

# GRADTalk Workshop

## 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



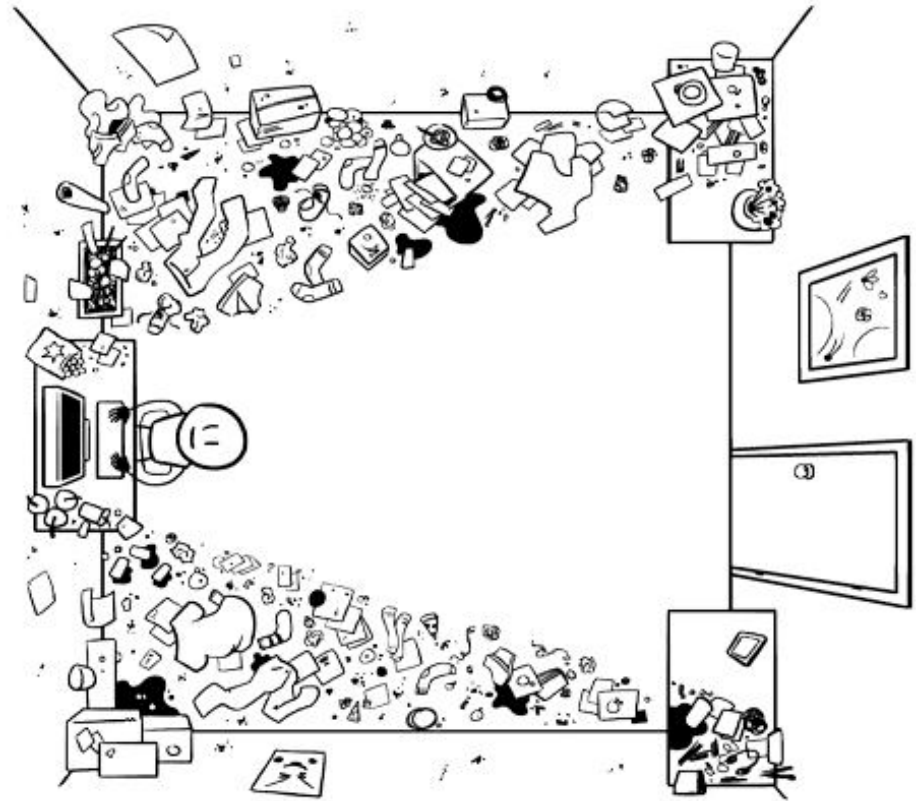
# Use Verbal Cues

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

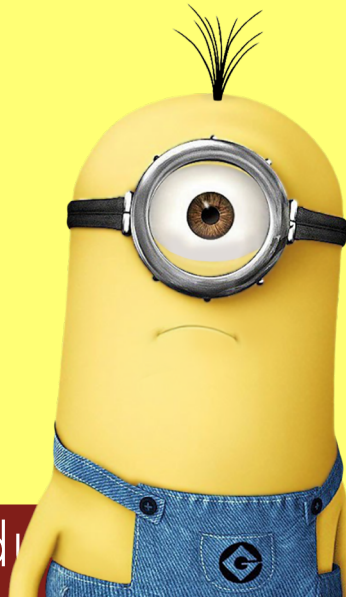


VIDEO CHAT IS A CHANCE FOR MY INTERNET FRIENDS TO GET TO KNOW THE REAL ME.

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# Consider Your Background



# Add a personal touch...





...but don't overdo it.



[grad.uchicago.edu](http://grad.uchicago.edu)

CHICAGOGRAD





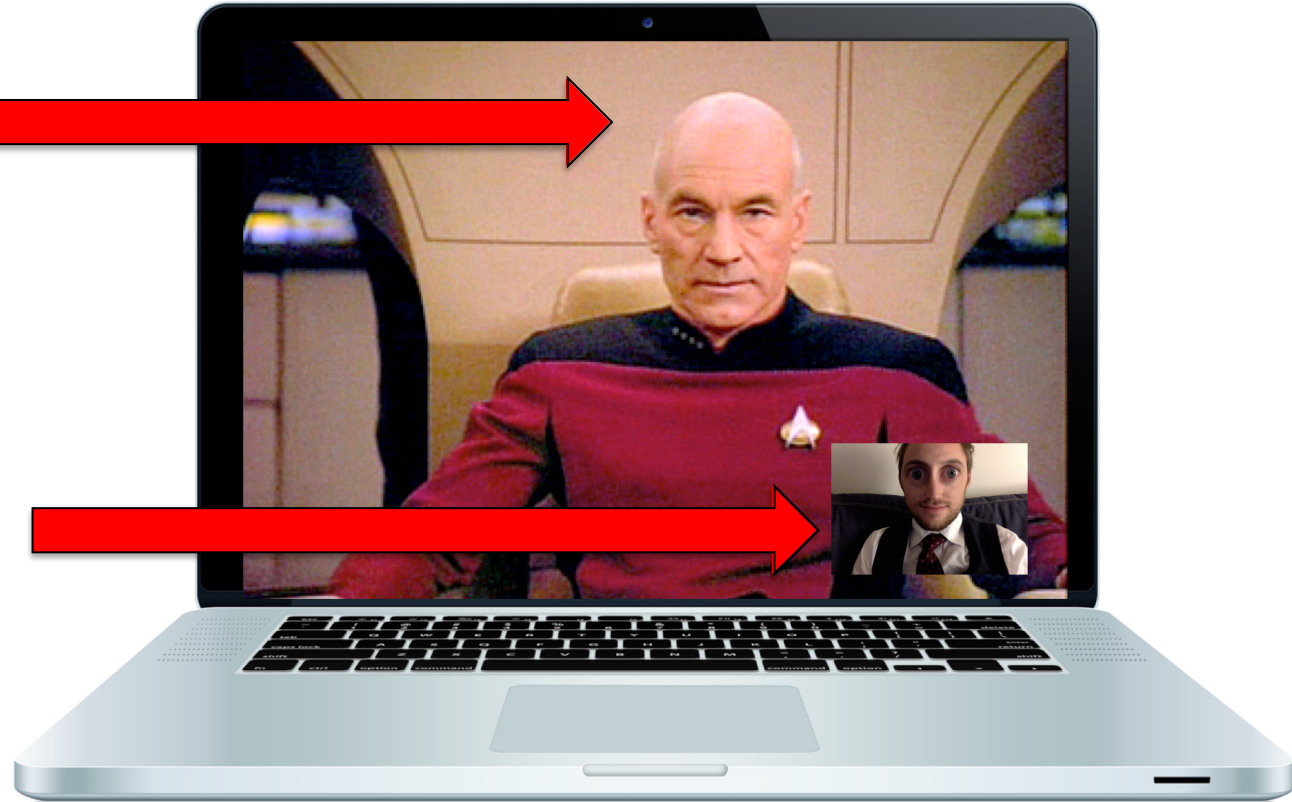
# Skype: Camera Placement



# 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



# 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 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.



## **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](http://gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu)

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



# QUESTIONS?

For appointments

[gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu](http://gradgargoyle.uchicago.edu)

Advising Appointments > Type > GRADTalk

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