

# GRADTalk Workshop

## Improving Your Interview Skills



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# GRADTalk

- Public speaking skills
- Presentation practice
- Networking skills
- Interview practice



Make an advising appointment on Grad Gargoyle: [gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu](http://gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu)



# Workshop Overview:

I: Three Fundamental Principles

II: Common Questions & Strategies

III: Q&A



# Part I: Three Fundamental Principles for Interviewing



- 1) Be positive; emphasize what you bring to the table, not what you lack



# Be positive

Be positive about:

- Past employers and colleagues
- Your reasons for pursuing a new position
- The skills that you have
- If asked about a skill or experience you don't have, be ready to talk about your plans for developing that skill



## 2) Focus on the big picture



# Focus on the big picture

Before any interview, think about the following questions:

- At the end of the interview, what are the 5 or 6 things you want the interviewer(s) to remember about you?
- What are specific examples from your experience that you can use to highlight those 5 or 6 most significant things?
- How will you demonstrate not only your skills and experiences, but how those skills and experiences relate to and connect with the position you're applying for?





# Focus on the big picture

Reinforce your take-away message



What is the big picture answer in 2 to 3 sentences?

What are 2 or 3 specific examples that highlight and support your take-away message?

Reinforce the take-away message



3) Be selective and concise



# Knowing when and how to end

Strategies for ending an answer:

- Provide a 1 to 2 sentence conclusion that restates the question and includes your take-away message. Use your vocal tone to cue you're finished: slow down, use more emphasis, avoid lowering your volume or a questioning "upswing."
- Offer to elaborate on your answer if you have more to say but want to move on to the next question:
- "Those are some of the ways I've demonstrated leadership in my past work experience. I'm happy to go into more detail if you'd like."



# Questions?



# Part II: Common Questions and Strategies



# Common Interview Questions

1) Tell me about yourself

Three-part structure:

- Situate yourself: What are you doing now and/or what is your most recent career milestone?
- Highlight 2 to 3 of your most relevant experiences and/or skills for the position
- Briefly mention one reason you're interested in the position



# Common Interview Questions

## Tell me about yourself (mediocre example)

My name is Joe Smith. I went to College at Oxford University. After college I worked at a small business in their IT department. After that job, I worked for a large hospital as part of their data analysis team. Then I decided to get a Master's degree in Data Analytics at the University of Chicago. Right now I'm looking for a job in data analytics after I graduate in the summer.



# Common Interview Questions

## **Tell me about yourself (better example):**

I'd be happy to. I'm currently a Master's student in Data Analytics at the University of Chicago. I've developed my skills in data analysis over several years working at both small businesses and a large hospital, where I helped the hospital to develop an improved system for patient referrals. I have expertise in programming languages and statistical methods and I enjoy working in teams. I'm interested in this position because I want to apply my skills in data analysis to help County Hospital improve their patient services.





# Common Interview Questions

## The Question

“What is one of your weaknesses?”

## Interviewer’s Motivations

- Are you able to reflect critically about yourself?
- Do you take steps to identify areas for improvement?

## Potential Risks

- Highlighting a weakness that affects a core skill for the position
- Presenting a weakness as an absolute, rather than an area for growth and improvement
- Not ending on a positive note



# Common Interview Questions

## Strategies

- Situate your weakness as something you've noticed in the past and made steps to improve
- Use “softeners”: “I had a tendency to...” “In the past I've noticed that I wanted to improve...”
- Keep your answer short and details minimal
- End on a positive note: indicate your happiness with the progress/growth you've made



# Common Interview Questions

## Tell me about a time when you had to....

...work with a difficult co-worker.

...persuade someone to see your point of view.

...use teamwork to solve a problem.

...explain a difficult concept to someone.



Create a list of at least three qualities and characteristics that you think are important for the job.

Prepare a story for each one of those qualities and characteristics. Your stories should be specific and draw on a range of your experiences.

Reflect on each story and ask yourself: What other kinds of questions can this story potentially address?



Prepare at least three stories that begin with a negative but end with a positive:

- Overcoming a challenge
- Dealing with a difficult co-worker or teamwork situation
- Making a mistake and then needing to fix a problem, or learning something from your mistake
- Persuading someone who disagrees with you



# Common Interview Questions

## The STAR Method

**Situation:** Describe the situation you were in. It must be a specific situation, not a general one.

**Task:** What was your goal in this situation?

**Action:** What action did you take to accomplish this goal?

**Result:** What was the result of the action you took to accomplish this goal?



# Common Interview Questions

## Do you have questions for us?

Always prepare at least four questions to ask the interviewer.

What are good questions?

- Questions that show your curiosity to learn more about specific aspects of the position and the company
- Questions that build on what you already know about the company

What are less effective questions?

- Questions that have a yes/no answer.
- Questions that are negative or critical.



# Follow-Up

Within a day of the interview, send an email to each person who interviewed you. Thank them for the opportunity to interview and mention one detail about the interview. Re-emphasize your interest in the position.





# Practicing Effectively

- 1) Practice out loud; record yourself or get feedback from a partner
- 2) Don't just practice sample questions; practice stories you want to tell about yourself
- 3) Practice as if it were the interview



**Questions?**

For appointments  
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