



SCHOLARS MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

PROFESSIONAL TRACK

Session 4: Interview Part 1

Welcome to Session 4, which is to be covered in Week 7 & 8. This session focuses on helping your mentee prepare effectively for job interviews.

Recap

- Review progress from the previous session on Networking on LinkedIn and discuss any tasks your mentee has completed. Address any questions or challenges they faced.

Activity 1: Understanding Different Interview Formats

1. Interview formats

- **Behavioral interviews** - Focus on past behavior as an indicator of future performance. Commonly use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to answer questions.
- **Technical interviews** - Assess specific technical skills related to the job. Often includes problem-solving or coding challenges.
- **Panel interviews** - Involve multiple interviewers. Teach mentees to engage with all panel members.
- **Phone/Video interviews** - Initial screening or remote interview. Emphasize the importance of clear communication and a professional setting.

2. Common interview questions

Interview questions can either be Behavioral questions, technical or situational questions.

a) Behavioral Questions

Behavioral questions focus on past experiences and behaviors to predict future performance. They often start with phrases like "Tell me about a time when..." or "Give me an example of..."

1. Teamwork and collaboration

- "Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team to achieve a goal."
- "Describe a situation where you had to manage a conflict within your team."

2. Problem-solving and analytical skills

- "Give me an example of a challenging problem you faced and how you resolved it."
- "Describe a time when you had to analyze information and make a decision quickly."



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3. **Adaptability and flexibility**

- "Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a significant change at work."
- "Describe a situation where you had to adjust your approach to meet new demands."

4. **Leadership and Initiative**

- "Give me an example of a project you led and the outcome."
- "Tell me about a time when you took initiative to improve a process or solve a problem."

5. **Time management and prioritization**

- "Describe a time when you had multiple deadlines to meet. How did you prioritize your tasks?"
- "Tell me about a situation where you had to manage your time effectively to complete a project."

6. **Customer service and communication**

- "Give me an example of how you handled a difficult customer or client."
- "Describe a time when you had to communicate complex information to a non-expert audience."

b) Technical Questions

Technical questions assess your specific knowledge and skills related to the job. They can include coding challenges, problem-solving exercises, or questions about tools and technologies used in the field. Below are some examples of technical questions in the IT field. Look for technical questions in the field of your mentee and use in the session.

1. **Coding and programming**

- "Write a function to reverse a linked list."

2. **Algorithms and data structures**

- "Describe the time complexity of binary search."

3. **System design and architecture**

- "Design a URL shortening service like Bit.ly."
- "How would you scale a web application to handle millions of users?"

4. **Specific technologies and tools**

- "What are the main features of Java 8?"
- "How do you optimize a SQL query for better performance?"

c) Situational Questions

Situational questions present hypothetical scenarios to assess how you would handle specific situations in the future. They often start with phrases like "What would you do if..." or "How would you handle..."



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1. **Conflict resolution**

- "What would you do if you disagreed with a team member's approach to a project?"
- "How would you handle a situation where a client is unhappy with your work?"

2. **Decision-making**

- "How would you handle a situation where you have to choose between two equally important tasks?"
- "What would you do if you were given incomplete information to make a decision?"

3. **Leadership and management**

- "How would you motivate a team that is underperforming?"
- "What steps would you take to manage a project that is behind schedule?"

4. **Customer service**

- "How would you handle a situation where a customer is asking for a refund but company policy doesn't allow it?"
- "What would you do if you received negative feedback from a customer?"

5. **Problem-solving**

- "What would you do if you encountered a major technical issue right before a project deadline?"
- "How would you approach a situation where you don't have the necessary resources to complete a task?"

6. **Adaptability and flexibility**

- "What would you do if your manager assigned you a task outside your job description?"
- "How would you handle a sudden change in project requirements?"

Preparation Tips

- **Behavioral questions** - Use the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to structure your answers.
- **Technical questions** - Practice coding problems, review key concepts, and stay updated with the latest technologies in your field.
- **Situational questions** - Think about your problem-solving approach, decision-making process, and how you handle pressure and change.

Activity 2: STAR Method

Using the STAR method effectively helps candidates present their experiences and skills in a structured and compelling manner, increasing their chances of impressing interviewers and securing job offers.



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Understanding the STAR method

The STAR method is a structured approach to answering behavioral interview questions by discussing the **Situation**, **Task**, **Action**, and **Result**. This technique helps candidates provide clear, concise, and well-organized responses that demonstrate their skills and experiences effectively.

1. Situation

- Begin by setting the context for your story.
- Describe a specific event or situation you were involved in.
- Provide enough detail to give the interviewer a clear understanding of the context, but avoid going into unnecessary detail.
- Be specific: Avoid vague descriptions.
- Keep it relevant: Choose situations that are relevant to the job you're applying for.

Example

"In my previous job as a project manager, we were working on a major project with a tight deadline. Halfway through, a key team member left the company, which put us at risk of missing our deadline."

2. Task

- Explain the task you were responsible for in that situation.
- Describe your specific role and responsibilities.
- Focus on the challenges and expectations involved.
- Highlight your role: Make it clear what your individual contribution was.
- Emphasize challenges: Show how you approached and managed difficult tasks.

Example

"As the project manager, it was my responsibility to ensure that the project stayed on track and to find a way to compensate for the loss of the team member."

3. Action

- Describe the specific actions you took to address the task or challenge.
- Focus on what you did, how you did it, and why you chose those actions.
- Provide enough detail to show your thought process and the steps you followed.
- Be detailed: Outline the steps you took clearly.



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- Focus on your contribution: Highlight your specific actions, not the team's collective effort.

Example

"I immediately called a team meeting to reassign the tasks of the departing member. I also worked extra hours to fill in the gaps and coordinated with the client to keep them informed of our progress and the steps we were taking to ensure timely delivery."

4. Result

- Explain the outcomes or results of your actions.
- Highlight what you accomplished and any lessons learned.
- Quantify the results if possible, using specific metrics or data.
- Be positive: Focus on positive outcomes and accomplishments.
- Use data: Quantify results when possible (e.g., percentage improvements, cost savings, etc.)

Example

"As a result of our team's efforts, we successfully met the project deadline. The client was very satisfied with our work and subsequently awarded us additional projects. Additionally, my leadership during this period was recognized by senior management, leading to a promotion."

Additional Tips for Using the STAR Method

1. Practice makes perfect - Practice your STAR responses for common behavioral questions. Rehearse your answers out loud to build confidence and ensure fluency.

2. Be honest - Choose genuine experiences. Authenticity is key to making a strong impression.

3. Tailor your responses - Customize your answers to highlight experiences that are most relevant to the job you're applying for. Focus on skills and achievements that align with the job description.

4. Keep it concise - Avoid rambling. Aim to provide clear, concise, and relevant responses. Practice keeping your answers to around 1-2 minutes.

5. Prepare multiple examples - Have several STAR examples ready to cover different types of questions (e.g., leadership, teamwork, problem-solving). This allows you to provide varied and well-rounded examples during the interview.



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Example STAR Responses for Common Interview Questions

Question: "Tell me about a time when you faced a significant challenge at work and how you handled it."

Response

- **Situation:** "In my previous role as a marketing coordinator, our team faced a significant challenge when our lead graphic designer unexpectedly left during the final stages of a major campaign."
- **Task:** "As the campaign manager, it was my responsibility to ensure the campaign launched on time and maintained high-quality standards."
- **Action:** "I quickly reached out to freelance designers and reviewed their portfolios to find a suitable replacement. Meanwhile, I coordinated with the remaining team members to redistribute tasks and maintain progress. I also personally handled some of the design work, despite it being outside my usual scope."
- **Result:** "We successfully launched the campaign on schedule, and it was well-received by our audience, resulting in a 20% increase in engagement compared to our previous campaigns. My proactive approach was commended by my manager and led to a formal recognition award."

Question: "Describe a situation where you had to work as part of a team to achieve a goal."

Response

- **Situation:** "In my role as a software developer, my team was tasked with developing a new feature for our company's main product, which had a tight three-month deadline."
- **Task:** "My specific role was to lead the backend development and ensure seamless integration with the frontend."
- **Action:** "I organized regular team meetings to ensure everyone was aligned and shared progress updates. I also collaborated closely with the frontend team to understand their requirements and addressed any technical challenges promptly. Additionally, I implemented an agile development process to improve our workflow and productivity."
- **Result:** "We completed the feature ahead of schedule, and it was launched without any major issues. The new feature received positive feedback from users and contributed to a 15% increase in user engagement. Our successful collaboration was praised by senior management, and the project became a case study for future development efforts."

Tasks for Mentees to Complete Before the Next Meeting

1. Practice interview questions



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- Prepare answers for at least 10 common interview questions using the STAR method.

Preparation for Session 5

Focus Area: Interview Part 2

Prepare to discuss interview part 2, a continuation of this session in the next session. The goal is to help your mentees to master professional presentation and post-interview follow-up skills.

Feedback Form

Please fill out the feedback forms at the end of your meeting. Share the mentee feedback form with your mentee to fill out as well. Your input helps us improve the program, and we appreciate your assistance.

Mentor feedback form - <https://airtable.com/app9D3AZKrWuuIryo/shrEc8sDgcxbci9Wt>

Mentee feedback form - <https://airtable.com/app9D3AZKrWuuIryo/shrH0VAQT8he1C3kx>