

College of Natural Science: Interviewing

There are basically Four types of questions asked during the course of an interview:

1. Credential questions

Examples: "What was your GPA?" "How long were you at..."

Purpose: to place objective measurements on features of an applicant's background

2. Experience questions

Examples: "What did you learn in that class?" "What were your responsibilities in that position?"

Purpose: subjectively evaluate features of an applicant's background

3. Dumb questions

Examples: "What kind of animal would you like to be?" "How many ping pong balls could fit in a Volkswagen?"

Purpose: to get past pre-programmed answers to find out if an applicant is capable of an original thought.

4. Behavioral questions

Examples: "Can you give me a specific example of how you resolved a conflict in the past?" "What were the steps you followed to accomplish that task?"

Purpose: To anticipate future responses based upon past behaviors.

Of all these types of questions, only behavioral questions have a predictive validity for on-the-job success of >10 percent. (10 percent predictive validity is the same level that is generated from a simple resume review.)

Behavioral interviewing yields a predictive validity of 55-60 percent.

Behavioral interviewing is gaining great acceptance by trained interviewers because past performance is the most reliable indicator of future results.

How To Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

Candidates should explain the problem or situation, describe the action they personally took, and describe the results.

P=Problem (identify what the interviewer is really asking—then give a specific example)

A=Action (what did you do?)

R=Results (what happened?)

K= Knowledge (what did you learn?)

To prepare for this type of interview, students should think of examples from past experiences where pertinent skills were demonstrated. The examples can come from class projects, work experiences, student activities or living situations.

Tell the interviewer “the story” keeping in mind PARK in order to provide a complete, yet concise answer.

Sample answer

Interview Question: “Tell me about your weaknesses.”

Answer: Reveal a trait that is a weakness, but explain how you overcame it and learned from it:

Problem: the interviewer wants to know if you are able to admit you aren't perfect, and if you can speak about how you remedied a deficit.

“I am not a good speller. I use spell-check in my Word documents, and I thought that would fix the problem. Then once I did a paper on “attention-defecate disorder.” That was really embarrassing!

Action:

Now I make sure that I read over the finished paper, because there could be a correctly spelled word in the wrong place. I also keep a dictionary handy to make sure that I am using words correctly.

Results:

I haven't made an embarrassing mistake like that since then, and my grades on written material have been improving as a bonus side-effect.

Knowledge:

I learned the hard way that Spell-check isn't a substitute for a human proof-reader. I also learned that reading over a draft is critical to good writing, and produces a better overall paper.”

The Dreaded “Tell Me About Yourself....” Question

Here’s one way to answer:

1. A brief statement of what/who you consider yourself to be at this stage of your life.
2. Detail about your path to this point
3. Add a closure where you state one solid reason that you'd be a good fit for the company you are meeting with. What is there about the background you've described that makes you uniquely qualified to solve problems for this company?

Sample Answer:

“I’m an entomologist! That might not seem like a logical choice for a career advisor, since the stereotype is a goofy person running around with a net.

But I’ve actually been doing student advising for undergraduates since 1985, when I first started teaching at a university. I also have instructional design experience, both at a dot.com and in my own courses.

One of my favorite parts of being a faculty member was advising students and watching them grow and develop. I am really excited about the possibility of making that the focus of my future work.”

Don’t:

Tell your Entire life story.

Go on and on and on....

Forget to relate whatever you say back to the job you are interviewing for.

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Below are some examples of behavioral questions an employer might ask in an interview, organized by general category.

Organizational Success\Teamwork\Cooperation

- Please give me your best example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal.
- Tell me about a time when someone gave you feedback about your actions.

Creativity/Innovation

- Describe the most significant or creative presentation/idea that you developed/implemented.
- Can you think of a situation where innovation was required? What did you do in this situation?

Flexibility/Adaptability to Change

- By providing examples, demonstrate that you can adapt to a wide variety of people, situations and/or environments.
- Tell me about a decision you made while under a lot of pressure.
- When was the last time you felt pressured on a job? How did the situation come about? How did you react? What made you decide to handle it that way? What effect, if any, did this have on your other responsibilities?

Continuous Learning/Development

- Describe a decision you made or a situation that you would have handle differently if you had to do it over again.
- Tell me about a time when your supervisor/co-workers gave you feedback about your work/actions. What did you learn about yourself?
- Tell me about a recent job or experience that you would describe as a real learning experience.

Leadership/Initiative

- What are 3 effective leadership qualities you think are important? How have you demonstrated these qualities in the past?
- What risks have you taken?
- Describe a leadership situation that you would handle differently if you had it to do over again.

Interpersonal Skills

- Tell me about a time when you had to resolve a difference of opinion with a co-worker/customer/supervisor. How do you feel you showed respect?
- Tell me about a time when you needed to give feedback to a person with emotional or sensitive problems. Was the outcome?
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to address an angry customer or fellow student. What was the problem and what was the outcome?

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- Tell me about the most difficult challenge you faced in trying to work cooperatively with someone who did not share the same ideas.

Supports Diversity and Understands Related Issues

- Tell me about a time when you had to adapt to a wide variety of people by accepting/understanding their perspective.
- What have you done to further your knowledge/understanding about diversity? How have you demonstrated your learning?
- Can you recall a time when you gave feedback to a co-worker who was unaccepting of others?
- Can you recall a time when a person's cultural background affected your approach to a work situation?
- By providing examples, convince me that you can adapt to a wide variety of people.
- How have you handled situations in which you could not understand a customer's strong accent?
- Tell me about a time that you successfully adapted to a culturally different environment.
- How have you taken responsibility/accountability for an action that may have been offensive to the recipient?
- How have you reacted to conversations between co-workers that were clearly offensive to non-participants?
- Tell me about a time when you avoided forming an opinion based upon a person's outward appearance.

Honesty/Fairness

- Tell me about a specific time when you had to handle a tough problem which challenged fairness or ethical issues.
- Tell me about a tough decision you made.

Builds Trust

- Think of a situation where you distrusted a co-worker/student, resulting in tension between you.
- Tell me about a time when your trustworthiness was challenged.

Resolves Conflicts Constructively

- Tell me about a time when you felt you were under too much pressure. What did you do about it?
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person, even though you felt the individual did not value your perspective.
- Thinking of the most difficult person you have had to deal with, describe an interaction that illustrates that difficulty. Tell me about the last time you dealt with him/her. How did you handle the situation?

Positive Attitude

- Describe your best boss. Describe your worst boss.

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Job Effectiveness /Planning/Organization

- Give me a specific example of a time when you did not meet a deadline. How did you handle it?
- Are you better at working on many things at a time, or are you better at working on and getting results on a few specific things?

Problem Solving/Judgment

- Describe an instance when you had to think quickly to free yourself from a difficult situation.
- Tell me about a politically complex work or school situation in which you worked.
- What types of problems do you most enjoy tackling? Give me some examples of such problems you faced. What did you enjoy about them?
- What types of problems do you least enjoy tackling? Give me some examples of such problems you faced. What was it about the problems that you least enjoyed?
- To whom did you turn for help the last time you had a major problem and why did you choose that person?
- In some aspects of work it is important to be free of error. Can you describe a situation where you have tried to prevent errors? What did you do? What was the outcome?

Makes Effective Decisions

- Tell me about a decision you made but wish you had done differently.
- In a current job task, what steps do you go through to ensure your decisions are correct/effective?

Takes Responsibility

- Give me an example of something you've done in previous jobs that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.
- What is the biggest error in judgment or failure you have made in a previous job? Why did you make it? How did you correct the problem?
- Tell me about a time when your supervisor criticized your work. How did you respond?
- Tell me about a time when you took responsibility for an error and were held personally accountable.

Communicates Effectively

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to handle an angry customer.

Dependability/Attendance

- Give me a specific example of a time when you did not meet a deadline.
- Give me an example of an important goal that you had set in the past, and tell me about your success in reaching it.