Technical Interviews

A technical interview consists of a series of questions designed to test your quantitative knowledge in areas such as programming, algorithms, data structures, circuits, operating systems, etc., as well as your ability to solve problems. This type of interview is usually part of the interview process for engineering, computing, or other technical positions.

Preparing for the Interview

1. Review the job description: Make a list of the skills and requirements that will be needed as part of the job. Think about your skills and experience in relation to the job description. Did you learn and use those skills in a course or an internship?

2. Study: Technical interview questions are like an exam. Review old labs and class notes relating to the position you are interviewing for. You do not have to be an expert, but you should be familiar enough with the material to answer questions and show that this is something you know about.

3. Practice the Answering Process: In the interview, you may be asked to solve the problems on paper or on a white board. Practice explaining the steps needed to solve the problem while you are working through the question.

Types of Questions

There are two main types of technical interview questions:

1. Questions that determine how well you know advanced technology, software processing, special algorithms, etc.
2. Questions that address your problem solving skills. The interviewer is looking at your approach to the problem and how you think through to find a solution. For example, “why are manhole covers round?”

Advice for Success

Never lie about your skills and past experience. A technical interview or technical questions will quickly determine what you know and what you don’t.

You can admit that you don’t know the answer to a question. But then, tell the interviewer what steps you would take to find the answer. Be straightforward; don’t be overly apologetic or look confused.

Acing the Interview

During the interview:

Be sure to write the question or problem down, verify your assumptions about the problem, and ask for clarification. You must have as much information as possible before you start answering a question.

Talk through the process of solving the interview question. Even if you aren’t asked to write anything down on the whiteboard or paper, the interviewer needs to hear your thought process. If you are sitting quietly, the interviewer won’t know if you are thinking through possibilities or just stumped.

How you are being evaluated:

One goal of the technical interview is to find out if you have the skills that match the job requirements. However, the interviewer is looking at more than just your technical skills. The company is trying to find people who are creative problem-solvers, have the ability to learn, and are innovative. They are also looking at how you handle the stress of the technical interview itself, how well you articulate your answers, and whether or not you possess self-confidence.

Post-interview:

After the interview, be sure to write a thank-you note to the interviewer. It is also a good idea to evaluate the interview questions and your answers. Were there some questions that you didn’t answer as well as you could have? Be sure to look up answers and learn more about that topic in case the company calls you for a second interview. You don’t want to make the same mistakes twice!