THE THREE Rs

I. RESEARCH  Do your homework. Use all your resources to learn more about the employer and the position for which you’re interviewing. Go to the organization’s website, but don’t stop there. Get a 360-degree perspective on the employer by researching a variety of resources, from the Vault Online Library (available through the Web Resources page on careers.tufts.edu) to media sources and professional organizations. Develop an understanding of the organization’s mission, culture, and challenges.

Learn as much as you can in advance about the nature and format of the interview. Will you meet with a single individual from Human Resources, the hiring manager, and/or potential co-workers? Will there be case questions involved (typical of consulting or technical interviews)? The better your preparation, the better your performance.

II. REFLECT  What happens before your interview will help determine its outcome. Now that your research has given you more information about an employer, you’ll have a better understanding of where you might fit and, most importantly, how you can contribute to the organization’s goals.

Reflection is the phase where you develop answers to the following questions that are certain to be asked at some point in an interview:

- Why are you interested in this organization? This field? This specific position?
- And, the query that candidates most often find challenging: “Why YOU?” If you’ve done your homework – and you’re sincere about your interest in the position – you’ll be prepared to answer these questions and differentiate yourself from your competition.

As you do your research, consider the fundamental goals of interviewing (below). Reflect on these goals and consider how your research will support you in achieving them.

Your Goals:
1. Market yourself by describing skills and experience that match the job
2. Get information about the position and organization
3. Determine whether the position is right for you

Employer’s Goals:
1. Determine whether the candidate can do the job
2. Assess the candidate’s ‘fit’ with a team/organization
3. Sell the organization and position

III. REHEARSE  Develop a script to answer the questions commonly asked by employers. Somewhere between your brain and your mouth, the most articulate responses can become garbled. Don’t wait until your interview, when the stakes are high, to discover this! Practice, practice, and practice!

Develop scripts to respond to typical interview questions and practice OUT LOUD. Do it alone, with a trusted friend, or a Career Advisor. Sign up for a mock interview with video so you can observe yourself on tape. And finally, don’t postpone this practice until you’ve been notified about an interview; you may not be able to get an appointment and even if you do, you may not have the time to improve, based on an advisor’s feedback.
THE REAL THING: DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Get off to a good start

- Check your appearance and grooming.
- Bring extra copies of your resume in a portfolio.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early so you don’t appear rushed or hassled.
- The interview begins at the moment you cross an employer’s threshold, sometimes earlier. (Candidates tell stories of meeting VIPs — unknowingly — in the parking lot!)
- Behave respectfully with everyone you meet, from administrative assistants to managers.
- The first 60 seconds create lasting impressions. Offer a firm handshake, greet the interviewer by name, and don’t be lulled by ‘small talk.’ You’re being evaluated from many angles, including informal conversation.
- Be aware of your non-verbal communication, especially your eye contact and physical posture.
- Display energy and enthusiasm in a way that fits your personal style. Be YOU.

Keep up the momentum

- When the recruiter begins discussing the organization or position, ask questions if you need clarification or want to know more. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job, the requirements, and the challenges. Your questions should highlight your interest and knowledge of the organization and industry.
- The interviewer will ask about your qualifications as well as areas where they may have concerns. Be prepared to deal with aspects of your background that could be construed as negative (e.g., low GPA, few outside activities, no related work experience). A low GPA or minimal extracurricular involvement could have resulted from working for financial support through college. Or, you may not have directly related experience, but can point to an employment history that demonstrates positive qualities.
- Never criticize a former employer.
- Watch your grammar and enunciation. Employers want articulate employees.
- Never bring up salary or benefits in the first interview.

Conclude with confidence

- Final impressions count. As you conclude, the recruiter is assessing your overall performance. Remain enthusiastic and courteous.
- If you’re unclear about next steps in the hiring process, ask for clarification. Example: “When do you expect to be making a decision?”
- Shake the recruiter’s hand, offer thanks for the opportunity to interview, and request a business card (so you have contact information for your thank you letter).

AFTER THE INTERVIEW...

Jot down the pertinent facts you want to remember about the interview and make note of questions as preparation for future interviews. Within 1 - 2 days, send a ‘thank you’ email or type written note to those who interviewed you. Emphasize your interest in working for the organization and how you can contribute. Use this as an opportunity to clarify or to mention something you might have overlooked in the interview. If you choose to correspond through email, ensure that your message is as formal as one you would send via snail mail.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Career Center offers hour-long mock interviews to help you strengthen your interviewing skills. You also have the option of a mock interview with video so that you’ll be able to see how you look on camera. Schedule an appointment (617.627.3299) before you have an interview so that you’ll have extra time to prepare!
Behavioral interviewing is a popular framework for conducting interviews because employers believe it will illustrate how you – as an employee – will function in a new organization. Proponents of behavioral interviewing theorize that “the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in similar situations.”

Thus, employers will pose a problem or describe a scenario and ask how you would handle it. Likewise, they will ask you (or you are expected to volunteer) similar situations from your own background. This more probing style of interviewing is expected to demonstrate how you manage challenges, awkward situations, and stress (see sample questions listed under Behavioral Interviewing on page 5).

Many employers have come to view behavioral interviewing as a more reliable predictor of your performance than more traditional inquiries, such as “Tell me about yourself.” In the more traditional approach, you might be asked “How would you handle a ______ situation?” You might offer the “perfect response,” but an employer has no idea if it’s a reliable indication of what you would actually do in that set of circumstances. Thus, most interviews today will involve a combination of the two styles.

To prepare for behavioral interviewing, you should develop a repertoire of examples from all your experiences: employment, internships, and extracurricular activities. Think of it as storytelling. In your repertoire, you’ll have stories that exemplify your strengths, achievements, work style, teamwork, initiative. When asked to describe a situation, you simply choose the most appropriate example and adapt to fit the question. The more stories you develop, the better equipped you are for behavioral interviewing.

As you tell your stories, be prepared for more questions. An employer may want to know the “How” and “Why” of what happened. “What prompted you to choose that course of action?” “How did you handle that obstacle?” or “Tell me more about _____.”

This probing gives depth and detail to an employer’s knowledge of you. It’s difficult to ‘fake it’ when you’re providing real life examples. And if you haven’t figured it out by now, honesty is the best policy. Remember: an employer has access to your references who may be asked to verify the stories you’ve told.

If you’ve done your research on the position, the organization, and the industry, you’ll have a good grasp of what is needed in an entry level candidate. Knowing this, you can create a list of stories illustrating skills, knowledge, and abilities that position you as someone who meets the job-related needs of a specific employer. For example, if you know the employer requires individuals to work in teams, be ready with stories of your team work. Likewise, if presentation skills are a requisite, polish your description of a class, internship, or service projects where you played a lead role in reporting to a group. The more you can quantify or provide specific details, the more credible your responses.

**DON’T FORGET:** Employers are interested in how you handle negative or awkward situations (akin to the “What are your weaknesses?” question) so make sure you have a few stories that acknowledge how you made the best of a bad situation or managed to produce a positive outcome.
The **STAR** model offers a useful framework for storytelling and will keep you on track. It will help you organize your stories to give the “big picture”, get quickly to the point, and make a positive impression. Keep your story to 3 – 5 minutes and when you conclude, you may want to invite questions from your interviewer to ensure that you accurately interpreted the question and provided helpful information. Example: “Would you like to hear more about ____? Or “Is this information what you were looking for?”

**SITUATION:** Briefly describe the background to give context to your example. Be specific in identifying a problem or challenge and provide enough detail for an interviewer to ‘get it.’

**TASK:** Identify the task that you set out to accomplish. This step might reflect your strategy or thinking in coming up with a plan.

**ACTION:** Describe your actions. What did you do specifically? Which skills did you use? If you were part of a team, focus on you and the role you played.

**RESULTS:** What happened? How did the situation, project, or event unfold? What did you achieve or learn? How might you do things differently to improve an outcome?

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**Behavioral Interviewing Checklist**

- Identify six to eight examples from your past experiences that demonstrate behaviors and skills that employers typically seek.
- Develop stories to describe these examples, emphasizing your achievements and attitude, yet remembering to include some evidence of struggles or turnarounds.
- Diversify your stories. Choose from internships, classes and school projects, volunteering and campus activities, hobbies, part-time jobs, and other areas that give a 360-degree view of you.
- Organize your stories using the STAR model.
PART 1: BRAINSTORM!
List any and all experiences that you can draw from and talk about during an interview. This includes jobs, classes, internships, groups and clubs, teams, and time spent volunteering. In the right column jot down a few key skills you gained from each experience.

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<th>EXPERIENCE</th>
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PART 2: USE THE STAR METHOD

S What was the situation
T What was the task?
A What action did you take
R What was the result?

Pre-Interview Exercise: Develop a story around each of these skills. Try to develop stories from different experiences. Completing this exercise thoughtfully will help you be ready to answer tough “example” questions!

Teamwork
S
T
A
R

Personal Initiative/ Leadership
S
T
A
R

Interpersonal/ Communication Skills
S
T
A
R

Conflict Resolution/ Problem Solving Skills
S
T
A
R

One of your Strengths and/or Weaknesses
S
T
A
R

Failure Experience
S
T
A
R

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## Sample Questions Asked by Employers

### Getting to Know You
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why/how are you qualified for this position?
- What do you know about our organization? Our products? Services? Competition?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- What can you offer us?
- Why should we hire you over another candidate?
- Define success. Failure.
- Of which three achievements are you most proud?
- Who are your role models? Why?
- What motivates you?
- Have you had difficulty getting along with a professor (supervisor, co-worker)? Explain.
- Do you prefer to work independently or with supervision?

### Your Education
- How did you choose your college?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Which classes do you like best? Least? Why?
- Would you change anything about your education?
- In which campus activities did you participate?
- Do your grades accurately reflect your ability? Why or why not?
- Did you pay for any portion of your education?
- Describe the skills you’ve gained through your coursework and projects.

### Your Experience
- What did you most/least enjoy about your last job or internship?
- Which skills do you enjoy using?
- Have you ever spoken before a group of people?
- Have you ever quit a job? Withdrawn from a course?
- Have you ever done any volunteer work?
- How would a former supervisor describe you and your work?

### Your Career Goals
- Describe your ideal job.
- What other types of positions are you considering?
- Describe your ideal work environment.
- Where do you want to be in five years?
- Do you plan to go to graduate school?
- Would you be willing to relocate?

### Behavioral Interviewing Questions
- Tell about a time when you persuaded someone or successfully pitched an idea.
- Describe a time when you worked under stress and demonstrated your coping skills.
- Tell about a time when you provided a solution or improved something for an employer.
- Give me an example of a time when you set and then achieved a specific goal.
- Describe a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a time when you had too much to do and how you prioritized your tasks.
- Share an experience that demonstrates your willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Describe the most significant written report that you’ve completed.
- Have you ever had to make an unpopular decision? Give an example.
- What’s the best example of how you think logically and use sound judgment?
- Tell me about a difficult decision you’ve made in the past year.
- How have you dealt with a co-worker or subordinate who was incompetent?
- How have you handled an emotional reaction or personality conflict with someone?
- Describe a time when you had to think on your feet.
- Give an example of an occasion when you used fact-finding skills and analysis.

### Expect the Unexpected
- Who’s our CEO?
- Tell me a joke.
- What’s the last book you read?
- Describe your most creative Halloween costume.
- Tell me about your most awkward moment.

Some recruiters have favorite questions. These inquiries are designed to observe your processing: the way you think, behave, and respond. Besides doing the research we’ve recommended (which would give you the CEO’s name), you cannot predict all these questions. Stop and think. Respond carefully. Use humor, if it comes naturally. Don’t just give the answer—give the reason for the answer.
TECHNICAL INTERVIEWS

In many career fields, especially engineering and other technical fields, be prepared to answer questions about coursework, projects and labs. You may be asked to describe a significant project in detail including the objective and results. Note that hiring managers will assume you have a general grasp of technical terminology in your field. Your depth of knowledge may be explored with questions such as: What assumptions did you make? Why do you think that was a valid assumption? Did your results make sense? Did the experiments match your analysis? If you were to start the project over, what would you do differently? Explain what others in your group did — to prove you were interested in the full project.

For each type of position there will be truly technical questions related to the actual job:

◊ For programming jobs you will need to answer algorithm questions and write code;
◊ For structural engineering positions you may be asked strength of material questions;
◊ For electrical engineering jobs you may be asked circuit design questions.

Prepare by reviewing the building block concepts in your field and reviewing past projects and reminding yourself of important equations and relationships. You should also be ready for brainteasers and other questions designed to assess your logic and problem solving skills.

Be Prepared to:

◊ “Whiteboard” your answers to questions to show how you think
◊ Understand that you may not know the right answer, but you should show how you would get to it
◊ Admit you do not know an answer; don’t make something up.

YOUR TURN: QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK EMPLOYERS

◊ What is the most significant challenge facing this organization? This department?
◊ What kinds of assignments might I expect initially?
◊ How is training provided for new employees?
◊ How much opportunity is there for _________? Fill in the blank with a skill that you want to use (e.g., writing, research)
◊ Which skills and qualities are you looking for in a candidate?
◊ Does this position require more teamwork or more independent work?
◊ What are the department’s goals for this year?
◊ What do you like best about working for this company?
◊ How often are performance reviews given?
◊ How would you describe this organization compared to its competitors?
◊ Which characteristics do achievers in this company share?
Consulting Case Interviews

Adapted with permission from Case In Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation by Marc Cosentino

A case interview is a role playing exercise in which an employer can assess how logically and persuasively you – a potential consultant - can present a case. The objective is not to see if you get the correct answer but rather to evaluate the process by which you think and arrive at a solution.

The purpose of a case interview is to test you in the following areas:

- Analytical and logical ability
- Structure and thought process
- Tolerance for ambiguity and data overload
- Poise and communication skills under pressure and in front of a client

Common Case Scenarios

Strategy Scenario: Assisting a client who is entering a new market, developing a new product, investigating pricing strategies, developing growth strategies, starting a new business.

Operations Scenario: Helping clients to increase sales, reduce costs, improve bottom line.

Sample Case Question: How do you price a light bulb that never burns out?

Steps to take with every question:

1. Summarize and re-state the question
2. Verify the objectives
3. Identify the type of case and layout your structure
4. Ask clarifying questions
5. Organize your answer
6. Deliver summary or recommendations

Guidelines for Responding to Case Questions

- Listen to the problem and take notes
- Verify objective and ask clarifying questions
- Think big picture first; think top down
- Structure the problem
- Organize your answer and manage your time
- Be creative and brainstorm
- Listen to the interviewer’s feedback
- Think out loud (but think first)
- Bring closure and summarize
- Demonstrate enthusiasm & a positive attitude

Case Interviewing Resources for Tufts Students

Check out the Consulting link in Careers A-Z (on the Career Center Web Resources page) for many helpful tools including advice from Tufts alumni in the consulting field.

Visit the Consulting Section of “Spotlight on Careers”.

Casequestions.com: Marc Cosentino’s book, “Case in Point,” has been a useful tool for many students preparing for case interviews. Read about the process at Cosentino’s website. Yes, he’s promoting his book, but there’s also a lot of good free content here.

Go straight to the source: Visit the sites of consulting firms that interest you. Most large firms dedicate sections of their website to tell you what they look for in candidates. In addition, they offer great advice about preparing for the interview and, specifically, a case interview.
**Dressing for the Job Interview**

*Before you open your mouth, your appearance speaks for you!*

Appearance is of utmost importance in an interview. Your interviewer will develop a visual impression of you within the first 10 seconds of the interaction. Be aware of your physical appearance. Dress conservatively, and be neat, clean, and tidy. Remember, image is as important as content and that your nonverbal gestures as well as body language add to an interviewer's impression of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>◊ Wear a suit or sport jacket with color coordinated trousers.</td>
<td>◊ Wear a classic suit or a simple dress with a jacket. The best choices in suits or jackets are solid colors or conservative prints. Bold patterns are distracting. Some appropriate colors are navy blue, black, dark green, dark red, burgundy, or gray.</td>
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<tr>
<td>◊ The color should be neutral or dark—blue, black, gray is best. Stripes, herringbones and small plaids are fine, but avoid bold prints.</td>
<td>◊ Silky blouses and rayon look dressier than cottons. Choose a conservative neckline and hem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◊ A light-colored shirt such as white, ivory, or shades of pale blue, yellow or pink is more conservative than a dark color. Cotton or cotton blends look more tailored than silky fabrics.</td>
<td>◊ Avoid wearing clothes that are revealing or trendy. It may be the latest fashion but it will not impress the interviewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◊ Wear a tie—one accessory that can be creative.</td>
<td>◊ Choose sheer stockings in a soft neutral color.</td>
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<tr>
<td>◊ Shoes should be leather—clean and polished. Wear with coordinating colored socks.</td>
<td>◊ Closed toe and moderate height heels are best. Avoid sandals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◊ Keep jewelry to a minimum. A watch and possibly a ring are all you should wear.</td>
<td>◊ Keep jewelry to a minimum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◊ Make sure your nails are trimmed and clean.</td>
<td>◊ Fingernails should be trimmed to a reasonable length. The polish color should be neutral.</td>
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<tr>
<td>◊ Minimize cologne as many people are allergic.</td>
<td>◊ Minimize perfume as many people are allergic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>◊ Avoid backpacks; carry a portfolio instead.</td>
<td>◊ Avoid big bags or backpacks. Carry a portfolio and a small handbag.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>◊ Be sure all cell phones are off!</td>
<td>◊ Be sure all cell phones are off!</td>
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**Additional Resources for Interview Attire**

- [http://www.quintcareers.com](http://www.quintcareers.com)
- [http://www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com)