

# PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW

Your resume and cover letters have an underlying goal: to get you an interview. You must be prepared to take full advantage of this face-to-face opportunity to show why you are the best candidate for the job. Careful preparation can reduce your anxiety and help you present yourself and your qualifications more effectively.



## KNOW THE ORGANIZATION

If you want employers to take an interest in you, show interest in them by demonstrating knowledge of the position, the organization and the industry. What appeals to you about the organization? Why are you interested in the position?

Research the organizations through:

- Company websites
- Current events and recent news
- Professional associations
- Annual reports
- Current employees
- Informational interviews
- Review sites like [glassdoor.com](https://www.glassdoor.com)



## KNOW YOURSELF

- Think about how your background has prepared you for this role.
- What are your top skills and strengths? You may want to emphasize three or four of these points when responding. I have strong sales experience, I am self-motivated and I work well in teams.
- Be sure your key points address the employer's needs and interests, as indicated in the job description.
- Be ready to use examples to illustrate your strengths.



## PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

Plan three to five questions to ask the interviewer. This helps show your preparation and interest in the organization and position. Come prepared, but be flexible based on the interview questions.

- What characteristics best describe a successful employee at your organization?
- What are the skills and attributes you value most from someone in this position?
- How does the company measure performance?
- How does your company give back? What career or professional development do you offer?
- What are the most immediate priorities that must be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the next steps in the interview process?
- What do you love most about working here?
- What is an area of opportunity for growth on your team?
- You can also prepare questions about things you found while researching. E.g., "I saw on your website X is your client. Would I work with them in this role?"



## PRACTICE ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Get ready for your employment interview by practicing your responses to typical interview questions out loud.
- Be prepared to provide specific examples in your responses.
- Make an appointment for a mock interview with a career counselor.
- You can also use the online resource, InterviewStream, to video tape yourself and watch it back. This resource can be found in the Resources section of Handshake ([sandiego.joinhandshake.com](https://sandiego.joinhandshake.com)).

# BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS



## WHAT ARE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?

Behavioral questions are popular with employers because past performance is the most reliable indicator of future results. Behavioral interviews are different than traditional interviews in several ways.

- Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave. Use specific examples from your past to illustrate what you have done in these situations.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe.
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details about a specific situation and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about events.
- The behavioral interviewer objectively collects and evaluates information, working from a profile of desired behaviors for success on the job.



## PREPARING FOR A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW

- Review the job description, as the behavioral questions they may ask you to discuss are frequently pulled from the job description or qualifications.
- Recall situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, job experiences, leadership and teamwork.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to provide details if asked.
- Each story needs a beginning, middle and an end. Be ready to describe the situation, your action and the outcome.
- Be sure the outcome reflects positively on you (even if it was not favorable).
- Be honest. Do not embellish or omit any part of the story.
- Be specific. Do not generalize about specific events; give a detailed account of one event.
- Be real and authentic.



## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW METHOD

Interviewers want to hear about specific experiences. Structure your responses using the “S/TAR” method: Situation/Task, Action, Result.

- **S/T:** Briefly describe the context in which the behavior or action took place.
- **A:** Specifically explain the action you took to handle the situation.
- **R:** Most importantly, describe the results, outcomes or impacts of your action.

### Example:

- **Question:** Discuss a time when you were on a team and one member wasn't contributing as much as others.
- **Answer:** I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of cardboard. One of our team members wasn't showing up for meetings or doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration the rest of the team felt and asked if there was anything I could do to help him. He told me he was preoccupied with a class he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with his other course. He was then able to spend more time on our project, and he was grateful I had helped him out. We finished our project on time and received an A.

### Possible Interviewer Probe Questions:

- How did you feel when you confronted this person?
- Exactly what was the nature of the project?
- What was his responsibility as a team member?
- What was your role?
- At what point did you take it upon yourself to confront him?

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



## BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when you had to respond to a customer complaint.
- Describe a situation in which you saw a problem and took action to correct it.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were not able to achieve it.
- Tell me about a time you were on a team and one person wasn't contributing as much as the others.
- Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgement and logic to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time you dropped the ball.
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem. Give an example of how you have done this.
- Tell me about a time when you had many tasks and were required to prioritize.
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person on a team and how you worked together.
- Give me an example of a time you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Why do you want this job?
- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision?



## SAMPLE PERSONAL ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- Describe your most significant accomplishment.
- As you look back on the last four years, what are you most proud of?
- What are areas or skills you need to improve?
- What is a common misconception that people have about you? How do you remedy that?
- Tell me more about your responsibilities at the position(s) on your resume.
- What have you gained from your previous work experience/internships?
- How did you decide on your major?
- Where do you see yourself two years from now?
- Why did you choose USD?
- What would your previous employers/professors cite as your strengths?
- Do you have any reservations about this position?



## SCENARIOS

These types of statements present you with a situation and ask what could be done. Before you answer, make sure that you fully understand the scenario. Be clear when explaining your approach to analyzing information, solving problems and making decisions.

- How would you respond if a recommendation you made at a meeting, which you believe in strongly, was shot down by the majority of your coworkers?
- If you had the opportunity to run concessions for the next Super Bowl, what would you do to maximize sales/profits?
- If you had a clash of personalities with a colleague, what steps would you take to make the working relationship run smoothly?
- You need to motivate team members without using money. How would you do it?
- In a team leadership role, you discover that a team member has gone over your head to propose an idea or complain about an issue without talking to you first. How do you handle the situation?

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW



## FINISH STRONG

If you are genuinely interested in the position, communicate your enthusiasm before you leave the interview. Ask for the interviewer's card so you can follow up. Thank the interviewer and project confidence as you shake hands and say goodbye. A strong closing leaves a good final impression.

Write a short thank you note and request to connect on LinkedIn within 24 hours of your interview. Keep the interview information on file for the future—this person may be an important contact for you.



## THANK YOU NOTE FOLLOW UP

Sending a thank you note to each main contact or hiring manager who assists with your job search is a professional courtesy, as well as a wise career move. A thank you note can reinforce the positive impression you made during a networking event, informational interview, career fair or job interview. By thanking contacts and employer representatives, you build your professional network.

- **BE TIMELY:** Send a thank you message within 24 hours of a meeting or interview. It's important to acknowledge the career assistance you received from all sources. You especially want to show an interviewer that you are a serious candidate by following up quickly before a hiring decision is made.
- **HANDWRITTEN OR EMAIL:** Take your cue from your previous communication with the contact. Recruiters generally respond favorably to brief, handwritten notes on high-quality paper. An emailed thank you note is fine if time is a factor which is often the case. Thank you messages via text are not recommended.
- **BE BRIEF:** Your main goal is to express gratitude for your contact's time and personal attention. If you have interviewed for a job or internship, you want to reiterate your interest in the position. A short message is best.
- **BE FLAWLESS:** Check your spelling and grammar. Ensure that you have the contact's name and title correct. If writing an email, print and review the email before sending it.



## THANK YOU NOTE CONTENT

- Thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.
- Mention something positive that you learned in the interview. This is the most important part.
- Briefly summarize how your skills and experience qualify you for the position.
- Restate your interest in the position.



# INTERVIEW THANK YOU NOTES

## HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU NOTE

Dear Ms. Doe,

5/15/19

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. After speaking with you about the opportunity at XYZ and meeting the marketing staff, I am even more interested in joining your team.

I was particularly excited to learn about XYZ's focus on group presentations. As I mentioned, I developed my presentation skills by creating PowerPoint slides as an intern at ABC Marketing and by speaking to large groups as a USD campus tour guide. I feel I could be an asset to your organization in this area.

Again, thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
Logan Torero

## EMAIL THANK YOU

To: jdoe@xyz.com  
From: ltorero@sandiego.edu  
Subject: Thank you for the interview

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. After speaking with you about the opportunity at XYZ and meeting the marketing staff, I am even more interested in joining your team.

I was particularly excited to learn about XYZ's focus on group sales presentations. As I mentioned, I developed my presentation skills by creating PowerPoint slides as an intern at ABC Marketing and by speaking to large groups as a USD campus tour guide. I feel I could be an asset to your organization in this area.

Again, thank you for your consideration. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,  
Logan

Logan Torero  
1234 Linda Vista Road #56  
San Diego, CA 92110  
(619) 260-1234  
ltorero@sandiego.edu



Always include your contact information in your email signature.

# ACCEPTING AN OFFER

Once you have been given an offer, it might be helpful to talk to a career counselor about comparing, accepting or declining the offer. Make an appointment or stop by during our drop-in hours.

An acceptance letter confirms you are taking the job and shows your appreciation for the offer. Acceptance letters also clarify and restate your understanding of the position.

- **CONFIRM YOUR ACCEPTANCE:** Your opening paragraph should confirm acceptance of employment, indicating both the particular position and the starting date.
- **RESTATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE POSITION:** Briefly restate your understanding of the salary, assignment (position), starting date and work location. Additionally, mention any requirements or provisions previously discussed, such as testing (medical examinations or drug testing), orientation program or completing company employment or insurance forms.
- **EXPRESS APPRECIATION:** Mention your ability to contribute to the company and express enthusiasm about your employment.

## ACCEPTANCE LETTER

To: jdoe@xyz.com  
From: mtorero@sandiego.edu  
Subject: Project Coordinator Position Offer

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Dear Name (How the recruiter signed their last email):

Thank you for offering me the Project Coordinator position with XYZ Company. I am delighted to accept this position, and I am eager to start on July 20, 2020.

I have attached my signed offer letter with this email.

Thank you again. I look forward to working directly with you and contributing my project administration skills to your team.

Sincerely,  
Maria

Maria Torero  
1234 Linda Vista Road #56  
San Diego, CA 92110  
(619) 260-1234  
mtorero@sandiego.edu



Always include your contact information in your email signature.

# DECLINING AN OFFER



If you decide to decline a job offer, be professional, concise and courteous. If you have accepted a job offer while in the application or interview process with other organizations, inform these employers about your decision and withdraw your candidacy as soon as possible.

- **BE PROMPT:** As soon as your decision has been made, call the hiring manager and write a letter declining your offer.
- **BE COURTEOUS:** You never know if a contact or company might be part of your future plans. Keep your options open by thanking those you interacted with for the opportunity.
- **KEEP IT SHORT:** You don't need to provide specific reasons nor restate your accomplishments.

## DECLINE LETTER

To: jdoe@xyz.com  
From: mtorero@sandiego.edu  
Subject: Project Coordinator Position Offer

Dear Ms. Doe:

Thank you for offering me the Project Coordinator position with XYZ Company. After carefully considering my options, I have decided to pursue another employment opportunity that matches my current career interest and aspirations more closely. Therefore, I respectfully decline your offer.

Thank you again for considering me for this position. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversation during the interview, and I admire your organization's mission and vision. I wish you all the best in developing your new business ventures.

Sincerely,  
Maria

Maria Torero  
1234 Linda Vista Road #56  
San Diego, CA  
(619) 260-1234  
mtorero@sandiego.edu



Always include your contact information in your email signature.

\*If you have another student or friend who would be a good fit for the position, you could refer them in this letter.

# INTERVIEW CONTENT PREPARATION WORKSHEET

Fill out this worksheet using a relevant position description, then practice articulating these responses with peers.

**Example Position Description:**

The YMCA Outdoor Education program is looking for outdoor enthusiasts who wish to engage students and adults alike in learning outside the classroom. You will serve as a role model, and inspire personal growth, leadership, teamwork and an appreciation for our natural surroundings. We teach 90-minute classes in topics surrounding nature education, from forest and animal ecology, survival, and sustainability to personal growth and development activities such as our high ropes course, climbing tower, zip line and team building skills.

In addition to our education curriculum, we also use our facilities as multipurpose conference and retreat spaces. We host many different groups of people, including professional conferences, weddings, corporate team building and groups with special needs. You will help to organize and schedule all group visits and help to teach the programs.

Qualifications: Experience working with children; must desire to work in the outdoors with all age groups; interested, degree or experience in education, science, outdoor recreation or psychology; exceptional organizational skills, creative problem solving, flexibility and a willingness to learn and have fun; lifeguarding/CPR/WFR are a plus.

<p>SKILLS FROM THE JOB DESCRIPTION</p>	<p>SPECIFIC SITUATION IN WHICH YOU GAINED THIS SKILL</p> <p><small>INCLUDE THE ORGANIZATION, YOUR ROLE AND WHAT YOU DID</small></p>	<p>STAR MODEL BREAKDOWN</p> <p><b>S:</b> SITUATION    <b>T:</b> TASK  <b>A:</b> ACTION      <b>R:</b> RESULTS</p> <p><small>USE A SHORT VERSION OF YOUR COLUMN 4 WITHIN YOUR RESPONSE</small></p>	<p>WHY IS THIS SKILL RELEVANT TO THE POSITION?</p> <p><small>EMPHASIZE IF STILL DEVELOPING SKILL</small></p>
<p><b>Example:</b> Organizational skills</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> Captain of Relay for Life Team at USD, Spring 2019</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p><b>S:</b> Role, organization, time range, responsibilities  <b>T:</b> Had to coordinate fundraising, communication, scheduling and logistics  <b>A:</b> Created spreadsheets and schedules to organize  <b>R:</b> Efficient, clear communication and team raised the most funds for cancer research</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>Relevant for outside classroom. It has an impact on others – if you're disorganized, you're inefficient, people can't do their jobs, could make for bad customer service and affect reputation, etc.</p>
		<p><b>S:</b></p> <p><b>T:</b></p> <p><b>A:</b></p> <p><b>R:</b></p>	