

# THE ULTIMATE INTERVIEW GUIDE: STANDING OUT IN THE INTERVIEW

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Updated 09/2020

## OVERVIEW

### An Interview Is...

- A chance for the employer to get to know you
- A chance for you to evaluate whether the manager and company culture are a fit
- An opportunity to prove that your experiences and skills align with the job duties

### What Employers Look For

Employers use the interview process to obtain answers to four questions:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you do the job?
3. Will you fit in with the organization?
4. Are you a person I will like and our team will like?

It is your job to convince the prospective employer that the answer to all four questions is yes. Be honest about your experiences and skills that make you an excellent candidate.

### Types of Interviews

Remote: Often, employers conduct first round interviews via phone or video. Phone and video interviews last 15-60 minutes and employers use them as a screening tool for future interviews including on-campus and on-site interviews.

1. Phone
2. One-Way Video (HireVue, SparkHire)
3. Two-Way Video (Skype, Zoom, WebEx)

On-Campus: Employers may offer an on-campus interview after a candidate has completed a successful phone or virtual interview.

On-Site: Employers offer on-site interviews after a candidate completes a successful phone, virtual, and/or on-campus interview. Some on-site interviews could last 2 hours while others could last a half-day or full-day. The on-site interview is the last step in the hiring process where candidates meet multiple people and may be asked to take assessments. It is also the last opportunity for you to evaluate the employer.

## HOW TO PREPARE



# TOP 10 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself.

What interests you about this job? Why did you choose this particular career path?

Why should we hire you?

What do you know about our organization?

What are your strengths? What is one weakness?

What courses have you enjoyed the most? Least?

How would your boss or professors describe you?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

What questions do you have for me?

## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about a time when you envisioned a better outcome and energized others to achieve the desired results. **(leadership)**
2. Tell me about a time when you chose to step into a situation, took charge, gained support, and brought about excellent results. **(leadership)**
3. Tell me about a problem situation when you had to analyze facts quickly, define key issues, and develop a plan that produced good results. **(problem-solving)**
4. Describe a time when you learned from a mistake to improve your solution to a problem. **(problem-solving)**
5. Tell me about a time when you contributed a new and better way of doing something. **(creativity)**
6. Tell me about a time when you were able to think “outside-the-box” to come up with a solution. **(creativity)**
7. Tell me about a time when you “pushed back” against doing something even though the majority, including some at higher levels, favored the idea. **(risk-taking)**
8. Describe a time when you took a well-informed risk and failed. **(risk-taking)**
9. Describe a situation where you influenced a group decision to your point-of-view. **(collaboration)**
10. Tell me about a situation where you formed productive relationships with a diverse group of people to accomplish a common goal. **(collaboration)**
11. Tell me about a time when you were challenged by multiple, competing priorities. How did you focus your efforts? Describe your results. **(time-management)**
12. Give me an example of setting a goal and meeting it despite short-term obstacles. **(time-management)**
13. Give me an example of a situation where you faced a conflict or had a difficult communication issue. **(communication)**
14. Tell me about a special contribution you have made to your employer. **(individual strengths)**
15. Tell me about the most difficult situation you have faced in the context of work or campus organization. **(problem-solving)**

When answering behavioral questions, use the STAR method. The interviewer is looking for you to articulate specific examples of your responses to certain situations. Provide focused answers that demonstrate specific skills or qualities necessary for the position.

- S – SITUATION
- T – TASK
- A – ACTION
- R – RESULT

**To practice answering behavioral interview questions, set-up a chart using the STAR method.**

Example:

Behavior Based Question	S Describe the SITUATION	T Describe the TASK	A Describe the ACTION taken	R Quantify the RESULTS
Tell me about a situation where you formed productive relationships with a diverse group of people to accomplish a common goal.	My group was assigned a class presentation to discuss the unique challenges that homosexual students face on our campus. Some in the group were more accepting of this student population while others were less accepting.	We were asked to present ideas about increasing university support of homosexual students on campus.	Despite viewpoints very different from my own, I pulled the group together by suggesting that we focus on our task of providing services to a student population, rather than discuss homosexuality from a moral/ethical perspective.	We received an A on our presentation and the university adopted our idea to provide safe zone training to faculty, staff, and students.

## TOP 6 QUESTIONS ASKED BY EXECUTIVES

1. Give me an example where a failure changed your course and set you on a different path that surprised you because of how you grew from it.

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** Know the difference between productive failures and nonproductive successes. The process of learning and growing always involves challenges. A resume is full of accomplishments, but you need to speak to how you grew through your struggles.

2. Motivation is crucial with any job, and it often boils down to work ethic. Talk about a time when you had a task you disliked. How did you stay motivated?

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** Bad habits are easy to develop, but hard to live with. Yet, good habits are hard to develop, but easy to live with. Motivation is one of those good habits to cultivate.

3. Internships and leadership roles in clubs and organizations in college really prepare you for life after college. How have you seen this work experience help you grow not only intellectually but emotionally?

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** There is no substitute for experience, which creates competence. And competence leads to confidence.

4. Tell me about your goals in life. How do you plan to achieve them?

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** What matters is not so much what you want “to do” but rather what you want “to be.” This question will give the employer insight into your personal initiative, your underlying motivation, and assessment of your strategic thinking.

5. Give me an example of how you found a solution to a problem you faced in your life or your work experience.

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** In any line of work, we need solution finders – NOT merely problem solvers. Solution finders think vertically to eliminate the issue permanently. Problem solvers think horizontally and only react to the tyranny of the urgent. Employers are looking for deep, vertical thinkers to join their team.

6. Tell me about a time when you were assumed a leadership role – whether assigned or assumed. How did you motivate the people around you to carry out the mission? And how did you handle disgruntled team mates?

**Life Skills Tip from President Qubein:** Leaders must build bridges of understanding in order to persuade, influence and guide. Those bridges must always be built at the feet of the other person – not you. Employers will look for candidates who share how they connected with their teammates in order to foster trust. Remember, if no one will follow you, you're not a leader.

## DIFFICULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What would you do if you discovered that your company was doing something illegal?
2. How do you handle stress? Give examples.
3. What was the last book you read? How has it impacted you?
4. If you could meet a historical figure, who would it be and why?
5. How would you gain the confidence of a client who has over 30 years of experience?
6. What would you do if a colleague is underperforming and it is affecting your department?
7. Where else are you interviewing?
8. What types of people do you dislike the most?
9. You appear to be overqualified for the position. Why would you be interested in a position at this level?
10. What do you see as future trends of our industry?

## DURING THE INTERVIEW

### Questions to Ask the Employer

1. What do you see ahead for your company in the next 5 years? What do you see as future trends for this industry?
2. How do you distinguish yourself from your competition?
3. What skill-sets do you not have on board already that you are looking to add with a new hire?
4. What is the overall structure of the company, and how does your department fit within the structure?
5. What have been the department's successes over the last few years?
6. What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this position?
7. Where have successful employees in this position progressed to within the company?
8. Can you describe a typical day/week in this position? Can you describe the typical client/customer/student I would be working with?
9. How would you describe this organization's culture?
10. What should I expect the next steps to be after our interview today?

### Questions **NOT** to Ask Employers in the First Interview

1. What will be the salary? What are the benefits? (You may ask these questions when you receive an offer.)
2. How much vacation time will I get?

### Examples of Illegal Questions from Employers:

1. Are you a U.S. citizen?
2. What is your native tongue?
3. What religion do you practice?
4. Which religious holidays do you observe?
5. How old are you?
6. When do you plan to retire?
7. Are you married or partnered?
8. Do you have children or plan to have children?
9. Are you disabled?
10. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations?
11. Are you single?

If employers ask you an illegal question, there are some strategies that you can implement. First, you can respond by asking them a question. For example, you may say, “that’s an interesting question that I’m happy to answer, but could you tell me how it relates to the job?”. A second strategy involves addressing the concern behind the question. For example, if an employer asks about plans for marriage and children, you can respond by saying, “nothing that comes up in my family life will get in the way of my ability and desire to do the job well.” You also can choose to answer the question or refuse to respond, though both may be undesirable. Regardless of your strategy, if an organization asks an illegal question, evaluate whether it was intentional or unintentional bias and decide whether the organization remains a place in which you want to work.

### How to End the Interview

At the end of the interview, ask for the interviewer’s business card. Be sure to shake the interviewer’s hand and thank them for meeting with you. Clarify next steps, their timeline for the hiring process, and when you can expect to hear from them. Also, indicate that you plan to follow-up with them if you have not heard from them by the date they specified. Be aware that confidently following-up is a critical part of the process. Do not leave anything to chance.

## FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### Thank You Note

It is important to send a thank you note that not only thanks the interviewer for their time, but also reiterates why you would be a good fit for the organization. Send an email or hand-written note on a professional looking notecard within 24 hours of the interview. **Below is a sample thank-you note.**

October 20, 2019

Mrs. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I enjoyed hearing about Truist's Leadership Development Program as well as your many professional accomplishments within banking. I was impressed to learn that Leadership Development Program participants will be taught by senior and executive management and will have an opportunity to choose one of two areas of focus. As we discussed, my internship with Wells Fargo and my experiences as President of the Sales Club and Vice-President of Pi Kappa Alpha have prepared me to excel within Truist's structure. I would be delighted to be considered for a position in Truist's Leadership Development Program, and I will follow-up with you next week. Thank you again for talking with me yesterday morning.

Sincerely,

Will B. Banker

## REMOTE INTERVIEWING TIPS

### Phone

- **Study up:** Read all interview materials thoroughly from the company to prepare. You want to show that you can follow directions
- **Check the time zone:** Don't assume the employer is in the same time zone as you. Always suggest and confirm times using both your contact's time zone and your own. It eliminates confusion and allows everyone to catch a time conversion error
- **Service:** Use a landline phone if possible, or a well-serviced area
- **Answer professionally:** Answer the phone with "Hello, this is <clearly state name.>" The interviewer now knows he/she has reached the right person and knows how to pronounce your name. This simple gesture starts the interview off on great note for the interviewer
- **Project yourself confidently:** Think about your presence and posture. Stand up while speaking and enunciate your words. Many find it helpful to dress as you would for an in-person or video interview
- **Smile!** Emotions are contagious. You have the power to create a positive vibe in your interview

### Video

In addition to the phone interview tips above, also:

- **Download the online platform:** Make sure you have access to the platform being used as soon as possible and test it out
  - Check camera and microphone
  - Check for updates to the software
- **Research the platform:** If you are conducting a one-way video interview, discover what kinds of information it uses to judge you, such as word choice, speaking in complete sentences, body language, etc.

- **Prepare your space:** Prepare a quiet, clean, well-lit space to conduct the interview with a neutral-colored wall behind you
- **Look the part:** Dress appropriately and look into the camera, not yourself
- **Limit distractions:**
  - Make sure your laptop is fully charged or plugged in
  - Silence your cell phone
  - Close all other programs and browsers (email, pop-ups, etc.)
- **In groups, mute yourself:** On group calls, mute yourself when you're not talking. It makes a positive first impression by showing you understand virtual etiquette. For one-on-one calls, do not mute your mic unless there's unexpected background noise, like a garbage truck idling outside your window or a dog barking. In those situations, explain why you're intermittently muting.
- **Don't forget: Smile!**

### Utilize other best practices for interviewing:

- Research the company and interviewers beforehand
- Show up on time
- Have a copy of your resume handy and a notepad to take notes
- Have questions prepared to ask the interviewer

Check out our video on remote interviewing tips:  
[Ready. Set. Remote Interview!](#)

## HOW WE CAN HELP YOU PREPARE

### Big Interview

Big Interview gives students a powerful suite of tools to get you ready...fast. Their complete lesson curriculum teaches students how to get inside the head of any interviewer and prove that they're the ideal candidate. The interactive interview practice module gives you the hands-on preparation you need to comfortably and confidently deliver stellar answers. Additional tools like the Answer Builder, Question Library, and Interview Roulette help users drill down on specific skills and get even more guided instruction.



### Mock Interviews

In addition to Big Interview, you are invited to schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor for a mock interview. It is most helpful to submit your resume and the job description of a desired position to a Career Advisor in advance of the appointment. To schedule an appointment visit:

<https://bookhpuocapd.timetap.com/>.

## INTERVIEWING DURING THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 has impacted the working world, from the job market itself to job searching, to communicating with employers. Whether you are seeking a position in a more stable industry that allows for remote work or taking on the challenge of finding work in a hard-hit area, a COVID-era job search will look quite different. **Be prepared to adapt.**

### **Ask additional questions.**

Unless you are interviewing for a position that is fully remote at all times, you will want to ensure the COVID-19 protocols taken by your potential employer match your needs and comfort level.

1. Are employees required to wear masks?
2. Does HR require any sort of screening for employees and visitors?
3. How have employee workspaces and schedules been adapted to ensure adequate social distancing?
4. What is the protocol for a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the workplace?
5. How has the company met employees' child and elder care needs during required shutdowns?
6. What tools and procedures have been implemented to ensure employees are able to communicate effectively from home?
7. How have the company's priorities and focus shifted?
8. What will the onboarding process look like for new employees, especially if governmental entities order additional shutdowns?

Like with all interview questions for the employer, make sure you have done your homework and tried to find the answer on your own by researching the company's website and social media pages. If you have found some of these answers on your own, it's okay to ask for confirmation or clarification, but first state that you did read the information to show your pro-activeness.

Read the full article on the COVID-era job search on [The Washington Post](#).