



## Career Milestone Guide: Preparing for an Interview

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Congratulations! You just got the call from an employer asking you to come in for an interview. Whether it's your first or 50<sup>th</sup>, preparing for an interview can be a daunting process. Following these four steps will help you be well on track for acing the interview!

### **Step 1: Research the Company/Organization, Industry, and Position**

The more you know about the company or organization you are interviewing with, the better you will be able to market your skills and experience that are relevant. Doing your homework will also help set yourself apart from other interviewees demonstrate your interest in the role.

Use the [Career Milestone Guide: Researching Organizations](#) for a list of resources to use and information to gather

### **Step 2: Know how you Fit: Why you? Why them?**

The best candidates not only know their own strengths and accomplishments, but they can articulate how their strengths fit both the position they are interviewing for and the larger organization. An interviewer wants to hear how you, as a potential employee, will drive results at their organization.

Directions: Review the job posting for the position. Highlight requirements or skills you already have or those that are similar to things you have done in a past position. It might be helpful to print out both the job posting and your resume and actually draw lines/highlight where there is overlap.

What are three requirements/skills in the job posting that are similar to something you have done in the past?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have a better understanding of how you are qualified for the position, you need to think about **why you want to work for this organization**. Answering this question can be tough, but if you have thought about this before your interview you will be able to answer the ever-present interview question "Why do you want to work here?" with confidence.

Review the responses to the research questions in **Step 1**. What about this organization stands out from their competitors? How does their mission statement align with your own values or goals? What aspects of the position or organization most excite you? Reflect on this and then answer:

I want to work for \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

### **Step 3: Develop your STAR responses**

Now that you have a good understanding of your fit within the organization and the position, it is time to build some responses to potential interview questions using the STAR method. The STAR method allows you to develop your responses to interview questions so that you always hit essential points when you are asked.

So what are the components of a STAR response?

**S**ituation: Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When?

**T**ask: Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why?

**A**ction: Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use?

**R**esults: Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings etc. Quantify.

How does this technique work? Here's an example:

**Question:** What is your best quality?

**Response:** I would have to say that I am very detail oriented. For example, when I was serving as VP of Marketing for my sorority, **(S)** I was responsible for planning and executing our major philanthropic event benefiting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital **(T)**. There were many moving parts crucial to the event's success. I used my detail oriented mindset and developed a comprehensive communication strategy that included both social media and direct outreach to students and potential donors **(A)**. By executing this strategy, attendance at the event increased by 50% from the previous year and the sorority raised over \$3,000 for St. Jude **(R)**.

Now it's your turn. In the space below, develop a STAR response to the following question: As you think about your prior internships and work experiences, what accomplishment are you most proud of?

Situation: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Task: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Action: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Result: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Step 4: Review Common Interview Questions**

There are various types of questions commonly asked during interviews. Reviewing the job description will help you to prepare for questions you might be asked. Check out a list of [50 standard interview questions](#) and review types of questions you may encounter:

**Opening Questions:** An interviewer wants to find out about you as a person and to evaluate how you are going to fit into the culture of that specific organization. Examples: How are you? or Tell me about yourself.

**Credential Questions:** The interviewer is trying to get a better idea of your background. Examples: What is your GPA? or Which classes have you excelled in? or How did you do in your major classes?

**Behavioral Questions:** These questions are the most commonly asked by college recruiters because your past behavior is a good indicator of how you will behave in the future. Examples include:

- Describe a stressful situation at work and how you handled it.
- Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
- What do you do if you disagree with a co-worker?

Source: <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/behavioralinterviews/a/behavioral-interview-questions.html>

**Experience Questions:** These are questions that relate to your experience that help an interviewer to subjectively evaluate your background. Examples: Have you done this type of work before? or What did you learn in that class? or What were your responsibilities when you worked for that company?

**Company Research Questions:** Sometimes interviewers do ask questions to determine if you did your homework. Examples: Why do you want to work here? or What about our organization most interests you? or What kind of contribution do you think you could make to our pre-existing sales team?

**Crazy Questions:** Depending on how non-traditional the employer is or how important creativity and problem-solving are to the position, you might find the employer asking you questions that seem absolutely off-the-wall. The real purpose of these questions is to see if you can offer an original thought and get past all of the pre-programmed, “correct” interview answers, but you can still use interview strategy to give your best answer. Examples: What kind of animal would you like to be? or How many jellybeans do you think could fit in my office? or Who has most influenced you in your life?

**Closing Questions:** This is your opportunity to ask questions. Prepare a few questions that focus on things

you really want to know, not insignificant details. See “[10 questions you should ask in an interview](#)” for some examples. Always ask, “What are the next steps” or “What is your timeline for making a decision” so that you can plan appropriately.

**Improper Questions:** Before you begin interviewing, it is important to know that there are some questions that, by law, interviewers cannot ask. The DirectEmployers.org article “[Improper Interview Questions and How to Handle Them](#)” can help you determine which questions are appropriate and how to respond to those that are not.

### **Step 5: Remember the Presence Factor**

Impressions are important! While you can't control or plan for every aspect of the interview, there are many things you can do to ensure the day goes smoothly

- Arrive 10 minutes early. Traffic or public transportation can be unpredictable. You may want to plan to arrive even earlier (30 to 60 minutes) and find a nearby coffee shop to wait in.
- Offer a confident handshake and make eye contact
- Dress professionally. We recommend a suit. Pants and a dress shirt/ sweater may also be appropriate. However, it is always better to be more formal rather than underdressed.
- Develop and practice your Professional Introduction (See [Career Milestone Guide: Developing Your Professional Introduction](#))
- Practice introduction while you are waiting
- Ask questions during your interview, demonstrating your interest in the position, the organization/company, and the industry
- Ask your interviewers for contact information and send a “Thank you” note within 24 hours of your interview. Your note can be an email (especially if the company will be making a decision quickly) or a hand written note. Be brief but mention specifics from your conversation, like information you learned that solidified your interest in the role.