Acing the First-Round Interview

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Workshop Goals:

• First-Round Interview Overview
• Phone & Skype Interview Tips
• Preparation Strategies
First-Round Interview Overview

Typically first-round interviews may focus on:

- **Broad questions about yourself, your skills, and your qualifications.**
  - Tell us about yourself
  - What are your strengths? What is one of your weaknesses?
- **Questions about your past experiences** as described in your cover letter and resume.
- **Questions about your interest in the position.**
  - Why are you interested in this position?
  - Why do you think you’re a good fit for this position?
- **Questions about your future.**
  - How does this position fit in with your career goals?
  - Where do you see yourself five years from now?
First-Round Interview Overview

A few things to keep in mind:

• Your interviewer might not have the same technical background as you. Pitch your answers to a general audience, but be prepared to go into more technical detail if asked.

• Your interviewer might begin by describing the position, sometimes for several minutes. Listen carefully, and if possible, take a few notes on questions you might ask later.

• First-round interviews are notoriously varied and hard-to-predict. Prepare for multiple possibilities.

• Be selective and concise with your answers. 1-3 minutes is a good guideline for length.
Phone Interviews
Interviewing on the Phone

Practical Advice:
• Find a quiet place with no distractions
• If possible, use a landline (and turn your cell phone off)
• If using a cell phone, turn off notifications and disable call waiting

What to have with you:
• Resume
• Pen and paper for taking notes
• A few notes to help you remember things
• DO NOT READ FROM A SCRIPT
Your Voice is Your Friend!

An interviewer cares not just about what you say, but how you say it

• When you answer the phone, say your full name with an enthusiastic tone of voice
• Use a varied vocal tone to convey your interest and enthusiasm in the position
• Begin your answers on a positive note: “I’d be happy to answer that question.” or “That’s a great question.”
• Thank your interviewer at the beginning and end of the interview
Use Verbal Cues

Verbal cues are phrases that orient your listener to where you are in the answer. They are especially important in a phone interview:

• Group your answers into discrete numbers: “There are three reasons I’m interested in this position.”

• Be clear when you’re highlighting an example: “To provide an example of this…”

• End your answers with a verbal cue that you’re finished: “Those are what I consider to be my main strengths.”
Skype Interviews

Video chat is a chance for my internet friends to get to know the real me.
Consider Your Background
Add a personal touch…
...but don’t overdo it.
Skype: Camera Placement
Skype: Eye Contact

Eyes up

It’s tempting but avoid constantly checking to see how you look
Preparing for a First-Round Interview
Preparing for Interviews

Read the job description closely. It is your best guide for what to expect in the interview

- Write a list of the key skills and strengths in the job description as well as your own that might not be in the description

- For each of these skills and strengths, be ready to talk about one example where you demonstrated that skill or strength
Preparing for Interviews

Learn about the employer and its key values and mission.

- Read the “about” section of the organization’s website
- Look up recent news items about the employer
- Know how the organization distinguishes itself from similar organizations
Preparing for Interviews

Have at least three specific reasons you’re interested in the position

• Connect your interest in the position with specific responsibilities mentioned in the job description

• Be ready to talk about how the position fits in with your long-term career goals
Preparing for Interviews

Prepare at least three questions for your interviewers

• Ask open-ended, positive questions that demonstrate your curiosity and enthusiasm
• Let the interviewer know your motivation: “I’m really interested in your professional development program. Can you tell me more about it?”
Preparing for Interviews

Prepare and practice a few key questions:

• Tell me about yourself.
• Why are you interested in this position?
• What are your strengths?
• What is one of your weaknesses?
Tell Me About Yourself
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
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.
Tell me about yourself (better example):
I’d be happy to. I’m currently a Master’s students 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.
Challenging Questions: Weaknesses

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
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
Structuring Your Stories

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?
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.
GRADTalk

Make an advising appointment on Grad Gargoyle: gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu

• Interview practice
• Public speaking skills
• Presentation practice
• Networking skills

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QUESTIONS?

For appointments
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