

Session 3 (1/24/26):

What do you worry most about for interviews? What are your biggest gaps?
The biggest worry – accent can make it hard for them to understand you.
Sometimes it's hard to find the right answer.

Intros:

Studying EE at ISU. Strong interest in biomedical. Worked on robot project and raspberry pi. I co-founded a company with my mom. Started a club on campus for hijabi women on campus, we have 15 members. First even is going to be with MSA on Friday, expecting to have 15-20 attendees. We have 4 events scheduled this month for Ramadan.

1 or 2 of your favorite classes so far and why? SE185 – introductory class to Software Engineering. Mostly project based, created fun games, create mazes, first time using sensors. Used the controller (GS4) that was used for PS4 system, we would use PS4 controller and create games to play.

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."

"Describe a situation where you had to lead a team or project. What was your approach?"

S/T: Before creating the club, I played sports a lot growing up. I started wearing the hijab after starting college. I noticed it was hard to find a welcoming place. I

started surveying hijabi women. There were big % that would practice more if they have an inclusive space 40%/60% for metrics.

A: Created a club for hijabi girls. Everyone is welcome. We might be able to have 60% participation and 20-30% growth per semester. Not an official ISU club right now, but hope to become. We need to get more members to form a club officially.

R: We have 15 members currently, hopefully going to grow. We have 4 events scheduled partnered with ISU clubs (MSA, ASA, others). Our main goal is to spread the club through ISU campus.

?:

How did you project the growth? The # of attendees we have now, and the # of events we have planned. The goal is 2-3 events per month. We want to host more wellness types of events. We have a survey out for people to make event suggestions and get feedback.

Biggest lesson learned? Tell the interviewer you think back about what you learned, and how you can apply what you learned elsewhere.

Created a link tree with the survey, Instagram/WhatsApp communities, created an email signup, planning things again, dealing with the financial realities of planning events (rent venue/buy supplies/etc). Managed all of this by myself.

If you could go back in time and do it again? Tell the interviewer that you think about how to improve the process.

Amal own feedback:

I feel like i'm getting lost, halfway through an idea, you realize you should have done something different.

3 levels of an answer:

1 – did what was asked, answers the question, answers the competency
2 – level 1 + above and beyond what was asked (process improvement afterwards, broader impact than intended or super effort/overcame big obstacles to get it done)

3 – level 2 + became a spokesperson for this thing, shared with other teams/groups/departments/trained others/taught others/applied elsewhere.

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."

S/T: Working on a project creating a robot. Using a raspberry pi. It was a personal project outside of school. Used sharp something for configurations. Used ISU printer lab to make it happen.

A: I would analyze the sensor/actuator interactions live data. From a debugging standpoint, I would go through the iterations, and see where a problem was issued. I would implement a solution, then I would move on to the next problem.

R: By going little by little, one problem at a time, I reduced the sensor errors by 30-40%. Also the movement by 35%? By doing iterations, I did about 15 iterations, everytime I would have to do it 3 more times. It was a lot of work, but overall total system errors was reduced by 50%. The most effective way for me to do it. Robot became reliable enough to demo and testing. The project went well at the end.

LL: Solving through iterations. Main method used in SW engineering (talked about it in SE185). I learned how to use it more efficiently in a real project environment.

BT: I would try to find another solution to reduce the time spent. I would break down code chunk by chunk and build them, debug them, then move on.

Feedback: S/T needs more content.

Amal feedback: S/T could have been better. I get lost a lot in what I want to cover.

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?"

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: Work at Goodwill. Part of mission is to make purposeful employment for all (work with people on Autism spectrum). Build technical skills, build confidence, talk to people. When I first started at Goodwill wasn't aware of the mission.

Through our donations/work, we make skills available and train people not only with autism, but drug recovery folks, people who want to get back into society. I had to train one of the guys working with us to learn how to stock items (clothes, toys based on size and color) on the shelf.

A: Had to adopt my language for him to understand. I trained him to stock clothing by color and by size. We had to arrange items by material, and category. I had to adopt my language to make it more understandable for him. We have a cart with all the items. I made a map of the store and color coded it. Each item has a color and he could see what part of the store it goes to.

R: He was trained and could work independently.

LL: Learned how to work with people on the spectrum, how to adjust language and way of talking based on how they interpret and understand. I learned a lot about adjusting my communication style. Working with a diverse background of

people.

BT:

Mansour feedback: mention first time training someone with autism. Can mention that work with another person with autism, but doesn't need as much help/intervention, so I didn't do any in depth training with him.

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."

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."

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?"