

A person wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit jacket is holding an Ace of Hearts playing card in their right hand. The card is white with red hearts and the letter 'A' in the corners. The background is white.

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OWN THAT INTERVIEW: 9 Common Interview Types and How to Ace Them All

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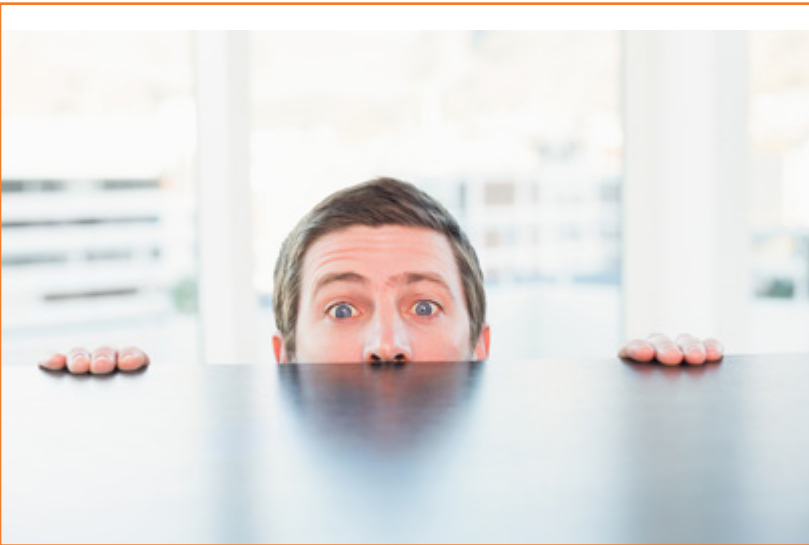
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What's Inside



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You sent in the application. You made it through the phone screening with aplomb. Now, you've been invited to interview with the company. You're feeling exhilarated — and more than a little nervous. You really want this job. Are you prepared to totally conquer the interview process?

If not, don't fret: this ebook will tell you everything you need to know about wowing your interviewers in any situation.

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Every company has its own particular interview process, but generally speaking, most companies will follow a three-step procedure:

Step 1: Phone screening

Step 2: First-round in-person interview

Step 3: Second-round in-person interview

In a previous ebook, *Keep Calm and Get Your Interview On: How to Prepare for a Job Interview*, we covered phone screenings and how to prepare for them. This ebook, on the other hand, will focus on the rest of the interview process.

Because every company has its own interview process, it's tough to say exactly what you'll face at any given employer. To help you prepare, though, this ebook explores nine common interview types that you might encounter and offers best practices for each interview format.

The interview process can be an anxiety-ridden experience, but it doesn't have to be. With this ebook on your side, you can breeze through any interview a company throws at you.

Why Do I Need So Many Rounds of Interviewing Anyway?

Most companies aren't satisfied with one round of interviews. In order to land a job, you'll likely have to go through at least two rounds of interviews, if not more.

You may wonder why this is: If I can impress a hiring manager in a first-round interview, shouldn't that be proof enough that I'm the right person for the job?

The short answer is, "No, it's not."

Typically speaking, a first-round interview is a one-on-one, in-person interview between you and the hiring manager.

The hiring manager is the person responsible for the open position to which you applied. The only reason you had the chance to apply for the job is because the hiring manager decided they needed a new employee for their team or department. Once you're hired, the hiring manager is the person who will oversee you in your new role.





The hiring manager may be your potential supervisor and a key member of the hiring team, but they are not the only person with whom you will work. If you land the job, you'll have to interact with colleagues, and you'll have to work in service of executive leadership's defined mission, values, and goals. Your potential coworkers and leaders are stakeholders in your hiring. A multiple-round of interview process give these people a chance to meet you.

Multiple-round interviews also give organizations a way to assess you on a number of different levels and according to multiple sets of criteria. Hiring a new employee is expensive and time-consuming. An employer needs to make absolutely sure that you are the right person for the role before it extends an offer. If not, the company could end up making a costly mistake.

9 Common Interview Types to Prepare for

When we think of job interviews, we often think of the archetypal first-round interview: just you and a hiring manager, sitting across from one another, talking about your work history, your skills, and so on.

But interviews can come in all shapes and sizes, and during the course of a multiple-round interview process, you're likely to come across a few different interview formats. In this ebook, we'll cover nine common interview types that you may see at some point during your job searching days.

Just a quick note, before we begin: there's a lot of permeability between interview types. For example, you may find yourself in a traditional interview with an interviewer who asks a few behavioral

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questions. You may sit in a group interview where you and other candidates are asked to work on a business case together.

For this reason, it's best to familiarize yourself with all the interview types we cover here. That way, you can recognize when an interviewer is using techniques from a specific interview format, and you can respond with the proper strategies.

1. Traditional Interviews (One-on-One With Hiring Manager)

This is usually the first step in any interview process: a first-round, one-on-one interview between you and a hiring manager.

During the first-round interview, the hiring manager wants to learn more about you, the person behind the resume in their hands. Most of the hiring manager's questions during the first interview will focus on things like:

- learning more about your work history and your experiences and responsibilities at past jobs;
- your qualifications for the job;
- your skill set;
- how you might fit in with the culture at the company.

If you want to really impress the hiring manager and prove to them that you are the right person for the job, keep these tips in mind:



- Hiring managers want to get to know who you are. They want to make sure you'll thrive at the company. So be honest with them: if you only say things you think the hiring manager wants to hear, they'll know you're putting on an act. Besides, if you have to fib your way into a job, then it isn't the right job for you — and you'll realize that very quickly when you're working in a role you loathe at a company you hate.

- When hiring managers ask about your past roles, be prepared to answer with specific examples of your achievements, accomplishments, passion, and struggles. They want you to go deeper than your resume. Vague and theoretical answers to their questions are no good.

- Don't overstay your welcome. Candidates who ramble on and on — candidates who can't seem to get to the point — leave hiring managers feeling exhausted. Be clear, concise, and direct during the interview.

- When the hiring manager asks you why you're leaving your current job (or why you left your last job), give them a positive answer. Focus on the new opportunities and challenges presented by the new job, rather than on the bad bosses or annoying coworkers who drove you from your old job.





- Do plenty of research! The hiring manager expects you to know about the company and the job opportunity coming into the interview. It is likely the hiring manager will ask you point-blank about your knowledge of the company. If you only have a cursory, general knowledge of the company and/or role, the hiring manager will see you aren't very dedicated or passionate about the job.

Perhaps the single most important piece of advice we can give when it comes to the traditional interview, however, is this: come prepared to ask questions!

If you don't have any questions for the hiring manager, they'll take that as a sign that you are disinterested in the role. If you were really passionate about the opportunity, wouldn't you want to learn as much about it as you possibly could?

Moreover, it's not good enough to just have questions for the hiring manager. You need to have the right kind of questions. If your questions focus only on little things, like perks, hours, and pay, the hiring manager will think that you're nothing but a mercenary, more interested in a paycheck than the company.

It's perfectly fine to ask questions regarding practical and administrative issues, but these cannot be your only questions. You should also be asking questions that demonstrate your interest in and commitment to the organization and the role.

Good examples of questions to ask the hiring manager include:

- What are some of the challenges your company faces?
- What might success look like in my role?
- What traits, qualities, and skills are you looking for in this role?
- Is this a new position? Why was it created?
- What is the company's vision? It's mission?

- What are the company's goals? How could I help the company achieve these goals if I landed this position?
- What's the culture like at this company?
- What kind of people tend to really excel here?
- What sort of career paths have others had at this company?
- Can you tell me about the team I would join if hired?
- What are the team members like?

Questions such as these show the hiring manager that you are taking the process seriously. By asking about success, challenges, and the company culture, you demonstrate that you want to make sure this is the right role for you — and you also prove that you are a goal-oriented person who would be committed to the company if hired.

2. Peer Interviews

During a peer interview, you'll meet with potential coworkers. These coworkers will ask you questions about yourself, and you'll have the chance to ask them questions about the company, the team, the job, the culture, etc.

Let Your Personality Shine

Show Genuine Interest

Listen Carefully

Ask Thoughtful Questions

Be a Team Player

When meeting potential coworkers, it's best to let your personality shine. The reason these coworkers are involved in the interview process is because they want to know whether or not you would be a good fit for the company,

department, and/or team.

Be yourself, but don't let your ego get the best of you. Take a genuine interest in all that your potential cowork-

ers have to say. Listen carefully to them, ask thoughtful questions, and engage in intelligent, respectful discussions with them. Prove that you are a team player who values all of their colleagues.

Meeting coworkers is also a chance for you to learn more about whether or not you'd like to work for the company. Ask potential coworkers about their experiences with the organization and its culture. Frame your questions in a positive way: you're not here to dig for dirt; you just want to get an honest picture of what it's like to be in the trenches day in and day out.

It's also important to note that, during the interview process, you may meet with potential coworkers from all levels. These coworkers may be your peers, or they may be below you in the chain of command. They may be from the team or department you are looking to join, or they may be from other areas of the business.

Remember that everyone you meet during the interview process — including employees with more junior status than you, interns, and receptionists — is part of the company and deserves the same level of respect. Treat every person you meet with genuine kindness and take a sincere interest in what they have to say.

Whether it takes place during a formal peer interview or as you're passing through the halls of the building, every interaction with a potential coworker is a chance for you to prove you are the right person for the job.

3. Case Interviews

Often used by management-consulting firms and investment banks, case interviews are interviews in which the candidate is presented with a business case and then asked to analyze the case and explain how they would approach the challenges posed by it.



Case interviews are a chance for candidates to demonstrate their real-world business skills. To really impress interviewers during a case interview, do the following:

- Find some practice cases online — there are plenty out there; Google is your friend here — and spend time honing your business analysis skills before the interview.

- Bring paper to interview. Listen to the case carefully and take thorough notes. You may also want to bring graph paper, in case you want to add a visual component to your analysis.

- Your process for analyzing the case is almost as important as — if not more important than — your proposed solution to the problem presented by the case. Be sure to think out loud and explain your approach thoroughly.

Take your time. Ask the interviewer if you can have a few moments to think quietly about the case before

you start thinking out loud. Use this time to gather your thoughts. However, don't take too much time. A minute or two should suffice. Any longer, and the interviewer may start eyeing you with suspicion.

Feel free to ask questions of the interviewer. You want to gather as much information as you can about the case

— plus, your questions will show the interviewer that you are putting all of your mental resources toward the analysis of this case.

When analyzing the case, break it down into smaller pieces and approach each piece in sequence.

Don't try to handle the whole case at once. After you've dealt

with a specific piece, link it to the rest of the factors in the case and proceed with your analysis.

For more information on how to prepare for case interviews, check out this thorough post from [Quintessential Careers](#).



4. Behavioral Interviews

Behavioral interviews are growing increasingly common, and your chances of running across a behavioral interview at some point in the interview process are relatively high. During a behavioral interview, the interviewer will ask questions focused on a candidate's past performance and job experiences.

There are three general types of questions usually found in behavioral interviews: open-ended questions, close-ended questions, and "why" questions:

Open-ended questions are those that ask for a description of a past event where a problem needed to be solved. The applicant is expected to discuss how they satisfactorily met the needs of the situation.

Close-ended questions are those that require a "yes" or "no" response and are used to verify information. **"Why" questions** seek to understand the rationale behind past decisions or to determine an applicant's level of motivation.



The best way to handle a behavioral interview is by practicing the **STAR method** of answering interview questions. STAR stands for:

Situation: Describe a situation you experienced at work.

Task: Explain the challenges of that situation. What was your task? What did you need to do?

Action: Describe the action you took to meet the challenges of the situation.

Results: What was the outcome of your action?

When pitched a behavioral interview question — something like, “Describe a time you had a difficulty with a coworker; what did you do to resolve the situation?” — follow the STAR format, and you’ll knock the query out of the park.

It’s important to remember that, during behavioral interviews, interviewers are looking for specific examples of your past behavior. Don’t be general, vague, or hypothetical when answering behavioral questions. Draw on your past experiences, and give detailed accounts of the situations, tasks, actions, and results involved in these past experiences.



To prepare for behavioral interviews, you may want to create a list of stories surrounding important events in your work history. These can be times you learned valuable lessons, times you met particularly daunting challenges, or times you went above and beyond the call of duty. During the interview, when you’re asked a behavioral question, you can call up one of these stories and use it as the basis of your STAR answer.

For more examples of behavioral interview questions, check out Big Interview’s “Master Guide to Behavioral Interview Questions.” You may want to practice answering the questions found in this guide; doing so will help you both master the STAR format, and also create a list of stories you can use during the actual interview.

5. Group Interviews

During group interviews, multiple candidates interview at the same time. The purpose of these interviews is usually to see how well you (and other candidates) can interact with people.



For that reason, the golden rule of group interviews is Do not monopolize the interview. Don't talk over other candidates. Don't shut down their ideas. Don't set out to prove yourself better than everyone else by saying the most, talking the loudest, or holding the interviewer's attention for the longest amount of time.

Obviously, you want to make sure your ideas are heard. You shouldn't be mute and timid and let other candidates dominate the floor, either.

What you really want to demonstrate in a group interview are your people skills. Make friends with your fellow candidates. Engage in discussions with them when the opportunity arises. Listen intently to everything your fellow candidates say. Support their ideas when you can, and, if anyone says anything that you feel requires a response, respond politely and personably — even if you disagree with what is being said. You'll have to do some politicking, but it's for a good cause: you'll show the interviewers that you can work well with others, even when you disagree with them.

Many group interviews require candidates to work together on group projects. For example, you may have to work on a business case with other candidates. In such a case, you have the chance to show off your leadership skills.

This doesn't mean you should "take charge" or dictate the project. Rather, you should act as a facilitator. Make sure that all the candidates in the group are listening to one another. Encourage quieter candidates to speak out and participate. Offer positive feedback when candidates do good work or make good points. Help to mediate disputes or disagreements, if they arise. And, of course, contribute your own skills and knowledge to the successful completion of the project.

Paradoxically enough, the best way to really shine at a group interview is to remember that you are not the only person in the room. Work as a member of the team, but make sure you do the kind of work that leaves a definite impact. Share your thoughts and opinions, but also encourage other candidates to do the same, and don't shut anyone out of the conversation in order to give yourself more floor time.

6. Panel interviews

During a panel interview, one candidate sits in front of a panel of interviewers. The panel is often composed of a number of people from different areas of the business. It may include a senior executive, the hiring manager, a potential coworker, an HR representative, and/or others. The panel interview is one of the most daunting interview styles: it can feel like you are up against an army.



But, you have it within you to go toe-to-toe with this army. You can do that by taking the “divide and conquer” approach. Don’t view the panel as a group; view each member of the panel as one individual among others.

Before the interview, find out who will be on the panel, and do some research on each person. Through this research, you will learn what each person is looking for during the interview. For example, the hiring manager will want to know whether or not you’d be a good fit for the team; a senior executive might want to gauge your understanding of the company’s big-picture goals and mission; a potential coworker will want to know what kind of person you are and whether or not they’d enjoy working alongside you.



Once you know what each member of the panel is looking for, you can tailor your answers to their individual questions. Essentially, all you need to do is treat the panel interview like a bunch of little one-on-one interviews being conducted at the same time. All

the rules of the traditional interview apply — there are just more people involved.

7. Lunch/Dinner Interviews

The only real difference between a lunch/dinner interview and a traditional interview is that a meal is involved. All the advice offered for traditional

interviews applies here, but there’s an added challenge: dining etiquette.

To prep for a lunch/dinner interview, visit the restaurant before the actual time of the interview.

Maybe even run through a practice interview at the restaurant with a trusted colleague or friend.

This will help you acclimate yourself to the interview environment and make you more comfortable when the day arrives.

You may also want to brush up on dining etiquette (e.g., which fork is which? Where does my napkin go?) Etiquette scholar is a good resource for this purpose. A couple of big ones that everyone should know: don't talk with your mouth full, and don't put your elbows on the table!

Order food that is clean and easy to eat. Skip large sandwiches, lobster, and anything with a lot of sauce or cheese. Go for simple items: salads,

steaks, chicken breast, etc. Don't eat too quickly: try to keep pace with others at the table. If you have any allergies or dietary restrictions, don't make a big deal out of them. Simply order a meal that suits your needs.



It's best to avoid alcohol altogether. If, for whatever reason, you feel it's better to have a drink (maybe the interviewer ordered a round or a bottle of wine for the table), limit yourself to one glass of wine and no more. Don't reach for beer or hard liquor, even if the interviewer does.

If you have any complaints about the restaurant — slow service, noisy crowds, bad food, etc., — keep them to yourself. You're here for an interview. Focus on that.

8. Video Interviews

As technology evolves, video interviews are becoming more and more common in pretty much all industries and for all types of jobs.

To excel during a video interview, keep these four tips in mind:

Optimize Your Environment

When conducting a video interview, make sure that you are in a private room, ideally with a door you can lock to avoid interruptions. Make sure the room is lit well.

Eliminate external distractions: close windows and shut blinds, ensure the temperature is right, and make sure you are in a comfortable chair.

Position yourself in front of a clean, clear white wall, if possible. If not, at least make sure the camera doesn't catch any clutter or any inappropriate decorations.



Present Yourself Well

Dress exactly as you would for a normal interview. Make sure that your body is centered in the camera's view and that you are looking directly into the camera. Ensure that the camera is close enough for the interviewer to clearly read your facial expressions; this will lead to a more enriched communicative experience.

Set Up the Camera Properly

Get a hold of a high-quality Web cam for the duration of the interview. Set up the camera to show a good shot of your upper body, including arms and hands. A majority of communication comes from nonverbal cues (i.e., body language), so you want to ensure that the interviewer can see your body for more effective communication.

Conduct Yourself Well During the Interview

During the interview, ensure you maintain a good posture. Sit up straight and don't slouch. Look directly at the camera: it will appear to the interviewer that you are looking straight at them and making eye contact.

Beware that video interviews can dampen your personality a little, so be enthusiastic in your communication style. Consider doing some slight overemphasis of your facial expressions.

9. Stress Interviews

Stress interviews really earn their name: during stress interviews, interviewers put candidates under intense pressure to find out how they handle high-stress situations. During a stress interview, the interviewer will try to intimidate you, using some of the following tactics:

- adopting a hostile or combative tone;
- appearing disinterested in your answers; seeming to ignore you;
- taking calls during the middle of the interview; interrupting you;
- demeaning or criticizing your answers to questions.

The key to succeeding during a stress interview is to recognize that the interviewer is trying to intimidate you. Instead of cowering in the face of the interviewer's harsh treatment, remember: it's nothing personal.

Once you realize it's nothing personal, you can remain focused on your answers. Answer questions with confidence and clarity. Start your sentences strongly, enunciate clearly, and project your voice. Do this consistently throughout the interview, and the interviewer will soon get the message that their hostile method is not working.

Don't let your answers wander. Get directly to the point at all times. If the interviewer asks questions you don't quite understand, calmly and politely ask them to rephrase the question. Do so with a smile on your face — it will show the interviewer that you're not nervous, you just want to make sure you understand the question.

You can also push back against the interviewer by asking questions of your own. Don't get hostile with them. Instead, ask questions that put them in the spotlight. For example, asking something like, "What's the biggest challenge that your team will face over the next six months?" will force the interviewer to become the interviewee for a few moments. This subtly shifts the balance of power in your favor.



A Quick Word on Thank-You Notes

When it comes to thank-you notes, the best piece of advice is the simplest one: send them!

After any interview, you should make sure to send a thank you note in a timely manner. If possible, make sending a thank-you note the very first thing you do after getting home from the interview.

A few tips on writing the best thank-you notes:

- Go handwritten, if possible. If not, send “thank you”s via email. But, really, you should try for handwritten. Handwritten thank-you notes are evidence of your genuine gratitude toward the interviewer and your sincere interest in the position.
- Send individual notes to each person you meet during the interview process: one for the hiring manager, one for each prospective coworker you met during a peer interview, one for every member of a panel interview, etc.

- Don't send generic notes. Personalize each note for each person. You can do this by briefly mentioning something specific about the interviewer. E.g., if the interviewer spoke about a certain hobby during the interview, reference that; if the interviewer described a challenge the company faces, talk about how you could play a role in overcoming that challenge.
- Keep your notes fairly short. A few sentences should do just fine!
- Don't write thank you notes ahead of time! If you have a note ready to go before the interview is even conducted, the interviewer receiving the note will be able to tell that it is not genuine.



Thank you!

Conclusion

We'd like to end with a bit of a caveat: as stated way back in the very beginning of this ebook, every company has its own interview process. Some organizations may be satisfied with a single interview, whereas others may put you through three, four, five, or more rounds of interviewing.

What's more, the role you apply for will affect the interview process as well: candidates for entry-level employment don't move through the same process as candidates for executive leadership roles, for example.

You may also come across interview formats we don't mention here.

The point is that the interview process comes with lots and lots of variables — we can't possibly account for all of them. Instead, this book offers an overview of some of the most common



interview structures that candidates may run across during the job search.

To really make this ebook truly valuable to you, feel free to adapt and modify all of our advice to best suit the reality of your interview process! Set up mock interviews with trusted mentors and friends, and practice our strategies. Learn how they work for you, and tweak or abandon them where necessary.



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