

Session 4 (1/22/26):

Intros: Skip

Behavioral Interview:

Question 1: Leadership & Initiative (taking ownership, stepping up, driving results without being asked):

What to Look For

- Identifies problems proactively, doesn't wait to be told
- Takes ownership of outcomes, not just tasks
- Influences others without formal authority
- Shows clear "I did" vs "we did" — knows their specific contribution
- Demonstrates follow-through to measurable results
- Volunteers for stretch assignments or ambiguous situations

Red Flags

- Waits for permission or explicit instructions
- Takes credit for team efforts ("we" without clarifying their role)
- Confuses activity with leadership (busy ≠ leading)
- Can't articulate the impact of their initiative
- Blames others when initiative fails
- Leadership examples are all about authority, not influence

"Tell me about a time you had to make a decision without all the information you needed."

Crane project last time

"Describe a time you convinced others to follow your approach or idea."

Question 2: Problem Solving & Technical Judgement (analytical thinking, debugging approach, technical decision-making):

What to Look For

- Structured approach: breaks down complex problems systematically
- Considers multiple solutions before deciding
- Articulates trade-offs clearly (cost, time, quality, risk)
- Uses data/evidence to support decisions
- Knows when to ask for help vs. push through
- Learns from debugging experiences—doesn't repeat mistakes

Red Flags

- Jumps to solutions without understanding the problem
- Can't explain their reasoning or thought process
- "Trial and error" without hypothesis-driven approach
- Overcomplicates simple problems or oversimplifies complex ones
- Blames tools, time, or others for technical failures
- No mention of validation or testing decisions

"Walk me through how you approached a complex technical problem."

Oven project last time

"Describe a time you were stuck on a problem. How did you get unstuck?"

Question 3: Teamwork & Collaboration (working well with others, cross-functional skills, and supporting teammates):

✓ What to Look For

- Shares credit genuinely—highlights teammates' contributions
- Adapts communication style for different audiences
- Seeks to understand before being understood (active listening)
- Puts team success above personal recognition
- Offers help proactively, not just when asked
- Handles conflict constructively—focuses on solutions, not blame

► Red Flags

- "I" language only—no acknowledgment of team
- Speaks negatively about previous teammates/managers
- Avoids conflict entirely OR escalates unnecessarily
- Takes a "not my job" attitude
- Can't give specific examples of helping others
- Blames team dynamics for personal failures

"Describe a conflict you had with a teammate. How did you resolve it?"

S/T: Earlier in my academic career, in intro to Mechanical Engineering class. We were put into groups of 4, and assigned to build a fully functional crane. Because of the uneven contributions of my teammate, I knew it was going to take more effort. Gave specifications of what the project was supposed to accomplish. Because of uneven contributions, we only had 6 weeks to finish the project which was supposed to be a whole semester.

A: I stepped up and facilitated splitting up the roles on the team. I included the members who had uneven contributions. I owned the design/stability and SolidWorks aspects of the project. I took the ideas from the team member I was having an issue with and including them into our project. To address the challenge of the instability in the project, as a team we added the counter weight. I designed it.

R: That was how we implemented everyone's idea through conflict and uneven contributions. Created a fully functional crane as we were assigned. A lot of other cranes in the class had these truss-like features, but ours was very simple and efficient, not overly complex. Other students' cranes traversed very slowly compared to ours. Was able to incorporate everyone's ideas to deliver the project.

LL: Having patience and stepping into a role when no one wants to get their hands dirty. If I didn't do that, we probably wouldn't be successful in terms of completing the project and getting a good grade. Got to hear people's ideas and let everyone weigh in.

Back in Time: Would have set earlier guidelines and deadlines in the project to keep us more organized and on track to make us more successful. Wasn't a fluke, but would have added more deadlines.

Feedback: What do you mean when you say uneven contributions? And did you ever try to address this head on? Focusing heavily on the technical aspects and less on the details of the conflict. (Answer: couch potato. Team member

contributed in terms of drawings, but nothing further. Wouldn't show up to meetings. When we met outside of class, we made progress without him, and he saw that, his progress and contribution improved as time went on.)

Question 4: Communication & Influence (explaining complex ideas, persuading stakeholders, and presenting):

What to Look For

- Adjusts message complexity for the audience
- Uses concrete examples, analogies, or visuals
- Listens and addresses objections thoughtfully
- Shows preparation and structure in presentations
- Delivers difficult messages with empathy and clarity
- Persuades through logic AND relationship-building

Red Flags

- Uses jargon when explaining to non-experts
- Rambles without clear structure or point
- Gets defensive when challenged
- Avoids difficult conversations entirely
- Relies on authority/position rather than persuasion
- Can't give examples of adapting communication style

"Tell me about a time you had to explain something technical to a non-technical audience."

S/T: Coming out of high school into college was a transition. I had worked for 3 years in high school at Lifetime Fitness. A lot of the job was staying calm under pressure or tough situations when people need help. I was a swim instructor teaching 3 kids in the pool. I had a member come up to me and say they saw someone feeling uneasy and like they were going to pass out. Very serious situations and lives in my hands with kids in the water.

A: I immediately got out of the water and took the kids with me. Went over to the supervisor and had the member talk to him. I went over to the parents of the kids and let them know they needed to clear the pool deck. I then went over to my supervisor and cleared the pool deck without giving too much information to make anyone panic. I had to stay calm, act fast, without making people panic to get them to exit the pool.

R: The parents of the kids praised me to my manager and supervisor.

LL: Being able to stay calm and act fast in tough situations. I've applied this in engineering. When I fail or face a challenge, my instinct isn't to shut down, it's to remain calm and see the situation in a different light.

BT: When training new lifeguards/staff, using this as an example and maybe even have a training module about clearing the pool deck in this emergency situation calmly and without freaking parents/kids out.

Question 5: Adaptability & Learning (handling change, learning quickly, and dealing with ambiguity):

What to Look For

- Embraces change as opportunity, not threat
- Has a systematic approach to learning new things
- Stays calm under uncertainty—takes action anyway
- Seeks out unfamiliar challenges proactively
- Shows curiosity and asks good questions
- Quickly integrates new information into their approach

Red Flags

- Resists change or complains about shifting priorities
- "That's not what I was hired to do" attitude
- Freezes when facing ambiguity—needs all answers first
- Relies only on familiar methods, won't try new approaches
- Learning approach is passive (waiting to be taught)
- Gets frustrated easily when things don't go as planned

"Tell me about a time you had to adapt to a significant change."

S/T: Coming into college was a huge change. Intro Comp S class was a very big change. We had weekly Python assignments (each assignment had 20+ questions). I had 0 python experience and 0 coding experience. The pace never slowed down. A lot of pressure and a lot of academic rigor to adjust to as a high school student. The 14th lab project of the semester stood out to me a lot. Incorporated a lot of things we learned, conditional logic, etc. I was taking 2 other hard classes at the time. Something that I had to dedicate a lot of time to.

A: A lot of key changes I had to make. One, changed to planning ahead of coding before doing any coding. Broke each problem into smaller bits, and attacked them in smaller pieces. Didn't do big code changes, did everything in smaller pieces, get things working, then add another small piece. I also had to really seek help intentionally. I would go to TAs with specific questions. I really tried to understand my work, instead of just asking TAs to give me the solution. I was intentional with the questions I asked. Lastly, I had to help my mental fatigue. When I would be fatigued, I would take a 5-10 minute break to refresh myself and avoid small, little coding mistakes.

R: I got a 100 on the assignment. I submitted it on time, and didn't use any late days that we were given. After this I completed the class with an A and an A on the final exam. I carry that with me to other classes as well.

LL: I really learned patience with this example, spent coding and debugging. Also, asking the right questions is far more effective than asking for the answer.

BT: I would apply this problem solving skillset after this project 20, earlier on in the class. I also would have applied them to my other classes early on.

Feedback: great job painting pain in S/T.

Question 6: Failure & Self-Awareness (humility, self-reflection, growth mindset, accountability):

What to Look For (Strong Answers)

- Owns the failure fully—no deflection or excuses
- Shows genuine self-reflection, not scripted humility
- Describes specific actions taken to improve
- Shares a REAL failure, not a humble-brag
- Demonstrates growth—behavior actually changed
- Comfortable discussing imperfection (emotionally mature)

Red Flags (Weak Answers)

- Blames others, circumstances, or timing
- "Failure" is actually a disguised success
- Can't name a genuine failure (lack of self-awareness)
- Gets defensive or uncomfortable with the topic
- Learning is generic: "I learned to work harder"
- No evidence the lesson was actually applied

"Tell me about a time you realized you were wrong about something."

Story of father passing away last time.

"What's the worst decision you've made? What happened?"

Question 7: Generic Job Fit (passion for engineering, career goals, and intrinsic motivation):

What to Look For

- Genuine enthusiasm—eyes light up talking about work
- Clear career direction with logical reasoning
- Pursues learning outside of job requirements
- Connects personal interests to professional goals
- Shows curiosity about the role and company specifically
- Has researched the company and asks thoughtful questions

Red Flags

- Generic answers: "I like solving problems"
- Motivation is purely extrinsic (salary, title, prestige)
- No side projects, learning, or personal development
- Can't articulate why THIS role vs. any other
- Career goals seem unrealistic or disconnected
- No questions about the role, team, or company

"Why are you interested in this role/company specifically?"

"Tell me about a side project or personal initiative in engineering."

"What got you interested in engineering/this field?"

Since I was a kid I loved engineering related things (minecraft, legos). I loved breaking things and fixing them. Today, what drives me is a defining challenge that happened in my life. My father passed away from kidney cancer. Even before he died, we moved from house to house to find him a place to live at the end of his life. We had nurses visiting the house to take care of him. Watching my father's illness progress and his passing took a serious toll on my mental health at a young age. I felt a responsibility to take charge and take a leadership role in my family. I had to become someone who my mom could rely on emotionally and physically. That mindset stayed with me as I grew.

I carried that with me into college, trying to be stable and steady for my team members and classmates. I stay focused and steady in school. I graduated high school with a 4.0 GPA and made it to college.

That experience shaped how I face engineering problems today. When things get difficult, my first instinct isn't to shut down, it's to stay composed. I take responsibility for what I can control. It has lended itself well to me to get through a tough engineering curriculum.

I stayed persistent through these circumstances, and it continues to drive me today.