

How to Interview Like a Professional

Thoroughly research the organization. You can't fake the motivation it takes to learn about an organization. This proactive initiative demonstrates to potential employers that you're a serious candidate, who will bring a positive, self-motivated attitude to the position. Research key facts about the organization, such as strategic goals, new developments in the industry, mission and vision, company culture, and mentions in media, so you can give well-informed responses tailored to the organization.

Demonstrate professionalism. Arrive to the interview 10-15 minutes early. Turn off your cell phone and throw away any gum. Be polite to everyone you encounter. When you meet the interviewer(s), greet them with a firm handshake and confident smile. Maintain good posture and eye contact with the interviewer(s). Dress professionally to demonstrate your respect for the organization and the seriousness with which you're taking the opportunity to interview.

Ask for a moment to think. If you're given a difficult question, don't launch into a mediocre response hoping to gather your thoughts while you talk. It's perfectly appropriate to ask for a few seconds to formulate your answer, just let the interview know you're taking a moment to reflect. If you did not hear or understand the question, it's okay to ask the interviewer to repeat it. Use this tactic sparingly!

Ask insightful questions. At the conclusion of the interview, you'll typically be asked if you have any questions. Demonstrate your knowledge of and interest in the position by preparing questions that cannot be answered by, but are informed through, your own research.

- *I understand the training process takes six months. Could you please tell me more about the specific skills and understandings that this training will develop?*
- *In what ways do you anticipate the new focus on reaching underserved populations influencing the priorities of this position?*

Send a personalized thank-you note. Immediately following the interview, send a short thank-you note via post or email addressing the interviewer(s) by name. Include specific details about the interview, such as what you enjoyed learning about the organization or position. Affirm your continued interest in the position, if indeed you still are. Be sure to ask the interviewer(s) for their business card(s) so that you have their contact information.



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Behavioral-based interviewing provides a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interviews focus on general questions, such as “Tell me about yourself.” Behavioral interview questions ask for specific instances of how you’ve modeled a particular behavior, skill, or attitude desired by the employers.

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear. Even if you are asked situational questions that start out “How would you handle XYZ situation?” you have minimal accountability because the interviewer can’t really predict if you would react the way you said you would if that particular situation ever arose. In a behavioral interview, however, it’s much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a behavioral story, the interviewer may pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer might probe further for more depth or detail such as “What were you thinking at that point?” or “Tell me more about your meeting with that person,” or “Lead me through your decision process.” If you’ve told a story that’s untrue, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

Behavioral-based interview questions generally start with any one of the following phrases:

- Tell me about a time when you...
- Describe a circumstance when you were faced with a problem related to...
- Think about an instance in which you...
- Tell me how you approached a situation where...

The STAR Method

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

- **Situation:** Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
- **Task:** What goal were you working toward?
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on YOU. What specific steps did you take and what was your particular contribution? Be careful that you don’t describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you actually did. Use the word “I,” not “we” when describing actions.
- **Result:** Describe the outcome of your actions and don’t be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without rambling or including too much information. Oftentimes students have to be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result (such as “lost the game”) can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.