

# Nailing the Job Interview

September 25, 2024



VANDERBILT  
UNIVERSITY

# What is your goal in a job interview?

To get a job offer, right? Nope.

You don't want a job if it's a bad fit. You'll be miserable.

Your goal is to figure out, together with the interviewer, if your *skills fit the work* and your *personality fits the culture* .

So...

Be authentic, so they see the real you.

Be prepared, so they see the real you at your best.

Remember, you're interviewing them, too.



# Interviewer's Perspective

They've heard the same answers hundreds of times...

So say something unique.

They're interviewing 10-15 similar people today...

So tell memorable stories.

They're impressed when you've done your homework...

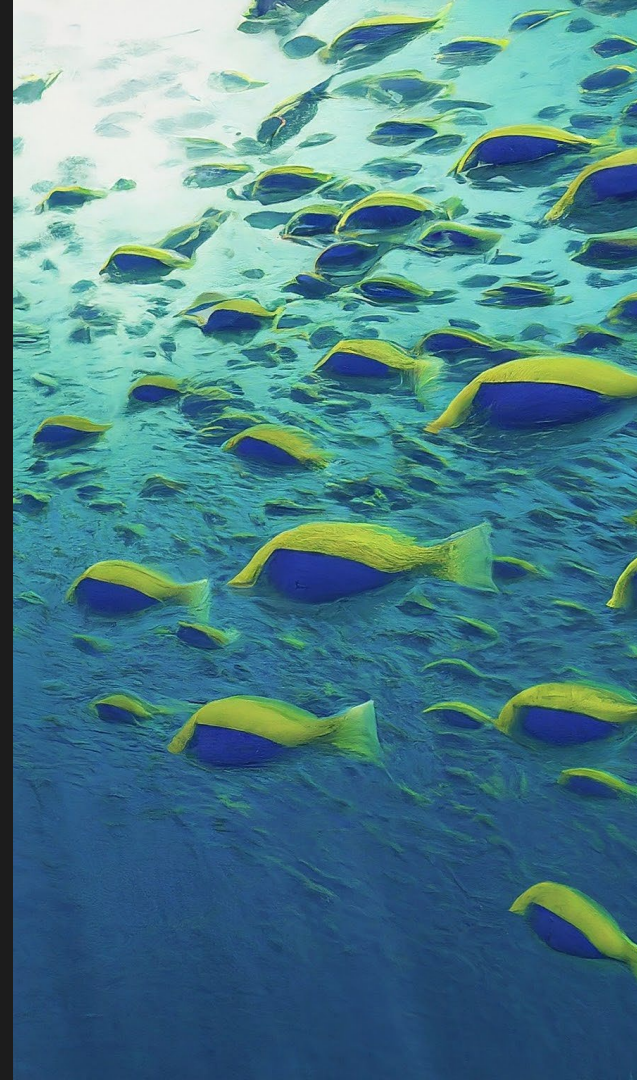
So be knowledgeable about the company

They're probably tired...

So be energetic.

They're looking for someone they'd like to work with...

So be friendly.



“Oh yeah,  
that’s the  
student  
who...”



# Two Keys During the Interview

## *First impressions matter*

Interviewers make decisions about you in the first 15 seconds.

- Be early
- Dress properly - company “+1”
- Shoes shined, clothes pressed, hair & face groomed
- Shake hands with firm grip (neither limp nor crushing)
- Stand up straight, look them in the eyes
- Smile.

# Two Keys During the Interview

## *How you act matters*

Have a conversation. This is two people getting to know each other, not an interrogation or a Q&A tennis match.

- Listen. Understand the question before answering
- Be concise. There's a lot to talk about. Don't hijack the conversation with long answers.
- Let your personality shine.
  - Smile
  - Good energy
  - Authenticity / Vulnerability

# The Questions



Tell me about yourself?

Why do you want to work with us?

Where else are you interviewing?

Have you ever failed at anything?

Tell me about a time when you...

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

# “Tell Me About Yourself...”

Have an elevator pitch

- A 30-60 second story that says what's distinctive and interesting about you.
- Not a resume recitation
- Make it memorable

Practice this pitch with a friend until you can give it easily (practicing alone doesn't help you much)

**Present** : “Currently I’m...”

**Past**: “Before that, I..”

**Future** . “I’d like to...”



# Exercise: “Tell Me about Yourself”

Develop your elevator pitch

1. Take 2 minutes to think about your “Present—Past—Future” elevator pitch.
2. Pair up and each give the pitch to your partner.
3. Give feedback to each other.



# “Why Our Industry? Why Our Company?”

You need to have thought this through with an answer for you.

- Focus on their company, not the industry.
- What attracts you (not what attracts everyone else) to their culture
- Why your skills match their needs
- Not the same answer they will hear from others
- It should tie to your elevator pitch



# “Where Else Are You Interviewing?”

It's okay to interview elsewhere, especially other good companies in their industry.

If you're interviewing in other industries...

Better have a great reason. It looks like lack of interest in their business.



Yes, we found a way to use this meme

# “Have You Ever Failed At Something?”

Be honest and say yes! Everyone has failed at something.

Have a story about learning from it and overcoming.

Nothing too personal

- “My girlfriend dumped me..”
- “I overcame my opioid addiction...”



# “What are Your Strengths and Weaknesses?”

## Strengths

No more than 2 or 3

Great stories to illustrate how you are distinctive/unique

Tied to your elevator pitch

## Weaknesses

No bogus weaknesses

- “I work too hard”
- “I’m a perfectionist”
- “I’m too loyal.”

Similar to failures, have a story of how you’ve overcome



# “Tell Me About a Time When You...

...showed leadership.”

..were a team player.”

..showed initiative.”

..persuaded/influenced a group.”

..or any other questions you and your friends are hearing from interviewers.

Practice brief stories (1 or 2 for each question), each of which emphasizes something distinctive about you.

Use the STAR method to respond:

**Situation** : set the scene

**Task**: your role /responsibility

**Action** : steps you took

**Results**: what you achieved or learned

# Exercise: Build an Interview Story with STAR

One time, \_\_\_\_\_ (Situation)

so I had to \_\_\_\_\_ (Task based on situation)

I decided to \_\_\_\_\_ (Actions, including thought process)

which resulted in / so I learned \_\_\_\_\_ (Results).

# When you ask questions

Start the conversation by getting to know the interviewer a bit:

“Can you tell me a little about yourself and your experience with the company?”

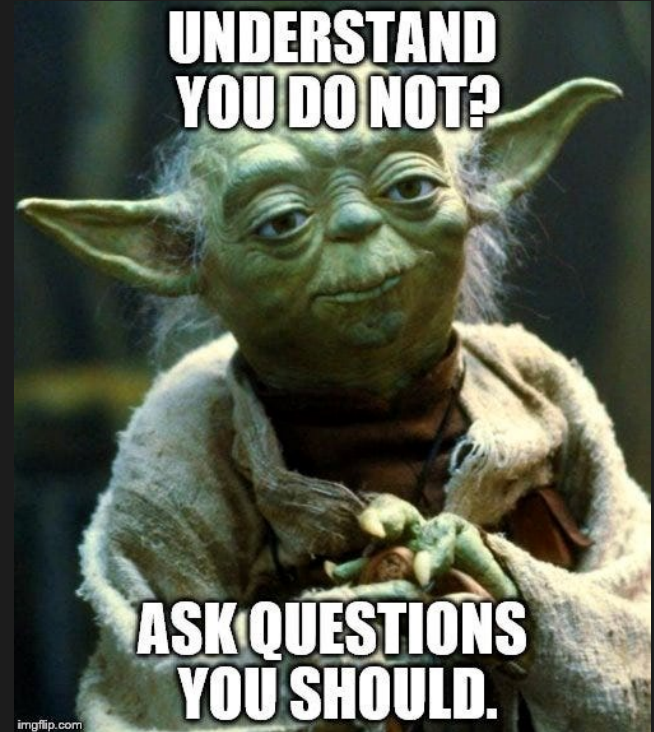
Ask for the interviewer’s perspective:

“What attracted you to the company?”

“What made you choose your company over competitors?”

“What makes you excited to come to work?”

“How do you handle work/life balance?”





# When you ask questions

Only ask questions that you really *care* about!

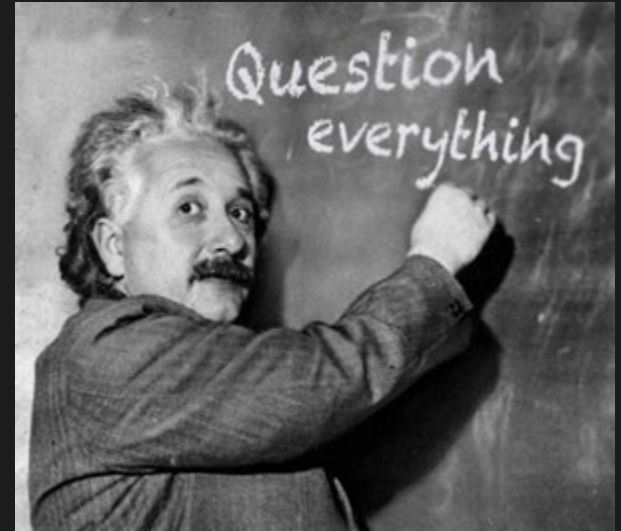
- They know if you don't
- Pay attention to their answers, then ask follow-ons.

Never ask...

Any question where you should already know the answer from your research on the company.

Generic questions about careers in their industry. (Only ask company-specific questions).

Questions about promotions, salary or benefits (until *after* they offer the job).



# Understanding Culture is Important... but Difficult

Questions can reveal culture:

Don't ask "Tell me about your company's culture." It usually gets you the PR answer. Ask these instead...

"What are some stories (legends) that everyone in the company knows?"

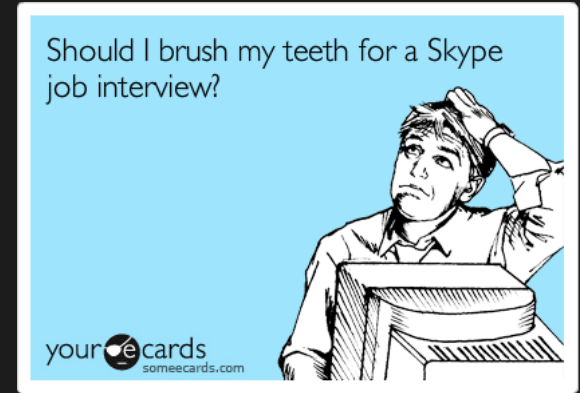
"Who is someone who would be considered a hero within your company (no names necessary), and why?"

"Think of a couple of people (no names) who didn't fit well with the culture of the company. What was it that didn't fit?"



# Special Situations: Video Interviews

- Quiet place (Career Center)
- Professional -looking background  
(*not* virtual, unless you have a green screen)
- Check audio, camera, connection, lighting
- Your face should be 1/3 of the screen
- Dress the same as an in-person interview
- Speak slowly and clearly, and vary your voice
- Be aware of lags. Listen carefully; don't cut the interviewer off.  
Take longer pauses than usual to signal you're finished talking.
- Sit up straight; don't slouch. Smile—simple & warm—without teeth.
- Eye contact: Look *into the camera* as much as possible, especially when speaking



# Special Situations: Networking and Coffee Chats

You have 3 purposes and none of them are “talk to as many people as possible.”

1. Get a more in -depth picture of the company than public info.
2. Get a better gut -feel for the company’s culture & people.
3. Make 1-2 friends. (This is better done when they are still students.)



Think quality, not quantity.



**Case  
Interviews**

# Don't Fear the Case Interview

Scared? You're not alone - everyone finds case interviews scary and intimidating (including us).

But they don't have to be.

Remember... they expect much less from you than what you see in company videos (those are MBAs and usually scripted).

Be confident. You have big advantages over other candidates: you're smart, well-trained, and you'll be well-prepared.



# The Most Important Things to Know

Case interviews are collaborative, not quizzes. They want to see how you solve problems as part of a team.

They're looking not so much for a right answer, but for your thinking process and your interpersonal skills.

Think out loud; let them hear your whole thinking process.

Smile and be likeable just as in any interview.

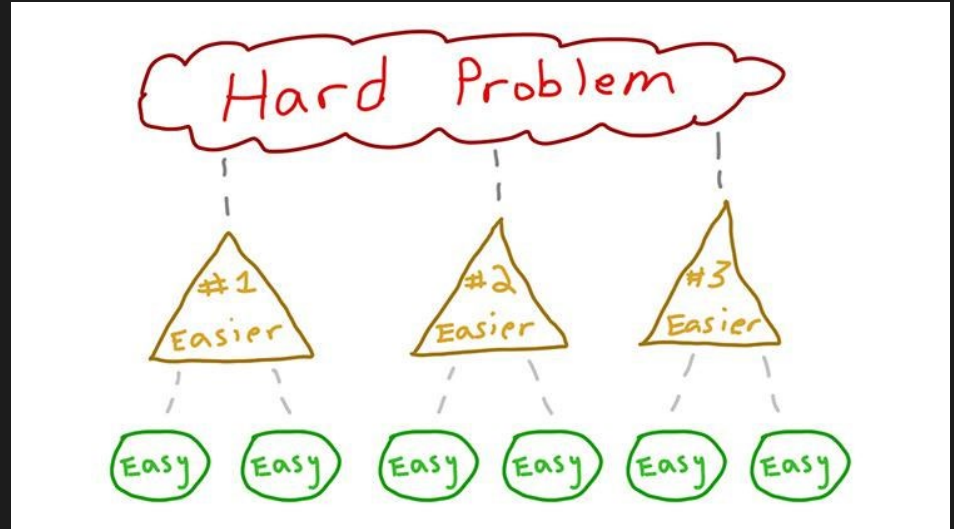


# Crack the case? No. Break it Down!

Break it down into manageable parts

Attack each of the parts

Put the parts back together



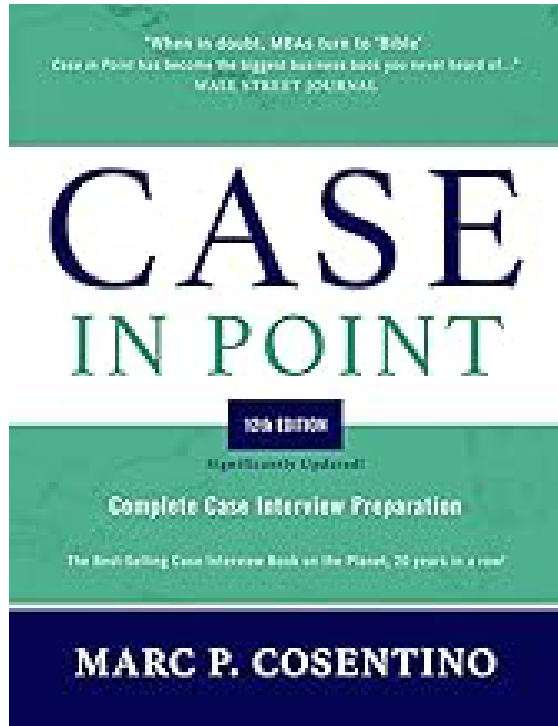


**Some Very Helpful Resources for You**



[Big Interview](#) is a powerful AI-enhanced tool to help Commodores excel in interviews. It's an entire interview prep system to provide interactive training to you 24/7 worldwide! Big Interview includes:

- Challenging, virtual mock interviews for dozens of industries
- A database of thousands of interview questions with tips
- A step-by-step interview Answer Builder for crafting answers to behavioral questions



# The book...

---

\$34 at Amazon  
(worth it)

# An Ever Growing Source of Resources for You:

**Business  
Studies  
website**



[as.vanderbilt.edu/business-studies/](https://as.vanderbilt.edu/business-studies/)



Drop In Hours

Gain clarity about your future.

We help students gain clarity about:

- Handshake and Digital Career Resources
- Networking
- Career & Major Exploration
- Graduate School Advising & Pre-Law Advising
- Interview Prep
- Job & Internship Search
- Resumes, CVs, & Cover Letters
- Fellowship Opportunities



VANDERBILT  
Career Center



VANDY IN  
Business & Consulting



# Factor Questions: Not a Case, Just How You Think

What factors influence which city Amazon chooses for a new distribution center?

- Location vs. other distribution centers
- Proximity to transportation (interstates, airports)
- Workforce: education, unemployment, wages & salaries
- Real estate prices
- Incentives from government, etc.

What issues should you consider in deciding how to market a film?

- Target market?
- Genre?
- Other films coming out?
- Big stars or no -names?
- Original or sequel?
- International appeal?
- Merchandising opportunities?

# CRAFT BEER

How big is the craft beer  
market in the US in dollars?





## Break it down and estimate

How many over 21?

What % drink beer?

What % of beer drinkers drink craft beer?

How many craft beers do they drink in an average week?

x 52 weeks

x average craft beer price



## Break it down and estimate

Over 21: 320 million people \* 75% over 21  
= 240 million

% beer drinkers: 25%  
= 60 million beer drinkers

% craft beer drinkers: 50%  
= 30 million

Drink average/week: x 3  
= 90 million craft beers / week

Annual: x 52 weeks  
= ~4.5 billion craft beers per year

Average price: x \$3.00 per craft beer  
= \$15 billion



# Entering a New Market

Company: products, strengths & weaknesses

Consumer: size, growth, customer needs

Competition: strengths & weaknesses



A person wearing a white sun hat is sitting in a wooden lounge chair on a beach. The person is looking out at turquoise water under a blue sky. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

**Your client makes hair care products, but is considering entering the market for sunscreen. Is this a good idea?**



Company: How similar is sunscreen to your current products  
Distribution channels? Customers?

—Production process?

Consumer/Customer: Is the sunscreen market attractive: Size? Growth? Customer segments whose needs you can meet?

Competition: Who are the big players in sunscreen? What are their competitive advantages? Can you compete effectively?

# Slam Dunk Your Interview with Michael Jordan

The Vanderbilt Career Center can help with

- Job / Internship Search
- Networking
- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Interview Prep and Practice

Your Career Coach for Business and Consulting

*Michael Jordan*

*michael.jordan@vanderbilt.edu*



Schedule a coaching appointment through

[Handshake](#).