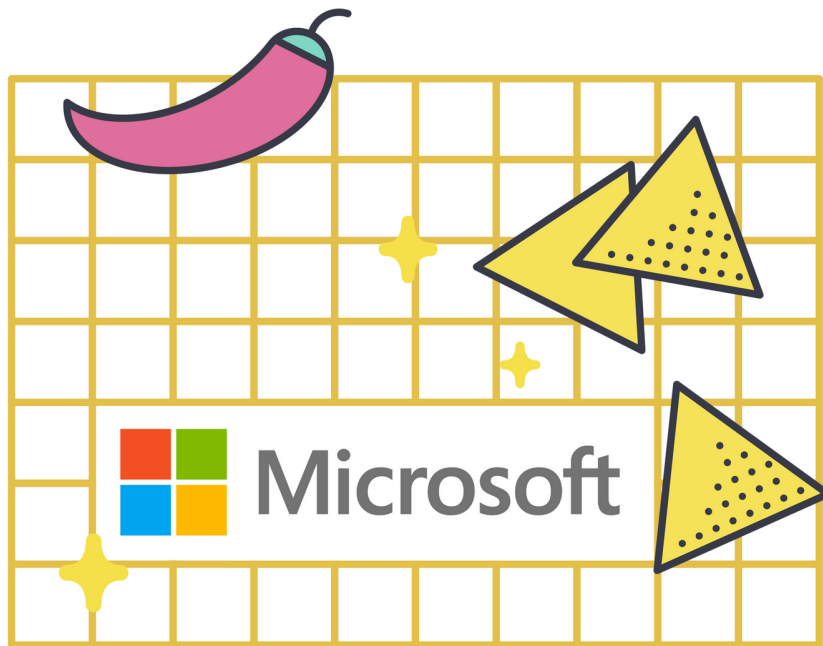# Understanding the Microsoft Interview Process

The Microsoft interview process is collaborative and friendly, yet challenging.

Microsoft was one of the first big tech firms to drop the stressful brain teasers and theoretical questions. But its interviewing process is still one of the most difficult to get through.

Less than 2% of applicants make it through. You can increase your chances of making it into that group by understanding the interviewing process and preparing for every part of it.

The Microsoft Interview Process

Step 1: Recruiter Screening Call

The Microsoft interview process begins when a recruiter spots your resume or profile and reaches out to you for an initial screening call.

Microsoft's preliminary screening call gets right into it. You will go over your resume and then answer a few behavioral questions.

The recruiter wants to get a sense of how curious and capable of learning you are. They also want to gauge your leadership abilities, problem-solving skills, team collaboration skills, and how well you hold up to pressure. This part of the interview should take around 15 minutes.

If you are applying for a technical engineering or developer role, the recruiter will also ask you some technical questions. The technical skill questions let the recruiter know that you really have what it takes.

Microsoft is known for asking technical questions on data structures and algorithms during its preliminary call.

The recruiter will also ask you a coding question to be answered through a shared editor. You are given 30 minutes to complete it.

The data structures most likely to be discussed are arrays and strings, queues and lists, linked lists, trees/tries, hash maps/hash sets, and graphs.

You will need to show and discuss the algorithms used in your solutions. The interviewer may ask recursive questions and expect in-depth answers on the complexity of your algorithms.

Microsoft doesn't have any specific coding language requirements. But it's a good idea to use a preferred one, like C#.

This phone call lasts around 45 minutes, at the longest.

Step 2: Technical Phone Interview

Technical role applicants are often asked to do another phone interview (or two) with a Microsoft hiring representative. This phone call happens 1 to 2 weeks after the initial screening call.

The recruiter will give you an interview agenda that lets you know what topics and questions may be discussed and what's expected of you. You should get this at least a few days ahead.

Make sure you research the topics given. Microsoft expects its technical candidates to demonstrate deep technical knowledge, be able to recommend solutions, point out pros and cons, and defend your choices.

Step 3: Virtual On-Site Interview Loops

Microsoft's on-site interview rounds are now done remotely. This process consists of 4 to 5 continuous interviews, held on the same day.

The interviews are facilitated by two interviewers each. These interviewers are usually senior managers and developers. They ask both behavioral questions and coding exercises.

The interviews get progressively harder with progressively senior and higher-ranked interviewers.

After each round, the interviewers will give you a "hire" or "no hire" rating. If you receive three "no hires", your interviewing process may end there.

You will also get to interview with members of the team you want to join. The traditional on-site process holds this interview as a lunch. It may seem more casual, but it's a serious part of the process.

Step 4: Final On-Site Interview or As-Ap

The final on-site interview is called the "As-Ap" or "As Appropriate" interview. This takes place with a senior manager who has the authority to veto your entire candidacy or extend you a hiring offer.

The As-Ap interviewer has access to all your other interviewing results and may review this with the recruiter. They decide what happens next.

Most successful candidates receive offers during their "As-Ap" interviews. However, some applicants receive offers 1 to 2 weeks later or get notice to move on to the HR interview.

Step 5: HR Interview (Maybe)

Some candidates are asked to complete an HR interview. This gets into more behavioral and/or technical questions.

This round is done to confirm that you're the right choice. If you are asked to do an HR interview, there's a good chance that Microsoft wants to hire you.

If Microsoft is giving you an offer, they will usually let you know during this stage. The final part of this interview may include some conversation on your salary and benefits.

Step 6: Offer or No Offer

Microsoft has a reputation for making offers on the spot right during the interview process, but that doesn't always happen.

The Microsoft interview process concludes with confirmation of an offer or rejection. They will always let you know if you made it or not.

How Long Does the Microsoft Interview Process Take?

Microsoft's interview process takes anywhere from 2 weeks to 1 month for most applicants. Students and campus placements take a little longer and can take up to 2 months to make it through.

Types of Microsoft Interview Questions

Microsoft asks questions that are realistic and aimed at evaluating your analytical capabilities, problem-solving skills, leadership abilities, creativity level, and working style.

The interview process cycles between two kinds of questions: behavioral and technical/role-based.

Technical or role-based questions evaluate if you have what it takes to perform the job. Behavioral questions evaluate if you have what it takes to fit in at Microsoft.

These questions are all realistic in nature.

Behavioral Interview Questions

Microsoft's behavioral questions are intended to determine how intellectually resourceful you are and how well you collaborate.

This firm wants to understand how you work with others and try to experience how you may work with them.

You will interview with potential managers, teammates, and cross-functional colleagues for up to one hour at a time. But behavioral questions are typically sprinkled throughout all the interviews

Here are a few examples of Microsoft behavioral interview questions:

- Why Microsoft?
- Tell me about your greatest success.
- Tell me about a time you had a conflict with someone. How did you resolve it and what did you learn?
- Describe a time when your project failed.

Technical Interview Questions

During the Microsoft interview process, engineers and other technical applicants are asked questions about coding and system design.

Microsoft's employees work across several technical areas. Your interview question preparation needs to be customized according to the role and job description. That said, interview questions typically go over data structures, distributed systems, algorithms, and more.

The questions will be based on problems that Microsoft is working on in real life. You can expect to get these questions ahead of time.

Here are a few examples of Microsoft questions for software engineers:

- Store a list of numbers as a single number.
- Design the backend of Spotify.
- Determine if an array from 1..n has a duplicate in constant time and space.
- Find number of rotations in a circularly sorted array
- Given an integer array, return an array response such that the i-th element of the output array is equal to the product of all the elements of the input array except for its i-th element.
- Print all the words from a dictionary that can be found on a given boggle board

Non-Technical Role Interview Questions

Microsoft's product marketing, program manager, and other non-technical role applicants are put through rigorous interviewing.

If that's you, you can expect to get real-life questions on a variety of business problems.

Here are a few examples of non-technical interview questions:

- What's your favorite product and why?
- Tell me about a time you had a conflict with someone. How did you resolve it and what did you learn?
- Design a LinkedIn for blue-collar workers

- If you were the CEO of Microsoft, how would you increase usage for Internet Explorer?
- Design an alarm clock for blind people
- What happens when you navigate to a website?
- Describe a time when your project failed.
- Tell me about a time you convinced someone to change their mind.
- Design a touchscreen table for a restaurant.
- Design a photo app for the blind
- Improve the experience of moving to a new city.
- How would you use VR to improve education?
- Design a risk management plan for a data center.
- How would you design & launch a TinyURL kind of product?
- Tell me about your greatest success.
- How would you optimize serving time at an ice cream shop?
- You're a PM at a vending machine company. Your CEO asks of you to design a new line of vending machines to be placed at Hotels/Motels. What would you do?

How to Prepare for the Microsoft Interview

Understand then Demonstrate Microsoft's Core Competencies

Microsoft has identified six core competencies that make it and its employees successful. It tests for these competencies throughout the interview.

- Collaboration. "Communicating effectively within the team and across teams."

- Drive for results. "Working tenaciously to deliver on commitments, constantly seeking bigger challenges, and holding yourself and others accountable."
- Customer Focus. "Our mission at Microsoft is to empower every person and every organization to achieve more."
- Influencing for Impact. "Successfully persuading and influencing others with effective communication."
- Judgment. "Effectively scoping complex problems and using business acumen to make knowledge-based decisions."
- Adaptability. "Ability to deal with ambiguous and uncertain situations or problems with agility."

Analyze these competencies one by one, looking for ways to prove and demonstrate them throughout Microsoft's interviewing process.

- *How can you demonstrate a history of collaborating and communicating well with others? Are you ready for Microsoft's cross-functional team interviews?*
- What examples can you show of your drive for results? What examples of tenaciousness do you have to give?
- *Are you keeping up with what Microsoft wants to deliver to its customers? How can you include this in the conversation?*
- When have you successfully influenced others into a winning direction?
- *What difficult judgment calls have you made? What were the results and what did you learn from it?*
- When's the last time you dealt with uncertainty or had to move fast?

Choose Your Preferred Coding Language

Microsoft lets technical applicants interview in their preferred coding language. You should choose this according to how well it fits the role you're applying for and how popular it is with Microsoft.

Python, JavaScript, Java, TypeScript, C#, Go, HTML, C++, Ruby, and C are said to be Microsoft's current top ten most in-demand programming skills. And in that order.

Know Which Teams or Product Groups You Want to Be Hired For

Microsoft hires for specific teams and product groups – such as Azure, Outlook, Office, SharePoint, Dynamics, etc.

Make this a strategic choice. Microsoft made the news recently for cutting back on hiring for a few teams. But it's increasing hiring in other core areas.

You might want to go over this with a private Microsoft interviewing coach.

You don't want to waste your efforts aiming for something that's getting slashed down (unless that's your absolute dream position).

Understand Microsoft's Alternative Interview Framework

The Microsoft interview process now uses an Alternative Interview Framework. The alternative interview framework did away with secrecy, trick questions, outlandish requests, and the typical fast-paced interviewing style.

Microsoft realized that it didn't want to find the candidate that was best at answering riddles in a short amount of time.

What it wants, is to find the best candidate for each role and assess how well applicants will perform on the job. So Microsoft redesigned its interviews to recreate a real working environment.

Candidates are informed about the upcoming interview topics, problems, and questions in advance. Applicants are given access to Microsoft's internal data and encouraged to research the problems on their own.

Microsoft also uses real problems – most of which are problems its team is currently working on. The interviewing process gives you the chance to work with Microsoft.

The process is designed to resemble a typical working day. But it's still demanding. If you get three consecutive poor showings during the interviewing process, you're out.

Answer with the STAR(R) Framework

Microsoft's interviewing process includes many open-ended and conversational questions. You can answer with clarity, focus, and specificity by responding through the STAR(R) framework.

- Situation: explain the situation and its context
- Task: describe the task you had to complete
- Action: describe the actions and processes you took
- Result: describe the outcome of your actions
- Reflection: reflect on the experience

Microsoft recommends this framework to its applicants. Learn it until it becomes second nature to you.

Master Your Technical and Domain Knowledge

If you're applying to Microsoft, you should have complete technical and domain knowledge – at least to the level you're applying to.

Have you mastered your core skills and subject matter?

Understand Microsoft's Culture

Microsoft hires individuals that fit with its culture and cultural values.

- Growth Mindset. Microsoft expects its hires to have a growth mindset and rapid skill acquisition ability. You can't sit back on your haunches once you're in. Show Microsoft how well you can learn, adapt, and pick up on new, trending ideas.
- Diverse & Inclusive. How well do you work with others? How much are you aware of where you hold set personal biases? How flexible are you in reconsidering viewpoints and behaviors? Microsoft looks for those who are easy to work with and who put in the effort of getting along with different kinds of people.
- One Microsoft. Microsoft is a massive and diverse organization that still needs to move cohesively towards success. Are you an active collaborator who puts in work to find common ground, build with other people, and facilitate success?
- Customer Obsession. The customer is always number one – whether or not you're in a customer-facing role. You have to keep Microsoft's customers in mind. Are you aware of their perspectives, experiences, and desires? Are you familiar

with what they think about Microsoft products and ready to incorporate their insights?

- Values. Microsoft values respect, integrity, and accountability. And this is more than a catchphrase. You have to live these values in actions and words. Keep these three values in mind as you prepare for the interview and reflect on your experiences and history.
- Manager Expectations. Managers have even higher expectations for cultural fit. They're expected to model the values, reinforce the culture, and guide others in them. If you want to be part of Microsoft, think of how you can nurture and protect the environment managers are seeking to create.

Get Ready for Your Virtual Interview

Microsoft is firmly on board with virtual hiring. It generally uses Microsoft Teams but may use 3rd party tools.

You need to get familiar with its virtual interviewing tools from long in advance. Test your webcam, microphone, internet connection, and familiarity with Teams.

If you have any technical, accessibility, or other issues along the way, let your recruiter know so they can work with you.

How to Get Hired by Microsoft (Key Skills)

Microsoft looks for general engineering capabilities along with technical proficiency.

Engineering Capabilities

- Problem-solving: the ability to break down information and navigate through problems. Microsoft evaluates how you think, empathize with the customer, and make choices. Microsoft looks at your process and communication. You're encouraged to ask clarifying questions and develop a plan before beginning to solve.
- Design: your ability to work with Microsoft's system and platform, and ability to build or design new features from scratch
- Coding: how well you code and how clean, concise, and bug-free it is. Are you following best practices?
- Testing: Microsoft expects you to test your own code and other team members' code. You should test solutions before submitting them. Have an eye to security when you do so.

Technical Proficiency

Depending on the role you're applying for, here are some areas we recommend preparing for. This list simply gives examples and is representative, not exhaustive:

- Algorithms
- Data structures
- System design and Distributed Systems
- Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning
- Data Science
- Computer Networking

FAQs about Microsoft Interviews

- What are the top traits Microsoft looks for in candidates? Along with excellent role-specific technical capabilities, Microsoft looks for entrepreneurial spirit, willingness to learn, desire to excel, intelligence, technology passion, and desire to learn.
- Does Microsoft hire entry-level positions, students, or new graduates? Yes, Microsoft hires for entry-level positions, including students and new graduates.
- Can I apply for more than one Microsoft job at a time? Yes, you can apply for several. Microsoft doesn't restrict this.
- What's Microsoft's cooling-off period? Microsoft doesn't have one. You can apply as frequently as you want, to as many teams or positions as you want.