



PDP

Interviewing

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Introduction

This handout gives you an overview of the interview styles and types you will encounter during your career search process. We also address the ways that you can prepare for the interview, conduct the interview, and follow-up after the interview. These are critical steps in the process that you can not afford to miss.

Interviews can be conducted by telephone or in person. In either case, you may be speaking with one other person (one-on-one) or you may be speaking to a panel of people. It's important to be prepared for either situation. In addition, depending on the stage of your interview process, you may be invited to the organization for a number of interviews in either of these formats. Some interviews may last a day or two, and may require you to do a presentation and/or have a meal with your potential employers. We will touch on some etiquette issues related to the interview process later in this guide.

Understanding interview styles

There are a number of types of interviews that you may encounter during the interview process. The most common styles are:

- **Behavioral-based**
- **Conversational/fit**
- **Job-specific**
- **Case**

We will focus primarily on the behavioral-based interview as this is the most commonly used interview. However, if you are prepared for a behavioral-based interview, you will also be prepared for a conversation/fit interview. Job-specific interviews focus on technical and job content questions. Case interviews are conducted most frequently by management and strategic consulting firms, as well as by investment banking firms. However, more organizations are beginning to utilize them including US government, development consulting firms, and even non-governmental organizations. Ultimately, many organizations conduct hybrid interviews, in which they combine one or more questions from the different interview styles. This means that candidates should be prepared to answer behavior-based interview questions during all interviews, and case interview questions when interviewing in the consulting/investment banking industry.

Please note that some organizations use a competency-based hiring model throughout their interview process. This means that their questions are based on pre-determined organization- and position-specific competencies required for this position. Organizations believe that this method allows them to make more educated decisions about hiring by gathering the appropriate and

relevant information from a candidate. Again, most organizations will use behavioral-based interview questions during a competency based hiring process.

Behavioral-based interviews

Behavioral-based interviews leverage the fact that past performance is the most accurate predictor of future performance. As a result, the interviewer uses a structured set of questions focused on the job, your previous work experience, your skills, and your work-related values. The questions frequently begin with “tell me about a time” or “describe a situation where...”

As you answer these questions, you’ll be expected to describe examples of specific behaviors, which the interviewer will use to assess your proficiency in one or more job-related competencies. These competencies can include anything from adaptability to leadership to problem solving. You will be asked to describe specific past situations that demonstrate your abilities in a requisite competency.

Here are some examples of typical behavioral questions and the competencies they demonstrate:

- **Describe a difficult problem that you had to solve. How did you handle this situation? What was your thought process?**
(Demonstrates analytical thinking)
- **Describe a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be done, and you took on the task.**
(Demonstrates initiative)

Many organizations are adopting behavioral-based interviewing as studies have shown it is 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing

is only 10 percent predictive. Given these statistics, chances are that you will encounter a behavioral interview, either for an internship or a full-time job. Behavioral-based interviewing is more probing than conversation/fit-based interviewing and gives the employer a more objective set of facts by looking for the candidate's problem solving and communication skills. The idea is that if the employer knows how you handled a certain situation in a past work setting, he/she can extract how you may respond to a similar situation in the future. These types of interviews sometimes make the interviewee feel uncomfortable because the potential employer asks question after question without necessarily establishing a rapport. It is normal to feel this way, and it does not mean the interview is going poorly.

Conversation/fit-based interviews

Conversation/fit-based interviews leverage rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, rather than structure, to gather information. In these interviews, employers want to get to know you and learn about your background, motivation, and interests. Employers tend to see the interview as a conversation between two equals, and as a result, he/she looks for someone with whom he/she feels comfortable. Conversation/fit-based interviews include questions such as:

- **To what extent are you an organized person?**
- **What are your most positive qualities?**

Typically, you are given the opportunity to ask questions about the organization as well. The ideal interview flows much like a conversation, with a dynamic exchange of information and ideas so both parties get to know each other.

Job-specific interviews

Job-specific interviews focus on technical and job content questions. In these interviews, employers ask interviewees to solve financial problems, create a budget, summarize the main points of an article and make recommendations, write an essay, and/or give a presentation. These questions help employers determine if a candidate has the technical and/or job-content specific experience related to the open position. By taking the time to review the job description in detail, candidates can be prepared for these types of questions by thoroughly understanding the content of the job.

Confrontational questions are also used to assess a candidate's readiness for a certain type of position. These questions are meant to make you feel uncomfortable and purposefully create stress. Sometimes employers such as those on Wall Street and the Central Intelligence Agency, pair several "good cop" interviewers with one "bad cop" interviewer to see how you respond. Most questions are asked in a manner that forces you to respond defensively. For example, you might be told that your degree or school were poor choices or that your background has no relevance for the position for which you are interviewing. In this situation, the interviewer is purposely trying to put you on the defensive or make you angry to see how you react in uncomfortable or difficult interpersonal situations.

Case interviews

Case interviews are the standard in the field of consulting and investment banking, and they are used to measure your problem solving ability, your tolerance for ambiguity, and your communication skills. This type of interview determines how well you identify, structure, and think through problems. The employer wants to see how well you listen,

summarize, and articulate your conclusions while “thinking on your feet”. Employers are interested in assessing your approach to the case rather than the specific content of your answer.

Typically, applicants for positions with consulting and investment banking firms can expect several rounds of interviews. In each round candidates are evaluated on their personal qualities, which are of great importance to the company as the prospective employee will work closely with others on a consulting team and will make presentations to the client. In addition, candidates are also evaluated on their case-interview skills. Interviewers look for the intellectual ability, analytical skills, and common sense approach to problem-solving that enables the development of reasonable solutions to business problems in a limited time.

Types of case questions can include (from www.quintcareers.com):

- **Calculation/estimation/guesstimate/numerical/market sizing case**
- **Problem case**
- **Probing case**
- **Business operations case**
- **Business strategy case**
- **Resume case (case based on a company at which you worked)**
- **Brainteaser/logical puzzle/IQ question**

Preparing for the interview

Preparing for interviews takes time and practice. However, good interviewing skills are learned, and every student can improve his/her skills. To adequately prepare for interviews, you will need to:

1. Find out about interview day

2 Learn about the organization

3 Know your resume

4 Practice verbally

5 Prepare questions to ask your interviewer

Each of these points is explained below in more detail to give you concrete advice for your interview preparation.

Find out about interview day

In order to prepare for your interview, find out as much as you can about what to expect on the interview day. The more details you know, the better you can prepare yourself for that specific interview.

- Where will the interview be? Will it be on the phone or in person?
- With whom will you be meeting? Will it be a group interview or one-on-one?
- What will be the duration of the interview?
- Is there any specific prep work, such as preparing to deliver a presentation?

Learn about the organization

Most frequently, we hear recruiters say “the candidate isn’t prepared” or “the candidate doesn’t know anything about us”. This is a critical piece of the interview process that you can easily prepare for by taking the time to do some research about the organization. By researching the employer’s organization and its current needs, you will learn how

they function, as well as where you would fit into the structure. In addition, while salary questions can be uncomfortable at this stage of the process, it’s important to do your research so you can be prepared if need be.

As you do your research, you should consider the following questions:

- Who leads the organization? Where are the headquarters? When were they founded?
- How did they get to where they are today? What are the major divisions, offices, and subsidiaries?
- What does the website say today? What does the press say about them?
- Who are their peers? If private, who are their competitors and how is their stock doing?
- Is this a new position? If not, why did the last person leave? How long did he/she stay? What is the salary range for this position?
- What are the values and expectations of this organization? What do people say about working there?
- What are the salaries like at this organization? Do they pay competitively?

You may not be able to get all of this information. However, if you can, you’ll have a competitive advantage and better information to assess the opportunity. Where can you look for this type of information?

- Newspaper and magazine websites
 - Read The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Financial Times, Washington Post, Economist.

- Do a keyword search in Lexis-Nexis (leverage Ginn Library resources as detailed in the tools section) to get recent press coverage on the organization.
- Fletcher Career Central (FCC)
 - Read the employer profile and public comments sections for recent details about our outreach to these employers.
- OCS career guides
 - Read career field guides on the Intranet to get an overview of the industry.
- OCS referrals and alumni contacts
 - Speak with a coach in your area of interest to find individuals working at that organization.
 - Leverage the Office of Development and Alumni Relations (ODAR) to get a list of alumni working at a particular organization.
- Organization websites
 - Research salary grades at certain organizations.
- Career-related websites
 - Check out www.vault.com, www.wetfeet.com, and www.salary.com.
- Business websites
 - Look up the organization through Hoovers (leverage Ginn Library resources as detailed in the tools section of the PDP 3 Hiring Theory guide).

Know your resume

It's critical to spend time reflecting on your own goals, strengths, and skills, so that you can discuss them succinctly. Reflect on the self-assessment work you've done so far with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, as well as the exercises on your skills/aptitudes, interests, values, and life/work experiences. These reflections will help you think about how you may want to concisely present this information to an employer.

Overall, in your preparation process, you should:

- Review your resume
 - Think about it in the context of the job description. What are the most relevant projects or experiences?
- Identify your strengths
 - Think about related experience, skills, knowledge, transferable skills, etc.
- Identify your weaknesses
 - Be prepared to discuss how you are working on your weaknesses.
- Create an interview worksheet for each employer
 - Think through and write down your goals.
 - Identify three things you want to make sure this employer knows about you before you leave.
- Create a skills matrix
 - List your skills on one axis and the employer's requirements on the other axis to see where they match.

Finally, think of three to five key accomplishments from your past/present work, volunteer, or school related experiences. Think of how you can leverage these experiences when answering potential interview questions.

For example, a candidate who initiated a new project in his last position could use that experience to illustrate:

- **Initiative** – if the candidate came up with the idea and implemented it without being told to do so.
- **Effective communication** – if it entailed getting teammates and/or a supervisor on board with the project.
- **Leadership** – if the candidate had to manage other staff involved in the project.

While it is good to be prepared, do not memorize your “stories.” If your description of events sounds too rehearsed, the interviewer may ask you to give a second or third example of the same behavior.

Practice

Most interviews are won or lost based on your preparation. This is something you can impact by taking adequate time to practice prior to the interview. Don’t assume that just because the interviewer is a Fletcher alum that you don’t have to spend as much time preparing.

So what kind of questions should you expect? This is a difficult question to answer. In the course of your career search, you may meet calm and skilled interviewers and others who seem as nervous as you are. Some organizations use a standard set of questions and rate candidates on a standardized scale. Other organizations don’t use any pre-assigned questions.

The good news is that, independent of the interviewer’s skills, you will be successful if you prepare carefully. Your enthusiasm and thoughtful answers will make the tired or bored interviewer more interested and help the nervous interviewer relax and listen.

Leverage these tips for your preparation:

- **Prepare for questions that you are afraid of being asked:**

Organizations want to know about gaps and/or unrelated experience in your resume. Therefore, it’s important to think ahead about your responses in order to respond matter-of-factly, instead of defensively.

- **Frame your responses positively, even if asked negatively:**

An example is “What did you like least about your previous work at...?” A strong answer requires you to be brief, illustrate how you have learned to compensate for this weakness, avoid criticism of others, and end on an upbeat note.

- **Be ready to answer “tell me about yourself”:**

This is an extension of the “Elevator pitch” concept we discussed earlier, and it is frequently used by interviewers to get an interview started. This is your two minute opportunity to appropriately frame yourself to the interviewer and to make sure you highlight your top three selling points as to why you are a strong fit for this position.

- **Think long term:**

Even if you’re being interviewed for a summer position, remember that the organization may be thinking about hiring you long term.

- **Take the time to practice verbally and prepare answers to sample questions:**

This will prepare you for the range of questions from potential employers. Leverage your peers as sounding boards, join speaking groups such as Toastmasters, and do video-taped mock interviews with OCS. Take a look at the list of sample interview questions in this guide to get started. Even if you are good at thinking on your feet, the pressure of a job interview can make it easy to ramble if you are caught by surprise. Practice your answers aloud and time yourself so as not to waste the interviewer’s time.

Prepare questions

Remember that your interview is a two-way conversation. This interview is also your opportunity to interview the interviewer. Interviewers expect to answer your questions and ultimately will be disappointed and view it as a lack of interest in the organization if you don't have any. By asking well thought out questions, you will show your interest in the opportunity. Think about structuring questions about the position, organization, hiring process, timelines, and substance of the work.

Below are some suggestions to help you think about what you want to ask. Remember to wait to ask questions about salary, benefits, and start date until after you receive an offer.

- **What do you see as the strengths of the organization? What do you see as the greatest challenges of the organization?**
- **How would you describe the organization's corporate culture and values?**
- **How is the department in which I would work organized?**
- **Does management encourage promotion from within the organization?**
- **What would be my goals for the first six months I am here?**
- **Why do you enjoy working here?**
- **If you could change one thing about your organization over the next year without additional resources, what would it be?**

In addition, remember to think about some questions regarding the substance of the work. These questions will clearly be based on the specific position, career field, and your expertise in this area. These questions demonstrate your more in-depth knowledge of the actual job content.

Preparing for a phone interview

Phone interviews normally fall into one of two categories, initial screening interviews and in-depth interviews.

Generally, a member of the human resources (HR) department conducts the initial screening interview to ascertain some basic information about your experience, interests, and salary requirements to confirm that there is a good match. This is the *first cut* interview in which recruiters decide which candidates will continue in the interview process. This is generally a 15 to 30 minute interview.

In most situations, the manager conducts the in-depth interview. However, due to geographic or budget constraints, more and more employers are choosing to conduct in-depth phone interviews to save time and money. This is absolutely a real interview which may last anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes. Prepare for this interview in the same way that you would prepare for an in-person interview as outlined earlier in this guide.

Advantages

There are advantages to phone interviews:

- You can have your resume, prepared notes, and a list of questions for the interviewer freely in front of you.
- You can have the company's website up on your computer during the conversation.

Disadvantages

- You don't have any non-verbal communication clues from your interviewer such as facial expressions, eye behavior, gestures, and posture.

- Body language expresses emotions and feelings such as enthusiasm and understanding. These play a large role in developing rapport and persuading the interviewer of your genuine interest in and fit for the position.

To overcome these disadvantages, here are specific tips on how to conduct a phone interview. Remember also to follow the general interview guidelines discussed earlier.

- Dress up. The more professional you feel, the more confidence you will project.
- Stand while talking as it helps project your voice.
- Smile and be enthusiastic, as this will be apparent through the phone.
- Call from a private, comfortable location, free from intrusions.
- Have a glass of water handy to clear your throat and don't eat while on the phone.
- Support your statements with detailed examples of accomplishments when possible as it's easy for someone to get distracted on a phone call. Paint a vivid picture to keep the interviewer interested.
- Keep a pen, pad, resume, position description, and calendar on hand so you are ready to set up next steps if applicable.
- Write down each question and remain focused on completely answering what was asked.
- Make note card reminders to yourself such as: *answer the questions asked, don't ramble, smile, and be enthusiastic.*
- Listen carefully to what is being asked and ask for clarification if needed.
- Speak slowly and enunciate your words, and take time to prepare your answer if necessary.
- Say you would like to meet in-person, if appropriate.
- Do not hang up until the interviewer has hung up.

Conducting the interview

While many people give vague and general answers, behavioral questions require specific responses. During the interview, leverage the STAR model to structure your behavioral-based response. This model requires practice and preparation prior to the actual interview.

1 Situation: What was the situation?

- Give enough information to convey the accomplishment, without too much extraneous information.
- Choose something recent, as you will need to provide a detailed description of the event.

2 I ask: What were **Tasks** involved?

- Describe any constraints or hindrances on your actions.
- Practice framing the situation objectively so that you do not portray your employer, supervisor, co-workers, or classmates in a negative light.

3 Action: What action did you take to solve the problem?

- Take the interviewer through the steps you took to handle the situation or resolve the problem.
- Keep your answer clear and concise.
- Be careful of “we” versus “I”. If you were working in a team, figure out what your discrete role was.

4 Result: What was the outcome of your action?

- Explain the results that can be attributed to your actions.
- Summarize the example with a positive evaluation of your skill and how you have applied this skill since this experience. This can especially help if the result was not exactly what you were hoping for.

In addition to preparing to answer the interview questions appropriately, we also suggest that you focus on some critical tactical issues when interviewing with a potential employer.

A punctual, well-dressed, and well-groomed candidate is off to a good start. Always plan to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early and allow ample time for travel. Also, turn off your cell phone before entering the building and do not turn it back on until you have left the interview. It's important to make a positive impression on everyone you interact with during your visit to the prospective employer.

Here are our suggestions:

- Allow ample travel time.
- Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early for your interview and read the organizations material while waiting.
- Dress appropriately.
 - Since dress codes vary, be conservative.
 - A clean, pressed business suit for men and women is usually most appropriate.
- Pay attention to grooming.
 - Hair should be neatly cut, and beards trimmed.
 - Jewelry and scents (perfume, cologne, and aftershave) should be kept to a minimum.
- Make eye contact and shake hands firmly.
- Be aware of your body language/control nervous gestures.
- Remember names.
- Show interest in the interviewer(s).

- Bring additional copies of your resume as well as letters of recommendation if appropriate.
- Bring business cards to present to your interviewers and ask each of them for a card as well.

We recommend that you do not:

- Refer to problems finding the office.
- Speak negatively about travel arrangements.
- Ask if the weather is always this bad.
- Say you didn't get much sleep.
- Explain why you might do poorly in the interview.
- Volunteer why you lost your last job.
- Make reference to religion, race, gender, age or national origin.
- Try to *butter up* the interviewer by complimenting his/her appearance.
- Make negative reference to anyone.
- Use qualifiers such as "while I don't have..."
- Request refreshments unless offered.
- Inquire about lunch.
- Volunteer information if there is a pause in the interview.
- Ask about salary or benefits.
- Relax – the interview isn't over until you have left the building.

As the interview winds down, it's critical that you close the interview to make sure you've reiterated your key points.

Before you leave, make sure that you:

- Say "I really enjoyed speaking with you..."
- Reiterate your three key points during the interview, and if you haven't yet, this is the time!
- Discuss the follow-up time frame – what will happen next and when will they be in touch.
- Shake hands.
- Thank the interviewer for his and/or her time.

Frequently Asked Interview Questions

Behavioral questions

- Tell me about your biggest accomplishment.
- Give me an example of a time you demonstrated leadership.
- Give me an example of a time when you worked on a team.
- Tell me about a time when there was conflict of personalities, and how you handled it.
- Describe a situation in which you were presented with a task or instructions with which you disagreed.
- Give an example of a creative idea/solution you developed.
- Tell me about a time you had to manage an unmotivated employee. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a situation when you were given an unreasonable deadline. How did you handle the situation?

General questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your greatest passion?
- What three or four adjectives would a supervisor use to describe you? Why? Give examples to display those qualities.
- What three or four adjectives would a colleague use to describe you? Why? Give examples to display those qualities.
- How do you approach problem-solving? Are you a forest or a tree person?
- What is the procedure you go through to make a decision?
- How do you organize your time?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are your expectations of this role/job?
- Briefly summarize your thesis.
- What are the most important things for you in a job? What appeals to you least about this position?
- What achievement that is not on your resume are you most proud of?
- Why did you choose Fletcher for graduate school?
- Why should I hire you instead of an MBA candidate?
- Explain your decision to pursue a career in this sector after “x” years of unrelated work.
- What courses at Fletcher did you enjoy the most/least? Why?
- Why are you interested in this industry?
- Why are you interested in this company/organization?
- What did you do to prepare for this interview?
- Describe your ideal position with our firm.
- Where else are you interviewing?
- What qualities do you think make someone successful in this industry/organization?
- How do you think you could contribute to the objectives of our organization/company?
- What experience do you have in managing others?
- What qualities make a good/poor manager?
- How do you feel about travel, overtime, and demands of the industry?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this position?
- What did you like most, and least, about your previous positions?
- Where do you see yourself in five years? 10 years?
- What questions do you have for me (the interviewer)?

Following up from the interview

Even though you've walked out the door, the interview isn't over yet. Appropriate follow-up can make or break your experience with an employer. Take the following steps to wrap up your interview:

1 De-brief with yourself

- Think about what you did well and what you could improve on.
- Use this information in your preparations for future interviews.

2 Send a thank-you letter to everyone who interviewed you

- Personalize each note.
- Reiterate why you are a good fit for the position by including a short summary of the challenges facing the organization and how your skills and experience will help them.
- Reference something that you discussed in the interview.
- Say how you will follow-up and do so – this demonstrates your true interest in the job, ability to follow up, and desire to close the interview.

3 Keep alumni or other references who have championed you updated:

- Let them know what happened with your interview and how much you appreciate their help to ensure that you and future Fletcher students will get help from these alumni.

4 Acknowledge and respond to offers in a timely way:

- When you receive a job offer, it's critical to acknowledge the offer, even if you are not ready yet to accept or reject it. This demonstrates your general business professionalism.
- Be sensitive if you decline a job offer, as you don't want to burn any bridges. Make sure the reason you give is framed in a way that considers the recruiters' egos and reflects your professionalism. An inappropriate answer would be "I accepted a better offer for more money." A more appropriate answer would be "This was a very difficult decision, but I have decided to accept another offer."

5 Consider the consequences before accepting an offer and later rejecting it:

- Realize that Fletcher considers this a serious offense as it can damage your professional reputation as well as that of future Fletcher students.
- If you have doubts or concerns about a decision you've made, please speak with an OCS staff member.

Conclusion

In this handout, we reviewed the ways in which you can prepare for interviews. Practice is a critical piece of this preparation, so the more you do ahead of time, the better you will ultimately do in the interview.

Four critical pieces of this handout that we want you to retain are:

1 Preparation matters

The more you do ahead of time, the better you will sound to your interviewer. You can benefit from informational interviews by exploring many careers and organizations without commitment.

2 Interviewing is a learned skill

Anyone can learn to interview well. It just takes time and practice to do so. This means you have to spend the time outlined in this guide to actually practice and prepare. An interviewer can tell immediately the type of preparation that the candidate has done, and this impacts the organization's hiring decision possibly before you've even had your interview.

3 The interview starts the minute you walk through the organization's front door

Anyone in the organization who has interaction with you once you walk through the organization's front door (and even before) may influence the hiring decision. It's important to act professional and respectful to everyone you encounter.

4 Follow-up counts

Sending thank you letters and following up on your application are critical pieces to the interviewing process. It doesn't end when you walk out the door! This is actually how you set yourself apart from the crowd. By writing effective thank you letters and following up when you say you are going to do so, you build trust with your potential employer. As a result, they will want to continue to help you even if you don't end up getting hired for this specific position.

Additional resources

The OCS resource center has a number of books that will help you prepare for interviewing. As we've said many times throughout this guide, practice is essential.

Books

Many of these reading resources are available in the OCS Resource Center.

Case interviews:

"Business School Case Guides" (3-ring Binder)

- "The Case Interview Guide" by Stern School of Business Management Consulting Association
- "1997 Case Library" by The Tuck Consulting Group

Case In Point

by Marc P. Cosentino

How To Interview Like A Top MBA

by Dr. Shel Leanne

Vault Case Interview Practice Guide

by Srikant Balan, et al.

Vault Guide to the Case Interview

by Mark Asher and Eric Chung

Finance Interviews:

Vault Finance Interviews Practice Guide

by David Montoya

Vault Guide to Advanced Finance and Quantitative Interviews

by Jennifer Voitle

Vault Guide to Finance Interviews

by D. Bhatawedekh

Websites

There are many websites that will further assist you in your interviewing preparation.

Check out the following:

- <http://www.vault.com/>
- <http://interview.monster.com>
- <http://www.wetfeet.com/> (private sector company interviews)
- <http://www.casequestions.com/>
- <http://www.joinbain.com/apply-to-bain/interview-preparation/default.asp>
- http://www.mckinsey.com/Careers/how_do_i_apply/how_to_do_well_in_the_interview/case_interview.aspx
- <http://www.toastmasters.org/>
- <http://www.jobinterviewquestions.org/>