



Effective Interview Techniques

Despite all the feelings of anxiety and judgment associated with an interview, employers are really just asking you those questions to find one thing: the best person for the job. **However, the best person for the job still has to communicate that they're the best person for the job.**

In fact, you may be vastly more qualified than any of the other applicants. But if you don't connect with the interviewer and **help them see** that, you'll be throwing yourself back into the "hunt."

In order to successfully show the interviewer you're the best person for the job, you need to first understand three things...

1. What is the employer really looking for?
2. What is the interviewer really asking?
3. And how can I best communicate **what I can do for them**?

Stand out by providing specific examples to back up the statements you've made. It's not difficult, especially if you prepare beforehand, and it will greatly elevate your standing in the recruiter's eyes.

For example: A recruiter is interviewing a new college graduate for an entry-level job and asks, "What's your greatest strength?" Which statement would grab your attention more if you were a recruiter?

1. "Well, I'm very self-motivated. I often start projects on my own without direction from others, because I enjoy it. Compared to most people my age, I have more self-discipline and more willingness to try new things."



2. "Well, I'm very self-motivated. I know you've probably heard that before, so let me give you an example. For the last couple of years, I've volunteered part-time at my college's computer help desk. I wanted experience helping people with computer-related problems, so I approached the information technology director and asked her if she'd teach me to work on the help desk in exchange for my time and efforts. It's turned out to be great for both of us. She's gotten much-needed help, and I've been able to gain hands-on experience I wouldn't have gotten otherwise."

Clearly, the second response is more compelling. Why? Because the student not only makes a claim, but he backs it up with tangible evidence. Recruiters like evidence, especially since they don't hear it from candidates often enough.

You can even use this give-an-example approach to answer an employer's more hypothetical questions. The recruiter says, "You're working with a small team and you have a significant conflict with one of your team members. What would you do?" Which response is more convincing?

1. "I would try talking with the person first, to see what we could do about our differences. If that didn't work, I guess I'd probably go to my supervisor and see if he could intervene somehow. It would be important to get our conflict resolved."

2. "That actually happened to me once in a social psychology course I took. We were doing a group project, and it was clear that one person wasn't doing his share of the work. I talked with other people in the group about it, and they felt the same way I did. So I offered to talk to this person about our concerns. I'm really glad I did. As it turns out, he was stressed out, because his father had been in the hospital for several weeks having tests done. He was having trouble in all of his classes. So I mentioned the fact that our school has a counseling center and encouraged him to go there. He did, and he got the help he needed. The rest of us then divided up his work."

Again, the second response is much more persuasive, because the student has gone beyond simply predicting what she would do in a conflict situation; rather, she illustrated how she handled such a situation before, leaving the employer to conclude that the student would likely resolve future conflicts in a similarly professional way.



Examples will always beat mere words in job interviews. So as you think about the questions an employer will ask, be sure to prepare responses that feature your real-life experiences -- stories that will leave the employer thinking, "Now here's someone who isn't just telling me something, but showing me something. This one's a keeper."

6 Steps to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

1. **Listen to the question carefully.** Commonly, behavioral interview questions tend to be longwinded and may sometimes sound vague (blame an overuse of adjectives, adverbs and trendy language.) Here is an example: "Good problem-solving often includes a careful review of the substantial facts and weighing of options before making a decision. Give me an instance of how you reached a practical business decision by an organized assessment of the facts and weighing of options."
2. **Ensure you understand the question** before you begin to answer. You may paraphrase the question and ask the interviewer if you understand it correctly. If necessary, ask the interviewer to repeat the question. Do not, however, ask the interviewer to repeat every question — the interviewer may question your ability to listen and comprehend.
3. **Organize your answer.** Allow yourself some time to collect your thoughts and structure your answer. Interviewers appreciate this break — they could use this time to drink some water, review their notes or rest their hands from note taking.
4. **State your answer.** Attempt to conclude your answer in about five minutes. Five minutes is long enough to relate a story comprehensively and short enough to hold the interviewer's attention.
5. **Do not digress from your plan.** Resist the temptation to think of new details as you state the answer. By sticking to the details and structure you had planned for, you can provide a consistent and well-reasoned answer. Be concise. Do not ramble on.
6. **Answer follow-up questions.** In response to your five-minute answer, the interviewer may pose follow-up questions. These questions can be confirming questions that require simple 'yes' or 'no' answers or clarifying questions that require brief answers.

The STAR model is commonly used by recruiters and hiring managers to gather evidence around an applicants competence, skills and experience against the essential criteria for the role. The same model can be used by applicants to prepare examples in advance of the interview, helping you feel in control and confident about the interview.

STAR Model

	Situation or Task Questions	Action or Behaviour Questions	Result or Impact Questions
Situation	Describe a situation when ... ?	Exactly what did you do?	What was the result?
Task	What were the circumstances surrounding ... ?	Walk me through the steps you took.	How did it work out?
Action	What was the most difficult people management decision you have had to make?	Describe your specific role in the project.	What problems or successes resulted from ... ?
Result	Give me an example when you worked the hardest and had the greatest sense of achievement.	What alternatives did you consider? What tools or procedures did you use?	What feedback have you received? How were your actions perceived by others?

Answering a Question: Use the STAR Technique to Narrate an Experience

In behavioral interviewing, every answer should specifically address the skill being addressed. Your answer should relate an experience from a previous job assignment, project, academic studies or community work.

Present a diverse set of experiences. Suppose that you are asked six behavioral questions during a thirty-minute interview. Using a distinct context and/or experience for each question will help you portray a diversity of skills, interests and experiences.

Begin by examining the question: what is the purpose of the question, what specific skill is the question trying to address? Then, pick an experience that you could describe to address the question at hand. In your mind, recollect specifics of your experience. Structure your answer and narrate your experience using the four steps in the 'STAR' technique.

'S' for Situation: Commence your answer with the background to your experience. Detail the circumstances of your involvement. Provide sufficient detail to develop a context to the rest of your narration.

'T' for Task: Describe the challenge at hand: what needed to be done, what should have been done. Detail the outcome that was expected, constraints or conditions that needed to be satisfied.

'A' for Action: Elaborate your specific action in response to the challenge. Specify analytical work, team effort or project coordination. Use 'I' and 'we' statements as appropriate.

'R' for Results: Explain the results of your efforts: what did you accomplish, what did you learn, how did your managers and team respond, how did your organization recognize you. Wherever possible, quantify your achievements and improvements.

S Situation	Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?
T Task	Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?
A Action	Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?
R Results	Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify.
'STAR' Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions	

An Example: Using the STAR Technique to Narrate an Experience

Consider a question suggested by authors Jack and Suzy Welch in a recent Business Week article on recruiting for leadership positions.

Question: “Have you ever had to define yourself in the midst of criticism, and did you succeed?”

Below is a concise four-step ‘STAR’ answer to this interview question. This question illustrates the ability of the interviewee to listen to feedback, adapt as a manager and lead teams well.

‘S’ for Situation: “My first job after business school was to lead a product development team at ABC Corporation. One of my responsibilities involved participating in weekly product planning meetings that decided on product features. After the meeting, I would meet with my staff and delegate the programming tasks. Since I am an experienced programmer, I would explain details of how each feature needed to be programmed. I expected my staff to write the programs in C++, test and debug. We seemed to work very well as a team.”

‘T’ for Task: “Three months later, my manager had collected feedback from my staff. In my performance review, my manager observed that I could improve my delegation skills. I was surprised to receive this feedback. I had believed that I was good at delegating given that I would detail my expectations of each staff-member and list every step he/she needed to work on. It believed my staff was productive and continually gained knowledge from my coaching. I thanked my manager for the feedback and promised to reflect on my delegating style and consider a change.”

‘A’ for Action: “I reflected on my delegation approach and realized two problems. Firstly, I assigned work to my staff only in terms of steps to take. I had habitually failed to describe the background of product features we wanted to develop and explain how their work would improve the overall product. My staff would do just what I had asked them to do. Secondly, in telling my staff how to complete each assignment, I was micromanaging. This may have tended to limit my staff’s initiative and reduced opportunities to advance their programming skills. During the next staff meeting, I thanked my staff for the feedback and acknowledged I would change. Then, each week, I explained the context to every product feature we wanted to develop, described the task in terms of outcomes and asked my staff how we could approach each task.”



'R' for Results: "My staff was very excited about the opportunity to propose ideas, brainstorm and choose a preferred way of going about their work. It was no longer my idea they would work on; it was their own idea and their own approach. They were more enthusiastic about their work and realized they were an integral part of something bigger than themselves. During the next quarterly meeting, my manager praised me for empowering my team."



Selling Yourself In the Job Interview

1. Be the Solution

Companies fill or create positions because they have problems they want to solve -- for instance, ineffective advertising or long customer-service lines. So prepare for an interview by identifying the problems hinted at in the job ad (if there's no job ad, research the company and industry) and then preparing examples of how you'll solve those problems -- and how you've solved similar problems in the past. Practice telling stories about specific results you've achieved.

And if you're interviewing for a career change keep in mind that many problems -- such as a lack of effective project management or a breakdown of teamwork -- are not industry-specific. Offering solutions to these problems is a great way to overcome a lack of directly applicable experience.

2. Be Specific

Avoid empty clichés. Be prepared to back up your claims about your skills or characteristics with relevant and specific stories. For example, don't just say you "work well with others" -- talk about the types of teams you've worked with and what you've learned from them. Or if you plan to say you're "detail-oriented," come to the interview prepared with a story about how your attention to detail saved a former employer money (or otherwise saved the day).

3. Prepare Sound Bites

Prepare three or four effective sound bites that highlight your skills and past successes. A sound bite is succinct and direct, so it's catchy and easy to remember -- for example, "I've designed logos for three Fortune 500 companies" or "My efficiency plan decreased product-delivery times by 15 percent without costing the company a cent."

When you're coming up with your sound bites, ask yourself, "What were my greatest accomplishments my most recent job?" and "What sets me apart from other candidates?"



4. Prepare to Talk About Your Resume

Your resume and cover letter will likely form an outline for at least part of your interview. Because a resume has to be brief, it probably says many things that could be elaborated on or explained in more detail. Often a resume explains the "what" (for instance, "supervised two people"). Use the interview to talk about the "how," as well as skills you gained, praise you received and so on.

5. Be Aware of Nonverbal Communication

You "say" a lot about yourself with nonverbal language: your posture and your facial expressions, for instance. Sit up straight -- leaning forward can make you seem closed off, as can holding a briefcase or purse in your lap. Maintain eye contact when answering questions, and smile frequently. Also, practice your handshake with a friend: An overly aggressive handshake can be as off-putting as a limp one.

6. Be Positive

Avoid complaining about a former employer or laying blame at a former manager's feet -- doing so will likely make you seem difficult to work with (or disloyal). Even if you quit your last job in a rage because you had an incompetent manager, saying something like "I felt I was ready for a more challenging position -- like this one seems to be" turns a potentially interview-killing situation into something that makes you look very attractive to a hiring manager.



Your Opportunity to Ask Questions

That means not just nailing the interview questions you are asked, but actually asking the kinds of questions designed to make the interviewer sit up and take notice. It's no longer enough to be qualified. If you want a job in today's business environment, you have to shine, and there's no better way to show your excellence than by asking excellent questions.

Don't squander the opportunity to shine by asking mundane questions the interviewer has heard before. Your goal is to make a statement in the form of a question. The statement is designed to:

- Highlight your qualifications.
- Demonstrate your confidence.
- Reinforce your commitment.
- Understand the employer's challenges.
- Make yourself accountable.
- Advance your candidacy.

Questions are the best way to demonstrate that you understand the company's challenges, emphasize how you can help the company meet them and show your interest in the most unmistakable manner possible -- by actually asking for the position.

Based on my interviews with dozens of recruiters, human resource professionals and job coaches, here are nine of the most memorable questions candidates can ask:

1. What exactly does this company value the most, and how do you think my work for you will further these values?
2. What kinds of processes are in place to help me work collaboratively?
3. In what area could your team use a little polishing?
4. What's the most important thing I can accomplish in the first 60 days?
5. Can you give me some examples of the most and least desirable aspects of the company's culture?



6. Am I going to be a mentor or will I be mentored?

7. How will you judge my success? What will have happened six months from now that will demonstrate that I have met your expectations?

8. This job sounds like something I'd really like to do -- is there a fit here?

9. Now that we've talked about my qualifications and the job, do you have any concerns about my being successful in this position?

Use these questions as prototypes for questions based on the particulars of the position you are interviewing for. Make them your own and polish them until their shine reflects on you. Asking questions like these is not for the faint of heart but, then again, neither is succeeding in today's hypercompetitive job market.

100 Potential Interview Questions

Basic Interview Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Why do you want this job?
- Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?
- What's your ideal company?
- What attracted you to this company?
- Why should we hire you?
- What did you like least about your last job?
- When were you most satisfied in your job?
- What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- What were the responsibilities of your last position?
- Why are you leaving your present job?
- What do you know about this industry?
- What do you know about our company?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Behavioral Interview Questions:



- What was the last project you headed up, and what was its outcome?
- Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
- Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
- Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?
- What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
- What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
- If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?
- What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
- Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
- What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
- Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.
- If you were at a business lunch and you ordered a rare steak and they brought it to you well done, what would you do?
- If you found out your company was doing something against the law, like fraud, what would you do?
- What assignment was too difficult for you, and how did you resolve the issue?
- What's the most difficult decision you've made in the last two years and how did you come to that decision?
- Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.

Salary Questions:

- What salary are you seeking?
- What's your salary history?
- If I were to give you this salary you requested but let you write your job description for the next year, what would it say?

Career Development Questions:



- What are you looking for in terms of career development?
- How do you want to improve yourself in the next year?
- What kind of goals would you have in mind if you got this job?
- If I were to ask your last supervisor to provide you additional training or exposure, what would she suggest?

Getting Started Questions:

- How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?
- How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?
- What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?
- If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?

More About You:

- How would you describe your work style?
- What would be your ideal working environment?
- What do you look for in terms of culture -- structured or entrepreneurial?
- Give examples of ideas you've had or implemented.
- What techniques and tools do you use to keep yourself organized?
- If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?
- Tell me about your proudest achievement.
- Who was your favorite manager and why?
- What do you think of your previous boss?
- Was there a person in your career who really made a difference?
- What kind of personality do you work best with and why?
- What are you most proud of?
- What do you like to do?
- What are your lifelong dreams?
- What do you ultimately want to become?
- What is your personal mission statement?
- What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?



- What negative thing would your last boss say about you?
- What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
- What are three positive character traits you don't have?
- If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
- List five words that describe your character.
- Who has impacted you most in your career and how?
- What is your greatest fear?
- What is your biggest regret and why?
- What's the most important thing you learned in school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- What will you miss about your present/last job?
- What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
- What are the qualities of a good leader? A bad leader?
- Do you think a leader should be feared or liked?
- How do you feel about taking no for an answer?
- How would you feel about working for someone who knows less than you?
- How do you think I rate as an interviewer?
- Tell me one thing about yourself you wouldn't want me to know.
- Tell me the difference between good and exceptional.
- What kind of car do you drive?
- There's no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?
- What's the last book you read?
- What magazines do you subscribe to?
- What's the best movie you've seen in the last year?
- What would you do if you won the lottery?
- Who are your heroes?
- What do you like to do for fun?