A Terse Guide to Behavioral Interview Prep

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Introduction

I put here selected resources I used when preparing for the behavioral interview in the past. Since this is really conversational, the range covered by the behavioral interview is quite, quite broad. I cannot exhaustively list all possible questions. However, preparing those questions as a starting point should often be enough to "ace" this portion of an interview.

I want to also point out that some companies have a separate behavioral interview while others have it embedded throughout the interview process.

Those questions should be enough for all the positions including all positions up to senior software engineer positions in typical large tech/finance companies. However, more preparations are needed for more senior positions (for example, software engineer manager position, technical lead position, etc.). However, I think these are beyond the scope of our class (and, frankly, I want to learn about how to ace those as well)!

References and Resources
- Jennifer Scupi: Answering Behavioral Questions in Amazon Interviews: Advice for Candidates at All Levels
- Martha Gage: The STAR Method Explained: Proven Technique to Succeed at Interview
- Horatio Bird: Behavioral Interview Questions and Answers
- https://www.educative.io/courses/grokking-the-behavioral-interview
- https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/software-engineer-behavioral-interview-questions
- https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/interviewing/how-to-answer-behavioral-interview-questions
- https://devskiller.com/45-behavioral-questions-to-use-during-non-technical-interview-with-developers/
- https://www.pathrise.com/guides/45-behavioral-interview-questions/

Steps
1. Tailor answers to the job description.
2. Note your projects and major accomplishments from past positions.

3. Use the STAR (situation, task, action and result) method to formulate your responses.
4. Keep your responses clear and concise.

To prepare, follow the following steps:
1. Study the company and job description.
2. List academic and professional accomplishments in a portfolio.
3. Prepare your responses with a mentor or a friend.
4. Practice your body language.
5. Know the structure
6. Be specific
7. Mix "I" and "we"
8. Stay focused
9. Avoid negative language

Some Sample Questions
- How do you respond when you disagree with a coworker?
- Tell me about a time you had multiple responsibilities to manage. How did you respond to this situation?
- Can you give me an example of how you set goals for yourself?
- In your opinion, what are some principles every software engineer should follow?
- What is the most helpful feedback you've ever gotten about yourself?
- Tell me about a time you were new to a situation or environment. How did you adapt?
- As a software engineer, you must be both predictable and innovative. How can these traits coexist in your work?
- Tell me about a time you needed information from someone who wasn't responsive. How did you handle it?
- What are your organizational strategies?
- How do you deal with unexpected changes to deadlines?
- Describe the most difficult scenario you've had to face in the last year.
- Tell us about a time when you went beyond your manager's expectations to service a client.
- Tell us about a situation when a coworker needed to be motivated and what action you took.
- Share a situation where you faced an issue with your workload. How did you resolve this issue?
- When did you face pressure when meeting a deadline? What strategies did you implement to face this issue?

- Describe when you made a mistake that affected your team. How did you handle the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you had to learn a new skill quickly. What was the result and what approach did you take to learn your new skill?
- Describe a time where you had to pitch ideas to senior management. What was the result?
- When did you disagree with a coworker about the direction of the project? What did you do to reach an agreement with the coworker?
- Describe a situation when you did much more than was expected from you to get the project done. Were your efforts recognized? By whom and how? How did that make you feel?
- Tell me about a time when you took ownership of a project. Why did you do this? What was the result of you taking the challenge? What could have happened if you did not take ownership?
- Think about an instance in which you came up with a project idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was it about? What was its outcome? What was your role?
- Describe a time when you made a suggestion to improve something on the project that you were working on.
- Give me an example of the project or initiative that you started on your own. It can be a non-business one. What prompted you to get started?
- Describe a situation in which you met a major obstacle in order to complete a project. How did you deal with it? What steps did you take?
- Tell me about a time you had to work on several projects at once. How did you handle that?
- Describe a situation in which you have experienced a significant project change that you weren't expecting. What was it? How did that impact you, and how did you adapt to this change? How did you remain productive throughout the project?
- Describe a situation in which you had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you do this?
- I'd be interested in hearing about a miscommunication you had with your supervisor. How did you solve it? What was the reason for that? How did you deal with that situation?
- Tell me about an instance when you had to communicate a really bad piece of news to your supervisor or team members. How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- Provide an example of a time when you didn't agree with other programmers. Did you stand up for something that you believed was right?

- Tell me about a time when you had to present a complex programming problem to a person that didn't understand technical jargon. How did you ensure that the other person understood you?
- Describe a situation in which you felt you had not communicated well enough. What did you do? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a situation that you had to speak up and be assertive in order to get a point across that was important for you.
- Tell me about a time when you had a disagreement with another programmer. How did you handle the situation? Were you able to reach a mutually beneficial resolution to that conflict? If not, why were you and your co-worker unable to reach a mutually beneficial resolution? If you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently to either prevent the conflict, or to resolve it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person to accomplish a goal. What was the biggest challenge? How did you handle it?
- Has there been a time on a project when you disagreed with someone? What did you do about it?
- Tell me about when you had to deal with conflict within your team. How was the conflict solved? How did you handle that? How would you deal with it now?
- Give me an example of a time you had to take a creative and unusual approach to solve a coding problem. How did this idea come to your mind? Why do you think it was unusual?
- Give me an example of a time when you were faced with a complex project related matter and you could not decide on the best way to deal with it. What did you do? How did you go about making the decision – lead me through your decision process? If you could make the decision once again, would you change anything
- Think about an instance in which you made a decision at work that was unpopular. How did you handle it?
- Give me an example of a project that completely failed. Why do you think it was a failure? Could there be anything done differently in order to turn it into success?
- Describe a situation in which you worked diligently on a project and it did not produce the desired results. Why didn't you get the desired results? What did you learn from the experience?
- Think about a situation when you made a poor decision or did something that just didn't turn out right. What happened?
- Provide an example of an important project goal you reached and how you achieved it.
- Think about an instance in which you worked on and achieved multiple project goals.

- Describe a circumstance when you were not able to achieve a project goal that was set by your supervisor. How did you handle this situation? What was the outcome?
- Think about an instance in which you had to depend on others to help you achieve a project goal. How did you feel?
- Tell me about a recent situation at work in which you were able to convince management to accept one of your ideas.
- Describe a situation in which you experienced difficulty in getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? How did this work? Were you able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way?
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your project team? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?
- Tell me about a situation when you were responsible for project planning. Did everything go according to your plan? If not, then why and what kind of counteractions did you have to take?
- Tell me about a situation when you made a mistake at work. What happened exactly and how did you deal with it? What steps did you take to improve the situation?
- What is the biggest problem you have faced on projects so far and how did you solve it? What made the problem difficult to resolve? What was the result? Would you do anything differently now?
- Give me an example of a time when you noticed a small problem before it turned into a major one. Did you take the initiative to correct it? What kind of preventive measure did you undertake?
- Walk me through a difficult/complex problem/project you encountered. How did you decide what to do first? What information did you need? What obstacles did you face? Which ones were you able to overcome? Did you have to ask for help?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with someone who was not completing his or her share of the work. How did you handle the situation? Did you discuss your concern with your coworker? With your manager? If yes, how did your coworker respond to your concern? What was your manager's response?
- Describe a situation where you had to work in a team that didn't get on very well. What happened? What did you do and what role did you take? How did the situation evolve?
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What would you have done differently to prevent this?
- Give me an example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal. What was the objective? To what extent did you interact with other project members?

- Tell me about the most difficult situation you have had when leading a team. What happened and how did you handle it? Were you successful? What was the most important thing you did?
- Describe a situation when you worked effectively under pressure. How did you feel when working under pressure? What was going on, and how did you get through it?
- Tell me about a situation when you had problems working under pressure. How did you handle that situation? Did you decide to ask for support? How and when did you ask for help?
- Give me a recent example of a stressful situation on the job. What happened? How did you handle it?
- Accenture question – If there was one obstacle or issue that you can foresee that might prevent you from hitting a deadline, what would it be?
- Dropbox question – What was the biggest takeaway from your current job that you'll carry with you throughout your career?
- Adobe question – Tell us about how you've dealt with unexpected changes to deadlines or project scope.
- Google question – Tell me about a time when you solved a conflict at work.
- Amazon question – Describe the project that you had the most trouble with. What would you have done differently? How do you defend your judgment to team members and stakeholders?
- Amazon (and many other companies) question – Which of the company values/principles is your greatest strength?
- Apple question – Talk about a time where you had to make a decision in a lot of ambiguity
- Intercom question – Tell me about a time you went beyond what was expected.
- Hubspot question – Give examples of situations where you have shown effectiveness, empathy, adaptability, & humbleness.
- Autodesk question – How would you handle a situation in which you were getting a lot of negative feedback in the middle of a presentation?
- Booking question – If you know there are 2 improvements that need to be made, but can only make 1, how would you prioritize?
- Docusign question – Talk about a time you failed and how you handled it.
- Expedia question – How do you keep your team engaged?
- Facebook question – Give an example of how you set goals and achieve them
- How do you come up with ideas?
- LinkedIn question – Share an example of how you were able to motivate employees or co-workers. Do you prefer to work with a team or on your own?
- IBM question – Why do you want to change jobs? Why now?
- Talk about your approach to solving difficult problems

- Intuit question – Describe a situation where you had to lead a group that had difficulties. How did you handle it?
- Salesforce question – What would you do if you don't know the solution for a certain problem and nobody can help at the moment?
- Microsoft question – What did you do when the requirement from the stakeholder is vague?
- How do you make a case for your vision and opinion?
- Oracle question – How do you stay organized?
- Spotify question – How do you experiment?
- Do you find that you get overwhelmed often at work? How do you combat that?
- How do you move forward with stakeholders who want to go in one direction but you don't think that's the right way to do it?
- Pinterest question – Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Rakuten question – Who has influenced you in your career?
- What advice would you give someone younger than you who is trying to come up in the field?
- Intercom question – What do you do when you are procrastinating?
- What are your hobbies?
- Netflix question – What do you like most about the culture memo? How do you fit in with our culture?
- How do you work with conflicting priorities?
- Slack question – Have you handled a difficult situation with a coworker? How?
- Stripe question – How do you collaborate with others?
- TripAdvisor question – What websites do you spend a lot of time on?
- How do you set goals?
- What are your biggest weaknesses and strengths?
- VMWare question – Talk about a time that you failed.
- How do you set people up for success?
- Workday question – Let's say a project you are working on is on hold, and your PM has not assigned another project for you to do in the meantime. How would you spend your time while waiting for the project to pick up again?
- Talk about a time when you had multiple requests from different people in the company. How did you handle them?
- Twitter question – What do you think is the most important responsibility that the team has inside the company's mission?
- Uber question – What do you do if you disagree with your boss?
- Talk about a time in your career where you made a mistake. What was the mistake, what were the results, and what did you learn from the experience?