

# Center for Engineering Career Development U.Va. School of Engineering and Applied Science

## Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

One of the keys to success in interviewing is practice, so we encourage you to take the time to work out answers to these questions using one of the suggested methods, such as the STAR APPROACH(see attached). Be sure not to memorize answers; the key to interviewing success is simply being prepared for the questions and having a mental outline to follow in responding to each question.

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).

## Desired Employee Behaviors

**Here's a list of typical behaviors that employers might be trying to get at from job-seekers in a behavior-based interview. Desired Behaviors:**

Adaptability	Communication-Oral	Communication-Written	Control	Analysis
Attention to Detail	Decisiveness	Delegation	Development of Subordinates	
Energy	Entrepreneuria	Equipment Operation	Insight	Fact Finding-
Oral/Financial Analytical	Flexibility	Impact	Independence	
Initiative	Innovation	Integrity	Judgment	
Leadership/Influence	Listening	Motivation	Negotiation	
Organizational	Participative	Sensitivity	Management	
Planning	Organizing	Practical Learning	Presentation Skills	
Process Operation	Rapport Building Q	Resilience	Risk Taking	
Safety Awareness	Sales Ability/Persuasiveness		Sensitivity	

# Behavioral Interviewing Strategies for Job-Seekers

The premise behind behavioral interviewing is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations. Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55 percent predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10 percent predictive.

Behavioral-based interviewing is touted as providing a more objective set of facts to make employment decisions than other interviewing methods. Traditional interview questions ask you general questions such as "Tell me about yourself." The process of behavioral interviewing is much more probing and works very differently.

In a traditional job-interview, you can usually get away with telling the interviewer what he or she wants to hear, even if you are fudging a bit on the truth. Even if you are asked situational questions that start out "How would you handle XYZ situation?" you have minimal accountability. How does the interviewer know, after all, if you would really react in a given situation the way you say you would? In a behavioral interview, however, it's much more difficult to give responses that are untrue to your character. When you start to tell a behavioral story, the behavioral interviewer typically will pick it apart to try to get at the specific behavior(s). The interviewer will probe further for more depth or detail such as "What were you thinking at that point?" or "Tell me more about your meeting with that person," or "Lead me through your decision process." If you've told a story that's anything but totally honest, your response will not hold up through the barrage of probing questions.

Employers use the behavioral interview technique to evaluate a candidate's experiences and behaviors so they can determine the applicant's potential for success. The interviewer identifies job-related experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities that the company has decided are desirable in a particular position.

The employer then structures very pointed questions to elicit detailed responses aimed at determining if the candidate possesses the desired characteristics. Questions (often not even framed as a question) typically start out: "Tell about a time..." or "Describe a situation..." Many employers use a rating system to evaluate selected criteria during the interview.

As a candidate, you should be equipped to answer the questions thoroughly. Obviously, you can prepare better for this type of interview if you know which skills that the employer has predetermined to be necessary for the job you seek. Researching the company and talking to people who work there will enable you to zero in on the kinds of behaviors the company wants.

In the interview, your response needs to be specific and detailed. Candidates who tell the interviewer about particular situations that relate to each question will be far more effective and successful than those who respond in general terms.

Ideally, you should briefly describe the situation, what specific action you took to have an effect on the situation, and the positive result or outcome. Frame it in a three-step process, usually called a S-A-R, P-A-R, or S-T-A-R statement: situation (or task, problem), 2. action, 3. result/outcome.

## Behavioral Interviewing Story

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique (often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

*Sample SAR story:*

**Situation (S):**

Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, the Stetson Reporter, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

**Action (A):**

I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of Reporter circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

**Result (R):**

We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent [quantities are always good] over the same period last year.

It's also helpful to think of your responses as stories. Become a great storyteller in your interviews, but be careful not to ramble.

## STAR Interviewing Response Technique for Success in Behavioral Job Interviews

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique, as outlined below. (This technique is often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

<b>S</b> <b>T</b> <b>Task</b>	Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<b>A</b> <b>Action you took</b>	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
<b>R</b> <b>Results you achieved</b>	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

It's difficult to prepare for a behavior-based interview because of the huge number and variety of possible behavioral questions you might be asked. The best way to prepare is to arm yourself with a small arsenal of example stories that can be adapted to many behavioral questions.

Knowing what kinds of questions might be asked will help you prepare an effective selection of examples.

Use examples from internships, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies and work experience -- anything really -- as examples of your past behavior. In addition, you may use examples of special accomplishments, whether personal or professional, such as scoring the winning touchdown, being elected president of your Greek organization, winning a prize for your artwork, surfing a big wave, or raising money for charity. Wherever possible, quantify your results. Numbers always impress employers.

Remember that many behavioral questions try to get at how you responded to *negative* situations; you'll need to have examples of negative experiences ready, but try to choose negative experiences that you made the best of or -- better yet, those that had positive outcomes.

### Here's a good way to prepare for behavior-based interviews:

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experience where you demonstrated top behaviors and skills that employers typically seek. Think in terms of examples that will exploit your top selling points.
- Half your examples should be totally positive, such as accomplishments or meeting goals.

- The other half should be situations that started out negatively but either ended positively or you made the best of the outcome.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.
- Use fairly recent examples. If you're a college student, examples from high school may be too long ago. Accenture, in fact, specifies that candidates give examples of behaviors demonstrated within the last year.
- Try to describe examples in story form and/or PAR/SAR/STAR.

To cram for a behavioral interview right before you're interviewed, review your resume. Seeing your achievements in print will jog your memory.

In the interview, listen carefully to each question, and pull an example out of your bag of tricks that provides an appropriate description of how you demonstrated the desired behavior. With practice, you can learn to tailor a relatively small set of examples to respond to a number of different behavioral questions.

Once you've snagged the job, keep a record of achievements and accomplishments so you'll be ready with more great examples the next time you go on a:

*by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.*

Hansen, Katharine, Ph.D., [The Quintessential Guide to Behavioral Interviewing](#), 2008. Quintessential Careers Press.

Byham, William C., Ph.D., with Debra Pickett, [Landing the Job You Want: How to Have the Best Job Interview of Your Life](#), 1999: Three Rivers Press.

*by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D.*

## **Acing a Phone Interview 6/1/2009**

<http://tiny.cc/OhERp>

Some job recruiters are starting to screen job applicants over the phone. Clarity Media Group CEO Bill McGowan explains how to avoid a few common mistakes.

## **Job Interview Questions for College Seniors/Recent Grad**

### **Typical job interview questions asked of college seniors and recent college graduates.**

Here is a list of sample interview questions college seniors and recent grads can expect, especially at first, more traditional interviews. Prepare answers to these questions, but don't memorize your answers so that you come off sounding like a robot; in other words, be prepared for these questions and have an outline or script ready, but don't worry about remembering your answers word-for-word.

### **Job Interview Questions for New Grads**

- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- Why did you choose your college -- and are you happy with the choice?
- What are your long-term career objectives -- and how do you plan to achieve them?
- What's more important to you -- the work itself or how much you're paid for doing it.
- What are the most important rewards you expect to gain from your career?

- What do you expect to be earning in five years?
- What do you expect to be earning after you graduate?
- Why did you choose this career?
- What are your majors and minors?
- Why did you choose the courses you took?
- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- How do you think your favorite professor would describe you? Your least favorite professor?
- What motivates you to go the extra mile on a project or job?
- What was your most memorable classroom experience?
- How has your college experience prepared you for your career?
- Why should I hire you?
- How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
- How do you define success?
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this company?
- How are you going to make a contribution to our company?
- What are two or three accomplishments that have given you the most satisfaction -- and why?
- What was your favorite class -- and why?
- What was your least favorite class -- and why?

## **Job Interview Questions for College Seniors/Recent Grad, continued**

- What changes would you make in your college?
- Do you have plans to continue your education?
- What skills have you acquired from your internships and part-time jobs?
- Describe your favorite professor or favorite supervisor.
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of the type of employee you'll make?
- What's your GPA? Are you happy with it?
- What have you learned from your experiences outside the classroom?
- Do you feel you work well under pressure?
- Why are you interviewing for this position?
- What can you tell us about our company?
- What interests you about our products?
- What do you know about our competitors?
- What criteria are you using to choose companies to interview with?
- What are your expectations regarding promotions and salary increases?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Are you willing to travel for the job?
- How much training do you think you need before you can make a contribution to the company?
- Describe one of the biggest mistakes you made in college.
- What did you learn from your mistakes?
- What other jobs/companies are you considering?
- If you were hiring for this position, what qualities would you look for in a new college grad?
- How well do you work with people? Do you prefer working alone or in teams?
- Have you ever been in a group project where there were difficulties? How were these issues resolved?
- How would you describe your leadership skills?
- How well do you adapt to new situations?
- Which is more important: creativity or efficiency? Why?
- What's the most recent book you've read that's not been a class assignment?
- What kinds of things did you do outside of classes and work while in college?
- What kinds of things or skills did you learn from these activities?

- Do you think college changed you as a person? If so, how?
- Have you ever tutored an underclassman?
- What have you accomplished that shows your initiative and willingness to work?
- If you were to start college over again knowing what you know now, what would you do differently?

[\*The Quintessential Guide to Job Interview Preparation\*](#), by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D., and Randall Hansen, Ph.D

## Questions You Can Ask at the Job Interview

**Job-seekers need to ask questions in job interviews; here's a list of some questions you can ask your prospective employer.**

*Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You **must** ask a least one question; to do otherwise often signals the interviewer that you don't really have any interest in the job or the company. On the other hand, do not ask questions where the answer is obvious or readily available -- or when the topic has already been thoroughly discussed in the interview. And never ask about salary and benefit issues until those subjects are raised by the employer.*

### Questions you might ask at a job interview:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company's management style?
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?
- What are the company's values?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

[\*The Quintessential Guide to Job Interview Preparation\*](#), by Katharine Hansen, Ph.D., and Randall Hansen, Ph.D. (Quintessential Careers Press).