Step-by-Step Guide to Preparing for a Successful Interview

**What is a Behavioral Interview?**

A behavioral interview asks you to describe your past professional accomplishments and experiences in detail with an emphasis on how you reacted to different situations. Employers listen to your “stories” to evaluate if you have the skills and experience that meets their job requirements as well as the responses that fit the company culture. They're also looking for demonstrated evidence of your skill, not just general statements about your skills.

**By the end of a successful behavioral interview, Employer Competitive candidates will have:**

* Built rapport with the interviewer
* Demonstrated confidence
* Communicated a willingness to work on a team
* Shared stories that:
  + Told a coherent personal narrative consistent with their brand statement
  + Demonstrated that they understand what the employer is looking for
  + Provided evidence that they meet the requirements of the job
* Asked questions that demonstrated knowledge of the company

**This step-by-step guide will help you prepare for the interview by offering best practices for each of the following categories:**

1. Preparing Your Stories for the Interview
2. Know the Employer
3. Be Ready for the Logistics
4. Deliver a Confident Interview
5. Follow-Up After the Interview

**Preparing Your Stories for the Interview**

Preparing for an interview takes significant time. Plan to put aside time to outline your own experiences, research the potential employer, and plan for logistics.

**Your Experiences**

**Step 1: Review your personal brand statement.**

At this point, you should already have developed your personal brand statement and an elevator pitch. Review those to make sure you are comfortable describing yourself in under one minute as an opening or response to the general question, "Tell me about yourself."

**Step 2: Develop specific stories that bring your brand statement to life.**

Pick 2 - 3 stories that demonstrate the accomplishments and qualities you emphasize in your brand statement. In addition, reflect on experiences when you have demonstrated your professional value. Consider skills like:

* Leadership
* Teamwork
* Problem Solving
* Influencing Others
* Analyzing a Problem
* Project Management

Use the chart below to think through the story. This method (the S.T.A.R. method) allows you to tell your story in a compelling and succinct way.

1. Complete one chart for each story.
2. Practice telling each story. (Each story should be no more than 3 minutes.)
3. Find willing family and friends who will listen and provide you with feedback.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SKILL/ ACCOMPLISHMENT | STORY |
| **Situation or Task:** Describe the situation you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. Be specific, and provide details. Paint a vivid picture to create clear understanding. | ​ |
| **Action:** Describe the action you took. Don’t tell what you would do — tell what you did. Use “I” statements, not “we” statements to highlight your contributions. | ​ |
| **Result:** Explain the results of your action. Focus on positive outcomes and accomplishments. Share what you learned or feedback you received. If applicable, quantify your results. | ​ |

**Step 3: Prepare Answers to Questions Likely to be Asked**

Below are some questions that companies often ask. Write out your responses to these questions and then practice responding. If you can use your experiences from above to answer these questions, include those. If you can tie your responses back to your brand statement, even better. Use technical language when appropriate, and share specific examples whenever possible.

* Tell Me About Yourself
  + Answer this question as if you were asked— Why should I hire you? What do you bring to this position from your past experience and education? Also, use a variation of your brand statement or elevator for this response.
* Why this company?
* What are your career goals?
  + Think about this question as a way to tell an employer how you would perform as a developer and be realistic about where you are currently in your career.
* Tell me about your experience as a web developer and what qualities do you possess that help you in this role?
* What role do you typically play in a team?
* What led you to web design?
* Describe the projects you're most proud of and the most difficult problems you've solved. What was your favorite website design project and why?
* Do you have an online portfolio? If so, please describe some of the projects.
  + (Be prepared to show and talk about your work.)
* How do you keep up-to-date with new and emerging technologies?

Think about your answers to these questions as well.

* Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
* Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.
* How do you handle a challenge?
* Have you ever dealt with company policy you weren't in agreement with? How?
* Share an example of how you were able to motivate employees or co-workers.
* Have you handled a difficult situation with another department? How?
* Have you handled a difficult situation with a client or vendor? How?
* What do you do if you disagree with your boss?

NOTE: When you are talking about technical projects, be sure not to dive into the specifications too quickly. First, discuss the problem you were trying to solve, the business issues overall, and the creation and deployment processes. By doing so, you help to demonstrate your value as both a technical expert and someone who can add value to the company more broadly.

**Know the Employers**

An Employer Competitive candidate is well-versed on the company before walking through the door. Use the internet and your LinkedIn contacts to learn about the company, its culture, and its leadership.

**Step 4: Research the company**

Learn as much as you can about the company online and through your contacts. Contact people you know on LinkedIn who work at the company. If you can, find out who and how many people you will be interviewing with and whether it will include a general screen, a technical screen, or a combination of both. Research the specific people interviewing you.

Use the chart below to help you capture notes on the company:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Company** | ​ |
| **Job Title** | ​ |
| **Major Job Responsibilities** | ​ |
| **Salary** | ​ |
| **Company leadership (know the name of the CEO, COO, other big names)** | ​ |
| **Company history** | ​ |
| **Questions to ask (see Step 5 below)** | ​ |

**Step 5: Think of questions to ask about the company**

Employers almost always ask you what questions you have of your own. Be prepared with at least four questions. Some potential question topics are below:

* Company Culture – How do cross-functional teams form? Where do people bring new ideas? Etc.
* Specific Projects – Based on your company research, what were the specifics of a particular project? Results? More to come?
* Role – What should someone in this position accomplish within 6 months or a year?

**Be Ready for the Logistics**

**Step 6: Prepare for the logistics of the interview**

While this step may seem obvious, it’s important to take a few minutes to make sure that logistics don’t stop you from getting a job.

* If it’s an in-person interview, make sure you know how to get there, and also research a back-up route.
* If it’s an online or phone interview, check your technology, and have a back-up plan here too.
* Leave with enough time to arrive 15 minutes early.
* Be dressed for the job — when in doubt, dress more formal, not less formal.
  + Whether you wear a suit or something less formal depends on the company culture and the position you are seeking. If possible, call to find out about the company dress code before the interview.
  + Professional colors to wear to an interview are blue, black, brown, gray, and navy.
* Bring a copy of your resume for each person who is interviewing you.

**Deliver a Confident Interview**

Now that you’ve prepared for the interview, think about what you want to do during the interview itself.

Review the following best practices:

1. **Practice good nonverbal communication**
   1. Demonstrate confidence: stand up and sit up straight, lean in, make eye contact, and connect with a firm handshake.
2. **Listen**
   1. Good communication skills include active listening and letting the person know you heard what was said. Observe your interviewer, and match their body language and conversational pace.
3. **Keep it professional.**
   1. This is not about making a new friend. Your level of familiarity should mimic the interviewer's demeanor.
4. **Take your time when answering questions**
   1. It's perfectly acceptable to pause for a moment before answering questions. An interviewer will respect you for answering the questions thoughtfully.
5. **Ask questions**
   1. Part of knowing how to interview is being ready to ask questions that demonstrate an interest in what goes on in the company. Asking questions also gives you the opportunity to find out if the company and role are the right fit for you. The best questions come from listening to what you're asked during the interview and asking for additional information.
6. **Be Confident**
   1. Reflect the three Cs during the interview: cool, calm and confident. You know you can do the job — make sure the interviewer believes you can too.

**Follow up After the Interview**

* After the interview, take the following steps:
  + Send a follow-up email within 24 hours after the interview. Thank the interviewer(s) for taking time to meet with you, and also personalize it by touching on points discussed in the interview. Be sure to express your interest in the next steps.
  + If not connected with them on LinkedIn, send connection requests to your interviewers.
  + After 2 weeks, follow up for an update.
  + If passed on for the position, ALWAYS ask for feedback.