



Interview Best Practices

An Introduction



Today will provide a few
concrete tips on **interview best practices** as well as **frameworks** for answering **representative questions** during job interviews



Today's Agenda

1. Pre-interview

2. Interview

(esp. research and teaching)

3. Post Interview



1. Pre-Interview



Pre-Interview

For Skype interviews:

- Technology
- Staging
- Quirks
- Etiquette

For in-person first round interviews:

- Accessories
- Non-verbal

For both:

- Attire



Technology

- Use a hardwired connection if possible
- Rent a microphone (or make sure that your space has great acoustics)
- Find the right volume on your speakers (headphones are not ideal)
- Make sure you've used the equipment
- Always have a second device



Staging

- **“Find a bookcase”**
- Keep things **simple** but **not bland**
 - Don't distract the viewer
 - e.g. Table with a flower vase off to the side
 - Bookshelf: varied patterns/empty space
 - Art posters on a blank wall
- What to **avoid**
 - Busy, Blank, Bright (or reflective)
- Ask a friend for help with staging

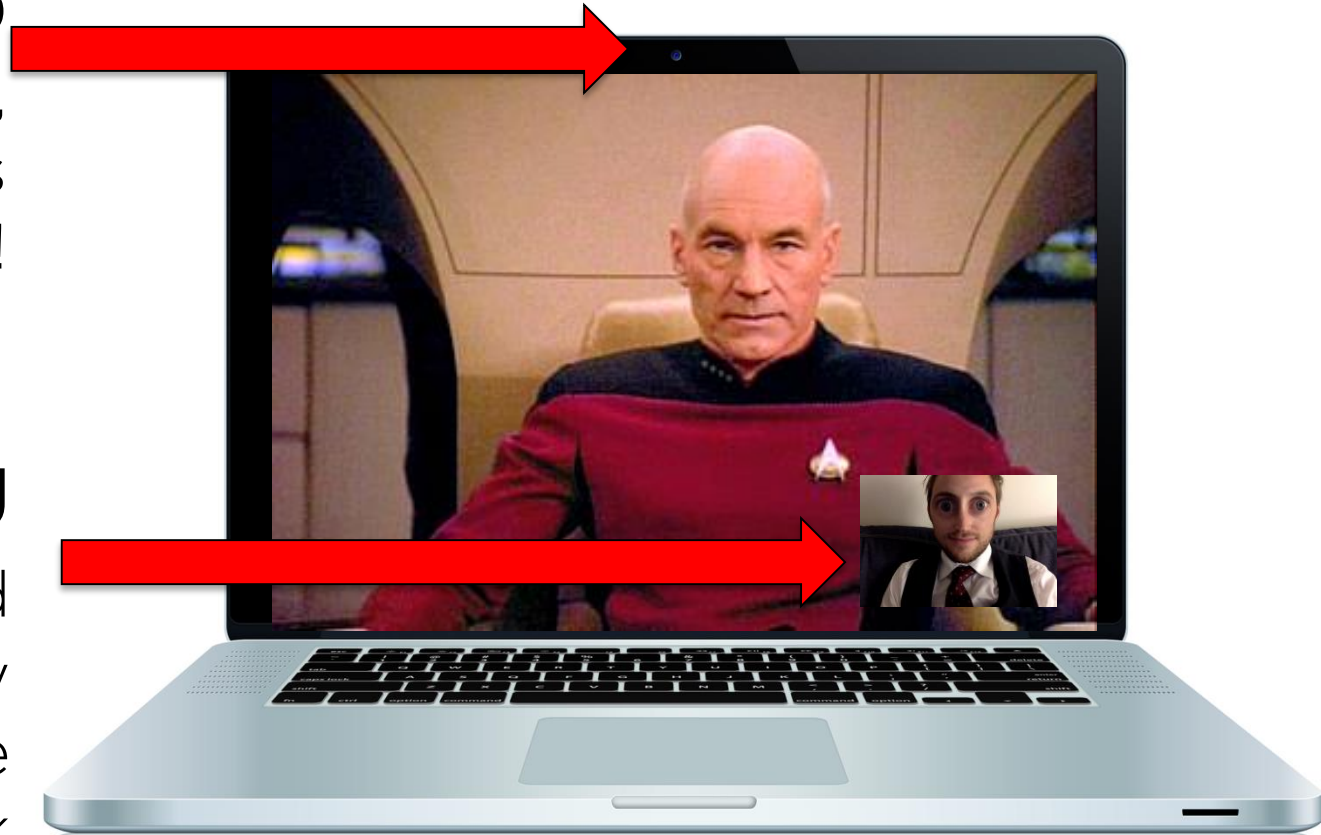


Quirks

Eyes up

No matter what,
your focal point is
the camera!

**It's tempting
but** avoid
constantly
checking to see
how you look



Etiquette



- **DO** close all programs
- **DO** use your hands
- **DO** sit with feet flat
- **DO** pause

- **DON'T** cross arms
- **DON'T** hunch over
- **DON'T** shout
- **DON'T** get too close to the camera



On-site Interviews



Prep for the Elements



Do Your HW / Don't Freak

- In the **Week(s)** before:
 - Do **research**
 - **Record** yourself
 - ...in front of a **mirror**
 - Practice with **partners**
 - Develop **questions**
 - Know:
 - Your resume
 - Your strengths
 - Your weaknesses
 - Your work style
 - Tricky questions
- **24 hours** before:
 - Arrive in town with **time to spare**
 - Check out **location**
 - **Sleep** (but caffeinate)
 - Read something unrelated—even **enjoyable**—on the morning of your conversation.
 - **Goldilocks** zone



Accessories



- **Your** pens
- Copies of resume
- Notebook
- H₂O or Coffee
- Post-it notes
- Breath mints

James T. Kirk

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EDUCATION

M.A. Starfleet Academy (San Francisco, CA): Pilot, minor field in Poetry

Thesis: "John Donne's Beguiling Lyric, also Photon Torpedoes"

Advisor: Admiral Pike

B.A. University of Iowa (Iowa City): Physics and Creative Writing

Advisor: Lorrie Moore

Work Experience

U.S.S. Enterprise

2265 - Present

Captain

- Leads large and diverse crew of ~1,000 in high pressure, team-centric environment
- Goes, boldly, where no man has gone before
- Manages multiple budget databases, tracking expenditures/revenues in nonprofit context
- Writes daily 500 word entries in official Starfleet journal



Accessories: This, Not That



Non-verbal



- **80% in 20 Seconds**
 - Smile / Energy
 - Handshake-ready
- **Eyes up**
 - Where?
 - Bridge of the nose
 - Keep them level
 - But you can look off!
- **Posture**
 - Hands at side
 - Minimal gestures
 - Feet flat
 - Back straight



Attire

EVERYONE

- **FIT, NOT \$\$\$\$**
- Dress professionally (no half-half even if it's Skype)
- Avoid bright colors
- Avoid busy prints
- Consider the “corporate” question
- Layer for flexibility



WOMEN

- Easy on the jewels
- Make sure the hair is not getting in the way



MEN

- Very clean facial hair
- Simple tie



Questions?



2. Interview



The Interview Breakdown

- Most first-round interviews last anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour. However, some are as short as 15-20 minute.
- Usually, 5-10 minutes are devoted to your own questions, and the rest is split between skills/fit/behavioral (and at times technical)



General: Ten Tips for Success

- **80%** of what hiring committees think of you is determined in the first **20** seconds
- Your answers are **too long** (and/or **too detailed, too dense**)
- Understand what **motivates** the question
- Know your **strengths** and **weaknesses**
- Answers have **beginnings, middles, ends**
- The # of possible questions is **not infinite**
- It's okay to ask for **time** and **clarification**
- **Practice** the way you **play**
- Always have **good questions** ready
- Always send **thank you notes**



Examples of Questions (I)

The Question

“Tell us about yourself/walk me through your resume”

Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you situate yourself within a specific field.

Traps

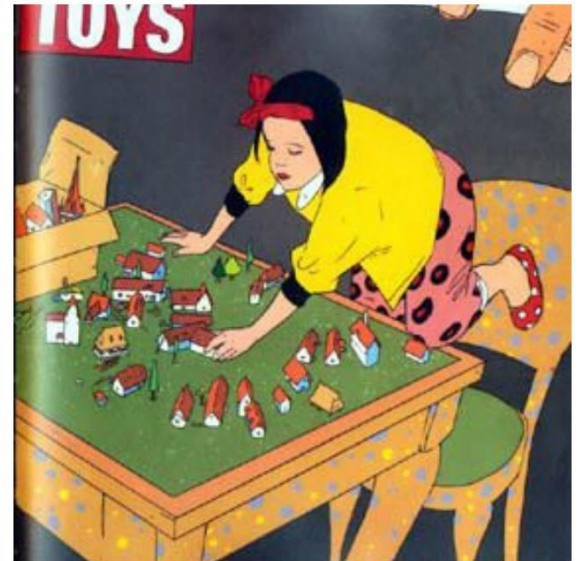
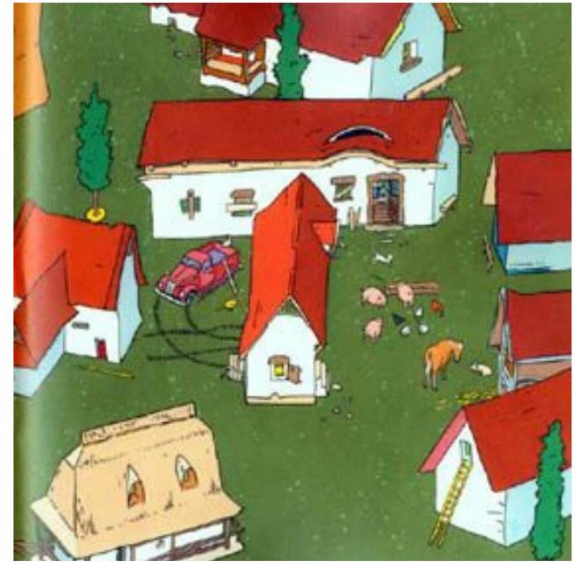
- Thinking and speaking like a student.
- Repeating your resume.
- TM's: Too much information, too much specialized information and jargon, too much monologue.

Tactics

- Brevity: Two sentences instead of three
- Use smaller “building blocks”: instead of a 3-minute response think about three, 1-minute responses.
- Focus on broad stakes and not details.



Being Modular



Istvan Banyai



Being Modular

- **Why be modular?**
 - Allows you to be interruptible
 - Helps keep you organized
 - Creates hierarchy of importance
 - Ensures central message isn't truncated



Your ultimate goal, regardless of settings, is to have a good conversation.

Monologues, by definition, are not conversations.



Examples of Questions (II)

The Question

“Why do you want this job?” [“Why should we hire you?”]

Motivation

Interviewers want to get a sense of your vision for your career path—past, present, future.

Traps

- Being generic
- Not interweaving your specific story with theirs

Tactics

- Express the specific things that excite you about this job (aside from the paycheck!)
- Link the aspects of the job to your past experience and your future career plan (as someone who has done X, and who sees their future in Y, this opportunity is especially exciting because of...)



Examples of Questions (III)

The Question

“What’s your greatest weakness?”

Motivation

How do you narrate your life experiences? Are you self-aware?
Positive? Sincere?

Traps

- Thinking that this question is about empirical truths
- Offering too much information/details
- Being too personal or too generic
- Not ending on a positive note

Tactics

- Remember that this is an exercise in self-narration. You’re expected to choose a weakness that showcases an understanding of context
- Keep story short, details minimal.
- Being too personal or too generic
- Use “softeners” (past tense; I have a tendency); indicate steps you’ve taken to improve and your happiness with the progress/growth



This isn't about "the TRUTH"



Examples of Questions (IV)

The Questions

Do you have questions for us?

Motivation

The interviewer wants to see how you see yourself fitting in, that you understand the position and the various contexts of the job

Traps

- Not knowing or not understanding the specifics of a position
- Not understanding the difference between a first round and second/third round interview

Tactics

- Do your homework (“it’s a great company!” will not get you the job)
- Contextualize and explain your motivation (“I’ve spent time doing ABC and have enjoyed the experience. Can you say more about opportunities to do similar things in company X?”)
- Weave things that excite you about the position into your story—a story that combines your past and present with the future you see yourself having at that position.
- Find out as much as you can about the company’s hiring process





Illegal Questions

Illegal Questions

Questions about national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest and conviction record, military discharge status, race, gender, or pregnancy status are illegal.

Any question that asks a candidate to reveal information about these topics **without the question having a job related basis** are a violation of various state and federal discrimination laws.

Examples of Illegal Questions

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Are you planning to have children?
- What does your husband/wife do?
- How old are you?
- What is your religious affiliation?



Illegal Questions

How to Deal with Illegal Questions

If asked an illegal question you can:

- **Choose not to answer**

“I’m uncomfortable with this question and prefer not to respond”

- **Choose to answer**

- Respond directly and briefly if you feel comfortable doing so

- Respond to the intent of the question

“Nothing in my personal life will prevent me from taking this job”

- Ask for the motivation behind the question

“It’s not clear to me why you’re asking about this. Can you please explain?”

- Deflect

“It’s interesting you ask me about children--do you have kids yourself?”

- Ignore and change the subject

“I hear the music scene here is great”



Questions?



3. Post-interview



Follow up

- **Follow up every interview with a thank you email**
- If you can, send individual emails
- However—
 - In short Skype interviews it may not feel right. You still should email but can send a group email to the search committee as a whole.
- **Consider sending hand-written thank you notes**
 - Depends on job/field, interviewer, turn-around time



Questions?





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