

**USC Marshall**

School of Business

*Graduate Career Services*

# Interviewing



## Strategies, Tactics & Effective Storytelling

Prepared by the Graduate Career Services, USC Marshall School of Business, 2017

# Interviewing Overview

*A Conversation with a Purpose.*

## **Three Main Objectives**

1. Build rapport
2. Accomplish the interviewer's objectives.
3. Accomplish your agenda

## **The Eight Phases Of An Interview**

1. Preparation
2. Introductions: Meet & Greet
3. Tell Me About Yourself
4. General Q&A – Four Primary Types:
  - Information Seeking
  - Behavioral
  - Case
  - Negative
5. Your Questions
6. The Close
7. The Debrief
8. Follow Up

## **Six Essential Components**

1. An overwhelmingly positive attitude
2. A total commitment to the task
3. An understanding of the issues
4. An intelligent, organized game plan
5. Perseverance and determination
6. Impenetrable self-confidence

*You must be prepared psychologically,  
intellectually, and physically.*

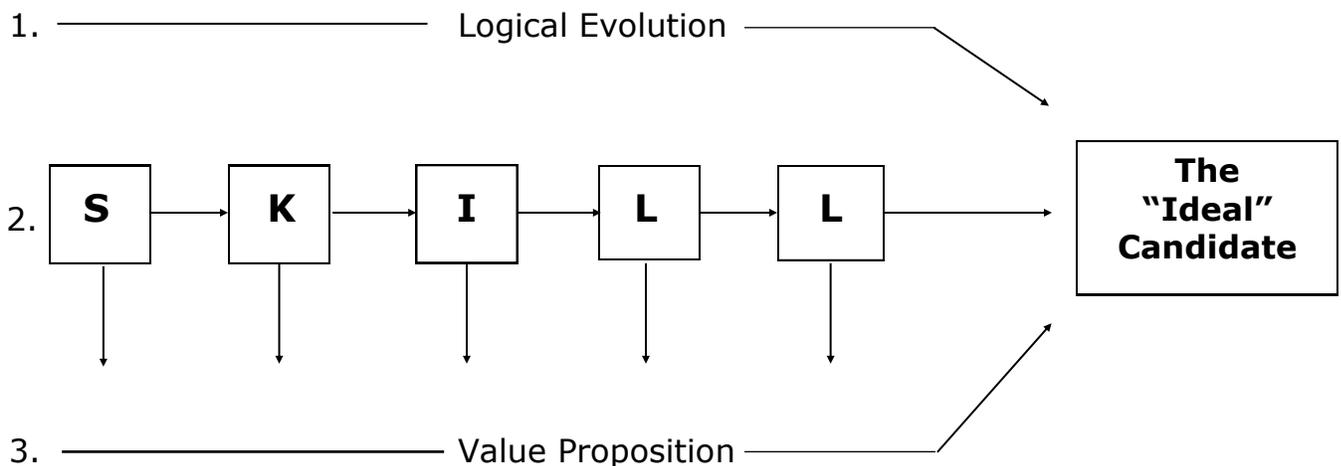
# Tell me about yourself: Focus Statement

Like a gold miner who looks for gold nuggets to lead them to the mother load, the interviewer is looking for “nuggets” from you; your job is to lay out the “nuggets” that represent your relevant skills for the position, indicating to the interviewer where to dig and highlighting the strength of your candidacy for the position.

There are three components to a **Focus Statement**:



1. **The Logical Evolution** ~ you should clearly indicate why the specific position, company, and industry are the next logical step in the evolution of your career at this specific point in time.
2. **Your Relevant Skill Set** ~ you want to highlight the four to six strongest, most-relevant skills you possess; use examples you want the interviewer to ask you about, to dig into.
3. **Your Value Proposition** ~ highlight how you have added value in the past utilizing these skills, indicating your ability to continue to add value in the future.



Your answer must be well-researched, well-planned, well-organized and concise; two minutes is a good rule-of-thumb, but a thoughtful, well-organized answer is most critical.

When you finish your **Focus Statement**, the interviewer should clearly know why this position is the next logical step in your career, why you will be good in the role, and confidence that you can add value. In short, the interview should perceive that you are **The Ideal Candidate**.

# Behavioral Questions: Your CAR Story

The digging continues; this time the interviewer is digging to determine how well you will handle situations you will encounter in the role utilizing the requisite skills. The belief is that the best predictor of your future behavior is your past behavior, so "give me an example of a time when...". What strategy should you use to answer behavioral questions? **The CAR strategy** ~ challenge, action, result. There are three components to developing a **CAR Answer**:

1. **Dissect the Ad** ~ determine the key skills sought by the employer for a given position and list them on a sheet of paper.



2. **Determine Your Best Examples** ~ for each key skill you want identify two real world experiences in which you utilized the requisite skill(s) and achieved a positive outcome. Find examples in which you overcame challenging circumstances to achieve the positive outcome.

3. **Develop Your Story** ~ use the CAR format (below). Focus on actions and result; avoid a lot of "stage setting. Remember, the interview wants to know that can act appropriately to challenging situations and utilize your talents/skills to add value. Develop your **CAR Outline** = two stories/examples for each skill.

## What is a story?

*Story is a reimagined experience narrated with enough detail and feeling to cause your listeners' imaginations to experience it as real.*

## The Modifier

Interviewers will often modify a basic behavioral question to gain more specific insights relative to a particular challenge. For example, a basic question would be 'give me an example of a time when you solved an analytic problem.' A modified question would be 'give me an example of a time when you solved a *complex* analytical problem.' You must address this modifier as it defines the question in a way that is important to the interviewer. It is particularly effective to summarize your answer with the modifier: 'so the analysis was complex because...'

## Create your outline for both structure and story

**Skill:** Identify the skill you are addressing

**Story:** Give the story name

**Challenge** ~ this opening is a sentence or two that clearly identifies the challenge you faced; no need to go into much detail...it is your actions and the result you achieve that the interviewer wants to hear.

**Action #1** ~ the development of the strategy you used to meet the challenge.

**Actions #2–5** ~ the tactics (actions) you utilized to meet the challenge.

**Result** ~ the result you achieved; the value

Identify the feelings/emotions you experienced every step of the way:

1. When presented the challenge

2. As you were developing your strategy.

3. As your actions moved you toward your goal

4. When you reached your goal

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**Summarize using the question modifier** if one was presented (e.g., complex)

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Your answer must be well-researched, well-planned, well-organized and concise; two minutes is a good rule-of-thumb, but a thoughtful, well-organized answer is most critical.

# Negative Questions

## The Questions No One Wants to Answer



Digging where you don't want them to go; finding the bones of disaster's past! These are the questions we love to hate ~ What is your greatest weakness? Tell me about a time you failed. What is the interviewer really after when asking this type of question?

Maturity and Wisdom; it's time to face your demons, sincerely but concisely. The point of this type of question is to determine if you have the maturity to admit to mistakes (we ALL make them) and the wisdom to learn from the experience. There are three components to developing a answer that will show off your maturity and wisdom:

1. **Sincerity** ~ a mature answer is also a sincere answer. You won't fool anyone with "I'm a perfectionist", "I work too hard", or "I place high demands on myself and others." Attempted humor doesn't work either... "I'm a lousy racketball player".
2. **Concise** ~ this is certainly not the time for long-winded answers. Focus on what you learned and the changes/improvements you have implemented to counteract the weakness/failure.
3. **Honest But Not Disastrous** ~ find at least three honest weaknesses and/or failures from which you can describe positive change. Interviewers have been known to ask 'what are you three greatest weaknesses?' Although that is not very common, be prepared.

**Remember**, it is not the weakness that matters as much as how you have learned to *manage* that weakness; the more specific you are the better.

And, it is not that you failed that matters as much as what you learned from that failure and how you have effectively avoided similar failures since.

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What do you do if you are asked to say something negative about an ex-boss or an ex-employer, for example, "what did you dislike about your last boss/employer?" Don't take the bait. Badmouthing an ex-boss or ex-employer is tabloid material, not interview material. Simply state you had a very strong working relationship with your ex-boss or an excellent learning experience with your ex-employer.

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Your answer must be thoughtful, well-planned, and concise.

When you finish your answer, the interviewer should clearly see that you can overcome the obstacles and hurdles that life throws your way.

Literally, everyone continuously faces obstacles throughout their career. Employers want the individual always finds a way to rise to a challenge, to succeed in the face of

# The CAR/Skill Outline

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“Dissect” the ad and prepare two examples to support each skill; presume that you will be asked for at least two examples to support that you possess that skill.

## Skill A (for example *Communication*)

### *Example #1*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

*Emotions/Feelings*

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### *Example #2*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

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## Skill B (for example *Analytical*)

### *Example #1*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

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### *Example #2*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

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## Skill C (for example *Teamwork*)

### *Example #1*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

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### *Example #2*

**C** hallenge

**A** ction #1: Strategy to meet the challenge

**A** ctions #2-5: Key tactics

**R** esult

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(Continue and complete for all skills identified)