

Interview

Guide

Email: Career@pratt.edu

Phone: 718.636.3506

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Introduction

Preparing for an interview is essential for securing a job. Even with great skills and competencies, you may struggle in a competitive interview if you're uncomfortable discussing why you're a strong fit for the role or if you lack prepared examples of past contributions. Understanding why interviewers ask certain questions, knowing how to answer them effectively, and practicing with sample questions can make a significant difference. This guide will help you navigate the interview process with confidence.

The Power of Storytelling in Interviews

Storytelling is a crucial skill for anyone hoping to excel in interviews. Here's why:

1. **Engagement:** A well-told story captures the interviewer's attention and makes your responses more memorable. People naturally connect with narratives, making it easier for interviewers to recall your examples and experiences.
2. **Demonstration of Skills:** Through storytelling, you can vividly illustrate your skills and competencies. Instead of just stating that you have a particular skill, a story allows you to show how you've applied it in real-life situations.
3. **Clarity and Structure:** A good story has a clear structure with a beginning, middle, and end. This clarity helps convey your message effectively and ensures that your responses are organized and easy to follow.
4. **Emotional Connection:** Stories evoke emotions, which can help you build a connection with the interviewer. An emotional resonance can make your interview more impactful and set you apart from other candidates.
5. **Evidence of Soft Skills:** Storytelling demonstrates your communication abilities, emotional intelligence, and ability to reflect on experiences. These are critical soft skills that employers value highly.
6. **Illustration of Problem-Solving Abilities:** By telling a story about a challenge you faced, the actions you took, and the results you achieved, you can clearly showcase your problem-solving skills. This method, often referred to as the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result), is a powerful way to frame your experiences.
7. **Authenticity:** Authentic stories from your own experiences make your answers genuine and relatable. Authenticity builds trust and credibility, as opposed to generic or rehearsed responses.

In summary, storytelling is an essential tool in your interview toolkit. It not only makes your responses more engaging and memorable but also allows you to effectively demonstrate your skills, build an emotional connection, and present yourself as a well-rounded candidate. By mastering the art of storytelling, you can significantly enhance your interview performance and increase your chances of landing the job.

Why Interviewers Ask Certain Questions

1. **Assessing Skills and Qualifications:** Employers want to determine if you have the technical skills, knowledge, and experience required for the job.
2. **Cultural Fit:** Companies look for candidates whose values and work style align with their corporate culture.
3. **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:** Employers are interested in how you approach challenges and think critically.
4. **Communication Skills:** Your ability to articulate thoughts clearly and effectively is crucial in most roles.
5. **Motivation and Enthusiasm:** Interviewers gauge your passion for the role and the company.
6. **Behavioral Tendencies:** Understanding how you have behaved in past situations helps predict future behavior.

How to Answer Common Interview Questions

- **Prepare Thoroughly:** Research the company, understand the job description, and reflect on how your background matches the role.
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- **Use the STAR Method:** For behavioral questions, structure your answers using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).
 - **Example:**
 - **Situation:** Describe the context within which you performed a task or faced a challenge at work.
 - Example: "In my final year project, our team was tasked with developing a mobile app for campus navigation."
 - **Task:** Explain the actual task you had to complete, highlighting your responsibilities.
 - Example: "I was responsible for designing the user interface and ensuring it was user-friendly."
 - **Action:** Describe the specific actions you took to complete the task or solve the problem.
 - Example: "I conducted user research, created wireframes, and collaborated with developers to implement the design."
 - **Result:** Share the outcomes or results of your actions, ideally with measurable achievements.
 - Example: "The app was successfully launched and received positive feedback, increasing campus engagement by 20%."
- **Be Honest and Authentic:** Provide genuine answers that reflect your true experiences and aspirations. Avoid trying to sound overly confident or using hyperbole and clichés. Authenticity builds trust and credibility.
- **Focus on Contributions:** Rather than focusing on selling yourself, emphasize how you can contribute to the company. Highlight how your skills and experiences make you the right person for the job, and explain how you can add value to the team.
- **Show Enthusiasm Appropriately:** It's fine to express your excitement about the job or internship opportunity, but make sure the focus remains on why you're the right person for the job, more than why the job serves you.

How to Answer Common Interview Questions

- **Be Concise and Relevant:** Stick to the point and ensure your answers are relevant to the question asked.
- **Showcase Your Skills and Achievements:** Highlight your accomplishments and how they relate to the job you're applying for.
- **Ask Insightful Questions:** Prepare questions to ask the interviewer that show your interest in the role and company. Avoid asking questions that you can easily find answers to via a quick online search.
- **Great Go-To Questions:**
 - "Can you describe a typical day in this role?"
 - "What are the biggest challenges the team is currently facing?"
 - "How do you measure success for this position?"
 - "Can you tell me more about the team I would be working with?"
 - "What opportunities are there for professional development and growth within the company?"
 - "How would you describe the company culture?"
 - "What are the next steps in the interview process?"

Sample Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Tell me about yourself.

- Why it's asked: To get an overview of your background and experiences.
- How to answer: Provide a brief summary of your education, key experiences, and what brings you to this role. Focus on how your background makes you a strong candidate.

Why do you want to work here?

- Why it's asked: To assess your interest in the company and role.
- How to answer: Mention specific aspects of the company that appeal to you and how your goals align with their mission. Emphasize how you can contribute to their success. Be sure to research the company to demonstrate genuine interest and preparation. This shows the interviewer that you are not just looking for any job, but are genuinely enthusiastic about contributing to their organization. Additionally, understanding the company's challenges and industry trends can help you highlight how your skills and experiences are particularly relevant, making you a more compelling candidate.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Why it's asked: To understand your self-awareness and areas for improvement.
- How to answer: Highlight strengths relevant to the job and discuss a weakness you're actively working to improve. Be honest without exaggerating your strengths.

Give an example of a time you faced a challenge and how you dealt with it.

- Why it's asked: To evaluate your problem-solving skills and resilience.
- How to answer: Use the STAR method to describe a relevant situation and your response.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

- Why it's asked: To gauge your long-term goals and ambition.
- How to answer: Discuss your career aspirations and how this role fits into your plans. Focus on your potential contributions and growth.

How do you handle stress and pressure?

- Why it's asked: To understand your coping mechanisms and ability to work under pressure.
- How to answer: Provide examples of strategies you use to manage stress and stay productive.

Sample Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Describe a time when you worked on a team project.

- **Why it's asked:** To assess your teamwork and collaboration skills.
- **How to answer:** Use the STAR method to highlight a team project and your contributions.

Why should we hire you?

- **Why it's asked:** To determine what makes you stand out from other candidates.
- **How to answer:** Summarize your unique skills, experiences, and how they align with the job requirements. Focus on how you can add value to the team.

Interview Exercise

Practice makes perfect. Here's an exercise to help you prepare for your interview:

- **Pair Up with a Peer:** Find a friend or classmate who is also preparing for interviews.
- **Role-Play:** Take turns being the interviewer and the interviewee. Use the sample questions provided.
- **Record and Review:** If possible, record your responses and review them to identify areas for improvement.
- **Provide Feedback:** Give each other constructive feedback on your answers, body language, and overall presentation.
- **Refine Your Answers:** Based on the feedback, refine your answers to be more concise, relevant, and impactful.

Sample Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Tips for Answering Interview Questions

1. **Understand the Question:** Take a moment to understand what the interviewer is really asking. If unsure, ask for clarification.
2. **Stay Positive:** Even when discussing challenges or weaknesses, focus on what you learned and how you improved.
3. **Be Specific:** Provide specific examples from your experiences. General answers can come off as vague and unconvincing.
4. **Practice Active Listening:** Listen carefully to the interviewer's questions and comments. It shows respect and helps you provide better answers.
5. **Stay Calm and Confident:** Maintain a calm demeanor and confidence in your abilities. This can greatly influence the interviewer's perception of you.
6. **Avoid Hyperbole and Clichés:** Exaggerations and overused phrases can make you seem insincere. Be straightforward and honest in your responses.
7. **Be Authentic:** Authenticity builds trust and credibility. Avoid trying to sound overly confident or rehearsed. Be yourself and let your true personality shine through.

Sample Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

Tips for Answering Interview Questions

You and your partner will role-play a portion of a professional interview. One person will play the role of the employer and the other will play the interviewee.

Choose a job position that the student playing the interviewee is familiar with (i.e. either for the office/studio that they are interning for or one that they plan to interview for in the near future.

Do your best to “stay in character” even if you make a mistake, that’s fine, work through it.

Interview Questions:

1. Hi and welcome. Let’s begin by having you tell me a little bit about yourself and why you think you’re a good fit for this position?
2. Could you please walk me through a project that you worked on in either a professional or rigorous academic setting that relates to a project you might work on for us?
3. What is a great strength of yours?
4. What is a weakness of yours (other than you’re a perfectionist or you care too much or try too hard)?
5. Could you tell me about a time when, in a professional or academic setting, you had conflict with a co-worker or team member and walk me through how you resolved the issue? Please give an actual specific example.
6. Could you tell me something about yourself that’s not on your resume?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

Conclusion

Practice with the sample questions provided and seek feedback from career services or mentors to refine your responses. **Note from a professional actor:** It’s important to practice answering these questions out loud so you experience hearing your own voice, feel the physicality of answering to get these answers into your muscle memory. Break a leg and best of luck!

Informational Interviews

Introduction

Informational interviews are a powerful tool for gaining insights into your desired industry, career path, or specific company. Unlike job interviews, the purpose of an informational interview is to learn, network, and seek advice rather than to secure a job. This guide will help you understand the purpose of informational interviews, how to conduct them professionally, and key notions to keep in mind to make the most of these opportunities.

Purpose of Informational Interviews

1. **Gather Information:** Gain firsthand insights into a specific role, industry, or company. Learn about day-to-day responsibilities, required skills, and industry trends.
2. **Build Relationships:** Develop a network of contacts in your desired field. Establishing connections can be invaluable for future career opportunities.
3. **Clarify Career Goals:** Understand what different roles entail and how they align with your skills and interests. This clarity can help you make informed career decisions.
4. **Gain Industry Insights:** Learn about the challenges and opportunities in the field, as well as any advice the professional might have for someone entering the industry.
5. **Practice Professional Communication:** Enhance your ability to communicate professionally and confidently in a low-pressure setting.

Key Notions for Conducting Informational Interviews

- **Be Appreciative:** Recognize that the person you are interviewing is doing you a significant favor. They are taking time out of their busy schedule to share their knowledge and experience with you. Always express genuine gratitude for their time and insights.
 - **Example:** "Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I truly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and insights."
- **Avoid Solicitation:** Remember that an informational interview is not a job interview. Your goal is to learn, not to ask for a job. Focus on the person's story, their experiences, and advice rather than how they can help you get a job.
 - **Do Not Say:** "Do you know of any openings in your company that I could apply for?"
 - **Instead Say:** "I'm really interested in learning about your career path and any advice you might have for someone entering this field."
- **Present Yourself Professionally:** Treat the informational interview with the same level of professionalism as you would a job interview. Dress appropriately, arrive on time, and prepare thoughtful questions.

Informational Interviews

- **Respect Their Time:** Keep the interview within the agreed-upon time frame, usually 20-30 minutes. If the conversation naturally extends and the interviewer seems willing to continue, that's fine, but always be mindful of their time.
- **Do Your Homework:** Research the person's background, their role, and the company they work for. This preparation shows respect for their time and allows you to ask informed questions.
- **Prepare Thoughtful Questions:** Focus on questions that help you understand their career path, the skills needed for their role, and their perspectives on the industry.
 - **Sample Questions:**
 - "Can you tell me about your career journey and how you got to your current position?"
 - "What do you enjoy most about your job? What are some of the challenges?"
 - "What skills do you think are essential for success in this field?"
 - "Are there any industry trends or developments that you think are particularly important?"
 - "Do you have any advice for someone looking to enter this industry?"
- **Listen Actively:** Show that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Make eye contact, nod, and provide verbal affirmations. Take notes to remember key points and follow up on interesting insights.
- **Follow Up with Gratitude:** Send a thank-you email within 24 hours of the interview. Express your appreciation again, highlight a few key takeaways, and keep the door open for future communication.
 - **Example:**
 - **Subject:** Thank You for Your Time and Insights
 - **Dear [Name],**
 - Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I genuinely appreciate your willingness to share your experiences and insights about [industry/role]. I found your advice on [specific topic] particularly valuable and will certainly keep it in mind as I continue to explore my career options. Thanks again for your generosity and guidance. Best regards, [Your Name]

Conclusion

Informational interviews are a valuable tool for gaining insights, building relationships, and clarifying your career goals. By approaching these conversations with appreciation, professionalism, and genuine curiosity, you can make the most of these opportunities. Remember, the focus should be on learning from the interviewee's experiences and stories, rather than seeking direct assistance with job opportunities. With the right approach, informational interviews can significantly enhance your career journey.

Thank You Letter

Introduction

Writing a thank you letter after an interview is an essential step in the job search process. It not only shows appreciation for the interviewer's time and insights but also reinforces your interest in the role and your fit for the team. A well-crafted thank you letter can leave a lasting positive impression. This guide will help you write a professional thank you letter that cites specific examples from the interview, avoids overselling yourself, and shows your appreciation and excitement about contributing to the team.

Key Elements of a Thank You Letter

1. **Timeliness:** Send the thank you letter within 24 hours of the interview to ensure your appreciation is received promptly.
2. **Professional Tone:** Use a professional and courteous tone throughout the letter.
3. **Specific Examples:** Cite specific examples from the interview that you found useful or insightful. This demonstrates that you were actively listening and are genuinely interested in the role.
4. **Appreciation:** Express sincere gratitude for the interviewer's time and the opportunity to learn more about the role and the company.
5. **Excitement to Contribute:** Show your enthusiasm about the possibility of joining the team and contributing to the company's success.
6. **Avoid Overselling:** Focus on your appreciation and interest rather than trying to re-sell yourself. The interview already provided the opportunity to showcase your qualifications.

Thank You Letter

Sample Thank You Letter

Subject: Thank You for the Opportunity to Interview

Dear [Interviewer's Name],

I wanted to extend my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to interview for the [Position] role at [Company] on [Date]. I truly appreciated the chance to learn more about the team, the company culture, and the exciting projects you're working on.

I found our discussion about [specific topic or project discussed during the interview] particularly insightful. Your explanation of [specific example] provided a deeper understanding of how [Company] approaches [specific aspect of the role or industry]. It was fascinating to hear about [another specific example], and it reinforced my enthusiasm for the opportunity to contribute to such innovative work.

Thank you also for sharing your experiences with [another specific detail discussed]. It gave me valuable perspective on [related aspect of the role or company]. I am excited about the possibility of bringing my skills in [specific skill] and [another specific skill] to your team and contributing to [Company]'s continued success.

Once again, thank you for your time and the insightful conversation. I am very enthusiastic about the prospect of joining [Company] and contributing to [specific team or project]. Please let me know if there is any further information I can provide.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Email Address]

[Your Phone Number]

Thank You Letter

Tips for Writing Your Thank You Letter

1. **Personalize Each Letter:** If you interviewed with multiple people, send a personalized thank you letter to each interviewer. Mention something specific from your conversation with each person.
2. **Keep It Concise:** A thank you letter should be brief and to the point. Aim for 3-4 short paragraphs.
3. **Proofread:** Ensure there are no typos or grammatical errors. A polished letter reflects your attention to detail.
4. **Express Genuine Appreciation:** Sincerity is key. Your gratitude should come across as genuine and heartfelt.
5. **Follow Up:** If appropriate, mention any next steps you discussed during the interview. This shows you are proactive and interested in moving forward.

Conclusion

A well-written thank you letter is an important part of the interview process. By citing specific examples from the interview, showing genuine appreciation, and expressing your excitement about the opportunity to contribute, you can leave a positive and lasting impression on your potential employer. Use this guide to help you craft a thank you letter that reinforces your interest in the role and your fit for the team.