



## Guide to Acing the Interview

### PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW(S)

#### What do employers (the interviewer) want to know?

Before the interview, an employer has already determined that you have met the qualifications (based on your application materials) and has selected you from the pool of candidates to learn more about you. During the interview, potential employers are trying to assess: Why should we hire you? Interviewers are looking for someone who is qualified, communicates well (can speak articulately and clearly about their accomplishments), is genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity, and is a good “fit” (with the work culture).

#### What do you (the interviewee) want to know?

An interview is an opportunity for you to assess whether the position is a good fit for you - What does the work involve? What is the work culture like? Does this position match your professional goals, values, skills, and interests?

*The key to successful interviewing is **advance preparation and practice**. You need to be able to discuss how your skills and experience relate to the position and the value you can add.*

### PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW

**Different types of interviews:** There are different types of interviews. The preparation for all of them is similar but if you can, you should find out the person(s) with whom you will be speaking. It may be helpful to know if you are speaking with a Human Resources/Talent Acquisition Specialist (who may ask more general questions about your qualifications) or a Hiring Manager (who may ask more technical/substantive questions).

Types of interviews include:

#### Standard Interviews

- Initial Screening (may be phone, skype or in person)
- Second or more/On-Site

#### Specialized Interviews

- Case Interviews
- Videoconference
- Group, Board or Panel
- All day on-site interviews with numerous individuals and groups
- Lunch

**All interview preparation should include the following:**

**Do your research on company, field, and position.** Learn about the company by reading news articles, websites, and press releases. Consider reaching out to people you know who work or have worked at that company for an inside perspective. You can also set up informational interviews with Harvard Chan alumni who have connections to the company through Alumni Directory or LinkedIn. Having this background information will



allow you to speak more intelligently about the company, frame your experiences through its lens, and determine your fit. Additionally, be sure to stay current on industry news. Conduct a Google search on the organization the day of the interview to learn of any new developments.

**Know your resume.** Review the resume you submitted as part of the application package and prepare to discuss every aspect of your resume. Expect questions about your choice of activities, concentration, projects/thesis, or professional experiences. Employers are interested in knowing how you've chosen to spend your time and energy, and why. Help your interviewer get to know you. When answering "what and why" questions, expand on your experiences and skills. Focus your responses on how they relate to the job for which you are interviewing.

**Practice answering interview questions.** Prepare 2-3 examples to answer the same question themes (such as leadership and teamwork) and practice answering these out loud. The goal of practicing how to respond to interview questions is to help you assess if your explanations are clear and how well you connect your experience to them. Use a strategy like the STAR format to structure your answers. Be sure to include specific information/concrete examples about the experience. This will help you be more memorable to the interviewers and will also serve to support your experience.

**Situation:** Give an example of a situation you were involved in that resulted in a positive outcome

**Tasks:** Describe what you had to accomplish

**Actions:** Talk about specific actions you took with strong action verbs. Mention tools and techniques and clearly identify your contributions. This portion should take 60-70% of the answer.

**Results:** Discuss the results that followed

Our office offers *InterviewStream* service for students to practice interviews online (accessible through the Career Advancement webpage, Career Resources, Interviewing). *InterviewStream* uses webcams to record you answering interview questions and then allows you to playback your responses for self-evaluation. You can also attend Interviewing workshops at Harvard Chan throughout the year. Lastly, career coaches can conduct mock interviews during individual appointments.

**Prepare questions to ask during the interview.** These questions will help you obtain the information you need to make an informed decision and show your interest in the company.

**Below are some questions interviewers may ask and some ideas for questions you can ask at an interview:**

### General Questions

*Note: When responding to each question, build a subtle case for your ability to: solve problems, get along well with diverse individuals, be successful, and enjoy your work.*

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you decide to go into the \_\_\_\_\_ field?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why are you interested in this organization?
- What can you contribute to our organization?
- What are your greatest strengths?
- What are some of your weaknesses?
- What will be your greatest challenge in this position?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What did you enjoy most/least about your last position?
- What is your ultimate career goal?
- What other positions are you applying for?



careers@hsph.harvard.edu



617-432-1034



<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/>

- What do you enjoy doing in your free time?
- What are your salary expectations? (Answer this question by inquiring about the anticipated salary range; do some homework so that if you are pressed, you have a reasonable salary range that is consistent with the market.)
- Tell me about an accomplishment of which you are particularly proud.
- How would your past supervisor describe you?
- What skills do you have from your Harvard Chan education that you can bring to this position?
- Tell me about any item on your resume/CV.
- How do you prefer to be supervised?

### Behavior-Based or Situational Questions

These questions are asked to get a sense of how you would react in specific scenario similar to one that you might face when you are on the job.

*Note: Prepare about five or six stories that you can use during interviews that highlight prior successes as well as challenges. Use the STAR method to prepare: describe the Situation, describe the Task or Action you took, and end with the Results (which should always be positive (if there were challenges, be prepared to discuss how you overcame the challenges)).*

- Describe a time when you and your professor/advisor/supervisor/co-worker had a difference of opinion and how you handled the situation.
- Describe the organizational system that you use to juggle multiple work responsibilities at one time.
- Describe a time when you were involved in a project or research that was not going well and tell me how you handled it and the outcome.
- Describe a time when you were put in a questionable ethical position and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when someone was critical of your work and how you responded.
- Give me an example of a time when you failed to meet a deadline and tell me why.

- Describe a time when you were working with a team and tell me about your role in the group.
- Tell me about a time when you were working in a team environment and one of your team colleagues was not producing as expected. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a particular problem that you encountered at work and how you went about solving it.

### Questions Students Have Reported Being Asked

- How do you explain what public health is and why it matters?
- How do you envision contributing to our team?
- How do we create positive change?
- How do the dimensions of your identity shape your understanding of privilege and oppression?
- How do you handle stress in a positive manner?
- How would you interpret this graph?
- How would you use your skills to address the dichotomy between public health & individual health in high-risk populations?
- How would you apply what you've learned to advance the mission of the organization?
- What are you afraid of?
- What are the things you can improve on?
- What is health equity?
- What is the hardest thing you've ever done and how did you handle it?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What are you most proud of?
- When can you start?
- Describe a project that failed and why?
- When confronted with a new problem, what do you do first?
- Why should I hire you? Why should we select you?
- Why are people poor?



- Why are you interested in working here?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? In 10 years? ... geographically and professionally?
- Tell me about a significant management challenge that you've encountered and how you dealt with it.
- Tell me about yourself.
- Tell me, in your own words, your understanding of this position.
- One of your co-workers posts something you disagree with or are offended by on Facebook. What do you do?
- Walk me through a particular project management experience from beginning to end.
- Describe yourself in 3 words.

### Case Questions

**Note:** Listen carefully, show that you can think on your feet, have excellent problem-solving skills, and can speak in a quiet, engaging, and persuasive manner.

Take notes when asked a case question and summarize the question prior to beginning your response. If necessary, ask questions to gain additional information. While you will need to process the solution to the question out loud, you will want to filter what you say. The following will give you an idea of the types of questions asked. **There is no way to anticipate questions**, you can only practice and prepare a methodology to respond to the case question.

- What is the anticipated growth of cell phone usage in the world during the next five years?
- How much ice cream is consumed in the United States annually?
- How many individuals who are under 40 years old participate in online social networking communities in the United States?
- Do you think the iPhone will live up to its anticipated success and why?
- Choose three mall stores that you think have a

strong future and tell me why?

- If you were the CEO of Dunkin Donuts, what would you do to improve the company's economic future?

### Additional case interview preparation:

Case Interview Secrets: A Former McKinsey Interviewer Reveals How to Get Multiple Job Offers in Consulting by Victor Cheng

Case In Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation by Marc P. Cosentino and Joan Oleck

Crack the Case System: Complete Case Interview Prep by David Ohrvall

Connect to the Harvard Graduate Consulting Club – [www.harvardgraduateconsultingclub.com](http://www.harvardgraduateconsultingclub.com) – the group offers case and interview preparation assistance.

### Questions for Teaching Positions

- What are your research interests?
- Why did you focus on this area of research?
- Describe your current research? Are you planning any future changes in this research?
- Why are you interested in teaching?
- What will your next research project be?
- Why do you want to teach here?
- How will you engage the students in your classes?
- Describe a course you taught and how you evaluated your teaching and students' learning.
- How would you teach \_\_\_\_\_ and which texts might you require?
- Describe your philosophy of teaching.
- Give me an example of a time you were working with a student who was not performing adequately and how you handled the situation.

### Willingness to Participate in the Department

- Can you tell us how you will be able to add



value to our department?

- Which faculty committees are of greatest interest to you and how will you contribute to that committee?
- What institutional issues are of particular interest to you?
- How would you see yourself contributing to the mission of the college and to the campus atmosphere?

#### **Career and Personal Choices**

- Where else are you interviewing?
- What are some of the non discipline-specific books that you are reading?
- How would you describe the ideal working environment?
- Can you describe the type of institution that will best suit your personal and professional needs?

#### **Questions You Can Ask During Interviews**

*Note: Never ask questions that reference salary or benefits during a first interview.*

- What skills/qualities do the most effective people in the department/organization have?
- What do you hope the person you hire will accomplish in the first year?
- How would you describe the work culture?
- What do you most enjoy about your job?
- What is the largest challenge facing the department right now?
- Are there any anticipated major new developments or changes that will impact this position?
- What is your hiring timeframe for this position?
- Has there been much turnover in this department and if so, why do you think that is?
- Can you describe the student body/patient community/clients?

### **TIPS ON REDUCING STRESS ON YOUR INTERVIEW DAY**

#### **Plan your trip ahead of time.**

- Confirm the location of the interview
- Map out the location, especially if you are in an unfamiliar city or area
- Determine commuting option and rehearse your travel to the interview location ahead of time
- Remember that traffic may delay your travel on the day of the interview
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early so that you can relax and compose yourself. If you arrive earlier, wait and review your notes.

#### **Items to bring to the interview:**

- Extra copies of your resume
- Pen and paper, notepad, or padfolio
- Writing samples, if appropriate for the industry
- List of references
- A bottle of water and light snack such as a granola bar

#### **Don't forget to...**

- Be polite to everyone you speak with or meet to set up the interview, on the interview day and post-interview
- Smile, make eye contact, shake hands
- Turn off your cell phone before the interview begins
- Show enthusiasm and excitement



[careers@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:careers@hsph.harvard.edu)



617-432-1034



<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/>

- Take a few minutes to reflect after the interview – write out your thoughts, feelings, and overall impressions

## **DRESS CODE AND ETIQUETTE FOR INTERVIEWS**

A professional appearance is essential on your interview day. Decide and plan what to wear in advance so that you have an opportunity to test it out and make sure that everything fits well. Do some research on the dress code of the employer. Even if professionals in the organization for which you are interviewing have a casual dress code, you should err on the side of dressing in more formal/conservative attire for the interview. You should dress the way you would if you were giving an important presentation or attending a business meeting at the organization.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

Follow up promptly with a brief **thank-you note** (e-mail is fine) that reiterates your interest in the job. Make sure you have correct spellings of names and no typos in the thank you note.

## **Special tips: PREPARING FOR A PHONE INTERVIEW**

Many companies rely on phone interviews as a screening mechanism to narrow down a list of candidates they will bring in for an in-person interview. In other cases, companies use in-depth telephone interviews to minimize the traveling expenses for the interviewer and/or the candidate. The questions and duration of this type of phone interview is more similar to the in-person interview format. Below are some tips on how to prepare.

### **Prior to the interview:**

- Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for an in-person interview: do background research and practice answering typical behavioral interview questions
- Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses. Have a “cheat sheet” of compelling story topics that highlight your accomplishments.
- Prepare a short list of questions about the job and the organization
- Print a copy of your cover letter and resume or CV and have them in clear view for when you need them to answer questions
- Find a quiet room without distractions. Close the door and place a note “Interview in progress – please do not disturb”.
- Check that the phone is working well to ensure high phone call quality. Use a landline or make sure your cellular service is strong at the location you are conducting the interview from.
- Have a pen and paper ready for note taking.
- Have a glass of water nearby.

### **During the interview:**

- Do not smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink
- Speak slowly, enunciate clearly, and with adequate volume
- Use the interviewer’s title and last name (e.g. Ms. Hudson) unless the interviewer asks you to use a first name.
- Do not interrupt the interviewer
- Take your time – it is acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts
- Give concise thoughtful answers – aim to tell a brief example/story of your experiences

### **Before you hang up:**



[careers@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:careers@hsph.harvard.edu)



617-432-1034



<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/>

- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity
- Ask for contact information for follow-up questions
- Ask about the hiring timeline e.g. when are you looking to make a decision?

**Updated June 2016**



[careers@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:careers@hsph.harvard.edu)



617-432-1034



[http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/  
career-services/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/career-services/)