

STRATEGIC APPROACH TO INTERVIEWING

BEST PRACTICES FOR THE MBA MARKET

TOP 10 INTERVIEW COMPETENCY CHECKLIST

COMPETENCY	SKILL EVIDENT	IMPROVEMENT NEEDED
Craft a targeted positioning statement that highlights your experience, expertise, and the immediate contribution you would bring to the position and organization.		
Practice positioning statement – be able to use it in multiple forms and multiple settings.		
Relate your abilities to employer’s needs: focus on your merits, not your needs.		
Research the company. Go to the website. Read business press. Talk to current employees (UW alums / personal contacts). Learn as much as you can about company’s key business issues, trends, and challenges.		
Focus on the positive: what you can offer the company, not the negative: emphasizing your lack of skills or experience.		
Use the STAR framework in your sharing your story examples: Situation / Task / Action / Result.		
Be concise in your answers and questions: don’t ramble.		
Show your enthusiasm for the position and company.		
Treat each interaction – be it by phone or in person – as an interview.		
Prepare questions that show you know something about the company and your interest in / enthusiasm for working there.		

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEW BEHAVIOR

BEFORE

- Research and prepare for the interview. Know the industry, competitors, and company. Synthesize the research with your own opinions and ideas about key challenges and directional trends.
- Tailor STAR stories to research
- Determine who and how many will be conducting the interview(s): name, title, division
- Take research notes to interview
- Wear professional dress and be well-groomed, limit smoking, cologne, anything potentially offensive

DURING

- Listen to the questions. Pause if necessary before answering so you can give thoughtful responses, don't jump in and ramble
- Respond by matching specific accomplishments to the job
- Nonverbal communication is powerful: strong handshake, smile, maintain eye contact, sit up straight, be interested
- Postpone salary/benefit discussions until after an offer is made
- Negotiate based on contribution
- Ask well thought out questions
- Did you accomplish your agenda? A summary statement provides one last impression of your skills and interest in the job
- Ask interviewer about next steps. Get his/her business card

AFTER

- Summarize meeting with a variation of your summary or positioning statement, highlighting your interest and value to the firm
- If appropriate, arrange for a specific date/time for your next contact with the interviewer/company
- Make notes about information you gathered during the interview
- Send follow up letters within 24 hours: can be by email or sent mail depending on the urgency

COMMON TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & RECOMMENDED WAYS OF FRAMING YOUR ANSWERS

Common Types of Interview Questions

- Opening Questions
- Behavioral Questions
- Case Scenario Questions
- Your Weaknesses and Potential Problems
- Choice Questions
- Future Questions

Opening Questions

Used to assess how you represent yourself.

Strategy: Determine your positioning statement before the interview and be ready to state and elaborate on your key points.

Examples of Opening Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Walk me through your background.
- What brings you here?
- List your key skills that are most relevant for this position.

Behavioral Questions

Used to find out how you've handled situations in the past. Assumption is past behavior predicts future performance.

Strategy: Think through your skills and prepare specific examples of accomplishments that align with the requirements of the job description. Have multiple examples (3 for each skill).

Use the STAR approach to frame your answers: note how much time (%) is spent on each aspect of STAR

Situation – Provide background information for context – 5%

Task – Describe the problem or situation and explain your task – 5%

Action – Detail what you did, obstacles you overcame and how you demonstrated your skills / expertise – 60%

Result – Share the results you produced and quantify as much as possible – 30%

Examples:

- Describe a time when you had to sell an idea to your boss or other authority figure.
- Describe a difficult colleague you had to deal with. What did you do?
- Give an example of an innovative solution to a business problem.
- Tell me about a time you were leading a team that wasn't going well. How did you handle the situation?

Case Scenario Questions

Used to assess your ability to apply business concepts and to determine how clearly you think through problems. Questions are typically tailored to functional knowledge of expertise.

Strategy: Clearly grasp the issue at hand in a given question, succinctly outline the business rationale you're using to frame your answer, explain the strategy that flows from that rationale and provide examples of tactics you would use to achieve that strategy. Be ready to defend your response.

Be prepared to explain how you would measure the effectiveness of the rationale and tactics you have proposed. If you have trouble doing this, then this tells the interviewer you truly don't understand the goals you are trying to achieve and therefore really don't understand how to address the question.

Examples:

- I'm the new product manager and you are my finance person and are out to protect me. Walk me through the P&L and explain what I should pay attention to?
- How would you price a new product?
- Our company has excess inventory that cost \$5 to build. A company has offered to buy it at \$6/unit but wants it repackaged for \$2/unit. Should you sell and why?
- Tell me about a hobby. Build a business plan around it.

Your Weaknesses and Potential Problems

Used to address personal concerns or to see how you handle sticky situations.

Strategy: Identify personal problem areas and practice how you will address them if asked. Confer with career services staff if you have concerns. Focus on the good news. Limit extent of problem. Explain what you have gained from the experience and how you overcame difficulty.

Examples:

- What is your greatest weakness?
- Tell me about a time you failed.
- You do not have any marketing experience so why should we hire you?

Choice Questions

Used to investigate your thought and decision making process. Check to see your interest in position/company.

Strategy: Emphasize the positives, demonstrate how you assess information and come to a decision. Interviewer expects a personal, compelling reason that led you to the decision. Why do you want to work for X? Not just that it's a market leader or in the Northwest but the personal reason behind your interest in the firm – philosophy, products, how company is run, the work you'd be doing...

Examples:

- Why did you choose to get a UW MBA?
- Why are you interested in our firm?

Future Questions

Used to obtain a reality check

Strategy: Frame your answer in terms of skills you want to be using now and the increased responsibility you'll be able to handle along the way, rather than focusing on a particular position you want to attain

Examples:

- What is your five-year goal?
- What do you want to achieve in your career?

REASONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER QUESTIONS

- Demonstrate company knowledge
- Determine what the interviewer perceives as most important to success in the position
- Assess the company on criteria you value
- Ask about the next step in the recruiting / hiring process

Examples:

- As Amazon.com moves into additional markets where dominate players exist, for example e-bay, what's the strategy to differentiate?
- Have you seen changes in culture since merging with XYZ?
- How would you characterize your experience working at ABC?
- What are the priorities for this position? Key challenges?
- What will I have accomplished in the first X months for you to know that you made the right decision in hiring me?
- What are some of the typical career paths for people who enter the company in this position?

RECRUITING COMPANY SUGGESTIONS

Amazon.com

When presented with case type questions, candidates need to clearly grasp the issue at hand in a given question, succinctly outline the business rationale they're using to frame their answer to that question, explain the strategy that follows from that business rationale, and provide examples of tactics they would use to achieve that strategy. Expect candidates to measure the effectiveness of the strategy and tactics they proposed and will push candidates to see how they think when challenged.

Many candidates tend to jump directly to the tactics piece (the ideas) without spending the time to outline the business goals they are trying to achieve, why those are the right goals, the strategy they'd follow to achieve those goals, and then the tactics that effectively execute that strategy (ie: respond with lots of ideas without outlining why those ideas are the right ones and how they address the situation successfully). Others may successfully frame the question but can't come up with any ideas on how to solve it.

Microsoft

Prior to the interview, it's important to thoughtfully think through why you want to work for a particular company. What is the compelling reason that draws you to this firm? Stating that company ABC is a market leader or based in the Northwest is not enough, rather you want to pull out and emphasize a personal connection. Perhaps you first used their products in college to do X project and found the products...and this led to your interest in finding out more about the company, then you meet B at a conference who worked for ABC company and talked to him...this solidified your decision to pursue this company.

Fidelity International

Company and industry research is critical. When preparing for an interview, the company expects that candidates will have researched their product and done the pre-work to be prepared to analyze and articulate their opinions using business tools and concepts. The interviewer will drill for interest in the market. Ask if you read the WSJ or comparable press. Fidelity would expect an ability to do in-depth analysis of stocks.

For example, being prepared to answer questions such as: When you buy stocks what 3-4 things do you look at? What are 1-2 potential risks? What ratios do you look at? What valuation methods? How do you analyze companies – what do you look for? Name a company, analyze if the stock is a good buy.