

Interview Tips

Job interviews can be scary! You're going into an unfamiliar situation to be evaluated by people you may not know, and as a result being your authentic self can be challenging. Here are some suggestions to help you succeed.

General tips

Before the interview:

- **Pick three qualities about yourself that you want the interviewer to know.** For example, perhaps you want to communicate that your strengths are problem-solving, communication skills, and an ability to learn on your own. Think about examples that illustrate each of these.
- **Have a good answer to the question, "Why are you interested in this position?"** Make it personal and have a compelling story. Research the position and organization so you can tailor your response.
- **Practice responses to behavioral interview questions** ("Describe a time you overcame a problem", "Tell me about a time you had to resolve a conflict with a coworker."). These answers are difficult to come up with on the spot. Think of responses which both answer the question and are flattering to you.
- **Prepare questions for your interviewers.** It's easy to forget, but part of the interview process is for you to see if you want this job! In addition to factual questions, feel free to ask questions about the work environment ("What do you like best about working here? What would you like to change?"), since that will have a large impact on whether you'll be happy in the position.
- If you have anything unusual in your employment history (gap year, change of fields, period of underemployment), think about how to **explain your work history in a way that tells a clear story about your career path.**
- **Practice your elevator pitch.** You should be able to describe your work in under a minute.

During the interview:

- **Find a way to work the qualities you selected before the interview into your responses.** For example, if an interviewer asks you to describe a time you overcame a problem, you might choose to talk about a time that your communication skills or your ability to learn independently helped you solve a problem.
- **Convey your enthusiasm for the position.** Interviewers are more likely to offer the position to someone who seems excited by it.
- **Be yourself** and have a two-way conversation. Get to know the people you'd be working with.
- **Be consistent with your responses.** If asked the same question by multiple interviewers, give roughly the same answer. They may compare notes later.
- **Feel free to take breaks when offered,** even if it's just to use the restroom. Staying sharp for hours of interviews is difficult, and a few minutes alone can help you clear your head.

After the interview:

- There will be some answer you gave that you don't love. That's OK! **No one has a perfect interview,** and just because you have regrets doesn't mean you won't get the position.
- **Thank the people who took the time to interview you.** It's unlikely to impact their decision, but it is professional.
- **Remember, all you have control of is yourself.** If you did your best, that's all you can do!

Virtual interview tips

- **Practice your setup ahead of time.** Is your background professional? Is your internet stable? Is your space free of distractions? What's your backup plan if you have a technical issue?
- **Plan to work harder to remember people.** Since you don't have some of the cues associated with an in-person interview, it can be more difficult to remember everyone you interact with and their role in the organization. Taking quick notes may help.

Academic interview tips

- **Do your homework.** Spend time in advance looking up faculty members and their research. This will make conversations easier and show that you are interested in the department.
- **Aim your job talk at the correct level.** You don't need to make your talk complex to demonstrate that you know your work. Design your talk so a mid-level Ph.D. student would understand most of it.
- **Be patient with multiple interviewers.** You may get asked the same questions many times over the course of your interviews; try your best to be engaged, since you never know who may put in a good word for you.
- **Prepare for a marathon.** Interviews for faculty positions, especially, may take place over multiple days. Look for opportunities for breaks when you can. You may want to bring water and snacks. If you have a bad interview, try to put it behind you and move to the next one.
- **Plan small talk topics.** You may be taken out to multiple meals and will have to meet many people, some of whom will not have much in common with you. Being able to make small talk with anyone for 5-10 minutes will make the experience more pleasant for both of you.

Industry interview tips

- No one comes into a job knowing everything they'll need to. **Look for ways to demonstrate that you are a problem solver who will quickly be able to contribute to the organization.**
- **Be prepared to focus on your skills.** Unless directly related to the company's mission, your interviewers will be less interested in your research and more interested in the skills, both technical and soft, that you acquired in graduate school or in your post-doc.
- **Adapt to your audience.** If your interviewer is unfamiliar with academia, you may need to explain in more detail why an NSF graduate research fellowship is a big deal, or skim over your publications and instead discuss the leadership experience being first author gave you.

If you will be having a technical interview:

- **Practice ahead of time with technical interview questions.** This will help you get comfortable talking as you design an algorithm, and also writing code without a syntax checker.
- **Ask clarifying questions if you are unsure.** You will likely be stressed, and it's easy to misunderstand something. Asking questions to make sure you understand the problem demonstrates your communication skills, and ensures you're answering the correct question.
- When giving your answer, **describe your thought process.** Even if you aren't sure how to solve the problem, thinking out loud and explaining what you do know will help the interviewer understand your problem-solving skills, and the interviewer may give you some hints.
- If you aren't able to answer the question completely, **remember that technical questions are hard for most people**, and having trouble doesn't mean you won't get the position.