# The. Interview. Guide.

**UMassAmherst** 

Isenberg School of Management
Chase Career Center

# **INTERVIEW RESEARCH & PREPARATION**

Research and preparation are key to your interviewing success. This Guide will provide best practices, tools and strategies to help prepare you for your interview and best position yourself as the candidate of choice.

## **BIG INTERVIEW**

Big Interview is an online interviewing preparation system available to Isenberg students, which is accessible via the Chase Career Center website. Big Interview allows you to access video tutorials, create mock interviews, get guidance from an interview coach, and practice your responses in advance. You may customize your own interviews within the platform, or practice using the pre-set interviews for your specific field of interest. In addition, Big Interview offers comprehensive guidance on formulating responses for the most difficult and frequently asked interview questions, as well has how to create a STAR behavioral interview response.

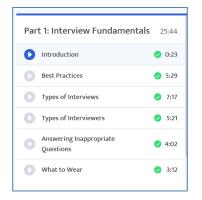
To get started practicing your interviewing skills:

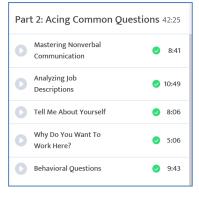
- 1. Log-on to Big Interview
- 2. Click PRACTICE INTERVIEWS on your navigation bar
- 3. You will see several interview practice categories, including General, Industry and Competency

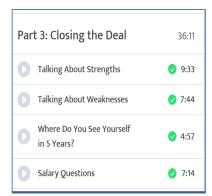


# **Big Interview Career Videos**

These are tutorials providing expert advice on interviewing. Each segment is short and provides invaluable help. These below are from the Fast Track. There is also a much more in-depth video curriculum called Mastery Track.







Big Interview is easy to use. However, if you need additional assistance, please download the Chase's Big Interview Quick Start Guide from the Student Guides section of our website.

# **INTERVIEW NINJA**

Interview Ninja will prepare you for your interview by showing you how to answer these *crucial questions*: Why do you want to work in this industry? Why do you want to work for this company? And, why are you the best fit for this position? Interview Ninja will teach you step-by-step how to research the industry, company and position, helping you turn what you have learned into thoughtful, comprehensive responses. Interview Ninja is only available to Isenberg students and is accessed from <a href="IsenbergWorks">IsenbergWorks</a>.



### **Additional Resources**

Chase recommends the following resources to research the company, industry and position:

- Company Website
  - About Us, Company History, Mission Statement, Media & Press Releases, Investor Relations
- Business Collection Online at UMass Amherst Libraries
  - o Vault Career Insider
  - o IBISWorld
  - LexisNexis
  - Wall Street Journal & New York Times
  - Industry-specific publications
- Google

# What Do You Know About the Industry?

The purpose of this question is to discover if you not only know what area the business operates within, but also to gauge what you know about the landscape of the business field. This is mostly about understanding trends in the field and their implications on the company.

# What Do You Know About the Company?

Learn as much as possible about the company, its mission statement, history, financial performance, competition, acquisitions, product lines and services in advance of the interview in order to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the company, and to best communicate how you will make a meaningful contribution.

### What Do You Know About the Position?

The Job Description will have a "Requirements," "Job Duties," or "Skills" section. These will tell you what skills you need in order to perform the job and what responsibilities are involved. The description will also provide introductory information about the company that they wish the reader to know.

Be sure to know everything in the job description! This will help guide your answers about what you bring to the table, how you are a good fit, and what skills to point out that you possess and/or have utilized in previous roles. Do not ask questions about the position that have already been answered in the description. You may ask for elaboration if something is not clear; however, it is your job to know what job you have applied for and to be a reasonable fit for the role.

## Why Are YOU the Best Candidate for the Job?

Know your strengths and clearly communicate how they relate to and align with the job requirements. Prepare specific examples of when you have demonstrated your strengths and the results achieved. Identify a weakness (ideally not related to your ability to successfully perform the job) and then end on a positive note by identifying steps taken for improvement. Lastly, have a focused career plan (even if you are not completely decided), and be able to discuss how it aligns with the job for which you are interviewing.

# **GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES**

### Before the Interview

Prepare Your Professional Attire

- Know what you are going to wear, and have it cleaned, pressed, and set out ahead of time. This includes socks, ties, hosiery, accessories, etc. Even if this is an online or phone interview, dress like you are in-person
- Utilize the "Dress for Success" toolkit on the Chase Career Center website if you have any questions regarding appropriate attire

Do Your Research

 Research the company, know the job description backwards and forwards, and be able to speak to industry trends and current events related to the company

### **Practice**

Utilize Big Interview to prepare and practice the responses recruiters are looking for!

## Complete a Test Run

 Know how long it is going to take you to get to the office. Use Google Maps to check if leaving or arriving at a certain time alters your trip length. Give yourself extra time for traffic or public transportation delays

### Relax & Focus

Doubt has a way of creeping in, even when you are confident. Being nervous is normal. Bring a set of small ear buds that can easily be stored in a pocket or purse (no giant Beats earphones) so that you can play your favorite song before you walk in. Boost your confidence, be calm, and get in your zone!

# **During the Interview**

## Arrive Early

- Do a test-run before the interview so you know approximately how long it will take you from departure to arrival. Be sure to factor in rush hour traffic or any additional forms of transportation you may have to take
- Be kind and polite to the receptionist. As soon as you walk in the door, the interview has started. Companies
  often ask the receptionist for input about how candidates behaved
- Give a firm, dry handshake upon greeting. If your hands tend to be moist, rinse them with cold water or keep a tissue in your palm to discard later

# Bring your Portfolio/Padfolio

- Your portfolio should contain copies of your resume, a list of references and how to contact them, and any other required materials (transcript, case study, letters of recommendation, etc.)
- Include a notepad, and ask if the employer minds if you take notes
- Have 6-8 questions written down to ask at the end of the interview. Even if they prefer you not have a pad open during the interview, it is appropriate to have one ready at the end

# *Introduce Yourself*

- Stand up when the interviewer enters the room, and give him/her a firm, dry handshake
- If you go in to a panel interview or meet multiple people, shake each person's hand
- If there is more than one interviewer present, greet each person. If taking notes, write each person's name down in an order you will remember so you can use his/her name when answering any questions posed

# Maintain Good Eye Contact

- When you first meet and while you are interviewing, look directly at your interviewers. Focus on them and ignore any other distractions
- If multiple people are interviewing you, look at each person throughout the course of your answers. Begin eye contact with the person who asked the question, and then move to each person for a few moments

# Answer What They Ask

- Listen carefully to what each question is actually asking. If you are asked about your Excel skills and you answer about your people skills, you have not provided an acceptable answer. If you are unclear about exactly what you are being asked, you can request clarification, but in the question, pose what you are confused about (ex. "Forgive me, but to be clear, are you asking how I've utilized Excel to manage data or an example about how I assisted a colleague with his understanding of how to use Excel to derive an answer"?)
- International students may be asked about visa status. Research CPT, OPT, and AT and other information in advance. It is your visa; you need to know its implications for U.S. Work Authorization. If you are not clear on this, particularly how you can do an internship in the US, please go to UMass' International Programs Office.

# Be Professional

- Do not chew gum, appear distracted or uninterested, answer your cell phone, leave your cell phone on or out, curse, smoke, fidget, look at your watch, or expect the job
- Display enthusiasm, energy, confidence, and a strong interest in their company
- Never lie or exaggerate about your skills or experiences. You will get caught eventually!
- Thank your interviewer(s) and ask for each person's business card so you can send thank you emails

## Move Forward

You might give a wrong answer or say something that elicits a poor reaction from the interviewer. Don't let a misstep throw off the rest of your interview. There is another question coming right behind the one you just missed, so let it go and move forward!

# Following the Interview

Send a Thank You Email

- Within 24 hours of your interview, compose and send an individualized and thoughtful thank you email. Thank
  the interviewer for his/her time, include relevant points from your discussion, and briefly summarize why you
  are the right candidate for the job
- Immediately jot down notes about what you were asked and how you answered. Note parts of the conversation that you feel went very well, and perhaps aspects that didn't go as well (for use in future interview preparation). Identify points that you would like to clarify or expand on in a follow-up interview or in your actual thank you note, topics that require further research or preparation, and additional questions that you have for the interviewer

### Follow Up

- It is customary to wait at least two weeks after your interview to follow up if you have not yet received a status update on your candidacy. If you were advised that it would take longer than that time frame, then allow at least one more week after the date referenced
- Ask in a polite manner where they are in their decision-making process. Pose your question in a way that makes you seem helpful, such as "I am just following up in case there is additional information I may provide."

# Proceed Accordingly

- If you are offered the position, make sure you understand when they require a decision and all aspects of the offer. Know whom to contact should you have questions while you are deciding
- If you are not selected for the position, ask your interviewer if he/she can provide you with feedback. You will find that many recruiters are prohibited by their company from providing interview feedback; this is for liability purposes. However, some recruiters will be able to provide you with some insight regarding what differentiated you from the person who was offered the role. Don't take this as criticism; rather, write it down and file it away so that you have more knowledge for your next interview. Stay positive, and keep moving forward!
- Demonstrate your continued interest by writing a thank you note, even if you were not selected. This kind of communication can differentiate you because it shows maturity and your understanding that this relationship is important

## **SPECIFIC INTERVIEW TYPES & SITUATIONS**

### **Behavioral Interviews**

This is the most common type of interview and is a component of most interviews. This style of questioning allows you to give examples of how you have handled, experienced, or learned from situations in your past. The examples can be work-related, from extracurricular activities, or personal in relation to the development of skills or knowledge. Utilize Big Interview for a helpful framework to best prepare your interview responses. Big Interview is accessed through Isenberg Works.

Prepare two or three examples you can use for multiple situations (for instance, an experience that encompasses customer service, leadership, and quick thinking). Vary the experiences you use for examples. Don't speak about just one job or position. Try to reference each company/organization mentioned on your resume.

Behavioral interview questions are a standard interview component and help employers predict your success in a future job. Studying the job description and identifying "required" and "desired" skills helps to focus in on potential behavioral interview questions.

Understanding the culture of the company will also help you answer behavioral questions. If you know the accepted cultural norms regarding work ethic, team dynamics, success factors, etc., you can tailor your answers to incorporate your skills in examples that reflect similar outcomes.

Use the **STAR (Situation-Task-Action-Result)** method for answering behavioral questions. This framework will ensure your answer provides the interviewer with ample detail about the "behavior" being asked about.

**Situation (S)**: Describe the situation briefly

Task (T): Describe the task to be completed or problem to be solved, and the skills needed to do so

Action (A): Describe the specific actions you took in order to improve the situation or fix the problem

Result (R): What was the positive outcome? Use quantifiable data when possible to demonstrate results

When responding to a STAR question with a group project, make sure to delineate the part that *you* actually did. Group projects are great interview stories to tell when they ask about teamwork. For additional practice with STAR behavioral interview responses, utilize the STAR Answer Builder within Big Interview.

# **Screening Interviews**

Most firms will conduct an initial brief interview to screen and evaluate candidates. This is usually done via the phone and can last from fifteen minutes to a half hour. The interview is usually conducted by Human Resources and is done to ensure you meet minimum qualifications. Prepare as you would for any other interview:

- Make sure you are in a quiet area with good phone reception
- Dress up even if no one will see you. It will make you feel more confident and professional
- Smile while you talk. This will help you convey enthusiasm
- Have pen and paper handy in case you need to take notes
- Prepare questions to ask. Have them near you to reference at the end
- Have your resume handy in case you need to remind yourself of specifics
- Do not attempt to do anything else during this phone call. Turn the television/radio off, close your computer if not using it for notes, and ensure you will not be interrupted
- If using a cell phone, turn notifications off so nothing incoming can distract you on the call
- Get comfortable with silence. Long pauses do not always signal recruiters are waiting for you to say more, rather they are typically formulating their next question

# **Surprise Interviews**

Sometimes hiring managers will call you at an unscheduled time and ask to discuss your resume. This is done to intentionally catch you unprepared, and gives the recruiter an idea of how you handle difficult situations:

- Treat the call like an unexpected pleasure, rather than an intrusion (ex. "It's great to hear from you! I am very interested in your firm.")
- Keep a brief log for each firm you applied to, including a few lines about why you were interested in the position and company, then refer to it to jog your memory about the organization.
- If you are flustered and need time to compose yourself and review your research, you may ask to reschedule (ex. "Ms. Smith, I am looking forward to our conversation but I am unable to speak at this time. When would it be convenient for me to return your call?"). The advantage of this approach is that you can buy some time. The disadvantage is that they may not have other available times and sometimes a loss of spontaneity means less credibility. It is best to expect the unexpected and proceed with the telephone interview when contacted.

## **On-Campus or In-Person First Round Interviews**

After a screening, you may move on to what is considered a first round interview. This is generally a "get to know you" question and answer meeting.

## **Online or Video-Recorded Interviews**

Online or video interviews are becoming increasingly popular because they offer a cost-effective and expeditious method for employers to become more familiar with a candidate without having to worry about geographical constraints. Some companies will have students record their responses online and then submit the video to recruiters for review.

- Access Big Interview to customize and create mock video interviews to get the practice you need to be successful
- Test the Skype or video software to be sure all components are functioning properly. Try a test call or practice
  video to ensure that your camera and microphone are both working. Have a steady and secure connection to
  the internet so you don't lose the feed if using Skype or other internet required software
- A video interview should be approached with the same level of preparation as an onsite interview
- Wear appropriate interview attire
- Be punctual (be online 10 minutes prior to the agreed upon start time)
- Have your resume and other supporting documents readily available for quick reference, but do not read directly from these materials during the interview
- Be ready with concrete and specific examples that showcase your skills, experience, and abilities
- Be prepared with paper and pen, as well as questions to ask your interviewer
- Make sure that your backdrop is appropriate and not distracting. Put your personal belongings and any other items that are not necessary for the interview out of sight of the camera
- Eliminate distracting noises. The microphone picks up all noise in the room, and you don't want to give the
  interviewer an opportunity to focus on anything except for you. Try to avoid shuffling papers and tapping pens
  or fingertips, and make sure that any personal electronic items are silenced
- Close down all other windows/applications on your computer. Don't be logged in to any chat or email servers, the internet, or any other apps that will distract you
- Don't chew gum, eat, or drink during the interview. It is okay to keep a glass of water handy
- Maintain effective eye contact. When you are speaking, look directly into the camera so that the interviewer
  feels as though you are speaking directly to her. In some instances, you'll be interviewed by multiple people,
  continue to look into the camera
- Use a clear and unhurried tone of voice. You may have to speak slightly louder than you otherwise would, but don't yell. It is acceptable to make an inquiry with the interviewer to ensure that he or she hears you clearly
- Be personable and relaxed. A video interview can feel awkward to both parties. Smiling and feeling assured can relax everyone
- Maintain good posture and gesture naturally. The simulated setting of a video interview can cause interviewees
  to maintain an abnormally rigid position and manner. Body language becomes especially important in a video
  interview, so try to relax and use natural gestures and facial expressions to convey your personality

### **Second-Round Interviews**

A second round interview will usually be more in depth, longer, and involve several individuals/interviewers. If you have not already been to the company's office, this is when you will be invited there. This invitation is usually called a Site or Office Visit. Typically, an Office Visit will last for the better part of the workday. It may take anywhere from a half to full day. You will usually interview with three or more people; each will have input into the decision to make you an offer. *Logistics* 

- Your Office Visit will most likely be coordinated through a corporate representative
- You may have to travel and incur personal expenses. These most likely will be reimbursed, but ask for clarification about which expenses will or won't be included

## Your Responsibilities as the Candidate

- If you are not provided with travel/logistic information immediately, contact the company to arrange and clarify the details of your visit as soon as you receive your invitation
  - o If travel is necessary, are they making the arrangements or will you need to arrange your own travel?
  - If you will be staying overnight, has the firm prearranged hotel accommodations or should you make your own reservation?

- o Will transportation from your hotel to the firm be provided?
- O How will you be reimbursed? Do you need to keep receipts or a documentation of expenses?
- Three days before you leave, confirm your interview date and review your travel plans with your designated company contact
- Establish a wake-up assurance system for the day of your interview
  - o Request a wake-up call from the Front Desk or set your alarm clock or phone to allow plenty of time
- If you are traveling, be sure to pack appropriately. Use a garment bag and have everything cleaned before you leave
  - Pack extra shirts, socks, ties, and/or hosiery just in case
  - Hang up and/or press your suit as soon as you arrive at the hotel
  - Be sure you have your toiletries. If you have forgotten something important (razor, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.) ask if the hotel front lobby can provide it for you
- Be sure to write a thank you email to each person you met with, including the individual who coordinated your visit

# Lunch during Office Visit

- Order something you know you like and can eat easily. Avoid any foods that are messy or complicated
- Use appropriate table manners and the proper cutlery, cut your food into edible pieces, keep your elbows off the table, and don't chew with your mouth open or speak with food in your mouth
- Lunch is STILL part of the interview. Even if it is a more relaxed atmosphere, you are still being assessed. Avoid
  controversial subjects such as politics or religion. Don't be critical of anyone you meet, even if your companion is
- Be polite to the wait staff or cafeteria workers

### **Panel Interviews**

A panel interview involves being interviewed by several people at the same time. These individuals may range in department, role, and hierarchy.

- If possible, shake each attendee's hand during introductions
- Respond to each question by starting your answer with eye contact to the person who asked it and then look at each person on the panel for a few moments while you are speaking
- Write down each person's name and position title if possible. This will be valuable information for thank you notes, networking, and future conversations with this person

# **Group Interviews**

A group interview will involve several candidates being interviewed at the same time. You may be asked to cooperate together on a case study or task, to engage in debate with the group, or simply to respond to the same set of interview questions at the same time.

- Be yourself. Don't shrink into the background and let everyone else speak
- Don't try to be the center of attention. You want to stand out, but not so far out that you seem like you are taking over the interview
- You don't have to answer everything. Answer questions that are addressed specifically to you and require your response. If a question is posed to the entire group and you don't have anything significant to contribute, don't
- Be polite to the other members in your group. Companies often utilize this type of interview to help gauge your interpersonal, teamwork, and communication skills
- Don't interrupt or cut someone else off. Let each person finish her thought and try to use a transition if adding on to or referencing what someone has said (ex. "I agree with Kim that..."). If you do interrupt, apologize and ask him/her to please finish their thoughts

# **Role Play Interviews**

Some interviews will require you to "role play" a certain scenario or position. This allows the employer to gauge your thought process, actions, and communication style. You often can't prepare for this scenario, so it requires you to maintain composure and think on your feet.

- Make sure you understand what the goal of the role play is. Are you dealing with an upset customer, solving a logistics issue, working in a team, etc.?
- It may feel uncomfortable and you may be uncertain about what you should do, but be as confident as possible and make the decisions you feel are best in the situation. You are probably more prepared and experienced than you think
- The only ways to fail this are by demonstrating a complete lack of confidence or simply refusing to do it. You have nothing to lose by trying!

### Informational Interviews

An informational interview is not an interview about you, nor for a specific job, but instead is part of the networking process and involves your gathering information about a role or company. Your goal with an informational interview is to help you determine if this is an industry or career you would like to pursue. LinkedIn is great for sourcing potential contacts for informational interviews, and your request should make clear you are not seeking a position; rather you are looking to learn more about their role, company or industry. Dress professionally, research the organization and industry in advance, prepare questions, be respectful of their time, and never ask them for a job. Also, remember to follow up and send a thank you email within 24 hours of your conversation.

# Potential questions:

- What do you enjoy most/least about your job?
- How did you choose this career path?
- What advice would you give someone like me who is starting out in this field?
- How do you see this field changing in the next 5 years?
- How do people learn about new opportunities in this field?
- What skills, experiences or qualifications do recruiters look for successful candidates to have?
- How well suited is my background for this type of work?
- Based on our conversation, can you suggest additional people in this field I should speak with?

## **Case Study Interviews**

Case study interviews are often conducted in groups, and are a good way for recruiters to observe your leadership, problem-solving, and time management skills. Candidates are presented with a question, problem or challenge, and are tasked with solving the issue, making recommendations or creating an action plan as a team. Recruiters will pay close attention to the methods you use to approach and solve the problem including teamwork, analytics, creativity and brainstorming. For additional information, access the Student Guides within the "For Students" section of the Chase Career Center website, and download the Case Interview Resources Guide, Mastering the Case Interview (Principles by IUCG) and Preparing for a Marketing Case Interview (by Vistaprint) presentation. You may also access industry expert Victor Cheng's Case Interview Secrets, via his website at <a href="https://www.caseinterview.com">www.caseinterview.com</a>, or visit Chase to borrow a copy of Marc Cosentino's book, Case In Point: Complete Case Interview Preparation.

## **COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in this company or role?
- What major advances or recent trends are you aware of that have propelled this industry?
- What interests or concerns you about this position or company?
- What is our mission statement?
- What are our service lines and products? Who are our biggest clients or customers?
- What was the prior year's revenue? Is it up or down from previous years?
- Who are our company's main competitors?
- What challenges might the firm face in the near future?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- What goals have you set for yourself? How do you plan to achieve your goals?
- Tell me what you perceive as your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses, and how have you worked to improve upon them?
- What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
- What has been your greatest challenge? How did you handle it? What did you learn from it?
- Why did you choose the extracurricular activities that you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?
- What was the most useful criticism you received and whom was it from?
- Tell me about a project you led that demonstrates your leadership skills. What did you do?
- How do you solve conflicts?
- Describe a project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical skills.
- What one academic course had the greatest impact on you and why?
- Give an example of a situation in which you failed and how you handled it.
- Give me a specific example of your work or learning within a diverse environment. What impact did the experience have on you?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Describe your leadership style.
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- What can you contribute to our organization? Why should we hire you? Why are you the best candidate?
- Give me an example of a time when you didn't have enough information to be able to make a decision.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick and think on your feet.
- Have you ever solved a problem, others around you couldn't? What did you do? How did you do it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to request help on one of your projects or assignments.
- Tell me about a time when you had to motivate others. Were you successful? What did you do?
- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?
- Tell me about a project or experience that would help me better understand what kind of team player you are.
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with a colleague. How did you handle it?
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Tell me about a project that you executed from start to finish.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to be assertive to get a point across.
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.
- Tell me about a time when you made personal sacrifices to meet the demands of a job.
- Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult customer. What did you do?
- What do customers do that irritates you? How do you react?
- Describe a time when you didn't know the answer. What did you do?
- Tell me a time you had to work independently without a supervisor's instruction or guidance.

## **INTERVIEW COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES**

# **Example of Interview Thank You Note:**

Dear Mr. Smith,

I sincerely enjoyed meeting with you yesterday and learning more about the Public Relations Specialist role at HugDug.com.

Our conversation confirmed my interest in becoming a member of HugDug's intern staff. I was particularly pleased at the prospect of being able to develop my own article ideas with the head of the bureau, as well as further developing my multi-media skills. I feel confident that my experiences both in the workplace and in the classroom would enable me to fill the job requirements effectively.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide you with any further information. I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you again for the courtesy you extended to me.

Sincerely, Cynthia Kellogg

# **Example of Thank You Email Following Rejection:**

Dear Ms. Smith,

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you again for considering me for the finance internship with your real estate group. Congratulations on coming to a final decision. I wish you the best moving forward with a new team member.

Despite my keen disappointment about your decision, I remain very interested in your firm and will continue to follow its developments online as well as interact with representatives who attend events on our campus. I have been most impressed by the firm's growth in the last year, especially with the diversity of your commercial property portfolio.

I truly look forward to a future opportunity to connect and hope you will keep me in mind should another role become available for which I may be a suitable candidate. Again, thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely, Alicia Monet