



# How to: Nail the INTERVIEW

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## TEN MUST'S FOR YOUR NEXT INTERVIEW

- 1. DO YOUR RESEARCH** - *Know as much as you can about the company you are interviewing with.* Go beyond the “basics” by looking into things like future projects/trends, clients, mission, and culture.
  - Look in business journals, Google, or other on-line resources for up to date information about recent events/announcements/news.
  - What type of direction the company is headed in, new ventures, etc. For example, have they just signed a new client or secured a major contract? Are they breaking into a new market?
  - Be very familiar with their website.
  - If you have contacts there, talk to them about their position/work.
  - What are their products and/or services? How are they unique in their market?
  - Know industry trends – Prove you’re interested and curious about the industry. Use industry specific language; Know who the big players are in that field; Be up-to-date with current events and future trends.
- 2. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE** – *Just because you are a “people person” doesn’t mean you’ll automatically ace the interview.* Be familiar with talking about yourself, your goals, activities, projects, employment etc, through doing a mock interview at VUCC. Follow up with practicing out loud with a roommate or friend. Utilize InterviewStream. Taking notes and thinking about your answers is great but you may find it differs from actually speaking your answers.
- 3. BE EARLY & BE POLITE** – Make sure you know where the interview is taking place before the day of. Plan your route/method of travel early and keep things like traffic and delays in mind. **Remember** that everyone you meet on the day of the interview, from the secretary to the first year associate to the partner is involved in evaluating you even if it is informally.
- 4. DRESS AND ACT APPROPRIATELY** – *Wear a suit!* First impressions last! Make sure you maintain a neat, clean, professional appearance. High profile industries, especially, will expect a polished presentation which includes a suit even though you’re still a student. Have a firm hand shake, and maintain eye contact as well as straight posture and SMILE. Avoid perfume & cologne and wear simple jewelry. **KEEP A FORMAL TONE** - *Address the interviewer as Mr. or Ms. unless directed otherwise. Avoid slang and overly familiar language. Avoid “filler language” such as “like” or “ummm.”* **KEEP EVERYTHING POSITIVE.** *Speak about yourself, even your weaknesses, in a positive light of growth and curiosity. SELL yourself and your skills!*
- 5. ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS** – *Your answers should be concise but also complete.*
  - Make sure you begin with the answer to their question and then follow up with examples and additional information.
  - The more you practice and become familiar with questions that could potentially be asked, the more comfortable and organized you will be.
  - Don’t be afraid to pause for a second before beginning your answer.
  - Don’t “talk yourself into an answer” by talking in circles- think first and then provide the best possible specific details to back up your claims.
  - If a question is asked and you are unsure of the answer, talk about how you would go about figuring out the answer to that question. For example, if they ask how you would determine a business’ worth, think about the steps involved and how you begin to analyze and gather data.

6. **\*\*BE SPECIFIC\*\*** – *This is one of the most important points. Don't just tell an interviewer that you're great – tell them WHY you are great for them!* In other words, “**sell, don't tell.**” Not only what did you do, but why is that significant?
- What are your top 3 strengths? How have you **proven** that throughout your college experience (ie an internship, project, activity, leadership position etc.)? If you cannot back something up do not talk about it in an interview.
  - Express a sincere interest in their organization/position by relaying how you are a great fit for them.
  - Employers WANT to hear about your role in a group project, what you accomplished as a member of a club/organization, what you were responsible for at a past internship). **THESE THINGS ARE WHAT MAKES YOU MEMORABLE.**
  - Essentially, how are you going to set yourself apart from the other candidates interviewing for the same position?
  - For example:
  - **Do NOT say:** “I am an extremely creative individual. I love to think of new ideas. I'm also organized and adaptable.”
  - **INSTEAD say:** “I am an extremely creative individual by nature. For example, most recently in my marketing class I worked with a group of 5 students to develop a new “mock” product line for a company. I worked primarily on the print advertising campaign which utilized short, catchy slogans and realistic photos of objects to lead the viewer to question and ponder the product line.” In terms of organization and adaptability, I led a Habitat for Humanity trip over Spring Break last year which required fund raising, working with a group of 11 fellow students as well as residents of Costa Rica to build 6 houses in 7 days.”
7. **\*\*MAKE A BRIDGE BETWEEN YOU AND THE EMPLOYER\*\*** – *Again, this is one of the most important points. What are they looking for and how do YOU CONNECT with that? What types of things are mentioned in their job description? How do have you demonstrated those skills? Those are huge indicators in terms of the things you want to highlight in the interview.*
- Prove you are the right person for the position by showing them how you fit in with what they are looking for.
  - Integrate your pre-interview research into both you answers to their questions as well as the questions you ask them. For example you may ask, “How has \_\_\_\_\_ changed the way you do business on a day to day basis?”
8. **ASK QUESTIONS** – *Prove that you have been thoughtful about the process of interviewing by asking questions that reflect your knowledge of the field and/or position. Do NOT ask questions that raise “red flags” such as salary, vacation etc. The company should bring up salary first. Also avoid questions that can be easily answered by the organization's webpage.*
- For example, “How do you feel the current industry standards will affect your company in the near future?”
  - “Will I be able to get a lot of broad experience, or will I be specializing in one particular area?”
  - “How will the acquisition of \_\_\_\_\_ new client become significant?”
  - “When can I expect to hear from you?”
9. **SEND A THANK YOU NOTE** – *Send either a typed or emailed thank you note to all individuals you interviewed with.*
- Ask for business cards while at the interview.
  - Whether you type and mail your thank you note or email it is up to you but sending it immediately is imperative.
  - Mention something that struck you from the interview (i.e. that was particularly interesting or that you learned). Personalizing thank you notes goes a long way. Feel free to follow up with any questions or information you did not feel you answered sufficiently.
10. **EVALUATE** – *Is this a place you think you would enjoy working? Do you feel comfortable in the environment?*
- Remember, part of an interview is also deciding if this is the type of position you would accept.
  - Ask questions to determine if this is the right position for you. One way to think about it is – If you were offered the same position at a different company what would the deciding factors be to help you determine your decision?
  - Follow up with a phone call if you have questions about the position or search status! Reiterate your interest in the position when speaking with representatives of the organization.

## **CHARACTERISTICS EMPLOYERS SEEK IN PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES**

- Ability to Handle Stress
- Assertiveness
- Communication Skills (written/oral)
- Flexibility
- Initiative
- Intelligence
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Organizational Skills
- Self-Confidence
- Enthusiasm
- Interpersonal Skills

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS**

- I read in your company literature that you are starting a new venture in \_\_\_\_\_. What are the firm's plans?
- What other growth areas do you anticipate in the future?
- How does your firm handle the problem of \_\_\_\_\_? (A current topic of interest to the profession or industry)
- What is the promotion/advancement potential in the company?
- How did you first begin in the organization?
- If you could change one thing about (company), what would that be?

*The best questions to ask are those that are unique and memorable.* Many questions can be answered by reviewing company literature; if you do your homework, it shows interest in the company. (And, you won't ask questions you could easily have answered for yourself by a little reading!)

## **REASONS INTERVIEWERS REJECT APPLICANTS**

- Lack of interest/enthusiasm
- Poor personal appearance
- Failure to maintain appropriate eye contact
- Failure to appear confident
- Lack of solid career planning - vague objectives and goals
- No insight into nature of the company
- Being late to the interview
- Lack of questions (i.e. Lack of interest)
- Overbearing, "know-it-all" attitude
- No understanding of personal strengths/weaknesses
- Interviewee "assumes" interviewer will figure out why he/she is the best candidate
- Inability to clearly express oneself; poor grammar

**Questions or concerns?  
Meet with a Career Counselor  
to discuss the interview process or practice  
Use InterviewStream  
Appointments: 610-519-4060**

## **DRESS IT UP: LOOK THE PART TO LAND THE JOB**

By Tara Maras & Donna Kozik  
Authors of *Get a Job! Put Your Degree to Work*

It's time to fit in and make it look like you belong in this business world. This includes a conservative interview suit in a neutral color, appropriate shoes and accessories that support you and your mission—not draw unwanted attention to make the interviewer think, “Next!”

Before you head for your interview, make sure your mirror reflects your business side...here's how:

### **Men in Black?**

For conservative jobs, a navy or dark gray suit in 100 percent wool is the norm. For creative jobs, brown or beige will do. A crisp white button down and attractive tie are critical criteria.

### **Lady in Red?**

Ladies get more leeway in suit colors and can look conservative in a solid, pinstripe, or muted plaid suit. The blouse should be ruffle-less, with long sleeves that peek out about a half-inch beyond the jacket sleeve. And please, keep skirts to a “mini” mum length!

### **Makeup Breakup**

Less is more. Opt for a clean and fresh look with slightly blushed cheeks, light mascara and not-so-shocking lip color.

### **Shoe Do's**

Your footwear should be conservative, closed-toe, and shiny enough to reflect your smile. For women: 1 ½ inch heels in black, brown, or navy leather work with neutral nylons. For men: only black or brown will do.

### **The Family Jewels**

For women, jewelry should be subtle, small, and metal (not plastic or leather). Men should limit their jewelry to a watch and/or ring band. You don't want to jingle when you move!

### **The Ultimate Accessory**

Want to be remembered by a “signature” accessory? Whether it's your purse or your pen, make sure it's in excellent condition and does not detract from the main attraction—you!

### **Besides the Clothes**

Men should be clean shaven, even for a late day interview. Men should have a fresh haircut and women should opt for a natural, not-80s hairdo. Fingernails should be perfect—and not perfectly hot pink!

### **What's that Smell?**

Whether you call it perfume, parfum, cologne, aftershave, or toilette—leave it at home. Your scent of choice may trigger haaaaa-choooooos!

### **Smiles, Everyone, Smiles!**

Put a bright, authentic smile on your face and keep it there! Let your face show your pleasure as you speak with the interviewer and you'll be on the way to earning valuable points. For more job-finding tips, visit [www.getajob.com](http://www.getajob.com)

## **QUESTIONS MOST OFTEN ASKED IN AN INTERVIEW**

What specific goals have you established for yourself for the next 5-10 years?

What are the most important rewards you expect in your \_\_\_\_\_ career?

Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?

Why did you choose our company/organization?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How would you describe yourself? How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?

How has your college experience prepared you for a career in \_\_\_\_\_?

Why should I hire you?

In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?

Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinate.

What qualities should a successful manager possess?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Describe your most rewarding college experience.

Why did you select your college or university?

What led you to choose your field of major study?

What college subjects did you like best? Why?

What college subjects did you like least? Why?

If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?

What changes would you make in your college or university?

Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?

Do you think your grades are good indications of your academic achievement?

In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?

How do you work under pressure?

What do you know about our company?

What two or three things are most important to you in your job?

Do you have a geographic preference? Why? Are you willing to travel?

## **STAR METHOD: BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING**

Taken from: <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/guide/star.html>

Behavioral Interviewing is a new style of interviewing that more and more organizations are using in their hiring process. The basic premise behind behavioral interviewing is this: the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. It focuses on experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that are job related. Traditional interviewing questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently. Employers predetermine which skills are necessary for the job for which they are looking and then ask very pointed questions to determine if the candidate possesses those skills. For example, if successful leadership is necessary for a position, you may be asked to talk about an experience in which you were a leader as well as what you think makes a good leader. To assess which skills the employer seeks, review employer literature, speak with alumni, family and friends who work for the employers, and listen carefully during the organization's information session.

During a behavioral interview, always listen carefully to the question, ask for clarification if necessary, and make sure you answer the question completely. Your interview preparation should include identifying examples of situations from your experiences on your resume where you have demonstrated the behaviors a given company seeks. During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them about the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive result or outcome. Your answer should contain these four steps (Situation, Task, Action, Result or "STAR") for optimum success.

### **STAR METHOD**

**Situation:** give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome

**Task:** describe the tasks involved in that situation

**Action:** talk about the various actions involved in the situation's task

**Results:** what results directly followed because of your actions

Before the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you will convey these points (with demonstrated STAR stories) during the interview.

It is helpful to frame your answer as a story that you can tell. Typically, the interviewer will pick apart the story to try to get at the specific behavior(s) they seek. They refer to this as "digging a well." The interviewer will sometimes ask you open ended questions to allow you to choose which examples you wish to use. When a part of your story relates to a skill or experience the interviewer wishes to explore further, he/she will then ask you very specific follow-up questions regarding your behavior. These can include "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person." or "Lead me through your decision process."

Whenever you can, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility. For example: "I was a shift supervisor." could be "As Shift Supervisor, I trained and evaluated 4 employees."

Be prepared to provide examples of when results didn't turn out as you planned. What did you do then? What did you learn? Your resume will serve as a good guide when answering these questions. Refresh your memory regarding your achievements in the past couple of years. Demonstration of the desired behaviors may be proven in many ways. Use examples from past internships, classes, activities, team involvements, community service and work experience.

## **EXAMPLE OF A STAR ANSWER**

**Situation:** During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events.

**Task:** I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past 3 years and wanted to do something to improve these numbers.

**Action:** I designed a new promotional packet to go out to the local community businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees.

**Result:** We utilized some of the wonderful ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient and visible and raised attendance by 18% the first year.

### **Examples of a Behavioral Question**

Behavioral questions can be difficult if you are not prepared. Always try to be conscious about what the recruiter is trying to find out about you by asking you a particular question. Setting up a mock interview with the MIT Careers Office is an excellent way to practice. Here are some examples:

Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way. Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem. By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and environments. Describe a time on any job that you held in which you were faced with problems or stresses that tested your coping skills. Give me an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision. Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communications skills in order to get an important point across. Give me a specific occasion in which you conformed to a policy with which you did not agree. Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it. Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

## **BEHAVIOR BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Tell me about a big project that you had to plan for work or school. What did you do?  
(Organizational skills)

Describe a situation when you had several things to do in a limited time, such as study for exams.  
(Ability to set priorities)

Tell me about a time when you were in charge of something and needed to let others help you.  
(Ability to delegate responsibilities)

Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a member of the public.  
(Interpersonal skills/customer relations)

Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with a supervisor or when you had to supervise someone else. (Ability to deal with people)

Tell me about the most difficult school or work problem you have ever faced.  
(Technical skills)

Tell me about a situation in which you had to apply some acquired knowledge or skill.  
(Ability to apply knowledge)

Tell me about a time when you had to turn to someone else for assistance.  
(Knowing limitations)

Tell me about a time when you had to take charge to get a job done or resolve a difficult situation.  
(Growing with a job/taking initiative)

Tell me about a time when you had to learn something new in a short time.  
(Ability to learn)

Tell me about a time when someone misunderstood something you said or wrote.  
(Communication skills)

Tell me about a time you misunderstood a teacher or supervisor.  
(Ability to listen)

Tell me about a time when you had to finish a job even though everyone else had given up.  
(Commitment)

## **CASE INTERVIEWING**

Taken from <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/guide/caseinterview.html>

Certain employers-especially management consulting firms-use what is known as a "case interview" to determine how well suited you are to their type of work. Case interviews are used to measure your problem solving ability, your tolerance for ambiguity, and your communication skills along several dimensions. Firms want to know how well you identify, structure, and think through problems. They also want to see how well you listen, summarize and articulate your conclusions, and think on your feet. Consequently, your approach to a case is more important than the specific content of your answers. Thinking out loud as you attempt to "crack" a case is advisable because it allows the interviewer to evaluate your thought process.

In a case interview, you are introduced to a business dilemma facing a particular company (often drawn from the interviewer's professional experience). You are asked to analyze the situation, identify key business issues, and discuss how you would address the problems involved. The interviewer begins by giving you some basic facts and then asks you an open-ended or specific question. The interview proceeds as an open dialogue between you and the interviewer, with the interviewer guiding the discussion as you ask probing questions to uncover key information and move toward resolution.

Sample case: "You are called in by Pizza Hut to help them develop a strategy for entering the home delivery market in which Domino's has the dominant position. As lead consultant on this project, what would you do?"

Your first challenge is to identify the type of problem the case addresses and decide whether there is an appropriate framework (e.g., growth tree, value chain, 4 P's and 3 C's of marketing, financial statement, Porter's 5 Forces, etc.) to structure your analysis. These frameworks are derived from a business curriculum. Begin by identifying the key business issues to show you understand the big picture. Then push deeper into each issue, starting with the most important first.

The above case is primarily a marketing case. The issues to raise include:

- The success factors in the business, and Pizza Hut's vs. Domino's relative strengths or weaknesses; based on that analysis should Pizza Hut enter the business?
- The customers Pizza Hut should target and the needs of those customers
- The product(s) Pizza Hut should sell and the prices they should charge
- How Domino's or other relevant competitors (are there any?) might respond
- What effects a new delivery business will have on Pizza Hut's existing business
- How the business should be structured to minimize costs.

As the discussion progresses, listen carefully and clarify anything you don't understand before proceeding. Follow the interviewer's lead. Each individual will have a unique personal interviewing style, and take you through the case in different ways depending on his or her priorities.

# IMPORTANT REMINDERS ON SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING

- I** Invest in preparation (yourself and the organization)
- N** Need to promote yourself
- T** Take time to process the question before you respond
- E** Every comment should be positive
- R** Ready for all types of questions and personalities
- V** Very important to “connect” yourself w/ the position/organization
- I** Interest in position/organization needs to be conveyed
- E** Expect to be nervous – transfer it into positive energy
- W** Winning attitude: Be confident
- I** Inquire: Ask good questions
- N** Need to be formal and professional at all times
- G** Get contact information so you may follow up with the interviewer