

Interview Preparation

Overview

As you prepare for your first (or third) interview with your company of interest, it is important to get organized, and be deliberate about your preparation. This section will help you complete pre-interview prep work so you arrive to your interview prepared to have a well informed conversation.

Conducting Thorough Research

When you have found a company or role that piques your interest, or are asked to schedule an interview, your first step will be to research that company and/or role. Ensuring you have a well crafted response means coming to the conversation prepared with facts and information you have learned through research. The goal of your research is to gather information that will help you:

- Answer the questions “what do you know about us?” or “why did you apply to this role?”
- Connect and align with their brand
- Craft well informed interview questions
- Avoid asking questions that can easily be answered through online research

How to Conduct Research About a Role or Company

There are several websites you can use to help you learn more about the company and role of interest. When researching these websites, there are several different topics you will want to research about the company. You can gather information about the company’s history, recent events, employment experience, and leadership by searching for this type of information through these websites. Some of these websites will offer fact-based information such as the number of employees, where the company was founded, and type of products or services they offer.

Glassdoor.com: This website provides current and former employees the opportunity to review the company and the overall experience of working there. You may also find information about the interview experience, and interview questions commonly asked. It’s worth noting that people in the extremes, meaning people who are greatly disappointed, or greatly pleased, typically review employers on this site.

The best way to utilize these extreme reviews is to look for common friends or themes in the reviews you read. Moreover, be sure to be mindful of the timeline the review was written. More recent reviews will have more relevant information than reviews written several years ago.

TheMuse.com: This website offers information about the company’s culture, environment, and benefits offered to its employees. It’s worth noting that companies pay to be on muse, so be the Muse.

LinkedIn.com: Although LinkedIn is most commonly known for being a social media outlet for professionals, you can also use LinkedIn to research company information. This is especially helpful when identifying certain employees or leadership at a particular company.

Company websites: Many companies have pages on their website where they provide general information about the company, outline the employee experience, and post open positions they are actively recruiting for. You can navigate around a company's website to learn more about what they do by taking a look at pages like: "About", "Jobs", "Careers" and "Culture."

When all else fails, use your search engine of choice to research your target company.

What Do You Know About Us?

Most candidates only conduct the bare minimum amount of research to sound informed (rather than actually being well informed). An easy way to impress your interviewer is to demonstrate how much you know about the company. It shows your genuine interest in their work, while also showing that you are a prepared person.

As you compile facts, figures, and interesting bits of information about the company, be sure to put them all in one place. You will want to refer back to these facts in the future when preparing for your interview. This information will help inform what you share about yourself, as well as help you craft well formulated questions for the interviewers.

Using Research to Create Talking Points About You

Use your research on the company and role to highlight things you have in common with the organization, or the demands of the role. For example, if the company caters to military veterans, you may want to mention the relationship you have with the veterans in your life. (Perhaps they are your parents, siblings, cherished friends, or perhaps you are one!)

If the role demands excellent customer service experience, highlight the award you won for best customer support of the month (assuming this is true). If the organization touts that they are highly innovative, talk about the outside-the-box project you completed as an assignment during your program. In short, after completing research, your goal should be to communicate your brand as it relates to their brand. Identify 7-10 talking points about yourself as it relates to their culture and the role.

Here are some examples of how to align your brand to the company's brand.

If you learned that....	And you...	Tell them...
One of their core values as a company is to care for others	Volunteer on a regular basis	How you also believe in their core value to care for others, as demonstrated by your

		volunteer work with a non-profit.
They recently won an award for most outstanding customer service	Were recognized by your manager for going above and beyond what's needed to help a customer	You noticed they recently won the award, and you found it fitting, given your recent recognition for going above and beyond. You want to work for a place that understands the importance of excellent customer care and support.
The role requires the candidate to have experience with a specific software	Don't have that experience, but you have learned a very similar software	You are confident you can master a new application, given your familiarity with a similar product.

Asking Insightful Questions Backed by Facts

Most interview questions can be easily researched and answered before the interview happens. It's your job to research the company well enough that you begin crafting questions which cannot be answered with online research alone. There are a myriad of questions you can ask an interviewer. Come prepared with questions about the company, the team, the role, your leader, growth opportunities, ongoing learning - any questions that help you best understand what life will be like working there.

Here are some examples of questions with answers not easily found online:

- How would you describe the communication dynamics of this team?
- Since becoming a leader, can you describe the qualities of your favorite employee?
- How does the company hold individual contributors accountable to accomplishing the mission?
- Is there a strategic roadmap for the company? Can you share a broad vision of the company's direction in the next 3-5 years?

STAR Stories

After conducting your research and identifying talking points about yourself, you are ready to prepare your STAR stories. A STAR story is a response to a behavioral interview question. For a deeper dive into STAR stories, read [Behavioral Interview Questions \(and How to Answer Them\)](#), and watch the video, *How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview*, included with the

article.



Key Takeaways

Below is an excerpt from the article which summarizes each portion of a STAR story:

- *“Situation: What is the context of your story? In setting the situation, you are telling your listener when or where this event took place. For example, ‘We were working on a six-month contract for a high-value client, when our agency merged with another, larger firm...’*
- *Task: What was your role in this situation? For example, ‘It was my role to lead the transition for my group while also communicating with our client to keep the project on track.’*
- *Action: What did you do? For example, ‘I set up weekly check-ins with the client to update them on the progress of the merger. This cemented an important level of trust between us. I also had regular one-on-ones with each person on the team, both to assess how they were handling the change and to make sure we would meet our deadlines.’*
- *Result: What did your actions lead to? For example, ‘We ended up completing the project on time, meeting all of their specifications. It was incredibly rewarding to navigate a lot of change and succeed under pressure.’”*

Interview Preparation Logistics

You can use the following checklist to ensure you have everything you may need in advance of the interview:

- ❑ **Determine transportation time:** Use Google Maps (or your map of choice) to determine the length of the commute to the interview site. Be sure to account for traffic during the time of day of the interview, and time your commute to arrive 15 minutes early. Arriving any earlier puts pressure on your interviewer to wrap up what they are doing, and arriving any later can be viewed as risky behavior. Fifteen minutes should give you enough time to park, check in at the front desk if applicable, make one last stop to the restroom to use the facilities and check your appearance, and review your notes before the interview begins.
- ❑ **Plan your wardrobe in advance:** As workplaces continue to evolve to match generational preferences, so too has the dress code changed along with it. Many companies who used to require business casual or business attire have relaxed their rules to offer a more casual working environment. Since the dress code for the company may be unknown, it's best to ask the interviewer for their recommendations. This will help prevent you sticking out like a sore thumb, whether you are overdressed or underdressed. Simply asking eliminates the uncertainty. After asking the company for their recommendation on appropriate interview attire, plan your outfit accordingly, and ensure your clothes are washed and pressed in advance. If you are unsure if your outfit is appropriate, take a picture and send it to your Career Services Advisor to get their opinion.
- ❑ **Print your resume & cover letter:** Have 5 printed copies of your resume & cover letter on hand. Be sure it's the same resume you submitted to them, as you will likely keep different versions of your resume and cover letter on hand.
- ❑ **Bring a Thank You note:** Bring with you a blank thank you card to complete after the interview, but before you drive away from the site. Taking a moment to complete a hand written thank you note is an outstanding gesture that will be remembered, and will help you make an incredible impression upon the interviewer. After completing the interview, find a quiet place to fill out the card, and drop it off at the front desk, letting the attendant know who it is for.
- ❑ **Bring your completed Interview Prep Worksheet** (assigned at the end of this lesson).

Review

Strong interview preparation correlates with strong interview performance. The less prepared you come to an interview, the more nervous you will be, which will distract you from answering the questions at hand. With the dawn of the Internet, information about a company or role can be easily found at your fingertips. Take the time to strategically research information about a company prior to an interview so you can align who you are with what they need.