

Networking & Interviewing: What to do before & during your job search



Chris Smith, Ph.D.

Postdoctoral Affairs Program Manager

North Carolina State University

This guide references two very different types of conversations related to your job search:

- **Informational Interviewing:**

Talking with professionals in career areas of interest to you to learn more about working in that role or company. This is an information gathering conversation and a chance for you to get an idea of the “fit” of different roles to your skills, interests, & values

- **Job Interviewing:**

An actual interview for a position as a candidate. In it, you will need to convey how you will add value to the organization and fulfill the duties of the role you applied for. Behavioral interview questions are also typically asked.

Informational Interviewing

Most jobs (~70-85%) are never advertised



Informational Interviewing 101

- Set up a call or in person meeting (coffee is good) with someone in a career that interests you
 - Ask them:
 - How did you get into your career?
 - What does a typical day look like for you?
 - What do you like and not like about your current job?

Your Goal: Learn more about that career, its pros/cons, how to transition.

Don't ask for a job!!!

This is a fact-finding mission.

Be sure to follow-up with them via email/LinkedIn. Thank them for their time, mention something specific you got out of the conversation, & ideally provide them some useful resource/contact.

Informational Interviewing Resources

- Great overview on Info Interviewing from UPenn: <https://bit.ly/UPenn-Info-Interview-Guide>
- Consult list of [informational interview questions & tips](#).
- For further preparation: [Informational Interview Worksheet](#)
- And see this [piece outlining the Informational Interview Process](#)

How do I find people to have these informational interviews with?

- [LinkedIn](#)
 - [Alumni Tool](#)
- Former trainees in your lab, department, college
- At conferences you attend
 - Break away from you local group
 - Strategically go to posters & talks – who do you want to meet?
- Join National societies or organizations you are interested in pursuing careers in....most have job boards!
- At local networking events

<https://www.rtp.org/calendar/>

<https://www.ncbiotech.org/events>

The Job Interview

Interviewing ≠ The Inquisition



What is the purpose of a job interview?

First, by the time you are interviewing for a position, your base skills have been vetted.

An interview is a mechanism for potential employers *AND YOU* to determine “fit” and for your personality and demeanor to be evaluated.

What makes a “good” interview is far more than the content details of your responses.

An Interview Should Be a Venue for YOU To Tell YOUR Story

YOUR GOAL for an interview is to tell an employer the story(s) YOU WANT to tell.

What do you want them to know about you that can't easily be conveyed in a CV/resume or cover letter?

This will allow you to respond effectively to behavior-based interview questions.

Behavior-based Interview Questions

These questions require candidates to share examples of specific situations they've been in where they had to use certain skills and can be broadly categorized as questions focused on:

Teamwork

Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?

Communication

Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way at work.

Adaptability

Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with the situation?

Your Motivation & Values

Time Management Skills

Craft compelling response “stories” via the STAR or SHARE Method

Situation

Task

Action

Result

Situation

Hindrances

Action

Result

Evaluation

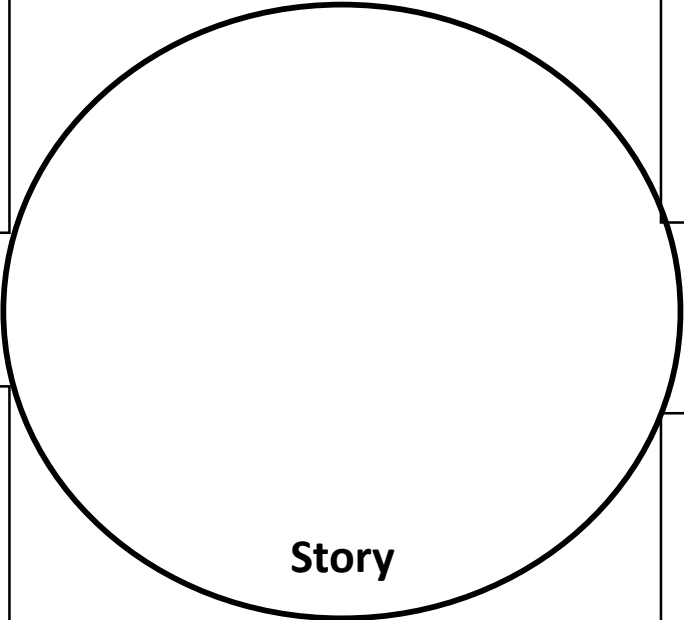
List of Behavioral Interview Questions

http://bit.ly/NCSU_Interview

Interview Story Circle Activity

Interview Question Theme Addressed

Interview Question Theme Addressed



Interview Question Theme Addressed

Interview Question Theme Addressed

Key points/details

Behavior-based Interview Question Themes

Leadership

Teamwork

Communication

Adaptability

Problem Solving

Conflict Resolution

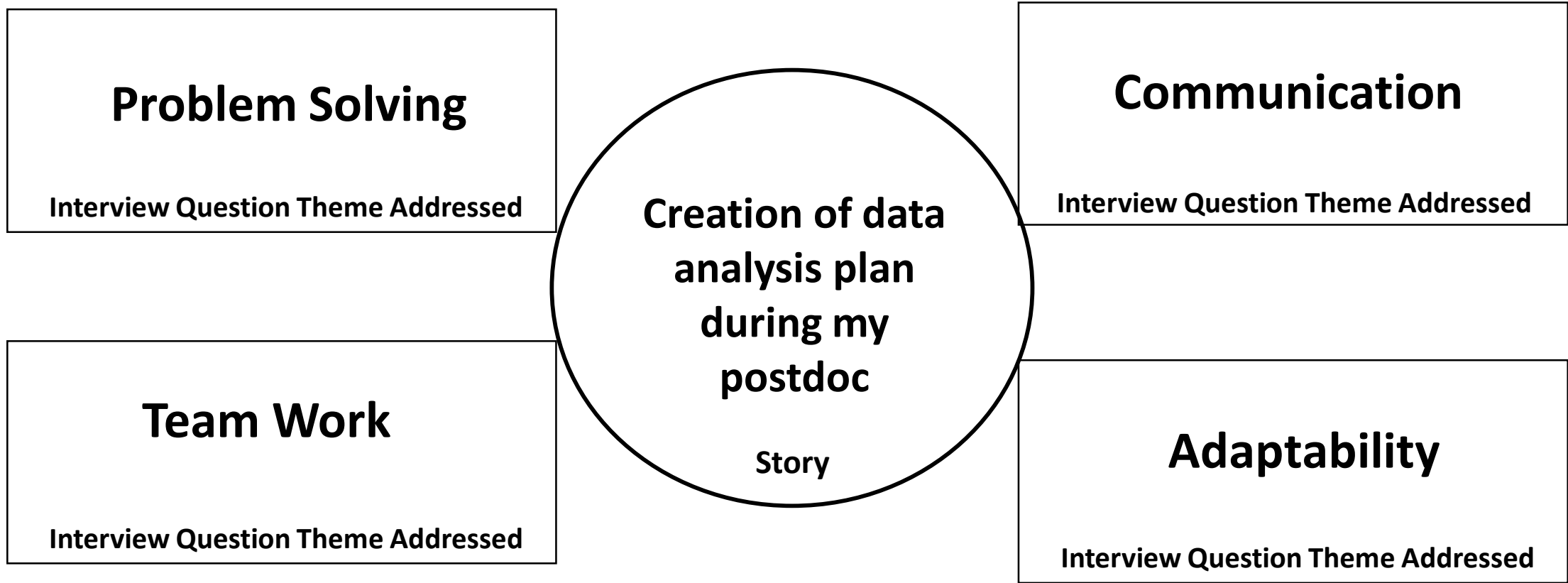
Work Ethic

Your Motivation & Values

Time Management Skills

Intercultural Fluency

**Productivity/Accomplishments
(getting things done)**



Key points/details

Situation: Unclear communication led me to miss a few key data preparation steps that another postdoc in the lab showed me during my first year as a postdoc.

Task: Needed to re-process the data, taking careful notes of the various steps.

Action: Decided to create a data preparation guide to help myself remember the various steps and eventually teach others.

Result: The data analysis plan and guide I created allowed others on the team to assist in data preparation in a standardized way & increased efficiency and consistency in our methods

TAKEAWAY: *Turned a communication breakdown that led to improper data preparation into a process to make data analysis plan clearer*

Story Circle Worksheet

When the interviewer(s) asks: Do you have any questions for me?...you better!

- A job interview *should* be a two-way dialogue between you and a potential employer.
- You want understand if this employer works for you.
 - Potential for growth in the organization?
 - Ability to seek out career/professional development opportunities?
 - Company culture: work/life balance, remote work possible, vacation time, etc...
 - What does the future of the company look like? How does it see itself growing and evolving in the next few years?

[List of potential questions for you to ask at your interview.](#)

Do your research on the employer so you can ask informed questions at your interview

- Check out the company's website
- Reach to individuals who work there currently or who worked there in the past (LinkedIn is a great tool for this)
- Try to find any news on the company...what are some new initiatives or projects they are working on?
- Research the sector the company is in to try to identify trends in the market, with competitors, etc...
 - <https://www.fiercepharma.com/>
 - <https://www.fiercebiotech.com/>
 - <http://agtechnews.com/>

Final Thoughts

- You should view [any job interview](#) as a great opportunity to hone your communication skills.
 - You will get better at your “elevator pitch” (i.e., your answer to “[tell me about yourself](#)”) where you will convey your unique value proposition
 - You will get more comfortable responding to behavior-based questions
 - You will be able to learn more about an employer and their future plans
 - Your interviewers will learn more about you

That last point is critical as even if you aren't the right fit for the position you applied to at the moment, just by interviewing, more people at the company/institution know about you. So, they could keep you in mind for future opportunities.

If you treat interviews as a learning opportunity and not some “test” of your worthiness, you will enter them less stressed and more open to the lessons you can learn about yourself, potential coworkers, and an employer through them.