



# Interview Prep Sheet

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There are so many different types of interviews! There is the “standard” type of talking across the desk, the lunch interview, the panel interview, or one that is conducted over the phone/video. Don’t take this time with human resources or the hiring manager for granted. Prepare!

Here are some best practices to get your brain working and prepare you for your next interview. Anything position specific will be discussed with me over the phone prior to your interview. This is a more generalized overview of interviewing in general.

## Experience Questions

These will be based on your tactical experience and how it relates to the position. Accomplishments, project work and relatable industry knowledge will be discussed.

- Be prepared with at least two key accomplishments from your most current position
- Make sure that your examples are both **relevant** (to the position, what type of research, etc.) as well as **recent** (talking strictly about your work in past organizations alerts the hiring team you are out of practice). If you have a good example from a previous position, make sure to caveat it with another example from your latest role.
- Avoid using “we” when speaking about project examples, as the team is strictly concerned about what you have accomplished specifically. Identify what you do as an individual, and what the team does as separate entities.
- “Walk me through your resume” or “Tell me about yourself” are questions that can be responded to in the same way. A quick, concise walk through is important. No one cares what you were doing while getting your MBA or that project you worked on ten years ago.
  - o What your degree is in
  - o What types of positions you have held
  - o Any major transitions
  - o What are you doing now/What the company brought you on to accomplish
  - o Choices you made for career and knowledge growth
- Be able to speak about where you sit in the organizational structure, if you have direct reports etc.

## Why Questions

These are intellectual questions. Your answers will display how introspective you are, and how interested you are. Your answers should reflect your serious interest in this position and this company.

- Know WHY for everything
  - o Why are you interested in leaving your current company?

- Why are you interested in this company and position?
- Why do you think this could be a match to your skillset?
- Why are you interested in this location (if relocating)?
- Make sure to never talk negatively about your current company and have prepared responses to these questions. Preparation will make you more self-assured and nimble in responding to variations on these same questions. You may not get these specifically but this self-analysis will pay off.

## Situational Questions

Most situational questions follow a pattern of response. The interviewer wants to know the situation, how you handled it, what you learned, what you gained from the experience, and how you implemented what you learned. Some organizations follow the STAR pattern (Situation-Task-Action-Result). Make sure to answer the behavioral questions as concisely as possible. These are probably the most difficult. Below are some examples (the first one being the most common).

- Tell me about a time when you had to deliver unfavorable information.
- Describe a difficult work situation that you encountered where you didn't know what to do.
- Describe something new that you have learned in the last 6 months that was not required or assigned to you
- Tell me about the best presentation you've ever made.
- Tell me about a situation where you had difficulty working with someone.
- Tell me about a project at work that required the most creativity from you.
- Describe a situation at work in which you had a tough time selling others your idea.

## Salary Chat

Always be prepared to talk about salary. HR will have a conversation with you about this either in the beginning or towards the end. Every process is different. Below are things to consider and be prepared for.

- What is your current base?
  - Most states have passed a law stating this is no longer a valid question for candidates. It is now an atypical question in the interview process.
- Do you have Long Term Incentives such as stock, profit sharing or 401k match?
- Do you have a bonus? When is it paid out?
- How often do you hit your bonus potential?
- What are your compensation expectations?
  - Don't let this stress you out! If you have no set expectations and are just looking for a new position with better opportunity then give a range of expectations and let them know you are open and negotiable.
  - **Never refuse to tell them your expectations for salary. It makes everyone uncomfortable and may eliminate you from consideration. Don't be cagey!**
  - You do not have to give a single hard number for your expectations but can use a percentage increase in salary if that makes you more comfortable. A typical increase when transitioning to a new position is 10%.

## Relocation

If there is a chance of relocating, be prepared to chat about it. Once again, all processes are different so just be prepared for the conversation when it comes up. Below are some ideas to start thinking about, if you will be relocating for a role.

- Will you have to sell your home or break your lease?
- Is everyone on board with the move?
- How much assistance will you need, if any?
  - o Closing costs, temp housing, moving, etc.
- Have you been to the new area before? Do you have friends or family there?

If the position requires relocation, you will be asked these questions repeatedly through the process, just to insure you aren't wasting anyone's time. Make sure you are moving for the opportunity, not just the location and understand how moving will affect those around you. This will get you really invested in the idea.

## Your Questions

Always have too many questions prepared. Not asking questions or not asking enough may come off as a lack of interest. At the end of the day, you don't have to ask all you have on your list. Have them anyway.

- RESEARCH the company. Ask business relevant questions based on articles on the company's website or articles in the press.
- No questions that you could have looked up the answers to on your own. (ie. Are you public or private? What type of solutions do you offer clients?)
- Ask about timeline for the position and what next steps will be (it should prompt feedback).
- Ask about how they view your background and how it aligns with the position (should prompt feedback for you).
- REMEMBER. An interview is a time to make a positive impression. It is not a time for you to interview them on whether or not you want the job. There will be time for that later.
- DO NOT ask about salary, benefits, vacation, etc. unless you are prompted to do so.
- Feel free to check in with me on the questions you have prepared.

## Strengths and Weaknesses

This classic will never go away.

- They can come in new forms: "if I were to ask your current employer things you need to improve on, what would they tell me?"
- Stay away from positive things as a weakness like "I'm just too organized." or "I'm just too dedicated to my work." These aren't weaknesses and we all know it!
- Weaknesses are true traits or skills in your current or past employment that you identified and then took steps to change.
- List the weakness, how you identified it, and what steps you took to overcome it. Talk about how it's no longer a weakness.
  - o Ie. As my responsibilities increased, I was becoming overwhelmed easily. I learned to delegate more tasks and work on organizing my calendar which has allowed me to become more profitable in my company.
- Strengths are easy, brag about yourself a bit.
  - o Did your employer compliment you?
  - o Did you win an award for something?

- Did you get recognized for an accomplishment at work?

## Transitions

You might be asked about certain transitions in your resume. Don't try to sweep them under the rug. Be prepared!

- Lay-offs and restructurings are awful, but they happen every day and all too often in this industry. Being laid off is not a red flag, so don't talk about all the details behind it. Simple answers around this are important.
  - Why did the company do a restructuring?
    - Merger?
    - Lack of revenue?
    - Loss of client?
- Fired or let go based on a mutual understanding? Touchy subject but don't let this topic take over your interview.
  - Why were you let go?
    - Position was different from what was interviewed for.
    - The scope of the work had changed and you weren't as successful in the new position. Be prepared to discuss what you couldn't do in a positive way.
    - The culture wasn't a fit (add in positives about your cultural standpoint).
      - Ie. I work very collaboratively and the position had me as a one man team with minimal support.
      - Ie. Your boss was a bit tough to communicate with and you prefer a consistent line of open communication.
  - Examples can go on for days. Speak with me directly about talking through the best way to present your red flag transition.

## Extras

- Practice your answers OUT LOUD. It develops a different part of your brain and makes it easier and quicker to access this information than sifting through your memory for it when the time comes. It will also make you feel more comfortable saying things you probably never have verbally articulated before.
- Rapport is very important. Be positive and smile. Say please and thank you. Make sure to do your research on the people you will be meeting with in case you have anything in common.(university or prior company, conference affiliations, etc.)
- ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS. Again, an interview is a time to make a positive impression. It is not a time for you to interview them on whether or not you want the job. There will be time for that later.
  - Don't run around answers. If you don't like the response you have to give, still be straight forward and honest. Haven't worked in that specific program before? That's okay. They might be trying to find out parameters of your skill set and if you say you can do everything that is the wrong answer. You have no idea why they are asking the questions, so just answer them truthfully and concisely.
- Pauses are OK. They show you think before speaking. Take your time when answering questions and give thoughtful responses vs. using filler language to avoid silence.

- Dress to impress.
- Refrain from tobacco use or perfumes/colognes.
- Print out multiple copies of your CV.
- **ALWAYS FOLLOW UP WITH A THANK YOU NOTE!**

**You're going to nail it! Our team is here to help you realize that. Give me a call after your interview to debrief.**

## **Resources**

Here are links to some helpful tips and tricks for your interview process from the Smith Hanley blog:

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2017/03/21/interview-thank-you-note-mistakes/>

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2016/11/28/4-panel-interview-no-nos/>

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2016/12/12/resume-summary-statement-no-nos/>

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2016/10/17/10-interview-day-no-nos/>

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2016/06/20/8-interview-thank-note-no-nos/>

<http://www.smithhanley.com/2016/03/21/10-skype-interview-dos/>