

INTERVIEW PREP



A Career Coach's guide to preparing for interviews at UT Knoxville!

Research, review, and rehearse your way to nailing the interview.

Step 1: Research

Interviewing is not just for employers to determine the best candidate; it is also your opportunity to confirm that the role and department of UT Knoxville is best for you! Once you receive an invitation to interview, you should commence researching!

- Make sure to re-read (and know!) the job description.
- Take note of their required and preferred qualifications for the role.
 - When preparing your practice answers, you will want real-life examples and stories from your experiences highlighting how you meet the qualifications in the description.
- Review the department's website.
 - Familiarize yourself with their mission, goals, and values.
 - Get to know the names of the staff, especially their leadership! They may be on your hiring team.
 - The website may provide insight into the department's policies and procedures, which could help you develop answers to interview questions!

Types of Interviews

To help better prepare for your interview, it is important to be familiar with the different types of interviews used in the UT Knoxville hiring process and what to expect during each phase of the process.

1st Round Interview: Hosted by the search committee members only, this interview is meant to identify the top candidates in the pool. The interview is typically short with only a few questions and will help determine who will participate in 2nd round, in-person interviews at the next stage.

- Zoom: This is the most common option for first-round interviews. Search committees typically conduct a short (up to 1 hour) virtual interview. Questions will range from introductory, gauge relevant experience and interest in the role, and behavioral

questions. Cameras are typically off, so the natural cadence of conversation and nonverbal clues are not present during this interview. Because of the time constraint, it is essential to be prepared and answer the questions concisely. If you feel that you have responded to the question to the best of your ability, be comfortable waiting for committee members to unmute, provide feedback, and proceed to the next questions.

- Spark Hire: This is the new screening option for first-round interviews at UT. Spark Hire requires you to film yourself answering assigned questions from the search committee. The committee will assign 3-5 questions, typically ranging from introductory, gauge relevant experience and interest in the role, and behavioral questions. With Spark Hire, questions are revealed one at a time. You will have an assigned amount of time to prepare for each question; then, you will record your answer. There is usually a time limit for your response, and you can only re-record your answer 2 times. Make sure to be prepared, and it is okay to write down reminder points before recording your answers. You can watch your answer before submitting it for revision. Sometimes watching your recording will have you second-guessing, so be confident in your answers and hit that submit button!
- Phone: This is an uncommon option, but you could participate in a short phone interview that reviews your experience and confirms your interest in the role before bringing you in person for the next round of interviews.

2nd Round Interview: Typically hosted by the search committee members, supervisors, department leaders, colleagues, and direct reports. This portion of the process could also require a presentation if this is a common task for the role. This interview will always be hosted in person and can last up to 3 hours. The interview will commence with questions from the search committee, then more interviewers will join the room to watch your presentation or move to more questions. After this portion is complete, you may be invited to meet individually with supervisors and leaders of the department.

Insight into Interview Participants

Search committee members: This will be the second meeting with the search committee; this round will focus on more behavioral questions. The committee will want to determine the skills and strengths you would bring to the position.

- Tell me about a time you experienced failure and what you learned from that experience.
- Tell me about a time you improved a process. How did you identify what needed to be improved, and what steps did you take to implement your idea?

Supervisor and department leader(s): This portion of your interview will be more of a dialogue; they may share insight into the direction of the department while asking you questions about your vision. They want to learn how you hope to impact the team and what ideas you may have for the growth and development of the role.

- What would your first few months look like in this role?
- Based on what you have learned about our department, what idea would you be excited about implementing if you accepted the role?

Direct Reports: If you have the opportunity to meet with potential employees that will report to you, their questions will seek insight into your leadership and management

style.

- Tell me about a time when you coached a team member to be more successful. What were the circumstances and outcomes?
- What is your philosophy for delegating responsibilities?

Colleagues: Depending on the department, they may invite other colleagues that your role would interact with regularly. These participants will ask technical questions related to the work and try to determine how you will contribute to the team.

- What was your role and responsibilities on the most recent project you worked on?
- What project are you most proud of, and how did you contribute to it?

Presentations

There may be a requirement to present on a specific topic during your interview; here are a few tips to remember when creating your content.

- Be creative: they don't want you to stand by a PowerPoint and read off the slide. Set aside time to develop unique and engaging material to showcase why they should want you on the team.
- Do your research: Make sure you are familiar with the department's mission, vision, and goals, and develop content that reflects those same ideas.
- Create structure: with good design comes an engaged audience; show off your ideas. There will be a time constraint; stay within your allowed amount of time provided.
- Practice!

Why are presentations a part of the process? Supervisors and Department Leaders are hoping to get a sense of your:

- Communication style and clarity of message delivery
- Creativity and the ability to develop ideas around an important topic
- Demonstrate skills and strengths that would make you a strong fit for the role
- Ability to engage and establish a connection with the audience

Step 2: Review

Take time to review and reflect on your own experiences. Determine what skills you have developed throughout your career that make you stand out as the best person for the job. Set aside time to develop answers and stories to common questions and formats to feel more prepared walking into your interview.

Commonly Asked Questions:

Tell us about yourself.

- While it is easy to want to share all about what you love doing in your free time, keep that portion of your answer short and sweet. Try to focus on sharing how long you have been working within your field/department/UT Knoxville. Share what you

currently do and the aspects you love about your role. Then share 1-2 accomplishments that showcase why you would be a fantastic person to hire.

Why did you decide to apply for the position?

- Focus on sharing what interested you in that role; give a specific example of something you read in the description. Next, share why you are interested in working in that department specifically. This will show that you have done your research, are familiar with their work, and are interested in promoting their mission.

What is your greatest strength? Weakness?

- Strength: Try to have 1-2 ideas of your strengths, and develop an example from your work experience that showcases that strength.
- Weakness: It is essential to be honest with this answer! They want to see that you are reflective and are working to better yourself. Try to have 1-2 ideas of weakness and share how you work to improve.

<u>Strength</u>	<u>Weakness</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedication• Determination• Positive Attitude• Organization• Flexibility• Creativity• Empathy• Leadership• Learning• Problem Solving• Work Under Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-Criticism• Insecure• Public Speaking• Too Direct• Too Detail-Oriented• Delegation• Disorganized• Impatience• Blunt• Delegating• Procrastination

Why should we hire you?

- This answer is where you should brag but casually because you don't want to come off as overly confident. This is an art! The important things to remember in your answer are to share why you would love to be a part of the team and department, what skills

make you the absolute best person they could ever find, and how you plan on making an impact in the future if you did receive the role

Behavioral Questions:

There are 2 helpful answer development frameworks to remember when creating answers for challenging behavioral questions, **STAR** and **Hero Stories**.



STAR is a mnemonic that helps you remember the components of creating concise and thoughtful answers.

Situation: Define the key details that paint the scene for the interview team.

Task: Describe the expectations of your responsibility in the scenario

Action: Explain the exact steps you took to address the task

Results: Communicate the measurable outcomes your actions achieved

While reviewing your experiences and developing stories in preparation for behavioral questions, ensure the story includes details for each category in the STAR method.

Check it out! To practice behavioral questions, and develop answers that fit the STAR model, check out **Big Interview**. Under Build Your Answer, there is a STAR response-building tool for you to flush out the right words to develop concise and thoughtful answers.

HERO Stories are examples you develop to share in your interview that showcases you as the hero of a situation, solving the situation and making a meaningful impact.

Here are some important tips when preparing HERO Stories:

- Create 5-7 unique stories that are adaptable to answer different formats of behavioral questions.
- Keep them short, **no** more than 3 minutes.
- Make sure to pick stories that spark your enthusiasm! These stories should show off your passion and dedication to whatever role you may be seeking.
- Pull examples from all areas on your resume: academic, work, and volunteer.

- Try to find 1-2 examples for each experience on your resume that could be used as the foundation of your HERO story.
- The goal is **NOT to TELL** the same story twice; interviewers want diverse answers.

Questions:

Part of the review process is to develop questions you hope to ask the search committee, supervisor, colleagues, and direct reports. Make sure to have at least 5-7 that will allow for backup questions if they address answers to your questions in the interview already.

- Your mission is focused on bridging the campus and broader Knoxville communities and this is something I value as well – can you tell me more about ways your department has made an impact in our community?
- Can you describe what you value most about your departmental work environment and culture?
- What have other staff members done to succeed in this role?
- What do you like most/find most challenging about working here?
- How do you support the professional development of your team?
- What would you expect me to achieve in the first 6 months?
- What new initiatives or changes are expected for the department within the next few years?
- What has made working at UT Knoxville and in this department impactful in your career journey?
- Can you share the next steps in the hiring process and your timeline?

Step 3: Rehearse!

Practice, practice, practice! Set aside time to practice your answers. In the review stage, you may have written down your stories and answers, but as the interview approaches, you should feel comfortable sharing your answers without referring to your notes. Practice will help you walk in feeling confident and ready to showcase how you are the best fit for the role!

- Practice with someone!
- **Big Interview**
- Schedule a mock interview!
 - Your UT Knoxville Career Coaches are always here to support all steps of your career development. Make sure to schedule a mock interview where we can help you feel prepared to nail that interview and showcase that you are the best person for that role!

Bonus Tip!

Don't forget to send a thank you to those who participate in your hiring process! This is a step easily overlooked, but it can make you stand out as a candidate if you take the initiative. Be sure to send out an individualized thank you to each person! Below is a template you can borrow after your next big interview. Good Luck!

Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss the _____ role. Learning more about your department and this position, I am very excited about my potential to contribute, based on my skills and experience. It's clear you are a team where individual contributions are valued and where you truly enjoy working together, which sounds ideal! I believe my seven years of experience in administrative roles within engineering would relate very well to your department and look forward to additional opportunities to discuss this role further.

Thank you,

Your Name

Your cell number



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