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Knowing what to expect before an interview can relieve a huge amount of pressure on you. But not every interview is the same! Depending on the type of role you’re interviewing for, your experience could vary widely in terms of content and format.

Here are common interview styles you may encounter—behavioral, technical, case study, and panel—and some tips on how to navigate the expectations and formats successfully.

Please note that some interviewers use a combination of styles—likely asking some behavioral questions followed by some technical questions in an interview for a specific technical position, for example. Understanding the basics of each style will help you better prepare for an interview that combines techniques.

Behavioral interviews

Behavioral interviews are a common method used across nearly all industries and roles—from entry-level to executive—to assess vital competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving, communication, and adaptability. For example, an interviewer for a customer service position might ask about a time you managed a challenging customer. Your answer could then illustrate how you effectively navigated the situation, perhaps by remaining calm under pressure and finding a resolution.

Behavioral interviews typically require specific answers, so here's how to get ready:

- Prepare and tailor your stories:** Brainstorm past experiences from work, academic projects, or extracurricular activities that demonstrate key skills relevant to the role, like teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, or communication. Carefully review the job description to select one or more examples that specifically align with the position’s responsibilities and the competencies the interviewer is likely seeking.
- Structure your answers clearly and emphasize your role:** Use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to frame your experiences. This framework helps ensure you provide a clear, concise, and compelling narrative by covering all crucial aspects of your experience. Within your STAR stories, consistently use “I” statements to highlight your specific actions, individual contributions, and the direct impact you had on the outcome.
- Be authentic and resourceful in your responses:** Honesty is crucial; never invent an example. Interviewers value authenticity. If you don't have a perfect example for a specific question, it's better to be resourceful. Offer a genuinely similar experience that showcases relevant transferable skills, or thoughtfully explain how you would approach such a situation based on your knowledge and other experiences.

Technical interviews

A technical interview is designed to assess your technical competency. This type of interview is common in fields like computer engineering, computer science, and IT.

During technical interviews, rather than focusing on your background as in a behavioral interview, interviewers will ask specific technical questions. They may even ask you to complete a coding or design challenge—either live or as a take-home assignment—and then ask you to explain your problem-solving process.

While you may not know exactly what that challenge will be, there are a few things you can do to prepare more effectively and feel more confident in a technical interview:

- Solidify your technical knowledge and anticipate question types:** Thoroughly review fundamental technical concepts crucial for the role. Ask your recruiter if there will be any specific technical components tested such as SQL, coding, or spreadsheet proficiency, etc. Research the specific business practices and technology the company uses. Be ready for various question formats, such as solving technical problems, debugging existing code, or addressing "what-if" hypothetical scenarios.
- Prepare to showcase your practical experience:** Be ready to discuss your practical experience with specific development tools, programming languages, and source control systems that are relevant to the role. Compile clear examples from your projects or past work demonstrating how you’ve practically applied your technical knowledge to achieve specific outcomes.
- Practice clear and adaptable technical communication:** Hone your ability to explain complex technical concepts and your problem-solving processes in a clear, concise manner. Be prepared to adapt your communication style so that both technical and potentially non-technical interviewers can easily understand your skills and insights.

Case study interviews

A case study interview is designed to evaluate your problem-solving, analytical, and communication skills by presenting you with real-world business challenges to analyze and solve. Case study interviews are common in strategic and analytical roles like consulting, product management, and finance.

In a case study interview, the interviewer will present a hypothetical business situation, providing relevant facts and context. You'll then be asked to analyze the situation and propose viable solutions. One thing to keep in mind is that your analytical process – how you structure your thinking and arrive at conclusions – is often more important than the answers themselves. Interviewers are assessing your ability to gather and synthesize information, identify key details, think critically under pressure, and deal with unfamiliar situations, so focus on the following:

- Actively gather and clarify all case information:** As the interviewer presents the case, take detailed notes to keep track of key points, facts, and figures. Throughout the process, don't hesitate to ask thoughtful, clarifying questions. This ensures you have a comprehensive understanding of the situation, any constraints, and the core objectives before developing your solution.
- Demonstrate a structured, yet flexible, problem-solving approach:** Clearly communicate your strategy step-by-step, showcasing a logical and structured thought process. Consider what publicly accessible data you would use to answer the question if appropriate. Understand that there isn't necessarily one 'right' answer; interviewers are often more interested in how you analyze the problem, make and state reasonable assumptions, and evaluate options. Show your ability to consider different angles and potential solutions, articulating trade-offs if appropriate, even if you don't explore all of them in exhaustive depth.
- Conclude with a clear summary and well-reasoned recommendation:** Wrap up your analysis by providing a concise summary of the core issues presented in the case. Then, clearly articulate your recommended solution or strategic approach, ensuring it's well-reasoned, actionable, and directly supported by your analysis and the information you've gathered.

Panel interviews

While terms like 'technical' or 'behavioral' describe the type (or focus) of questions you'll encounter in an interview, a panel interview is defined by its format—meaning you'll be interviewed by a group of people at the same time. The nature of the questions within a panel interview can still be technical, behavioral, or a mix.

Unlike typical one-on-one interviews, a panel interview involves a group that might include a hiring committee, potential supervisors and colleagues, HR representatives, and other relevant stakeholders. This format is often used for final-round interviews, leadership positions, academic roles, government jobs, or positions requiring significant cross-functional collaboration, where input from multiple stakeholders is valuable.

In a panel interview, you might answer questions from each interviewer, while some attendees may be present primarily as observers. Regardless of the specific setup, an organization's goal in conducting a panel interview is to draw upon multiple perspectives and increase the likelihood of hiring the best candidate.


To make a great impression in a panel interview:


- Prepare thoroughly beforehand:** If panelist names are provided, research their roles and areas of expertise. Prepare compelling answers for common interview questions—such as "How would a colleague describe you?", "Why do you want to work for us?", and "Why should we hire you?"—anticipating that different members may focus on different aspects of your qualifications.
- Engage professionally during the interview:** As interviewers introduce themselves, briefly note their names and job titles to help you address them appropriately. When answering a question, make initial eye contact with the person who asked it, then broaden your eye contact to include other panel members, engaging the entire group. It's crucial to give thoughtful and respectful consideration to every question, regardless of who on the panel asks it or their apparent seniority.
- Observe and learn from the panel's interactions:** Pay attention to how the panel members interact with each other. This can offer valuable insights into the team's dynamics, communication style, and the overall company culture, helping you assess if it's the right fit for you.


Interviewing confidently

Regardless of the interview type, some universal best practices always apply: Dress professionally (appropriate for the company culture and role), be punctual, speak clearly and concisely, and follow up with a thank-you email. Embracing these tips, combined with a solid understanding of interview types and expectations, will guide your preparation and practice sessions so you can feel more confident in the moment. If you’re able to find out the interview format beforehand, you can tailor your preparation even more effectively, to lead you even closer to success!

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