

Congratulations, you survived the resume screen and have been selected for an interview. While the number of candidates you are competing against for the position has decreased considerably, the intensity of the recruitment process has increased.

You were likely selected for the interview based on any number of factors - a well written resume and cover letter, strong writing sample, your previous work experience and/or personal recommendations. Unfortunately these factors alone are not enough to earn the job offer. We sometimes hear employers referring to a candidate as “looking good on paper” but then express disappointment in the candidate’s interview performance. From this point forward you will be evaluated based on your interview performance. As a result, how you prepare for an interview will determine your success.

A helpful starting point is to think of the interview as a conversation rather than an interrogation. A typical interview format will involve the interviewer asking questions and the candidate providing responses to each question. Since you will not receive the interview questions in advance of the interview many candidates are unsure how to effectively prepare for an interview. One popular approach is to find resources that list commonly asked interview questions and develop responses for each question. This process can be time consuming and in the end, the questions you prepared for may not be asked by the interviewer. Moreover, it relies on a responsive, passive approach rather than creating an active approach where you emphasize the qualities and experiences you want to promote.

Rather than trying to predict the interview questions in advance, your preparations should focus on two primary categories of information.

- What is the employer looking for in a candidate (i.e., specific skills, experience)?
- What aspects of your background do you want to highlight during the interview?

Of course the two questions are inter-related because the aspects of your background you want to highlight should also match the employer’s hiring criteria.

BASIC INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Before we get too far ahead let’s start at the beginning with a few general interview preparation tips:

- *Know your resume and background.* Don’t be caught off guard. Review the resume you submitted and be prepared to talk about anything listed.
- *Review employer materials* such as the position posting and employer website to determine the employer’s hiring criteria. Are they looking for certain skills or experience?

Your ultimate goal in an interview is to tell the interviewer what they want to hear. Of course the information you provide should also be an accurate reflection of your abilities and accomplishments. This leads us to a very important part of the interview preparation process – *approaching the interview from the perspective of the interviewer.*

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE INTERVIEWER

While it is impossible to predict the exact questions you will be asked during an interview, the questions typically derive from three general, over-arching questions.

- ***Can you do the job?***
- ***Do you want the job?***
- ***Do I want to work with you?***

Let's take a look at each question.

Can you do the job? This is the obvious question most candidates expect. Again it is important that you focus your responses on the skills and experience that are most important to the employer.

Do you want the job? Candidates often overlook this question. The assumption is that you want the job since you agreed to the interview. The employer is aware that you are looking for "a job" but they are trying to learn through the interview if you are interested in "this job" specifically. Along those lines it is important to communicate how a position fits into your overall career plan. You will also want to incorporate any information you have learned about the employer through your research so you can demonstrate a fit. Candidates can effectively address this question by asking thoughtful questions about the position and the employer during the interview.

Do I want to work with you? The interviewer's observations throughout the interview are often used to answer this question. Did you establish a good rapport with the interviewer? Did the interviewer appear genuinely interested in your experience as well as other aspects of your background? Did you demonstrate an interest in learning more about the interviewer and their experience/career?

INTERVIEW COMMUNICATION STRATEGY – THE CAR FRAMEWORK

It is common during an interview that you will be asked to share a story from your past experience. Discussing specific examples from your past is a great way to highlight your skills and experience. However, it is important that you communicate these examples in a clear, concise and powerful manner. *Keep in mind that a response to an interviewer question should not exceed three minutes.*

To help you structure your stories and keep within the recommended time limit we suggest the CAR framework. CAR stands for **Challenge, Action** and **Result**. The CAR framework allows you to condense your example into a manageable framework which will result in a clear and concise message. In addition, the framework involves ending your story with the result which both powerful and impactful.

BEYOND BASIC INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Earlier in this section we outlined a few general interview preparation tips – *know your resume* and *research the employer*. If you want to truly shine in an interview, we recommend the following tips:

- Identify 3-5 skills you want to highlight in the interview. Your list should take into account not only your personal strengths, but also the needs of the employer.
- Identify 3-5 examples/stories/accomplishments that you want to highlight during the interview. This list can include projects, accomplishments, awards, work experience, extracurricular activities, study abroad, etc.
- For each example think about how you can highlight one or more of the skills you identified. Simply stating your strengths is not enough. Employers will be more convinced of your abilities if you are able to provide a strong example highlighting a particular skill.
- Structure how you will communicate each example using the CAR framework.
- During the interview, analyze questions to determine what the interview wants to hear and choose an applicable skill and story.

Think about what makes you different/unique/stand out from the rest of the candidates. Imagine you were asked in the interview to describe what makes you stand out from the rest of the candidates. Remember, it is important that you highlight your strengths and not criticize the competition.

Tip – Create an Interview Flash Card – one side list the skills you want to highlight, flip side list the examples you want to highlight. This is a quick way to review your interview strategy!