Interviewing Guide

Part 1: Common Introductory Questions

“Tell me about yourself” & “Walk me through your resume”

This is a time to show the connection between you and the job/graduate program for which you have applied! Your response should be 2-3 minutes. Do not simply read off your resume like a grocery list. Your answer should include:

The present – where you are right now
The past – a little bit about the experiences you’ve had and the skills you’ve gained
The future – why you are really excited for this particular opportunity

The following are some, but not limited to, talking points and questions to get you thinking about what types of experiences you could share to answer the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience/Research Experience</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How did you decide your degree/major?</td>
<td>• What are the most relevant and important experiences to your professional career?</td>
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<td>• What do you hope to gain with your education?</td>
<td>• Is there a specific contribution(s) or accomplishment(s) in your previous experiences that you want to highlight?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do you have a relevant study abroad experience?</td>
<td>• Is there a transferrable skill you gained from your work or research experience?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Extra-curricular Activities</th>
<th>Interesting Facts</th>
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<td>• What are you doing outside of school to help you grow as a person and professional?</td>
<td>• Do you have an interesting hobby or interest that would be appropriate to share?</td>
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<td>• What organizations are you involved in or passionate about?</td>
<td>• Have you received any special recognitions/awards/certifications?</td>
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<td>• Have you done volunteer work in different capacities or served underrepresented populations?</td>
<td>• What about you is distinct and memorable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Do you have a relevant study abroad experience?</td>
<td>• What is something relevant about you that others may not know at first impression?</td>
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<td>• Have you completed shadowing or other professional mentoring programs?</td>
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Example: “I am currently a senior at the College of Biological Sciences and plan to graduate this May with a degree in biology. This past summer, I completed an internship working for a medical device company, where I worked on a process improvement map for the receiving of raw materials that ended up saving the company $150K annually. In this experience, I learned a lot about what it means to work on a multigenerational, diverse team. Outside of work and my studies, I am currently a member of the Twin Cities’ Big Brother Big Sister program which allows me to give back to the community. Based on your job posting, your company seems to be offering a work experience that will help develop my biology lab skills, which is why I am excited to be meeting with you today.”

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### Part 2: Behavioral Interview Questions

Most interviews will consist of behavioral interview questions based on the premise that past performance is the best predictor of future behavior. With these types of questions, you will walk your interviewer through “stories” which illustrate how you have behaved in the past. These stories can and should be from a range of experiences—work, internship, extra-curricular activities, classroom. You want to give interviewers an idea of how you perform in different settings; so be careful not to focus your answers from only one area of your life.

To answer behavioral questions, use the **STAR technique**, by describing the situation, task, actions, and results. Your answers should generally not exceed 4 minutes.

**Question:** Tell me about a time you had to be a team player in order to meet a goal.

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<th><strong>R</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Task</strong></td>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td><strong>Result</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the situation. Keep this fairly short.</td>
<td>Describe the task at hand—give enough information for the interviewer to understand but not the specific details.</td>
<td>Think of skills and knowledge that were called on to address the task. In addition, include the steps and process you took to complete the task. This is normally the longest part of your answer.</td>
<td>This is the outcome of the task and action stated in quantifiable terms, if possible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One of the core classes in my college curriculum is Foundations of Biology. This course is team-based and teaches the fundamentals of biology through solving real-world problems. Our team was tasked with coming up with a proposal to address the fungal disease white-nose syndrome affecting bats.</td>
<td>Our team was struggling to connect because of our busy academic schedules and we were starting to get behind on our project because we were only meeting for 10 minutes before class.</td>
<td>I decided to create a doodle poll to gain a better understanding of when our group could meet weekly outside of class and also created folders within Google Docs to upload and share aspects of the project with one another.</td>
<td>As a result, we were able to use google docs to write and comment on our project when it was convenient for each of us and allowed us to make progress on our project in-between our weekly meetings. We successfully completed our project and each team member felt we had all contributed equally.</td>
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PRACTICE:
1) Pick a skill such as “critical thinking” or “leadership”.
2) Come up with a story from your experiences that demonstrate this skill.
3) Write out your answers for the skill using the STAR technique (utilize the format below) to help you collect your thoughts and deliver your answer in a concise and compelling manner.

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This is the outcome of the task and action stated in quantifiable terms, if possible. |

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE:
Pick a specific job or position and read the job description. (If you are preparing for a graduate school or health professional school interview, look at a graduate school’s or health professional school’s admission requirements.) Pick out the key qualifications and skills the job, school, or program is looking for (leadership, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, teamwork, resilience, critical thinking, quantitative and qualitative reasoning, etc). Complete the above star exercise again based on the skills you pick. Remember to highlight different past experiences for each skill!

For more ideas of skills to practice with, look at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)’s Core Competencies for Entering Medical Students or the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)’s Career Readiness Competencies.
Part 3: Questions for the Interviewer

Asking questions about the company, job position, or graduate/professional school is one way of expressing your interest in the organization and letting the interviewer know you've done your research on the organization. In addition, think of this part of the interview as a way for you to find out if this job/spot is right for you! You will be expected to ask some questions; never say, “I do not have any questions.”

- Prepare 3-5 questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview.
- Ask questions that can't be answered from the organization’s website or job/school description.
- Keep it conversational; ask follow-up questions if you find the topic interesting.

PRACTICE: Come up with at least 3 questions to ask the interviewer.

Part 4: Giving a Closing Statement

Your closing statement should be a convincing statement about why the organization should select you. Not all candidates will give a closing statement. If you do give a closing statement, you can leave a lasting impression on the interviewer. It’s alright to repeat a skill/strength you may have mentioned earlier in the interview. It will just reiterate that you have the skills needed for the job/school/program. Below are some points to consider in your final sell:
- Key strengths or skills
- Significant work experiences that are relevant to the desired position/school
- Out of the box education experiences; such as study abroad
- What’s the value you will add to the organization?

Example: “Finally, I’d like to mention that I have a consistent history of leadership activities at school and in the workplace. Also, I am great at working with ambiguous project goals, seeking the key aspects that need to be worked on, organizing projects, and following through to completion. This is exemplified by my experience as the Service Engagement Leader for the Biochemistry Club when I coordinated 6 service events over the course of one semester. I believe with my past experiences and eagerness to learn I will be a great asset to your company.”

PRACTICE: Come up with a closing statement that is unique to your experiences and that you feel comfortable telling to a friend.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

InterviewStream
- Using a webcam, record your mock interview and review it on your computer

Interview Question Resources for Graduate School:

Emory Graduate School- Division of Biological and Biomedical Sciences: [http://biomed.emory.edu/admissions/interviews.html](http://biomed.emory.edu/admissions/interviews.html)

Sociobiology: Impressing us on your Graduate School Interview: [https://sociobiology.wordpress.com/2012/02/27/impressing-us-on-your-graduate-school-interview/](https://sociobiology.wordpress.com/2012/02/27/impressing-us-on-your-graduate-school-interview/)

Interview Question Resources:

CLA Career Services Typical Interview Questions: [https://cla.umn.edu/student-services-advising/career-internship-services/job-search-resources/interviewing-guide/typical](https://cla.umn.edu/student-services-advising/career-internship-services/job-search-resources/interviewing-guide/typical)

Improper Questions

You may end up in a situation in which interviewers ask improper or inappropriate questions, and you may be unsure of how to respond. For a list of questions and advice on what to do, review information from NACE here: [http://z.umn.edu/improperquestions](http://z.umn.edu/improperquestions)