

Interview Guide

McKinsey Career Network



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In today’s competitive job market, acing an interview is crucial for standing out among a pool of talented candidates. Effective interview preparation not only demonstrates your commitment and enthusiasm for the role but also equips you with the confidence and clarity needed to articulate your value proposition compellingly. By thoroughly preparing, you can align your skills and experiences with the company’s needs, anticipate and effectively respond to challenging questions, and leave a lasting impression that sets you apart as the ideal candidate for the position.





Getting Started



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Research the Industry, Company, Role and Interviewers

Research the company culture and understand its **core values**. This involves investigating the company’s mission, values, and work environment through its website, social media, and any relevant news articles or press releases. Additionally, insights from current or former employees, accessible through your network, can provide a deeper understanding of the internal culture and expectations. Understand the company’s position in the industry, including key competitors and market trends. Staying informed about the latest trends, recent developments, and challenges in the industry related to the role is also essential and can help you craft more relevant and insightful responses during the interview. Reflecting on your own values and experiences and considering how your personal values and work style align with the company’s culture is equally important.

A thorough understanding of the role and the job description is essential as it provides insight into what the employer is looking for. Pay close attention to the key responsibilities, focusing on the primary duties and tasks. Ensure you meet the required qualifications and highlight these in your resume and interview. Identify and emphasize any preferred skills you possess. Reflect on how your personal values align with the company’s culture and values. This knowledge will help you tailor your answers to demonstrate you’re a perfect fit.

Research the backgrounds of the interviewers. Understanding their roles and areas of expertise can help you anticipate the competencies they might focus on.

Position yourself

Knowing your value proposition and crafting and delivering a concise elevator pitch is critical. Focus on highlighting your most relevant achievements and skills. Think about specific examples where you added value. Your pitch should be clear, concise, and tailored to the role, mentioning who you are, what you do, and how you can help the company. Identify what sets you apart from other candidates. Develop a succinct and impactful “take-away” story, like an elevator pitch. This is the narrative you want interviewers to share with others who ask, “What did you think of her/him?” Make sure that your extended presentation, the examples you share, and the questions you ask all support this take-away story.

Practicing Interviewing



Prepare and practice answers to common interview questions.

This helps you articulate your thoughts clearly and confidently. Key areas to focus on include:

Ensure you have a **STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)** story for each of the competencies listed in the job specification, as well as for topics you anticipate being asked about. Choose stories that are most relevant to the job you are applying for. The STAR model helps organize your thoughts and clearly communicate your achievements, particularly in behavioral and competency-based interviews where demonstrating specific skills is crucial. Using the STAR method not only helps you stay focused but also prevents you from waffling. For each story, detail the situation or context, the tasks you were responsible for (including costs, deadlines, and people involved), the actions you took (highlighting the qualities you drew on, such as risk-taking, discretion, or influencing), and the results you achieved. This structured approach ensures that your responses are clear, concise, and impactful, making a strong impression on the interviewers and demonstrating your suitability for the senior executive role.

Practice interviewing and if you can, record your mock sessions so that you can observe your performance. Use practice interviews to get feedback on the content of your answers and your listening skills, as well as your non-verbal communication. Repeating and refining your answers in practice interviews will help you be fluent and articulate on interview day. Practice interviews help to build ‘muscle memory’ that enables you to be quick on your feet.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) can be a powerful tool to help you prepare for an interview. By leveraging its capabilities, you can enhance your readiness and performance. You can leverage gen AI to generate personalized interview questions based on your profile and the position you’re applying for or to perform a comprehensive market scan for examples.

Be prepared to answer fundamental questions such as, “Tell me about yourself,” “What should I know about you,” and “Why are you here today?” in a concise and compelling manner. You can find a much more exhaustive list of questions you may encounter in the [Appendix](#).

Prepare Your Questions for the Interviewer - having thoughtful questions for the interviewer shows your interest in the role and the company. Consider asking about:

- **Company Culture:** What do employees value most about working here?
- **Team Structure:** Can you describe the team I would be working with?
- **Role Expectations:** What are the immediate challenges for this role?
- **Growth Opportunities:** What are the long-term prospects for this position?

Diverse Interview Formats



When assessing candidates for senior executive positions, organizations employ various interview types to evaluate different facets of a candidate’s qualifications, skills, and cultural fit.

Behavioral interview focus on past behaviors as indicators of future performance. Interviewers ask candidates to recount specific instances and share concrete examples where they demonstrated relevant skills or qualities in real-world situations. Questions often begin with, “Tell me about a time when...” This format helps assess a candidate’s experience and their approach to problem-solving and decision-making.

Technical interview assess a candidate’s technical skills and problem-solving abilities through coding exercises, system design discussions, and questions on algorithms and data structures. To prepare, candidates should practice coding problems, review algorithms and data structures, study relevant technologies, practice explaining their solutions, and participate in mock interviews.

Competency-based interview aim to evaluate specific core competencies essential for the senior executive role, such as leadership, strategic planning, and financial acumen. This often includes a mix of technical skills, soft skills, and behavioral attributes that are critical for the role you are applying for. Candidates provide examples from their past that demonstrate their abilities in these key areas. Questions often begin with “Can you describe a time when you had to [specific task or challenge]?”, “How do you typically approach [specific task or situation]?” or “What are your personal and professional development goals?”.

Situational interview assess a candidate’s ability to handle hypothetical scenarios and behavior. They are designed to gauge problem-solving, soft skills and decision making.

Candidates are asked how they would manage specific situations, with prompts like, “Imagine that...” or “What would you do if ...?”.

Case Study interview provide insight into a candidate’s approach to real-world complex business challenges and their problem-solving methodology. Candidates are presented with a business problem to solve, allowing them to demonstrate their analytical skills, structured thinking, and practical implementation abilities. These interviews can be conducted on the spot or as take-home assignments. They are common for positions in consulting, finance, and management, with questions often starting with, “How would you solve this problem?”.

Panel interview allow various stakeholders, including board members and other executives, to assess a candidate’s skills and how they interact with different team members. A group of interviewers questions the candidate, providing a dynamic interaction that tests the candidate’s ability to handle multiple viewpoints. Be prepared for a wide range of inquiries, from technical to behavioral, and ensure your answers demonstrate your knowledge, skills, and experience relevant to the job and each interviewer’s focus area.

Cultural fit interview evaluate how well a candidate’s personal values, behaviors, and outlook align with the company’s culture. Questions are designed to reveal the candidate’s personality and values, ensuring they match the organizational ethics. A typical prompt could be “Can you describe a time when you had to make a decision that aligned with your personal values?”.

Presentation interview assess communication skills, the ability to articulate and sell ideas, and strategic thinking. Candidates may be asked to prepare a presentation on a relevant topic, such as their vision for the company or a strategic execution plan. Preparing for a presentation interview involves thorough preparation from content creation to delivery. Remember, the goal is not just to inform, but also to persuade and connect with your audience.

Informal interview gauge how a candidate behaves in less formal environments, assessing interpersonal skills and adaptability. During the interview, be yourself and let your natural personality shine through. Authenticity is crucial as interviewers often assess cultural fit.

Assessment center are crucial in evaluating senior executive candidates' capabilities, leadership potential, and organizational fit. Through structured exercises and simulations that replicate real-world challenges, such as crisis management and strategic planning, these centers provide a comprehensive assessment of candidates' decision-making and leadership skills.





Follow up



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Post-interview, send a thank-you note to each interviewer and panel member within 24 hours of your interview to express your appreciation and reaffirm your interest in the position. This follow-up not only leaves a positive impression but also keeps you at the forefront of their minds.

If appropriate, reiterate your interest in the position or company and in pursuing next steps. You can include any details you may have forgotten to mention during your interview. While the interview is still fresh, jot down some notes that you can reference as the interview process unfolds. This should include insights on key challenges and initiatives that were important to the interviewers, qualities and capabilities the interviewers are looking for, and concerns about your fit for the role to address in future discussions, as well as your impressions of the position/company and open questions to get answered.

Below is an email template you can use as a thank-you note post-interview.

Subject: Thank You for the Opportunity

Dear [Interviewer’s Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I wanted to extend my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to interview for the [specific position, e.g., Chief Financial Officer] role at [Company Name] on [date of interview]. It was a pleasure to meet with you and the team, and I truly appreciated the insightful conversation we had about the company’s vision and strategic goals.

Our discussion reinforced my enthusiasm for the role and my belief that my background in [specific relevant experience, e.g., financial strategy and operational leadership] aligns well with the needs of [Company Name]. I am particularly excited about the potential to contribute to [specific project or initiative discussed during the interview] and to drive [specific outcome, e.g., sustainable growth and innovation] within the organization.

Thank you again for considering my application. I am very eager about the possibility of joining your team and contributing to the continued success of [Company Name]. Please feel free to reach out if you need any additional information or references.

Looking forward to the next steps.

Best regards,

[Your Full Name]

Interview Questions to Practice

General

- Why are you interested in this role?
- What will you bring to this job?
- What do you do better than your colleagues?
- What is your greatest weakness? Greatest strength?
- What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
- What are three positive character traits you don't have?
- What will you miss about your present/last job?
- What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
- What did you do to prepare for this interview?

Career Goals

- How do you measure success?
- Tell me about your proudest achievement.
- Talk me through why you left [company name]?/why you took the role of [previous title]? [Sometimes interviewers ask you to talk through your career – keep it brief and focus on achievements/most relevant experience to the job you are interviewing for]

Understanding of the Company

- What is your knowledge of our market – what are your networks like in it?
- How does our company differ from its competitors?
- What are our company's biggest strengths/weaknesses/skill gaps?
- What does our brand mean to you?
- How would you describe our culture? What changes would you make?• What are our values?
- What are our strategic priorities and how will you contribute to this role?
- How does this function fit into our overall business model?
- What are the upcoming strategic challenges that our company faces and how will you contribute?
- What are the macro and micro threats and opportunities facing this industry?

Understanding of the Role

- Your CV/experience is largely in consultancy. What makes you think that you have the technical capabilities and line management experience to take on this role?
- What will you bring to this job?

- What will be your biggest challenge if you are successful in your application?
- If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
- What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- Why should we hire you and not someone with more [xx] experience?
- Why would you pick yourself for this role?
- Tell us about the personal/leadership attributes you bring to this role.
- First 90 days**
 - How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?
 - How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?
 - What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?
 - If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?

Financial Management

- What experience do you have of dealing with companies in similar situations to our special situations and private credit investments?
- How would you adjust your strategy for dealing with companies in each situation?
- Resilience
 - What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
 - Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
 - Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
 - Tell me about a project that you led that ran into difficulties. With hindsight, what would you have done differently?
 - Give me an example of when you had to respond to unanticipated situations/threats/opportunities – what did you do?
 - Do you ever reflect on mistakes you’ve made in business? Can you talk to us about these?

Leadership

- What do you think makes a good leader?

- Tell me about a good (and poor) leader that you have worked with. What defined their style and what was the impact?
- How would you define your leadership style? Give an example of when you have successfully applied this style. [Interviewers often ask this and it throws people – the key to answering well is to demonstrate how you vary your leadership style. E.g., you are directive or delegatory? depending on the context and skills of the team. Don’t get sucked into a discussion of theoretical leadership models]
- Give me an example of a tough decision you have had to make. How did you reach that decision/communicate it?
- Tell me about a time when you identified specific organizational weaknesses and what you did in terms of capability building to counter this.
- What experience do you have for managing cross-cultural/multi-lingual/remote/mixed (in-house/3rd party) teams? What tools have you found particularly useful for this?
- Tell me about a time when you had to manage someone’s poor performance. How did you do that?
- What experience do you have of working with teams in unionized environments?

- When you look back on teams you have led, what do you think was the most successful team? Why was this? And conversely, tell me about an underperforming team and what you did to rebuild it.
- What are you most proud of in your team leadership to date?
- How do you keep your team engaged and connected – and drive team collaboration – under remote work conditions?
- What experience do you have in managing geographically dispersed workforces?
- What are the challenges of leading a multi-site international organization? What have you learned to do – and avoid – in your career?
- Collegial Relationships
 - How do you establish good communication and information flow with others?
 - Tell me about a particularly difficult stakeholder relationship that you encountered and how you dealt with it.
 - Tell me about a time when you disagreed with company superiors.

Tell me about a time when you have had to juggle mutually conflicting demands/interests from diverse stakeholders (board/functional leads/country BU leaders, etc.).

Tell me about a time when you had to resolve critical differences of opinion with senior peers.

How do you operate in complex matrix environments? Give an example.

Describe the most effective and ineffective team you have worked in – what were their characteristics?

How does your current senior management team function?

Looking at the market, where would you envisage the fund focusing its investment strategy?

Driving Change

Tell me about the most successful financial restructuring/performance transformation you have led. [Use STAR – ideally one with short-term wins and longer-term success]

Tell me about a change program that you led which failed. [First give an overview of what was achieved – no program is a complete failure. Then give 2-3 main problems you identified and what you would have done differently –

don't take all the 'fault' on yourself but also don't appear bitter or badmouth former colleagues]

What is your approach to leading change?

Tell me about a time you really partnered with a management team to drive change/tell me about a time you worked with a hostile operational management team.

What are the key components of a successful change program?

Problem Solving

Tell me about a complex logistics problem that you solved/led a team to solve.

Give me an example of a commercial opportunity that you identified and the steps that you took to realize the potential benefits.

When have you worked with other senior functional leaders to drive change?

Innovation

Tell me about how you drive innovation. [Be specific in your example]

When have you worked with other departments/driven innovation across a complex business?

What do you think are the technological developments and changes that are coming down the pike that will impact our business?

Where is our company leading and lagging its competitors in digital innovation?

How have you leveraged digital to improve productivity?

What have you done to promote the ESG agenda in companies where you have worked?

Risk Management

Give me examples of when you have identified and mitigated (or had to deal with resultant fall-out) for the following risks – operational/commercial/reputational, etc.

What risks do you think this business faces?

What have you done to build organizational competencies to mitigate against future risk?

M&A

Tell me about your M&A experience.

What would you do to set the acquisitive growth agenda of the business?

Tell me about an acquisition you have been involved in that failed – what did you learn from that?

Strategy Development & Implementation

From an outside-in perspective what do you think are the key strategic challenges facing this division/our company?

What do you think is missing from our strategy?

When have you encountered similar challenges?

When have you taken a nebulous/top-level corporate vision and translated it into strategy, then actionable change? How have you communicated this vision?

What have you found is the most effective way of working with fellow Ex-Co members?

How have you broken down siloes in organizations you have worked in before?

Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict from a peer.

Describe a situation when you had to convince key internal and external stakeholders on a specific strategic decision.

Tell us about a critical communication issue that you faced and how you resolved it.

Tell me about a boss that you worked with that you didn’t get along with/fundamentally disagreed with. What happened?

Commercial Acumen

Looking back over your career, where do you feel you made the greatest impact on a business’s bottom line?

What is the best example of how you have stimulated revenue growth?

What is the best example of when you improved profitability via cost reduction?

What would you point to in order to demonstrate your ability to deliver stretch growth targets/tough restructuring programs?

What have you done to monitor performance/improve accountability?

What experience do you have in the professional customer segment?

Tell me about your experience of building multichannel capabilities.

Ethics

What values do you lead your life/work by?

Tell me about a time you had to stand up for your personal/your organization’s values.

Tell us about what you have done to promote diversity and inclusion in your teams.

‘Tricky’ Questions (some are not best practice – but best to be prepared)

Why are you looking to leave McKinsey before making Partner?

Give me an example of when you have demonstrated an ‘owner mindset,’ given that all your experience to date has been as an advisor.

What do you think will be your greatest challenge if you get this role?

Tell me about the toughest piece of feedback you have received.

Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years’ time? What are your ambitions?

What will you do better than other applicants?

What did you do to prepare for this interview?

Is this role going to be enough of a stretch for you?

Would you want my job (CEO) in a few years’ time?

