

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

# INTERVIEW GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

Job interviews are one of the most crucial steps in your career search process. It's the organization's opportunity to determine mutual fit. This guide provides up-to-date best practices and step-by-step instructions for mastering the conversation. There are three critical questions, often referred to as "the big three," that you need to be able to address in preparation:



## WHY YOU?

Articulating a response to "tell me about yourself."



## WHY THIS POSITION?

Understanding the role demands through the job description and online research.



## WHY THIS ORGANIZATION?

Understanding the organization and the industry.

# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: POSITIONING

Research is essential before any interview because it helps you position yourself in terms of the employer's needs — not just what you want from the job. Understanding the organization's mission, values, recent developments, and the role allows you to tailor your responses and show how your background aligns with their goals. It also helps you ask thoughtful questions and demonstrate genuine interest. Be sure to review the company's website, news updates, job description, and, if possible, information about your interviewers.

## RESOURCES FOR RESEARCH

- The job description
- The company website — specifically the "About Us" If possible, research its challenging new initiatives, and programs.
- If publicly traded, financial statements and other information might give you a perspective on overall goals, business philosophy, etc.



# THE INTERVIEW: USING FRAMEWORKS

## WHY YOU? (TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF)

One of the most common and important questions you'll encounter in an interview is, "Tell me about yourself." It often serves as the opening question and sets the tone for the rest of the conversation — this is your opportunity to build rapport and likability with your interviewers. A strong, focused response can help you make a positive first impression and guide the interview in a direction that highlights your strengths. Your answer to this question should focus on the why, rather than the what. Try to focus on the following:

- Professional identity and areas of expertise
- Most recent position
- Key achievement with scope or result
- Degrees, job titles, relevant skills
- Passion for the role

## EXAMPLES

- I'm a (list professional identity), with expertise in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ (list three core skills as identified in description).
- Most recently with \_\_\_\_\_, in \_\_\_\_\_ role (list current or previous role and company).
- I'm proud of the fact that \_\_\_\_\_ (list most recent accomplishment with metrics).
- A little on my background \_\_\_\_\_ (list degrees, additional credentials or experience).
- I'm really excited for the opportunity to make contributions to \_\_\_\_\_ (tie back to current needs/team)

## WHY THIS POSITION / ORGANIZATION / INDUSTRY?

Interviewers want to understand your motivation and fit. The assertion and proof framework is a clear and effective way to respond. This approach involves making a confident statement about your interest, then backing it up with specific examples or experiences that support your claim.

### EXAMPLE

*Why do you want to work in healthcare operations improvement?*

**Assertion:** I have been interested in operations improvement and healthcare ever since I was a child.

**Proof:** I still remember trying to speed up patient intake processes as I watched my mom volunteer as a nurse at a major church conference. I love figuring out the best and most efficient way to do things and provide the best service. My Lean Six Sigma Black Belt certification project at Michigan Medicine was a highlight. It combined my analytical strengths and values to see how improved medical services improved people's lives and health.

## THE “TIEBACK”

Remember to tie your responses back to the position, organization, or industry. Demonstrate that you’ve done your research, understand the organization and its needs, and that your experience and skillset are connected to the job's specific requirements.

### EXAMPLE

Finally, I understand that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the aging U.S. population are changing the healthcare industry significantly. In response, I understand Michigan Medicine has some new operations initiatives in the works, including your Emergency Room Initiative and Grand Rounds. I’m excited about the possibility of contributing to their success through my Lean Six Sigma expertise.



## WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST POSITION? FRAMING TRANSITIONS

Hiring Managers are most interested in transitions. If you lost a job due to downsizing or are a career switcher, make sure your response addresses the following:

- Make peace with yourself
- Depersonalize your response (never speak poorly of previous employers or supervisors, a commonly repeated interview error)
- Add a moving on statement

Consider using the F-I-T framework:

- Favorite (what was your favorite part of your previous role?)
- Insight (what did you learn? what improvements could be made?)
- Transition (why did you choose to make the transition?)

### EXAMPLE

I started my career in finance because I wanted to apply my analytical skills with my interest in investment and trading. I loved the fast and dynamic pace of X. However, I missed the more consistent operational aspects of business management. Operations efficiency in the financial sector would allow me to maintain my interest in pricing, costing, and financial modeling and apply this expertise in the banking sector more consistently. That’s why I joined X (current employer) two years ago. I’m very excited to continue my interest in financial operations by working for X (Prospective Employer). I believe I have much to offer in streamlining your financial systems and operations (moving on statement).

## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS: MASTERING 3-4 STORIES

To prepare for behavioral interview questions — those that ask about past experiences to predict future behavior — aim to have 3-4 stories ready. These stories should highlight your skills, accomplishments, and how you've handled challenges. Consider a story about overcoming a challenge, a time you faced a setback, and an accomplishment you're proud of. Best practice is to match your stories to the job description requirements (remember that the same story can be matched to varied requirements). There are many frameworks available to help you answer behavioral style questions, including the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result). We recommend using the same framework in your resume's bullet points: ACTION-CONTEXT-RESULT.

### EXAMPLE

*Tell us about a time when you applied analytical skills.*

The order entry processes at an auto parts manufacturing company, where I worked as a consultant, were up to ten days late in shipment dates (CONTEXT). I uncovered a sub-optimization flaw by assessing large amounts of data and conducting root cause analysis (hypothesis testing, graphical and regression analysis, pivot tables) and solution generation techniques (FMEA, structured innovation, designed experiments, trials). I reengineered sales and order entry (ACTION), saving the company \$678,000 annually (RESULT).

## YOUR QUESTIONS

It's important not to overlook this area when preparing for your interview. It's your opportunity to demonstrate your genuine interest in the employer and the job. When the interviewer asks, "Do you have any questions for us?" try asking questions that are:

- Strategic
- Job specific
- Wrap up the interview

### EXAMPLES

From your perspective, what are the most important trends (or challenges) affecting the company?

With these trends and challenges in mind, what are the implications for this team?

What key accomplishments would you like to see in this role over the next year?

Is there anything else I can clarify regarding my candidacy for you?

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW: FOLLOW-UP

## THANK YOU NOTE

Send thank-you emails to your interviewers within 24 hours following the interview (phone, informational, or final round). While many think hand-written notes are better, we recommend emailing to ensure your note arrives promptly. If a panel interviews you, send separate emails. Your thank-you note should include the following components:

- Thank the interviewer
- Reference one key exchange in the interview
- Reiterate your interest in the position and commitment to contribute to the organization's success

## EXAMPLE

Dear Mr. Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me earlier today. It was a pleasure to speak about your needs at X (company name) and how I might contribute. I also really enjoyed discussing the challenges facing the X industry. I believe I could make a genuine contribution to the success of the team (name of team) and organization (name of organization). Feel free to contact me anytime if you have further questions.

Thank you again.  
Maize A. Blue

## FEEDBACK

We recommend not asking for feedback from interviewers. Many companies have a “no feedback” policy due to legal implications. If you must, do not argue with either the decision not to provide feedback or the feedback itself — instead, ask the interviewer for advice on how you might improve.

## RESOURCES

- Answering "Tell Me About Yourself" Effectively in Interviews: the FIT Model: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HK1PxHdWHvk&ab>
- Book: The Job Closer by Steve Dalton