

GRADTalk: Behavioral Interview Questions

Many behavioral interview questions can be broken down into the categories below. Before your interview, prepare information and stories that you can employ flexibly to address multiple questions that are commonly asked in each category.

Yourself:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your resume.
- Tell me more about [specific item on resume].
- I see you studied _____ at University of Chicago. Why did you decide to study this?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- *If applicable:* Why are you leaving your current position/Why are you leaving academia?

Your skills, experience, and personal characteristics:

- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What is your experience with [particular skill or expertise required for the position]?
- How would you describe your teamwork style? Your leadership style?
- How would your most recent co-workers/colleagues describe you?
- What kind of feedback have you gotten from previous supervisors?
- What do you like to do outside of work?

Your fit for the position:

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What do you think makes you a good fit for this position?
- How does this position fit into your longer-term career goals?
- What do you think sets you apart from other candidates for this position?
- What do you know about our company/organization?
- What do you envision this position to be about?

Tell me about a time when...

- ...you had to work together with a team to solve a problem.
- ...you worked with people who approached things differently than you.
- ...you had to deal with a difficult co-worker/teammate.
- ...you made a mistake and what you learned from it.
- ...you had to persuade someone to agree with you who initially disagreed with you.
- ...you were able to accomplish a goal that you had set for yourself.
- ...you were unable to accomplish a goal that you had set for yourself.

Concluding Questions

- Do you have interviews with other companies?
- How would you decide if you were offered a job in more than one place?
- What questions do you have for us? (Prepare at least three questions.)

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GENERAL TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Understand what **motivates** the question*
- Answers have **beginnings, middles, ends**
- **Less is more:** make your answers shorter
- The # of possible questions is **not infinite**
- It's okay to ask for **time** and **clarification**
- Know your **strengths** and **weaknesses**
- **Practice** the way you **play**
- Always have **good questions** ready
- Understand the process in order to make effective and impactful choices
- Always send **thank you notes**

* REMEMBER WHAT AN INTERVIEW *IS* and *IS NOT*:

An interview *IS*:

- A conversation (friendly, at times difficult or uncomfortable)
- An exercise in self-narration (i.e., an event where you are expected to choose stories from your past that tell the interviewers something about who you are as a researcher and scholar)
- A venue for presenting yourself as a professional
- An exploration of (mutual) fit and future prospects

An interview *IS NOT*:

- An interrogation
- A venue for attacking or belittling you
- A sales pitch
- A conversation which is designed to uncover some type of “empirical truth”

Analyze the motivation behind the interview questions in order to come up with effective responses.

Example I:

The Question

“Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult teammate”

Motivation

The interviewer wants to get a sense of your views on communications through how you talk about an event (as opposed to the event itself). The interviewer wants to get a sense of how you view yourself as a professional. The interviewer wants to see how you how you talk about colleagues

Traps

Narrating stories as you would to a friend (i.e. in detail and through the “he said, she said, I said” framework). Being negative or blaming the team member. Not balancing the “we” with the “I”.

Tactics

Framing: Contextualize, summarize what the issue was, how you resolved it, how you grew from it
Brevity: Two sentences instead of three (especially in the description of the issue)

Example II

The Question: “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 (disciplinary, departmental, institutional, etc.)

Traps

Not understanding the specifics of the position and the company. Not doing your homework. Asking questions that don't promote a conversation. Asking questions that focus on what you'll be getting (resources, etc.).

Tactics

Do your homework. Contextualize and explain your motivation (“I've spent time doing X and really enjoyed it. Can you say more about opportunities to do X here?”). Don't focus on monetary resources (what kind of resources do you have?) but rather on opportunities. Think about open ended questions

