

The Basics of Interviewing

By: Colin Loveless

You hear the phone ring, and good news, it's that job or internship you applied for a couple weeks ago. They want to bring you in for an interview! Now what? There are a few basic things to keep in mind when preparing for, completing, and ultimately following up on a professional interview.

First, as with many things in life, preparation is tantamount to success. Once you have the interview scheduled, it's a good idea to review the job description of the position you applied to. You should always save a copy for yourself in case the employer removes the position from the website. Take some time to do a quick web search on the company with whom you are interviewing, and find out as much as you can. What EXACTLY is it that they do? What unique traits can you bring to the table? Why are you a good match for the job description? These are all things that may come up during the interview, so it makes sense to take nerves out of the equation and think about some of these topics beforehand. Researching the organization before the interview also shows initiative, as well as an interest in the company's vision, and employers will usually appreciate you knowing your stuff before you walk through the door.

When the day of the interview arrives, be sure to dress appropriately. Business professional attire is the norm, unless otherwise specified to you (site visits for example). If you have any doubts about whether your attire is appropriate, check out the style guide found on the [online career center](#). During the interview, try to project an image of enthusiasm and confidence (even if you are secretly nervous). Do your best to ignore your fear of the high stakes of the situation, and just be yourself. If you are asked a specific question, make sure to actually answer that question! While this may seem like common sense, it can be surprisingly easy to ramble, especially if you're nervous. In order to answer questions in the best format possible, prepare some S-T-A-R stories, or Situation/Task-Action-Result stories. These are brief, but detailed examples of your problem solving abilities and skills.

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| S Situation | Detail the background. Provide a context. Where? When? |
| T Task | Describe the challenge and expectations. What needed to be done? Why? |
| A Action | Elaborate your specific action. What did you do? How? What tools did you use? |
| R Results | Explain the results: accomplishments, recognition, savings, etc. Quantify. |

'STAR' Technique to Answer Behavioral Interview Questions

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Each one should IDEALLY be about 3 to 5 minutes, and contain three key elements: The Situation or task, a description of the problem or challenge, The Action, how you applied your skills and knowledge to overcome the situation, and The Result, how your action affected the outcome of the situation. Walking an employer through a scenario in which your problem solving skills were tested gives them the opportunity to evaluate and interpret how those same skills might be applied to the position they are hiring for, so having a few of these rehearsed and ready to go is a great idea if you are nervous. When you reach the end of the interview, you will be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about the position or the company. This is an excellent chance to stand out from other applicants, and ultimately, an interview is just as much to see if the company is a good match for you. It may be a good idea to bring along a legal pad and a pen or pencil, that way you can jot down any questions that might occur to you during the interview.

Having a few well thought out questions about the job or the company shows the person interviewing you that you really care about the company and the position, especially if you can incorporate information from the actual interview. A couple of examples of good questions to ask you interviewer are things like: “How does this company measure success?” and “If I prove myself to be a valuable asset, will there be an opportunity to grow with the company?”

After you complete the interview, it’s often a good idea to follow up with the person who interviewed you in the form of a quick thank you note. This note can be either via email, or handwritten, the important thing is that you simply thank the person for their time, and provide a few final thoughts as to why you believe you would be the right fit for the position. This follow-up once again shows a drive to be hired to that position, as well as a degree of courtesy that is always appreciated. One that note, if you do happen to be rejected from a position, remember that it is NOT personal. You should still send a note thanking the interviewer for his or her time, even if you are upset about not getting the position. There are plenty of employers out there who are willing to pass along your contact information and resume to other hiring managers if (and only if) you are professional, courteous, and prepared for your interview.

Remember, these are just the very basics of interviewing, there’s always more to learn and improve upon. My next article will cover different styles of interviews, and the different techniques you can use to achieve success in them. If you would like more information, please come visit us in the career services office in room C264, or visit our [Capitol Online Career Center](http://captechu.edu/blog) for other helpful resources.

Check out our new monthly
blog post:
<http://captechu.edu/blog>



Different Types of Interviews

By: Colin Loveless

In my last article, I covered the basics of preparing for, completing, and following up on an interview. Next, I’ll be introducing some of the different types of interviews that employers utilize to gauge how well you fit into the position for which they are hiring.

Phone Interview

The phone interview is commonly used to screen potential candidates before an in-person interview is scheduled; this allows the employer to weed out candidates who are not qualified for the position. Phone interviews typically last around 20 minutes, but I have personally been a part of phone interviews that have taken close to an hour. It really depends on the purpose behind the call. For example, a quick screening will be shorter than an in depth questionnaire.

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Be prepared for potential employers to contact you by phone, and keep your answering machine professional. Your message should state your name (or your phone number if you are concerned about privacy) and a brief, polite message. When you answer or return a call, be sure to be in a quiet location where you can devote your attention, and avoid background noise. If you do happen to miss the call, and the employer leaves a message, try to return it within 24 hours. When speaking to the employer, remember that you don't have body language as a tool, so you need to use tone and inflection to win the interviewer over. If you need to leave a message, be sure to slowly state your name and number at least twice. This will make it much easier for the recipient of the message to contact you back.

Panel or Committee Interview

The panel or committee interview is another style commonly seen in modern interviews. It consists of a group of interviewers that most likely represents different departments within the company. Many federal interviews are conducted in this manner. If at all possible find out who will be conducting the interview and do some light research on them beforehand. While this is not completely necessary, it can give you an advantage. When you arrive, be sure to shake hands with everyone and introduce yourself. Be prepared to take multiple questions from each interviewer, and to answer follow up questions by different members of the panel. When answering, first address the member who posed the question, but acknowledge the presence of the other members with shared eye contact. At the end of the interview, have relevant questions for at least a few of the members of the committee. It never hurts to bring along a notepad to write down thoughts you have during the interview. Afterwards, it's courteous to send a follow up thank-you note to each member of the panel.

Behavior-Based Interview

By far, the most commonly used form of interview is the behavior-based interview. This is the typical, "Tell me about your experiences," interview, in which your past behaviors and actions predict your future performance with the company. These interviews typically last from 30 minutes to an hour. When you arrive, greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and eye contact. This shows confidence, a must-have for landing any job. Use those SAR stories discussed in the last article to accentuate your skillset and problem solving abilities. Once again, be sure to send a thank you note.



Case or Technical Interview

A style of interview often seen by engineers is the case or technical interview. In a case or technical interview, the interviewer will give you a problem, or even a set of problems to solve based on the position for which you are applying. These problems will likely be based on the type of position for which you are applying, so computer science positions may use code, while business positions may use business scenarios. The case will likely be real-world applicable, so just stay calm and use your knowledge to answer as efficiently as possible. These interviews vary in time due to the variable nature of the problems given, so just arrive prepared and do your best!

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If the initial interview goes well, you may be asked to return for a follow-up interview so that the employer can get to know you and your skillset better. This means that the first interview went well enough that the employer would like to know you more in depth. It also means that you are likely among the top candidates. Congratulations! Each successive interview usually gets more and more intensive, so prepare yourself accordingly. This means being prepared to answer and ask more in depth questions than you did the first go around. Take time to go over your notes from the previous interview. You did take notes right? Good. It is also a good idea to review the job description, as well as the company's website so that the information is fresh. Do not be afraid to repeat what was said in a previous interview; however, feel free to add on additional information to your answers. **Do** send an additional thank you note.

The last interview style, the meal interview, is the most discrete. This kind of interview can happen, sometimes by surprise, so being prepared is important. When ordering food and drinks, take cues from the employer. For drinks, limit yourself to one alcoholic beverage, only if the employer orders one first, and keep in mind that you can never go wrong by ordering water. For food, order a moderately priced item. As a side note, it is best to avoid messy foods like soup or spaghetti, or any foods that may make your breath smell malodorous. Otherwise, just treat it like a behavioral interview, and be sure to use those SAR's!

This article discusses each type of interview separately; however, it is common in the real world to find a combination of these types. Don't be caught off guard if you get behavioral AND technical questions during a panel interview. You can find additional resources on the [online career center](#), and/or you can schedule an appointment with the office of career services via email at careers@captechu.edu or in person. We encourage all students to complete at least one mock interview with careers services before your first interview.



Just a few brief announcements:

The simplicity website, accessible from the [online career center](#), now has an updated URL to reflect our recent name change! It is now <https://captechu-csm.symplicity.com/>. Keep an eye out for our next issue sometime early in the next semester, and good luck with the job hunt!

Employer Spotlight:

<http://www.natton.com/company/careers/index.asp?t=1&id=usa>