build.

Here is a sampling of [Software Development positions](#) we hire:

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- Software Development Engineer (SDE)
 - Software Development Engineer in Test (SDET)
 - Quality Assurance Engineer (QAE)
 - Android Engineer
 - Application Engineer
 - Solutions Architect”

Yousef’s Role

Yousef Herwees is a Software Development Engineer at Amazon Web Services (AWS) on the Database, Analytics and AI consoles team. He develops for cross-team and cross-discipline projects. He has collaborated directly with an AWS Vice President, as well as other senior managers and developers at all levels. He has had the ability to own all sides of web service creation, including operations, infrastructure, feature design and development, and automation testing. He has created, maintained and expanded shared code resources and frameworks. Yousef extensively uses Java, Git, Unix command line, the GWT framework, as well as the use of many proprietary tools to complete his work.

Qualifications

Most software engineers must have a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Software Development, Statistics, Math or another STEM field. Alternatively, significant work experience, projects, and participating in specialized “Boot Camps” designed to train software engineers can be a way of breaking into the field. Yousef has his B.S in Computer Science with a Minor in Statistics from the University of California, Davis.

Yousef’s Pathway

After completing high school, he failed and dropped out of community college and worked full time on and off for 5 years in retail sales. After developing discipline through working, and learning to value education, he went back to school in 2012 to get a degree in economics. After two years at community college, he transferred to UC Davis where he initially decided to pursue a degree in statistics. His first quarter there, he took a computer science class and quickly fell in love with the subject and ultimately changed career paths junior year. At UC Davis, he completed one paid internship for a public sector consulting firm, and one unpaid as a research assistant.



Types of Technical Writing

The types of writing involved in Yousef's work include:

- Design Documents for Software Features and Design Reviews.
- Code Reviews.
- Cause of error reports.
- Operations reports
- OnCall reports
- Emails to stakeholders explaining technical circumstances
- Reference Wikis
- Technical reference material for internal technical stakeholders

Work Environment

Overview

According to Glassdoor, 81% of Software Engineers recommend working at Amazon and 93% approve of the CEO Jeff Bezos. Overall SE's gave Amazon a 4/5.

Culture

[Yousef says](#) "Amazon generally has a culture defined by its infamous leadership principles. The two that I would say are most important to defining our culture are customer obsession and ownership. Customer obsession shapes everything we do at Amazon. With every decision, we start with the customer, and work backwards. Every project starts by writing a press release and an FAQ. This helps to keep the customer in mind, instead of our competitors. Ownership drives the structure of the organization. Each individual is both an owner of the company, and an owner of the products that they make and support. That means that teams are shaped by product ownership, and individuals drive the products/projects they own independently, while coordinating with other stakeholders".

Work-Life Balance

The culture means that work life balance is completely up to the individual but is subject to team guidelines. Most teams expect their members to be online from 10-4 regardless of whether they choose to work remotely or in person. That said, it can be a lot more work if you are unable to manage your time well.

Team Division/Structure

[Janet Choi](#) says “at Amazon, teams are divided into no larger than what two pizzas can feed”. There are different teams for Amazon Web Services (AWS), Echo, Goodreads, AI, and so on. Each branch is divided into specialized groups. One team on Goodreads could be working on the mobile app versus another on data analytics.

Ambiance

The ambience of the office is very relaxed, with modern decor and an open concept. There are kitchenettes stocked with free snacks, cafes (not free), and games on each floor as well as patios.

Preparation and How to Land an Interview:

The best preparation to become a software engineer is a degree in computer science, computer engineering, electrical engineer, math or another similar STEM field. Outside projects and participation in extracurricular activities, such as CS club and Hackathons, are also important. Projects and activities allow prospective SEs to learn about frameworks, technologies and the overall industry outside of academia. These experiences will also give one content to talk about when you are interviewing with recruiters. In addition to a solid resume that might include research, experience and skill sets, having a website or Github repositories with your work or projects can give you an edge over other candidates. It shows initiative, competence and distinguishes you from students that have only done the bare minimum of getting good grades. GPA is still important though. Many companies have a threshold with a minimum of about a 3.0 GPA.

Typical Interview Process:

1. Phone Screening
2. Online Technical Test
3. Behavioral Interview with Hiring Team
4. Coding or Technical Interview with Hiring Team (Possibly multiple rounds)

5. Offer Decision



Yousef says:

“Apply to things fearlessly. Apply to jobs and internships you think you are not qualified for. Not a single member of my team meets all of the basic qualifications of the job posting for the position, much less the preferred ones.”

Compensation and Benefits



Yousef says:

“At Amazon, starting compensation for new engineers is between 130k to 140k including cash and stock, but not factoring stock growth. San Francisco and NYC employees get paid more. Also other benefits apply including different types of insurance, 401k matching and yearly salary adjustments and stock refreshers.”

Yousef’s Advice:

“Take a lot of opportunities to do different constructive things, no matter how irrelevant they seem. I’m not just talking about internships or research opportunities either. I’m talking about things like minoring in a different subject, or spending time with nonprofit organizations or clubs that have impact. These experiences will round out who you are as a person, and will often uniquely prepare you for opportunities you never thought of.

I stood out from other candidates for my first internship because of my sales experience. I stood out for my second because of my stats minor.



Lastly, don't shy away from a challenge, as the biggest challenges are where we grow the most."

Advice to CS students:

"Live in the CSIF (Located in the Kemper Basement on the UC Davis Campus, CSIF is the computer lab where many CS students spend their time."

In regards to pursuing software engineering as a whole, Yousef says, "Do it for the right reasons. Money is a valid reason, but not a great one. Beware of the golden handcuffs (financial incentives from the company to keep you longer with them)".

Conclusion

Although Software Engineers receive a generous salary and it is a "hot" field, it isn't enough to stay long-term in a position if you despise the responsibilities or the company. I did not grow up very wealthy, so income is a big factor in my decision making, but I have learned that It is important to choose a company that fits one's values and has a healthy culture. Constant failure and learning is part of the job role. You have to be ready to pull your sleeves up and get messy. Aside from designing software, technical documentation is a big part of the job. Particularly at Amazon, It seems that taking responsibility and owning your work is a backbone value of the company. Overall, it seems that a position as a software engineer at Amazon is both challenging and rewarding. My Computer Science background and entrepreneurial spirit make me a good fit for Amazon. After my interview and analysis, I would gladly join Yousef after graduation if offered a position.

