Interviewing
Handle the Tough Questions
The Interview Process

1. Preparation
2. The Interview
3. Follow-up

also see workshop

Interview • 1
Prepare to Ace the Interview

see workshop

Interview • 3
Ace the Interview
Purpose of the Interview

The Employer Wants To Know

Who are You?
What skills, assets and experience do you offer?

Are you a good ‘Fit’?
Will you fit with our team and culture? Are you right for this company & industry?

How will you Perform?
What have you done in the past that demonstrates how you will do in future?
To prepare for the interview * take inventory of your skills and experience in terms of these 3 categories of skills:

- **Content Skills**
  knowledge that is job-specific such as: classroom teaching, accounting, copy editing, financial analysis, etc. (expressed as **nouns**)

- **Functional or Transferable Skills**
  work that you do with people, information or things, such as: organizing, managing, developing, communicating, etc. (expressed as **verbs**)

- **Adaptive (Self-Management) Skills**
  personal characteristics such as: dependable, team-player, self-directed, creative, etc. (expressed as **adjectives**)

For each category write a list of your skills, experience and accomplishments. Give this exercise considerable time and thought - this will be the base from which you articulate your ‘story’ and prepare responses to interview questions about your qualifications.

* for more tips on how to prepare for the interview, see workshop: Interviewing1 - Prepare to Ace the Interview
Stages of the Interview

The interview generally flows in the following sequence; although stages # 1 and 2 can often loop back and forth into the other:

1. Getting to Know You
2. Are You a Good ‘Fit ’?
3. The Closing
Predictable Interview Questions

Prepare Your Responses *

Questions about Yourself
1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your greatest strengths? weaknesses?
3. What are your best qualities?
4. Why should we hire you?
5. What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in this position?
6. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
7. What type of personalities do you work with best? Which do you work with least well?
8. How do you define success?
9. How would you describe your personality?
10. What motivates you?

Questions about Your Education (recent grad)
1. Why did you decide to attend Middlebury?
2. How does your liberal arts education prepare you for a job in this field?
3. Which classes did you enjoy the most? ...the least?
4. What has been your most challenging class? Why?
5. Why did you choose your particular major?
6. What is your GPA?
7. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
8. What other college activities are you involved in?

Questions about Your Career Goals
1. Why are you interested in this position or career field?
2. Where do you hope to be in 5 years? ?
3. What are your career goals?

* for more tips on how to prepare for the interview, see workshop: Interviewing1 - Prepare to Ace the Interview
Predictable Interview Questions

Prepare Your Responses *

Questions about Your Experience / Personality

1. Tell me about your internship at X company?
2. What did you like most about that internship? Least?
3. If I were to contact your former supervisor, what would she/he say about you?
4. What is your greatest strength?
5. Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?
6. What is one of your biggest weaknesses?
7. Give me an example of a problem you encountered in your last internship/job, and how you dealt with it.
8. Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your colleagues about how to handle something. What did you do? What was the outcome?
9. How would your co-workers describe you?
10. Tell me about a time when a peer member of your team was not pulling his/her weight. How did you handle that?
11. How do you resolve conflict?
12. Tell me about a time when you had to give negative feedback to a teammate. How did you approach that?
13. Have you ever received negative feedback about your performance (in a class or job or internship)? How did you respond?
14. Why do you think you are a ‘team player’?
15. What were your responsibilities in X job?

Questions Specific to the Job & Company

1. What about this position appeals to you? (why are you interested in this position?)
2. Why do you want to work for us?
3. What do you know about our organization?
4. How much direction do you need?
5. What contribution do you believe you can make to our company?
6. What do you expect from a supervisor?
7. Why do you think you’re a good fit for this position?
8. Tell me about a time when you led a team of peers on a project. What was the biggest challenge and how did you handle it?
9. Describe the ideal job for you.

* for more tips on how to prepare for the interview, see workshop: Interviewing1 - Prepare to Ace the Interview
In any given interview you will be asked some variation of the question…
“*What is one of your biggest weaknesses?*”

To answer this effectively, you must understand what the interviewer is *really* looking for when asking this question.

The interviewer is actually hoping that your answer will reveal whether you possess key qualities (adaptive skills) such as:

- Self-awareness and Self-reflection
- Humility and Maturity
- Confidence
- Sincerity
- Initiative and Skill in managing shortcomings and mistakes
POOR responses to the ‘Weakness’ question

Well, I have a hard time getting to work on time, and I’m difficult to work with.

Too brutally honest. This self-indictment is not what the interviewer expects or needs. Doesn’t reflect a high level of maturity or self-development.

I work too hard, and my supervisor literally has to force me to go home at the end of the day.

An obvious ‘fake’ weakness. These are transparently ‘canned’ responses that can appear disingenuous. Will annoy most interviewers.

I’m a perfectionist and I care too much about the quality of the work I produce.
POOR responses to the ‘Weakness’ question

Actually, I don’t think I have any major weaknesses.

I can’t think of any mistakes that I’ve made.

A conversation stopper. Shows lack of self-awareness of professional strengths and weaknesses. Indicates lack of professional maturity – or, at best, shows lack of preparation for the interview.
The ‘Weakness’ Question

GREAT responses to the question

Remember, the interviewer is asking this question to find out whether you are a self-aware individual who recognizes his strengths and weaknesses and has learned how to manage or improve your weaknesses. The interviewer wants to know that you’re aware of your shortcomings and have taken action for your own professional development. This tells the interviewer a great deal about what kind of employee you will be.

See the following slides for some examples of great responses to the ‘weakness’ question.
Early on in my last internship, I underestimated the importance of keeping my supervisor apprised of the status of my projects. I now make it a point to give her regular updates. This has really strengthened communications, and has also helped her to provide me with the support and resources I need.

My presentation skills were not as strong as I’d like, so I signed up for a Winter-Term class on public speaking. I also try to take every opportunity to strengthen what I learned in that class by making oral presentations in my other classes and other meetings for the clubs I’m in. This has helped a lot, and I continue to feel more comfortable with this.

GREAT responses to the ‘Weakness’ question
In the beginning, as the editor of the school newspaper, I tended to set expectations for the writing staff that made sense to me, but not always to each of them. A mentor pointed out to me that not everyone sees things through the same lens, and that insight has helped me become a much better leader and communicator.

When assigned to a class project, I’ve had a tendency to jump right into the project and get working on the details, without understanding the broader picture. I’ve learned now to get a good understanding of the larger goals first, so that I can adapt when needed during the course of the project.
In the past, I tended to procrastinate on things until the last minute and then let the adrenaline rush drive me to the finish line. It was exciting, but exhausting. But since then I’ve made it a point to develop better time management skills, and have committed to better planning of my workload. Now I’m able to meet my deadlines and still have the energy to take on the other things I need to do.

In our editing process, I’m stronger in the writing components than the technical software components. So, for the last 2 months I’ve been doing extra study on the software. It’s really helped me round out the skills I need for any editing or writing project that I’m part of.

GREAT responses to the ‘Weakness’ question
The ‘Weakness’ Question

GREAT responses to the question

Your response to the ‘weakness’ question should:

1. Identify the weakness
2. Explain how you overcame, improved, or managed the weakness
3. Indicate that you now operate effectively, having addressed the weakness

- Be concise. Don’t ramble or give a ‘list’ of weaknesses.
- Be prepared in advance. Don’t try to ‘wing it’.
- Be sincere and honest; not cliché or canned.
- Show that you are self-aware and have the humility and maturity to reflect on your professional strengths and shortcomings.
- Explain how you have addressed the weakness; what steps you’ve taken to improve.
- Indicate that you now work effectively in that area, as a result of addressing the weakness.

Caution: the weakness you choose to discuss should not be related to any of the key requirements or skills of the job. (i.e., for an office manager position – do not cite ‘lack of organization’ as a weakness that you have addressed or are working on)
Prepare Your Response

“Why Did You Leave Your Last Job?”

[Most likely, this question does not apply to you as a college student. But it is good information that may be helpful, should you ever find yourself in this situation in the future.]

- **If You Were Fired:**

If you were terminated from your previous job, this may be an uncomfortable question to answer. All the more reason to prepare your response in advance and be ready for the question.

Don't lie about it, and don't sidestep it. It's a fair question — and, if you put yourself in the interviewer's shoes, you realize that it's her responsibility to be thorough. That said, answer the question honestly but don't dwell on it. Remain professional at all times, both in your demeanor and in how you explain the circumstances of your termination. Never 'bad-mouth' or disparage your former supervisor. Avoid making excuses.

If it applies, you could explain that you and the company were not a good fit; or that you and your supervisor had differing viewpoints. Or, simply, that the job required skills that were beyond your training. Emphasize what you learned from the experience and also emphasize your accomplishments while with the company.

Here's an excellent informational resource for how to manage your job search after being fired:
http://www.quintcareers.com/getting_fired.html
Prepare Your Response

‘What Are Your Career Goals?’

You can predict that you will be asked some variation of this question in the interview: “Where do you see yourself in X years?” or “What are your career goals?”

In responding to this question, try to strike a balance between:

- Honesty
- Ambition
- Desire to work for this company

Examples:

- “In 5 years, I hope to be working for this company, contributing to its success, and making a difference in the company’s future. I would also hope to grow and advance in the organization by taking on higher level responsibilities (or projects)”

- “Long-term I hope to earn my X degree, hone my X skills, and continue to advance within the company.

- “My goal is to become the very best X your company has.”

- “Over the next few years, my goal is to further develop my skills and earn an assignment as project leader on a major project.”
Prepare for the Predictable

This workshop has covered some of the ‘tough’ questions that are predictably asked in most job interviews. For these questions that are particularly ‘sticky’ or that require considerable thought, take care to prepare your response before the interview. It would be to your great benefit to tackle these in advance to think about and prepare your responses.

Preparing your response in advance does not necessarily mean that you’ll come across as robotic or scripted in the interview. It simply means that you have a firm grasp on what you want to say, what you want to highlight and emphasize, and what you want to be sure to avoid in your answer. It helps you to be able to give a complete and articulate response – confidently and clearly.

Also, being prepared for the predictable will allow you to be more relaxed and better able to answer the other questions that are not predictable!
Check out all the career clips in the job search series

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  Your Elevator Speech
- Networking • 2
  The Networking Interview

The Resume
- Resume
  Make Your Resume Count
- Cover Letter
  The Right Introduction

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- Interviewing • 1
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- Interviewing • 3
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Interviewing
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