

Job Interviews

Google Interview Questions and Tips

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I'm about to interview for SWE roles at Google.

Google

SWE

Interview

Questions

1. What kind of questions are asked during interviews and what they expect?

50 words minimum.

2. How can I stand out?

50 words minimum.

1 Answer

J

JOfb16 Google

May 12

+ Ask

1. What kind of questions are asked during interviews and what they expect?

I can only answer this for coding questions, since those are the only ones I've given interviews for. More senior candidates also get asked other kinds of questions which I am not familiar with at Google, like system design questions.

The coding questions are almost always in the same style as what's on Leetcode or Hackerrank (although Google is proactive about monitoring those sorts of sites, and will ban any questions which appear on them, so it's extremely unlikely to receive a question that you've seen before on the internet). The questions vary widely in terms of which algorithms or data structures are involved.

After posing a problem, many interviewers will give small hints pretty liberally, to keep the interview flowing. Interviewers who do this, it's not expected to solve a problem with no hints at all, since even just pausing a minute to think will probably elicit at least one small hint from them. However, missing the point of a hint will

typically count against a candidate.

If a candidate is really not getting something, and an interviewer feels like they have to give a bigger hint to get the candidate on the right track, this will also count against the candidate.

Interviewers tend to ask questions that can be solved optimally in the allotted time, but there's no rule about this, so on occasion, you might get asked a really hard question where you're expected to reach a sub-optimal solution.

Getting easier or harder questions doesn't especially affect your chances of being hired, since interviewers calibrate their expectations to the difficulty of the question, so that a candidate who doesn't find the optimal solution to a very hard problem can still get a positive rating from the interviewer, or a candidate who does find the optimal solution to an easy problem might still get a borderline or negative rating if they took longer and needed many more hints than most candidates.

I will say that solving a problem with optimal time/space complexity, without missing any edge cases, and without needing any major hints is almost always sufficient for a good rating. And on the other end of the scale, being unable to write even a sub-optimal solution typically results in a bad rating, even on a hard problem. But if a candidate's performance lies somewhere between those two extremes, the rating an interviewer gives will be heavily influenced by the problem's difficulty.

2. How can I stand out?

There are also a few more actionable ways a candidate can stand out:

- Ask good questions about the constraints around the problem that you're given, like "is there an upper bound on this"/"can this ever be empty"/"is there a particular order this will come in"/"will these ever be null", etc.
- Write good test cases without being prompted. A good test case has a narrow, specific purpose (i.e. tests a particular edge case), and isn't larger than is required to serve that purpose (i.e. don't use a long string or list when a short one will do). I'm always very impressed if a candidate is able to think of all of the major edge cases for which other candidates commonly fail on a given problem. One other minor tip is that it's better to write the expected output down along with the test case inputs.

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Man, this advice really helped. I think I was really able to stand out in my interview. I guess I never went as far as thinking about what the interviewer is looking for. Great insights! Will use this again.

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