

INTERVIEWING

GUIDE



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DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

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INTRODUCTION

With the right kind of preparation, interviews are enjoyable, professional conversations—far from the one-sided inquiries some fear them to be. The most successful candidates are the ones who have thoroughly researched the organization and the industry, know precisely why they're applying, and can clearly articulate the value they believe they're capable of bringing to the organization. Being invited to interview means the employer believes *you* have skills, background, and experience vital for the organization. Your job is to prove that their hunch about you is correct—something you'll do with a combination of research, good communication skills, knowledgeable and impactful responses, and professionalism.

The Center for Professional Development (CPD) offers a range of services and resources that you can use to prepare for interviews. This guide has been developed to help you learn more, including:

- Criteria employers use to assess performance and potential fit for positions
- Interview style (how to read your interviewer and respond to questions)
- Best practices to prepare and practice for interviews.

CPD advisors are available to meet with you for individual appointments and mock interviews. You can schedule an appointments and mock interviews through DartBoard. *If you want to do a mock interview for a specific position, it is a good idea to schedule your appointment even before you receive an interview invitation – as often time turnaround time between an interview request and the interview date is limited.*

HOW EMPLOYERS EVALUATE CANDIDATES

One of the best ways to prepare for interviews is to know what employers are looking for. While employers conduct interviews for positions that require different types of work and degrees of collaboration, a majority of employers evaluate candidates using a combination of the following criteria:

1. Quality of resumes/cover letters
2. Appearance
3. Poise and interview etiquette
4. Self-introduction/pitch
5. Interest and enthusiasm in position and relevance to career goals
6. Knowledge of organization
7. Knowledge of the field and related info/practices
8. Ability to connect prior experience to the position
9. Responses to behavioral questions
10. Performance in problem-solving questions/exercises
11. The quality of questions you ask

The level of importance of each of these criteria to the employer varies – and may be very different even in positions that appear to be similar at first glance. You can often glean a sense of what organizations value most from the language used in position descriptions, organizational branding and in conversations with employees. As you apply and interview for positions, you can then use this information to your advantage by highlighting aspects of your own experience and personality that match these values. The CPD Resume, Cover Letter and Networking Guides provide many examples of how you can articulate your skills and experience to show your fit with a potential employer.

PRE-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

THE JOB

What skills, tasks and workstyle are part of the position?

RESOURCES

- Description found in position announcement
- Information about the occupation from [MyNextMove](#) or Professional Association websites
- Your outreach to current staff or alumni, including Dartmouth Career Network

THE EMPLOYER

What are the organization's products and services? Culture? What distinguishes the organization from similar competitors? How has the organization performed in the past year?

RESOURCES

- Avention*
- Glassdoor
- Organization website, marketing and branding materials (including social media)
- Talk to current staff or alumni, including Dartmouth Career Network

THE INDUSTRY

What are recent developments/trend in the industry? How will they affect the work performed by the employer/job?

RESOURCES

- IBISWorld*
- Trade Publications related to the industry (e.g. Advertising Age). Dartmouth Librarians can help you identify relevant sources of information.
- News updates on professional association websites.

THE APPPLICANT (You!)

What are your most relevant skills, experiences, knowledge related to the position? How will you describe them so that they are well understood?

STEPS

- 'Match' all the skills and qualifications needed to perform the position to experiences where you've used the same qualities.
- Go through your resume and identify key skills/topics used in each experience.
- Think about your skills and experience in light of [how employers evaluate candidates](#)

* These resources are available through the Employer Research link in the Dartboard Resource Library

INTERVIEW ETIQUETTE

HOW TO RESPOND TO AN INTERVIEW INVITATION

While most employers will invite you to interview at a specific time and date, any interaction that you have with the employer throughout the process is part of the hiring process – and, therefore, can contribute to the impression you make to an employer.

Employers frequently extend interview invitations by phone, in person or via email or online communication. How an employer chooses to reach out to invite you to interview is up to their discretion and a behavior you should mirror (i.e. if the employer calls you, call them back).

Because you will not always be privy to an employer's timeline for notifying you, it is important to always be prepared to receive an employer's call. For this reason, we recommend setting up your voicemail on your phone so that – at minimum – employers will hear your name listed in the voicemail before they are prompted to leave a message. *If you have a message that only lists your phone number or set up your voicemail box, an employer may be uncertain that they have reached you.*

Some employers can use the first conversation that you have together as an opportunity to screen your candidacy for the position. (This is often referred to as a “phone screen.”)

If you receive a phone call and the employer asks if you have time to talk, be honest. If you are unprepared to discuss anything beyond setting a future time and date, politely tell them you're on your way to an appointment or class, and request to set up a time in the future.

Be realistic in responding to interview schedules. If you receive an invitation for a second interview through the CPD, the employer is required to give you two options for dates and times – so you should not need to skip a mid-term or cancel another interview should you have such conflicts. The CPD's Employer Relations and Advising teams are on hand to help you navigate your communication with employers.

RESOURCES FOR PRACTICING INTERVIEW SKILLS

- See DartBoard for upcoming workshops, events, and Face Times (30-minute informal meetings) related to interviewing, including special programs on case interviews and finance interviews.
- Set up an appointment for a mock interview with a CPD Advisor.
- Arrange an informational interview with a Tuck student by visiting CPD and asking for the Tuck School of Business resume binders (located behind the front desk)
- Leverage Dartmouth's extensive alumni network: talk to an advisor or download the Networking Guide from DartBoard's Resource Library to learn more.

WHAT TO WEAR AND WHAT TO BRING

- When dressing for the interview, you'll want to follow these guidelines for [interview attire](#). Check out these Pinterest pages for fashion advice specific to [men](#) and [women](#). If you don't own a suit, a blazer paired with dark, muted slacks (avoid khakis) or a skirt will often suffice.

How to Prepare for Unexpected Calls

1. Update your voicemail. Create a greeting that includes your name and a message that says you return calls.
2. Have your calendar and schedule on hand to schedule an appointment.
3. Don't answer the phone if you are not in a position to speak. If you are in class or in a noisy environment, let the employer leave you a message.

- Bring a binder (or a professional-looking folder) containing several copies of your resume, a pen, and paper for notes.
- Be sure your phone is completely muted – or, better yet, turned off.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Most employers believe that in part what makes a strong candidate are those who come prepared with good questions. If asked for questions, you don't want to get caught with nothing to say, since it can convey a lack of preparation or interest. In most interviews, an employer will ask for your questions you have towards the end of the interview. One way to impress an employer is to ask at least one question that shows you have researched the job, company and industry. Some examples of potential questions in this area include asking about current events that feature the company, developments in the industry space or new organizational initiatives. Avoid asking about salary, employee benefits, vacation time and other logistics as these discussions can be held after an offer is extended. If you've prepared well, you may find yourself in a situation where you've answered your questions through your own research. In this case, simply frame the question by saying, "In my research I was reading about x, and I was curious to hear your perspective..."

We recommend you prepare two to three questions in advance. Here are some examples of standard questions:

- Are there additional questions you have for me?
- What are the next stages in the hiring process?
- May I have your card? [to send a thank you]
- What led you to work for [organization?]
- I recently read that [current event]. Do you anticipate those developments will impact this role?
- What are some examples of projects [previous interns/people in this role] have been instrumental on?
- Could you walk me through the typical [day, week, month, project cycle] for people in this role?
- I've heard your culture described as [cite info from website, info session, etc.]—could you give some examples of how I might experience this?
- Can you tell me more about your organization's approach to [training/professional development/mentorship]?
- How are employees in this role assessed? For this role, what differentiates top performers from everyone else?
- Can you tell me about typical opportunities for advancement for employees starting in this role?

FOLLOWING UP

- Always write a thank you note or email to each person you interview with: (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~csrc/docs/thank_you_tips.pdf)
- [Forbes](#) and [Business News Daily](#) offer good tips, as well as a [sample note](#).

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Once you have been invited to interview for a position, there are several common types of interviews that employers will use to evaluate your potential fit for their opportunity: resume-based, behavioral, case interviews, and phone/video interviews. Here is an overview of several of these types; specific advice for preparing to answer each type of question can be found in the next section.

BEHAVIORAL / COMPETENCY-BASED INTERVIEWING

Method: Ask you to describe an experience where you used a particular skill (that the employer deems critical to perform the job). The question may be quite open-ended. Example: *“Tell me about a time when you faced adversity?”*

Preparation: Thoroughly research the job and the type of work style needed to perform it. *This can include seeking out 8-10 skills embedded in the job description and identifying 1-2 examples of experiences that would ‘showcase’ your use of each skill.*

Strategy: Describe the experience, organizing your content with the STAR method: Situation – Task - Action - Result

- Be explicit, yet concise, so that the interviewer can envision you in this situation
- Be careful to emphasize the skill being asked about (don’t veer off in your description)
- When finished, point out the relationship between that experience and the job

Competencies can include:

Accountability
Creativity
Communication
Flexibility
Interpersonal
Leadership
Logistics/Operations
Problem Solving
Project Management
Resilience (Overcoming Setbacks)
Scheduling/Time Management
Strategic Planning

PREP & PRACTICE TIPS FOR BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS

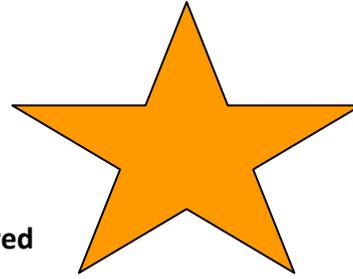
- Review position description and determine competencies
- Write down each competency
- Identify and expand on example prompts of competency or behavior

EXAMPLE

Competency: Communication Skills

Assumed Team Captain position mid-season -> successfully advocated for changes in practice times and collaborated with peers resulting in improved team commitment and performance

S. T. A. R. Method



Situation

Provide background information relevant to the desired competency or skill

Task

Describe your role

Action

Explain the specific action you took

Result

Share the direct result of your contribution

CASE INTERVIEWS

Method: Ask you to problem solve a 'case' by talking out the essential elements/issues. Cases are designed to test your ability to work through a mathematical problem logically, to make reasonable and well-founded assumptions, and to perform basic calculations comfortably and accurately. Cases may include strategy issues - ex. how to increase sales; estimation - ex. how many cars were sold online; or a 'brain teaser'

Employers will generally tell you in advance if they will be using a case-based methodology

RESUME-BASED

Method: Ask you to describe an experience from your resume and elaborate on it

Preparation: Thoroughly review each experience on your resume, identifying skills/topics related to the job. *Be prepared to talk about every experience mentioned on your resume.*

Strategy: Describe the experience, using Situation - Task - Action - Result star method.

- Be explicit, yet concise, so that the interviewer can envision you in this situation
- Emphasize the skills/topics that relate most to the job for which you are interviewing
- When finished, point out the relationship between that experience and the job

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewers use a variety of question types within their interviews. Most questions fall into one of five categories: personal overview questions, fit-based questions, resume-based questions, behavioral questions, field-specific (or technical) questions, and case-based questions. Most interviews will include a mix of questions types, though there are situations where one type will be more predominant than others.

PERSONAL PITCH QUESTIONS

More often than not, the first thing an interviewer will want to do is learn more about who you are and how you talk about yourself and your background. The most common questions here are either "tell me about yourself" or "walk me through your resume." Both mean essentially the same thing: the interviewer is asking you to give an introductory personal pitch—the highlight reel of your background, your credentials, your accomplishments, and your interests.

This is one question you know with certainty almost every interviewer will ask you, and it's one that can set the tone for the rest of the interview. "Tell me about yourself" questions are one of the most important to nail in an interview. And since you know it's coming, you should be prepared to give a strong, compelling pitch. But what exactly makes a pitch strong and compelling? Three attributes: proper **structure**, meaningful **content**, and engaging **delivery**. Along the way, remember that your pitch is about showing, not just telling. The most successful pitches are those offering an organized narrative that gives the interviewer a glimpse into your **motivations, qualifications, and drive**. They *interpret* your resume and provide insights into your life and professional persona. The least successful pitches are those that mechanically toss out a disorganized list of facts and information already found on your resume.

Structure

Structure consists of two elements: overall length or timing and the framework you use to organize your answer.

Timing: Your personal pitch—whether it's a response to "walk me through your resume" or "tell me about yourself" should generally fit into a 2-3 minute segment. Any shorter and you're probably underselling yourself or failing to explain the strengths you bring to the table. Any longer and you're probably delving too deeply into part of your background. Remember that you have the entire interview to dive into specifics—think of your personal overview as a teaser whose content you can always revisit throughout the interview.

Framing: It's often helpful to organize your content with some sort of overarching framework that allows you to be efficient and systematic. Any number of approaches can work, and there's single "best" framework to use. One common approach is to organize your information into the following five buckets:

1. **Intro and hook:** A brief thank you followed by a "thesis statement" that encapsulates either who you are as a candidate, why you're excited about this opportunity, how you got started in the field, or similar.
2. **Education:** Highlights of your major and any courses that relate to or have influenced your interest in the position. You can also discuss your academic performance and special projects including honors theses and the like.
3. **Experience and Impact:** Your most important and relevant roles, along with the positive impact you had in the organization or on the team.
4. **Skills and Aptitude:** A synopsis or quick distillation of the skillsets and competencies that have allowed you to be successful in the past, ideally linked back to the position you're applying for.
5. **Interest in the position:** A quick statement about why you're interested in the position. Note that an interviewer will often ask separate questions about your reason for applying, and so here you need only provide a brief overview.

A second approach:

1. **Motivation:** Your reason for applying and wanting the position
2. **Key qualifications:** Your top 2-4 "selling points" as a candidate, drawn from your experience, education, and aptitudes
3. **Evidence:** 1-2 examples of the impact you have held in similar or related positions/situations
4. **Shared goals or mutual benefits:** An overview of how you can help the organization, and how the organization can help you.

A third approach:

1. **Motivation:** Your reason for applying and wanting the position
2. **Needs statement:** A synopsis of what they're looking for
3. **Offer statement:** A synopsis of the qualities you offer, as demonstrated through education, experience, and skills/aptitudes.

A fourth approach:

1. **Present:** A synopsis of your current positions, interests, and focus area
2. **Past:** A focused narrative highlighting how your previous experience led you to where you are
3. **Future:** Your plan for next steps, which includes "due to," "because of" or "as a result of" your work/experience/interest in *x*, you are pursuing.

If you opt to use one of these frameworks, remember that they are only starting points. You might omit a category, reshuffle the order, or focus more heavily on one section versus others. The most important characteristic to recognize here is that *none* of these ask you to mechanically rattle through your resume. Structurally, your answer's success hinges on how well you highlight and interpret the information from your resume and cover letter, both of which your interviewer already has.

Content and "Message"

To shape your content and overarching message, you'll want to think about your pitch on four levels:

1. **Addressing the needs discussed in the position description:** Make sure you read and internalize the position description. This, combined with your research on the organization and the industry, will allow you to speak to your interviewer's needs. Doing so will make your pitch connected and relevant as opposed to generic.
2. **Portraying the most relevant parts of your education, experience, and skills:** Based on the needs, above, you'll want to select the parts of your background that demonstrate the kinds of skills, aptitudes, and experience required by the position.
3. **Articulating your "greatest hits" (achievements and impacts) as related to the job:** Don't just discuss your duties and responsibilities: talk about your greatest achievements and impacts as they relate to the job. You'll want to show that not only do you show up—you also perform.
4. **Demonstrating a winning attitude:** You'll want your message to convey or imply these critical points—important to nearly every employer out there.
 - I have a strong reason for applying and am very interested, even passionate, about the field and this opportunity.
 - I've thoughtfully considered my background and want to highlight what I think you'll find most compelling.
 - I want you to know me as a person—as a professional—not simply as a walking, talking resume.
 - I am humble and genuine, but also confident in who I am as a person and a developing professional. I'm trustworthy and coachable.

Delivery

When responding to "tell me about yourself" questions, one risk is delivering a "canned" response, especially since you practiced in advance. To avoid this, you'll want to make sure you're accomplishing three things:

1. **Make good eye contact:** Good eye contact indicates confidence, and it makes your audience feel unique.
2. **Use a comfortable rhythm/speed:** Speak at a comfortable pace. You won't sound polished by talking fast in order to cram more information into your answer. Remember that you're trying to connect to an audience—something you can do if you talk about the same rate that news anchors, NPR hosts, and TED Talk speakers use.
3. **Discuss—don't recite:** Your tone, body language, and use of words should be conversational. If you speak as though you're reading from a pre-rehearsed script, you'll quickly lose your audience.

****Check out the appendix for a sample pitch, and make an appointment with a CPD advisor to start working on yours.**

FIT-BASED QUESTIONS

Determining a candidate's fit with the position is one of the most important outcomes of an interview. In fact, some interviewers say that determining fit is a primary purpose of an interview. It drives almost every question you're asked. It also drives many of the questions that *you'll* ask at the end of the interview.

But what exactly is fit? For interviews, good fit is refers to:

- Being prepared to execute the duties and responsibilities of the role
- Matching (or complementing) the culture of the organization
- Showing promise—a combination of aptitude, a good track record, and being coachable
- Demonstrating knowledge and forethought about the industry
- Having motivations and goals that feature the position, organization, and industry

If you get the sense that almost every question an interviewer asks is somehow fit-based, you're absolutely right. That said, fit is more prevalent in some questions than others. At the beginning of an interview, it's common for an interviewer to ask questions such as, "**why are you interested in this position?**", "**why our organization,**" and "**why this industry?**" All of these questions are meant to give you a platform to talk about your rationale and motivations for applying. At other points in an interview, you may be asked questions such as "**how does this position fit into your long term career plans?**" or "**how has your past experience prepared you for this role?**" Questions such as these are meant to delve into how you think about your career path. Other fit questions gauge a combination of factors. For example, "**What about this position would you most look forward to? What do you feel least prepared for?**" provides insight into your self-knowledge, how coachable you are, and your understanding of the key features of the role. See the appendix for a full list.

Preparation

To prepare for the wide variety of fit-based questions you're likely to receive, we recommend that you take the following steps:

1. **Read the position description:** Carefully review the position description to identify key duties and responsibilities, skills and aptitudes, and required knowledge/content areas.
2. **Research the company:** Research the company using their website; research databases like Avention, GuideStar, and Vault; and the news. Through your research, identify the organization's mission, key strengths, major initiatives, leadership team, and any points that differentiate them from their competitors.

3. **Research the industry:** Using databases like Vault and IBISWorld, read about the industry so that you are familiar with the industry's main activities, its performance and outlook, competitive dynamics, and major companies.
4. **Talk to people with experience in this field:** Using LinkedIn, the Dartmouth Career Network, employer information sessions, and your own contacts, conduct informational interviews to learn more about the role and the employer. Focus on their needs, wants, and recommendations on what it takes to be successful.
5. **Identify the most relevant parts of your experience and training:** Based on your research and review of the position description, brainstorm examples from your own background that demonstrate experience and competency where it counts most. Don't worry if there are some gaps: remember that a job description is an employer's wish list. It's exceedingly rare that they find a candidate who checks every single box. Emphasize your strengths and demonstrate a willingness to grow in areas you're less familiar with.
6. **Identify the most relevant parts of your aptitude and attitude:** Organizations will often highlight the kinds of aptitude and attitudes they desire in an employee or intern. Often, these center on the following attributes:
 - Leadership
 - Ability to work in a team
 - Communication skills
 - Problem-solving skills
 - Initiative and ability to have an impact
 - Analytical/quantitative skills
 - Flexibility and adaptability
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Job-specific technical skills
7. **Set professional goals and understand what you need to do to achieve them:** Think about your path and how this opportunity fits into it. It's not important to have a "forever" goal—but it is important to be able to discuss a general direction for the first 3-5 years of post-college life. In fit questions, you'll want to be able to articulate how this position is a critical part of that path.

How to Answer

Interviewers welcome a wide variety of approaches to fit-based interview question. They'll often hope for a succinct answer that show that you've done your homework and thoughtfully considered what they need. Further, they'll want you to be able to demonstrate a link between their needs and your experience, background, and perspective.

One basic framework that you can adapt to fit-based questions is the following:

1. **Headline:** Offer a simple, concise synopsis of your main point or central claim, or offer a hook that demonstrates how you think about the question
2. **Grounds:** Cite your evidence in support of the headline
3. **Rationale:** Cite the "because" or the background that makes your evidence meaningful
4. **Takeaway:** Conclude with the key point you want to emphasize to your audience

RESUME-BASED QUESTIONS

Resume-based questions ask you to elaborate on the experiences you include on your resume. These can be very broad (as in, "tell me about your time at Xyz Company") or very specific (as in, "You mentioned that you helped Xyz Company increase its sales by 4%. How did you accomplish that?"). Regardless of how general or specific the question is, most resume-based questions challenge you to elaborate on, contextualize, and explain the experiences, accomplishments, and responsibilities you tout on your resume.

The golden rule of resume-based questions is that *you be prepared to discuss every experience you list on your resume*. If you're having trouble recalling details, do your homework, reach out to former colleagues and

managers, and refresh your memory. The worst possible answers you can give include responses like, "I don't remember—it was a long time ago," or "I left before that project was completed and I never followed up on what happened." With resume-based questions, you want to demonstrate interest, engagement, and even mastery.

Preparation

Thoroughly review each experience on your resume and make sure that for each one you know and can discuss:

- **Organizational Context:** Know background details such as the mission of the organization, its key services and the value it provides to its customers or to its mission. Know how your division fits into the organizational context, any important metrics related to budget, constituents, etc.
- **Rationale/Reasoning behind action:** Know the goal, problem, or situation addressed by the project or initiative you worked on.
- **Approach and key tasks associated with your role:** Be ready to discuss your approach including methodology, research, important collaborations, and your main duties and responsibilities.
- **Challenges associated with implementation:** Identify any roadblocks or challenges that you had to overcome.
- **Outcomes and results, impact:** Identify and be able to articulate what results you got, potentially quantifying them or at the very least being able to talk about what the project achieved.
- **Key learnings/Best practices:** Think about your key takeaways after having successfully navigated this process or project. Did it change the way the organization ran? Did you learn a better way to engage customers or convey information? Did you streamline future approaches as a result?
- **Connections:** Focus on identifying skills, topics, and situations related to the position you're applying for. Doing so may help you anticipate questions, and it can also help prompt you to frame your response in a way that's most interesting to your interviewer.

How to Answer

When responding to resume-based questions, you want to be focused and concise—generally 60 to 90 seconds should give you enough time to formulate your response. Two frameworks can help you organize your response:

1. **Headline:** Offer a simple, punchy synopsis of the purpose or outcome of the project.
2. **Context/Rationale:** Cite the goals or objectives driving the project, explaining its purpose and why it was important
3. **Role:** Discuss your role, flagging any significant points that emerged when following the preparation bullets, above.
4. **Outcome:** Tell the interviewer about the results/impact/benefits of the work.
5. **Relevance:** If applicable, tie your work to the position you're interviewing for.

Alternately, you can follow the STAR framework, and lay out the **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, and **R**esult. This framework is discussed in more depth in the Behavioral Questions section, below. Either way, your response should:

- Be explicit, yet concise, so that the interviewer can envision you in this situation
- Emphasize the skills/topics that relate most to the job for which you are interviewing
- When finished, point out the relationship between that experience and the job

A Special Note on Claiming Credit

If you're like a lot of students, you sometimes struggle to figure out where to draw the line between your own direct contributions, your team's contributions, and bigger picture outcomes. When you talk about outcomes and results, you can get points with an interviewer by saying *how* your work fit into the greater organizational context. Discuss individual responsibilities, project teams, collaborations, and institutional legacy, even feedback you received as a result of your work. Don't be afraid to draw a connection between your diligent work and positive results, and don't be afraid to tout the accomplishments of your team or division! Here are some ways to think about framing your experience:

Direct influence

- "I was directly responsible for..."
- "My specific role was..."

Indirect influence/team effort

- "Through my work/research, I identified x trend/idea, which I later developed by closely collaborating with..." [or was later developed by a project team]
- "I served on a project team tasked with..."
- "Our division served to [purpose], and within that general context my role was..."
- "Our work contributed to the organization's success in [this way]."

Escalation of responsibility

- "My work ended up drawing the attention of [title], who asked me to further develop the project..."
- "Because of my success with this project, I was next asked to..."

BEHAVIORAL (or Competency-Based) QUESTIONS

Behavioral interview questions ask you to describe an experience where you used a particular skill or competency. The questions vary from very open-ended ones ("*Tell me about a time when you faced adversity*") to ones that delve into specifics ("Discuss a time when you had to make an unpopular decision and then develop support for it").

Interviewers ask behavioral questions to find out more about what makes you tick. In essence, they want to know how well you, as a candidate:

- "Fit" with the mindset and competencies required by the position
- Exercise good judgement and leadership
- Know yourself—your strengths, opportunity areas, values, and aptitudes
- Employ critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Preparation

Interviewers use behavioral questions to get a read of your resiliency, ability to work independently and in teams, persistence, ability to execute—and a host of other qualities. Preparation for behavioral questions starts by predicting what qualities you'll be asked about, based on your careful read of the position description. If the position requires you to manage other employees, for example, you can almost guarantee some questions related to leading teams and managing others. If your role is about making data-driven decisions, you'll probably field some questions about times you've conducted research and used the findings to determine what to do.

After you analyze the position to identify core skills, you'll want to identify at least two examples for each one. These can draw from your resume, but they can also take into account experiences you haven't listed on your resume.

Be aware that it's common for interviewers to ask about your top strengths (or successes), weaknesses (or failures), leadership aptitude, and team competencies.

Common competencies to address include:

- Accountability
- Creativity
- Communication
- Interpersonal
- Leadership
- Logistics/Operations
- Problem Solving
- Project Management
- Scheduling/Time Management
- Strategic Planning

See the appendix for additional questions.

How to Answer

The most common approach for responding to behavioral questions is to use the *STAR Framework*:

- *Situation*: Provide context to explain the situation, what was at stake, any challenging dynamics.
- *Task*: Discuss your role or the role of your team and explain what you set out to accomplish and why.
- *Action*: Explain how you addressed the situation and completed the task, along with any nuances that demonstrate your ability to "add value" to complex situations
- *Result*: Convey the outcome along with what you learned. You can also consider quantifying the impact by using numbers, sharing feedback you got, or otherwise conveying how the results helped the organization in terms of both immediate and big-picture outcomes.

STAR, and its companion PAR (Problem, Action, Result), are great ways to frame *situational* questions—those that begin "**Tell me about a time when**" or "**Give me an example of a time when.**" Behavioral questions might also require you to discuss a perspective you hold, identify key success factors for the job, and the like. Other approaches to behavioral questions include:

Pre/Post (useful for discussing growth and change)

1. Discuss an old viewpoint, belief, process
2. Describe "disorienting dilemma" or inflection point
3. Discuss new viewpoint, belief, process

Factor Lists (useful for interpreting success/best practices)

1. State that success isn't attributable to any one factor, but instead a combination including x, y, z
2. Say why each is important
3. Provide an example of a time where you feel your approach incorporated each factor

Levels of Leadership (useful for breaking your approach to leadership/management into multiple levels)

1. *Knowing*: A baseline mastery of information, concepts, frameworks, tools, techniques
2. *Doing*: Development of capabilities with respect to analysis, critical thinking/ judgment, decision-making, execution
3. *Being*: Development of values, self-awareness, leadership capabilities, capacity for on-going learning

A Special Note on Discussing Strengths and Weaknesses

Talking about your successes and failures with a total stranger can be daunting. We rarely find ourselves in situations that require us to publically claim credit or bare ourselves to criticism. But with some forethought, these types of questions can lead to great conversations. Here's what you want to keep in mind when discussing your strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths

- Be strategic and select a strength that is integral to the job.

- Make sure you have evidence of 2-3 occasions that demonstrate this strength.
- Consider using STAR to provide an example of how the strength has served you in the past.
- If you feel too brash straight-out listing a strength, contextual it by saying things like:
 - "My previous work in [x] has allowed me to develop my ability to [y]."
 - "One trend you see throughout my work is an ability to [x]."
 - "I've been fortunate to have a lot of exposure to [x], which has in turn honed my ability to [y]."
 - "My previous manager [or colleagues] really appreciated my work on [x]."
- Segment your answer into three parts: 1) Identify the strength, 2) Say why you think it's important, and 3) Provide 1-2 examples showcasing how it's served you.

Weaknesses

- Be strategic and select a weakness that is meaningful but not central to the job.
- Select an area that you've since worked on, in order to demonstrate awareness and growth.
- Consider reframing the question to discuss a *failure* as opposed to a general weakness, and use STAR to frame an example. Sometimes it's easier to proceed by discussing your performance in a specific situation instead of a general weakness.
- Alternately, you can consider discussing the over-application or misapplication of a strength, and explaining how this led first to undesirable results, but later helped you understand your role or strengths in a more nuanced way.
- Segment your answer into three parts: 1) Identify the opportunity for improvement, 2) Offer a tradeoff—for example, if you're still developing as a leader, you can say that your view of leadership is less about commanding others and more about driving your role/collaborating/leading by example, and 3.) Give examples of how you've made progress on this front.

Describe the experience, using Situation - Action - Result star method.

- Be explicit, yet concise, so that the interviewer can envision you in this situation
- Be careful to emphasize the skill being asked about (don't veer off in your description)
- When finished, point out the relationship between that experience and the job

CASE-BASED and TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

Not every interview question requires you to talk about yourself and your background. Some questions will simulate a work situation you're likely to encounter, and ask you how you'd "solve" it. These questions allow you to use your knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities to address real-world problems. They can be a lot of fun, because they allow you to directly engage with the kinds of problems and situations you're likely to find in the field. They can also be a bit daunting, since they require you to think on the spot.

Full-length case interviews are unique to the consulting field. Here, a typical case revolves around a client problem that is representative of the kinds of situations the firm encounters in its everyday work. For example, a case interview may begin with your interviewer saying, "We have a client, Xyz Corp, who just had a cancer drug approved by the FDA. They're trying to determine how to price it, and they came to you for help. How would you proceed?" Consulting cases frequently focus on corporate performance issues (improving sales, revenues, or profitability), events (new product launches, moving into new territories, attracting new customers), or background analytics (estimating market sizes or potential revenues from a to-be-launched product).

The technical how-to's of case interviews are beyond the scope of this guide; however, CPD offers workshops and advisor appointments every term for students preparing for consulting interviews. CPD also has case interview prep books in their lending library, behind the front desk.

What are cases and technical questions?

- Real-time problem-solving exercises
- Require framing a problem, assessing it, thinking critically about potential solutions, applying principles or working with data (numerical and otherwise) responding to follow-up questions
- You often have to prioritize and decide what's *most* important to focus on
- Cases are behavioral—not just structured problem-solving!

Why are they so popular?

- Cases are small versions of larger, more complex business problems
- Technical questions test a candidate's ability to code, interpret information, evaluate decisions, etc.
- Consulting firms, in particular, see them as a way to gain insight into the way you think, solve problems, deal with uncertainty, and present solutions
- In addition to strictly analytical and problem-solving skills, cases are also used to gauge your presentation skills, client-management skills, respond to critiques

What is your interviewer looking for in a response?

- First, ask for clarification and confirm your understanding of the problem at hand
- Second, break the problem down into a logical structure
 1. Provide a 'roadmap' of how you are going to approach the overall problem, before delving into the details of each issue;
 2. Prioritize the issues that you will discuss;
 3. Proceed in an organized manner
 - Request additional information - selectively - explain why you think it is relevant to the analysis
 - Make assumptions: your interviewer may purposely leave out some facts or ask you to provide assumptions or estimates. Provide a rationale for what numbers or approaches you use.
 - Use scrap paper to organize the information and reason out an approach
 4. Conclude - summarize your thoughts concisely and develop a recommendation
- Third, remember to engage your interviewer: Cases aren't test questions to solve in isolation—they are dress rehearsals for your future work with colleagues and clients. Use your interviewer as a partner, demonstrate strong communication skills, and showcase your critical and creative thinking on the subject.

Additional Case Based Interview Resources

- Set up a free account and log into Vault Career Insider via the Dartboard Resource Library. Vault has a comprehensive section on interview preparation that includes tips on questions, research, and presenting yourself.
- Stop by the CPD to sign out a copy of *Case in Point* or request a case from www.consultingcase101.com
- Visit YouTube to watch [Victor Cheng's excellent case interview preparation videos](#)

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE DRAWING A BLANK

No matter how well you prepare, there will be times when you don't know how to respond to the question posed to you. However, this isn't a time to panic!—it's certainly not the end of the world. It's common for interviewers to ask one or two questions designed to see how you react to unexpected situations. Be ready for some exchanges that include:

- **"Tricky" questions**, with which *what* you answer is less important than *how* you answer. For example, an interviewer might ask you who, living or dead, you'd like to have dinner with; what superpower you wish you had; what animal you'd be if you weren't human, etc. Questions like these are designed to see how you deal with an unexpected situation. Your rationale (or your "because") is often more important than your actual choice.
- **Pushback**. On occasion, an interviewer will see how you deal with criticism by challenging your response. He or she might respond by saying things like, "Are you sure?", "That's not a good answer—give me another example.", or, "Everyone says that." When receiving pushback, you're challenged to show that you can be graceful under pressure. If you know you're right, engage by showing conviction for your answer, tactfully providing evidence that supports your previous claim. If the pushback reveals a flaw in your answer, confidently acknowledge the new information or perspective, thank the interviewer, and incorporate it into a refined version of your response.
- **Under-preparation**. Hopefully you're well-prepared for the interview, and if you follow the advice of this guide, you will be. However, sometimes a question will catch you off-guard: you can't in real time come up with an example, in the moment you forget something important, or you lose track of where you are while giving a response.
- **Unknowns**. On occasion, you may not know how to proceed. Perhaps you're asked a technical question, you haven't encountered the situation under discussion, or you're unsure of how to proceed with analysis related to a case or technical issue.

When you're caught off-guard...

1. **First, buy yourself some time**. Interviewers want to ask questions that challenge you, in part because they want to see how you respond to unexpected situations. You can create some time to think by pausing to take a sip of water. Alternately, you can respond by saying, "That's a very good question, let me think about that," or "Wow, what a great question—I want to think about this for a moment because it deserves a good response."
2. **Second, take stock of what you know and what you don't know**. Interviewers award partial credit! Chances are you have some idea of how to proceed. As you do, remember that answers have different levels. You may be able to provide:
 - *A full, comprehensive answer*: You have mastery of the concept, approach, and specifics.
 - *A thoughtful list of key underlying assumptions*: You have an idea of how to interpret the information and can make meaningful assumptions—you know the direction, just not the specifics.
 - *An analogous situations*: You can think of similar scenarios and perhaps create an analogy linked to the situation under discussion.
 - *A methodology*: You have a ballpark idea of how to proceed, or at least what steps you'd go to come up with an answer.

Once you've determined what you know and what you don't know, simply frame this for the interviewer. Don't try to over claim or pretend you know everything. Simply say, "That's a really complex situation. Thanks for raising it because it's something that has me curious. While I haven't encountered this before, I'd proceed by..." Afterward, you'd frame your answer or approach as precisely as possible. Ideally, you'll end up demonstrating that even when you hit a wall, you have a game plan of how to proceed.

3. ***Don't dwell on it.*** Getting tripped up is no fun, but don't let it ruin the rest of a good opportunity. You can demonstrate resilience and grace by moving on from a rough patch and performing well with subsequent questions. No one is perfect. Everyone performing near the top of their game makes errors—including professional athletes, surgeons, aid workers, investors, musicians, educators, and the like. Most of the time, persistence is more important than perfection.
4. ***Lastly, email the interviewer afterward.*** You can demonstrate a learning attitude and your commitment to the opportunity by emailing the interviewer afterward to provide a response. To do so, include a section akin to, "I wanted to thank you for your question about x. I've since had the opportunity to reflect more on it, and I wanted to expand on the answer I gave you during our interview..."

EMPLOYER RESEARCH: MAKE YOUR INTERVIEW A 2-WAY STREET

Even if it doesn't always seem like it, interviewing for opportunities is a process of mutual selection: organizations have an opportunity to evaluate you as a candidate, and you have ability to assess and decide if a position – and an organization is right for you. Fortunately, you can evaluate opportunities and prepare for interviews at the same time by conducting employer research.

You can integrate your employer research information into all aspects of the application process and interviewing process, including:

- **Assessing the employer and the opportunity**

Identifying what's important for the organization, the industry, and the job – and relating the employer's needs to your skills and experience

- **Asking questions that show you have researched the employer**

Dartmouth offers you best-in-class tools you can use to prepare in minutes. At the CPD we call this "learning the jig to get the gig." You can find these tools through our Resources for Employer Research in DartBoard 's Resource Library.

To learn the JIG, it is important to study the **J**ob, **I**ndustry, and **G**roup. Here are steps and tools you can use to do this – and tips on how to incorporate this information in interviews.

RESEARCHING THE **J**OB *(aka the position – internship, full-time position, research opportunity, etc.)*

Unless you are interviewing for an unadvertised position, use the **position description** to learn about the position and review the **desired list of skills and qualifications**. *(Saving a copy of the application is a best practice for applying for jobs, particularly as some organizations take down position listings when they feel that they have enough candidates. You can find general occupation information on the website MyNextMove.org.)*

How to **incorporate position description into interviews**:

1. **Answering interview questions.** When asked questions about skills, self-attributes, and past experience, include information that is relevant to the job in your answer. For example, if deciding between talking about two leadership experiences, share the one that is most relevant for the position – or give the employer a choice: "I could talk about ___ which was a longer term project or _____ which is more related to the skills you need but less directly related to the position. Which would you prefer?"
2. **Asking questions.** Position descriptions often list multiple responsibilities but don't tell you how your time will be spent on the job. This is an appropriate question for the interview, particularly as it can help you decide if a position is right for you. Example: "I see this internship includes both strategic planning and general office work. Can you give me an estimate of the amount of time I would spend on each?"

UNDERSTANDING THE **I**NDUSTRY *(area of economic and commercial activity in which organization works)*

Organizations do not operate in a vacuum—they are generally a part of and also affected by regulatory guidelines and trends affecting the industry in which they work. Make sure you know the industry.

[IBISWorld](#)* allows you to quickly access and download in-depth industry reports that include

- Industry definition and key jargon (terms you should know)
- Industry size, financial performance (revenue and projected growth)
- Major organizations, size and number of businesses doing related work and competitive landscape

At minimum, review IBISWorld reports for the industry in which you will be interviewing. If applying for consulting, finance or positions working across industries, research 1-3 additional industries.

How to **incorporate industry information into interviews:**

1. **Show what you know in an answer to a question.** It is especially important to know industries in interviews that will involve working in a specific industry vertical – i.e. healthcare, financial services, real estate. Industry information can be especially important in technical and case interviews – especially if you are asked to answer questions on market sizing or business strategy.
2. **Ask industry specific questions to show your curiosity and interest for the field.** This can also include recent news, forecasts and projections. Example: I understand that the domestic airline industry is to projected to grow by about 5% this year due to decreased fuel costs and the United/US Airways merger – is this true for Delta Airlines as well?

LEARNING ABOUT THE GROUP (*organization, company, institution*)

Before the interview, know who you are speaking with. Learn key information about the organization – from size of offices by location and organizational structure to current press releases, public information and any statements made by executives on recent performance or future plans. Key resources to conduct this research include [Avention](#)* for for-profit organizations/companies and [GuideStar](#)* for non-profits.

How to **incorporate group information into interviews:**

1. **Mention what you've learned as you answer a question or give a description.** "...Based on what I've read, I understand that you have been working in this area as well."
2. **Ask questions about how recent developments might affect your work.** Example, "I understand that _____ will open ___ new offices in 2017. Would this business development internship include any work in helping with this initiative?"

One of the most important factors for success on the job is cultural fit: does the organization's culture align well with your values, approach to work and style? While Best Places to Work surveys and sites such as Glassdoor are popular ways to seek out information on where to work, pay special attention to the people you meet – and the way the organization treats you. If offered a position, you can always ask to speak to additional employees before you accept.

* Accessible via the DartBoard Resource Library

APPENDIX

UNLAWFUL INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS

In the U.S., Federal, state and local laws and protocols regulate the questions you can be asked as a job candidate. An employer's questions – whether on the job, in the interview, or during the testing process – must be related to measuring your ability to do the job you are seeking.

Interview Questions		
Inquiry Area	Illegal Questions	Legal Questions
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not require an applicant's age, date of birth, or for records to prove his/her age. • Year of graduation from high school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An employer may ask whether an individual meets the minimum age requirements set by law. "Are you over the age of 18?" is an appropriate question.
National Origin/Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you a U.S. citizen? • Where were you/your parents born? • What is your "native tongue"? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you authorized to work in the United States?
Race/Color	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All questions regarding a person's race/color will be deemed illegal under state and federal laws. 	None!
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any question with regard to an applicant's religious beliefs, denomination, or any questions that indicate religious customs or holidays observed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After an individual is hired, an employer may inquire about religious accommodations.
Marital/Family Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you married? • With whom do you live? • Do you plan to have a family? • What are your child-care arrangements? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you be willing to relocate if necessary? • Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary?
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How tall are you? • How much do you weigh? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as that is part of the job?
Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any disabilities? • Please complete the following medical history. • How's your family's health? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you able to perform the essential job functions? • Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?
Arrest Record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been arrested? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been convicted of _____?
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you've been in the military, were you honorably discharged? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what branch of the Armed Forces did you serve? • What type of training or education did you receive in the military?

Source: National Association of Colleges and Employers

If you are asked a question that you feel may be illegal or inappropriate, let the Center for Professional Development know – particularly if the employer is associated with Dartmouth. You can either share your experience with a Center for Professional Development advisor or with our Employer Relations team (<mailto:srs@dartmouth.edu>)

Here are steps you can take in the interview:

You can answer the question.

However, if you are giving information that isn't related to the job and it could harm your chances of getting the job, you can alternatively respond by:

1. Asking about the intent of the question - "Can you help me understand how this (topic) is related to the job?"
2. Examining the question for its intent, but responding with an answer as it might apply to the job - If asked, "Are you a U.S. citizen?," you could respond by saying "I am authorized to work in the U.S."

ACCEPTING, EVALUATING AND CONSIDERING JOB OFFERS

If your interview results in an offer of employment, the CPD team is available to help you through the process of evaluating and negotiating your offer. For any position, there are often multiple factors to consider in addition to salary; we can help you with this.

Once you accept an offer of employment, you are committed to working for the employer. In some states, a verbal acceptance of offer is considered to be a legal agreement of employment. The same is true with accepting any offers you receive while you are at Dartmouth. Here is the CPD's official policy:

After you accept a job or internship offer (verbally or in written form), you must stop all further interviewing and immediately notify employers where you have an offer or interviewing pending, *regardless of how the offer was obtained. Students who renege on offers will immediately and permanently lose access to all CPD resources, including recruiting privileges.*

To allow you time to consider your options, employers who participate in CPD's Recruiting Program have agreed to comply with preset deadlines for offer decisions. These deadlines vary by date each calendar year; see the Recruiting section of the CPD website for more information.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE AN OFFER BUT STILL INTERVIEWING

If you have received another offer and are still interviewing, it is up to you to decide if you want to disclose your interviewing offer and your timeline for rendering a decision. Sharing this information with an employer may prompt them to speed up their interviewing and evaluation process for your candidacy; however, this may also not affect their hiring timeline and decision making process.

Should you choose to disclose the offer, be prepared to answer questions the employer may ask. These questions could include, "Who made the offer? Would the position be similar to the one our organization is offering? What interests you in our position versus the other offer?" CPD staff can help you anticipate and prepare answers to these questions.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

PERSONAL PITCH QUESTIONS

Personal pitch questions require you to discuss and interpret your background as it relates to the job.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your resume.
- What brings you here today?
- Tell me why we should hire you.
- What differentiates you from other candidates?

FIT QUESTIONS

Fit questions ask you to create a link that connects your previous experience, your education, and your interests to the position you're applying to.

Position

- Why are you interested in this position?
- What motivated you to apply?
- What about this role are you most prepared for?
- What would you find most challenging?
- How does this role fit into your career plans?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience?
- What skills do you think it takes to be successful in this role?

Organization

- Why are you interested in joining this organization?
- What do you feel differentiates us from our competitors?
- Who is our CEO?
- What are your thoughts on [an initiative or strategic direction the organization has undertaken]?
- In what kinds of environments do you work best?

Industry

- Why are you interested in this particular industry?
- How did you become interested in this field?
- What do you see as the key (challenges/opportunities/issues) facing this industry?
- Why this industry and not another field like [insert something based on your resume]?
- What's an issue you've been following that impacts this field?

Work history

- What about your previous experience made you want to apply to this job?
- How do you think your experience with [organization/subject/project] will help you in this role?

Self

- What differentiates you from other candidates?
- Why should we hire you?

- What do you think you would bring to this [position/team/organization]?
- What are you hoping to get out of this experience?
- What drives you?
- How do you best learn?
- How do you respond to feedback?
- How do you manage your time?
- What does success mean to you?
- What are your career goals?

RESUME-BASED

Resume-based questions are those that delve into your previous experience and ask you to discuss the kind of practices and key learnings you drew from them.

Education

- Why Dartmouth?
- How did you decide upon your major?
- Which course (or experience) has had the greatest impact on your mindset?
- What are you getting out of your Dartmouth experience, your education?

Experience

- Tell me about [x]...
A specific experience, your time at x organization, the project you did with x organization
- Which experience had the greatest impact on your approach to
Leadership, teamwork, work ethic, etc.
- Tell me about your career trajectory and how these experiences relate to one another.
- Which experience has had the greatest impact on your professional goals?
- Which experience(s) are you most proud of?

Skills

- Give me an example of how you have used [skill relevant to the job] in past positions.
- What skills did you acquire from [past position or positions]?

BEHAVIORAL

Behavioral questions ask you to discuss your beliefs, values, and experiences, so the interviewer can learn more about what kind of person you are.

- What is your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness?
- What do you consider your greatest accomplishment? Your biggest failure? What did you learn from each?
- Walk me through a time you used a research-based approach to guide a decision.
- Tell me about time you used analytical/quantitative skills.
- Tell me about experience where you feel your work made a difference/had an impact.
- Give me an example of a time you took a leadership role.
- Tell me about what good teamwork means to you.
- What's an example of a productive, collaborative relationship you had with a superior?

- Tell me about a time you demonstrated initiative above and beyond what was expected of you.
- Tell me about a time you had to manage up.
- How do you manage people who report to you?
- How do you like to manage your time?
- Describe a situation in which you had to deliver negative feedback or an unpopular view.
- Tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a colleague.
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an unpopular decision—how did you proceed?
- What kind of work motivates you the most?
- Tell me about a goal you set in the past, and the steps you took to reach that goal.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO PREPARE FOR INTERVIEWS

- [Forbes](#) and [The Muse](#) offer lists of common interview questions and guidance on answering them.
- By creating a free account on [Glassdoor](#), you'll have access to actual interview questions used by the organizations you're applying to.
- Free, industry-specific interview guidelines for fields including [consulting](#) and [finance](#) are available through Vault Reports (accessible through the DartBoard Resource Library)
- Illegal questions: On occasion, you may inadvertently be asked an illegal interview question. You can see a list of [legal and illegal questions](#) in the Appendix. Tips on responding gracefully are available [here](#) and [here](#).
- ALWAYS prepare questions to ask your interviewer! [Inc.](#) and [Forbes](#) offer good advice on what to ask.
- To prepare for skype-based or video interviews, follow these [best-practices](#).