

THE COMPLETE OVERVIEW

The Interview Playbook

Everything you need to know before your next interview:
what to expect, how to prepare, and exactly what to say
when it matters most

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HR Director | Interviews, Negotiation, Careers

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What's Inside

Your complete interview preparation system in 15 pages.

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SECTION 1

You're Not Unprepared, You're Unstructured

Most candidates know their stuff. They just don't know how to show it.

Here's something I've seen hundreds of times as an HR Director: great candidates who lose to less qualified people. Not because they weren't good enough, but because they didn't have a system for showing what they're worth.

The person who gets the job isn't always the most qualified. It's the person who communicates their value most clearly, in the format the interviewer needs to hear it.

HR INSIDER TRUTH

Most hiring decisions are made in the first 5–7 minutes. The rest of the interview is spent confirming or challenging that initial impression. Your opening matters more than anything.

This playbook gives you the structure. It's the overview of everything you need to know before, during, and after your interview. Think of it as the map. For the deep dives on each topic, I've built specific playbooks that go much further, and I'll point you to them along the way.

What This Guide Will Give You

- A clear understanding of what happens at each stage of the process
- A repeatable framework for answering any question (the M.E.C. method)
- Scripts for the 10 most common interview questions
- How to handle curveballs, salary questions, and tough moments
- A one-page cheat sheet to review before every interview

THE GOAL

**Stop guessing what interviewers want.
Start giving them exactly what they need.**

SECTION 2

The 5 Stages of the Interview Process

Know what's coming so nothing catches you off guard.

Most companies follow the same basic structure. The names change, the format varies, but what they're assessing at each stage is remarkably consistent.

1

Screening Call (15–30 min)

Who: Recruiter or HR. **What they assess:** Basic fit, salary alignment, availability, communication skills. **Your goal:** Don't get eliminated. Be concise, professional, and enthusiastic. This is a filter, not a conversation.

2

First Interview (45–60 min)

Who: Hiring manager. **What they assess:** Can you do the job? Do they want to work with you? **Your goal:** Prove relevance. Lead with your best achievement framed for their needs. This is where the M.E.C. framework matters most.

3**Technical / Case Round (varies)**

Who: Senior team members or panel. **What they assess:** Depth of expertise, problem-solving approach, how you think under pressure. **Your goal:** Show your working. They care about your process, not just the answer.

4**Final Round (varies)**

Who: Senior leadership, skip-level, or cross-functional. **What they assess:** Culture fit, long-term potential, leadership alignment. **Your goal:** Think big picture. They already know you're qualified. Show them you belong.

5**Offer & Negotiation**

Who: HR or hiring manager. **What they assess:** Your professionalism and composure. **Your goal:** Don't accept immediately. Always ask for 24–48 hours. Negotiate the full package, not just salary.

PRO TIP

After every stage, send a follow-up email within 24 hours. Reference something specific from the conversation. This alone puts you in the top 10% of candidates.

SECTION 3

Your Preparation System

The work you do before the interview matters more than what you say during it.

Step 1: Research the Company

You're not just checking a box. You're looking for ammunition you can use in your answers.

- **Job description:** The first 3 bullet points are listed in order of priority. Lead with proof you can deliver #1.
- **Company website:** About page, mission, values, recent news and press releases.
- **LinkedIn:** The hiring manager's posts, team structure, recent hires.
- **Glassdoor:** Interview reviews tell you exactly what they ask.
- **Annual report / investor deck:** For senior roles, know their strategic priorities.

Step 2: Build Your Story Bank

Prepare 5–7 stories from your career that demonstrate different competencies. Each story should follow the structure: Situation, Action, Result.

COMPETENCY	YOUR STORY	THE RESULT
Leadership	<i>Fill in before your interview</i>	<i>Quantify it</i>
Problem-solving	<i>Fill in before your interview</i>	<i>Quantify it</i>
Collaboration	<i>Fill in before your interview</i>	<i>Quantify it</i>
Initiative	<i>Fill in before your interview</i>	<i>Quantify it</i>
Handling failure	<i>Fill in before your interview</i>	<i>What you learned</i>

Step 3: Logistics

- Confirm date, time, and format (in-person / video / phone)
- Know the interviewer's name and role (search them on LinkedIn)
- Prepare 3 thoughtful questions to ask at the end
- Test tech setup if it's a video call (camera, mic, background, lighting)
- Plan to arrive 10 minutes early (not 30, not 2)

SECTION 4

The M.E.C. Framework

One framework. Every question. This is how you structure answers that land.

Most candidates answer questions backwards. They start with context, build slowly, and hope the interviewer connects the dots. By the time they get to the point, the interviewer has already tuned out.

The M.E.C. Framework flips this. You lead with your point, then prove it.



Message

Lead with your answer. State your position clearly in one sentence. Don't make them wait for it.



Evidence

Back it up. One specific example, with a measurable result. Keep it to 2-3 sentences.



Close

Bridge to them. Connect your answer to the role, the team, or the company's specific need.

MEC IN ACTION: "WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?"

M: "I'm someone who turns complex projects into clear results."

E: "At my last company, I led a cross-functional redesign that reduced onboarding time by 40% and saved \$200K annually."

C: "I saw you're scaling your operations team right now, and that's exactly the kind of challenge where I deliver the most impact."

THE RULE

Every answer should be **60–90 seconds**. Not shorter (too vague). Not longer (you're rambling). If you can't say it in 90 seconds, you don't know your own story well enough yet.

THE #1 MISTAKE

Starting with "So basically what happened was..." and then spending 2 minutes on context before getting to the point. The interviewer has already made a judgement before you arrive at your evidence. Lead with the message. Always.

THE CORE 10

The **10 Questions** You'll Almost Certainly Get

For each question: why they ask it, what to say, and
what will get you eliminated.

QUESTION 01

"Tell me about yourself."

Why they ask: To see if you can communicate clearly and set the tone. This shapes the entire interview.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"I'm a [professional identity] with [X] years in [area]. At [Company], I [biggest achievement with result]. I'm excited about this role because [specific connection to their needs]."

NEVER SAY: "So, where do I start?" or a chronological walkthrough of your entire CV.

QUESTION 02

"Why do you want to work here?"

Why they ask: To test if you've done your homework and whether your motivation is genuine.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"I've been following [specific thing: product launch, market move, company value]. At [previous role], I did [related achievement]. That experience is exactly what your team needs right now as you [their current challenge]."

NEVER SAY: "I heard it's a great company" or anything you could say about any employer.

QUESTION 03

"What's your biggest weakness?"

Why they ask: To test self-awareness and whether you've actively worked on your development.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"Early in my career, I [genuine weakness]. For example, [specific situation where it showed up]. Since then, I've [concrete action you took], and it's now [how it's improved with evidence]."

NEVER SAY: "I'm a perfectionist" or any strength disguised as a weakness. They've heard it a thousand times.

QUESTION 04

"Why should we hire you?"

Why they ask: To see if you understand the role and can position yourself as the solution to their problem.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"You need someone who can [their #1 priority from the job description]. I've done exactly that. At [Company], I [specific achievement with numbers]. I'd bring that same approach to [their specific challenge]."

NEVER SAY: "I'm a hard worker" or generic traits. Reference the actual job.

QUESTION 05

"Tell me about a challenge you faced at work."

Why they ask: To assess problem-solving, resilience, and whether you take ownership or blame others.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"I [message: what you did and why it mattered]. The situation was [brief context]. I [specific actions you took]. The result was [quantified outcome]. That experience taught me [learning that's relevant to this role]."

NEVER SAY: "My boss was the problem" or anything that shifts blame to someone else.

QUESTION 06

"Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"

Why they ask: To check if you'll stay long enough to be worth the investment and whether your ambition aligns with their structure.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"In 5 years, I want to be [growth area that aligns with their company]. I see this role as the foundation for that because [specific connection]. My track record shows I grow fast, at [Company] I went from [X to Y] in [timeframe]."

NEVER SAY: "Honestly, I'm not sure" or "In your job." One sounds directionless, the other threatening.

QUESTION 07

"Why are you leaving your current role?"

Why they ask: To check for red flags: were you fired, are you running from something, will you leave them too?

SAY THIS (MEC)

"I've achieved [what you accomplished in current role], and I'm looking for [specific growth opportunity this role offers]. What drew me here specifically is [something unique about their company or team]."

NEVER SAY: Anything negative about your current employer, boss, or colleagues. Ever.

QUESTION 08

"What are your salary expectations?"

Why they ask: To anchor you low. This is a pricing strategy, not a casual question.

SAY THIS

"I'd prefer to focus on understanding the full scope of the role first and whether we're a great mutual fit. I'm confident that if we align on the right opportunity, the compensation will reflect that. Could you share the budgeted range for this position?"

NEVER SAY: Your current salary. It anchors your future to your past.

QUESTION 09

"What sets you apart from other candidates?"

Why they ask: To see if you can articulate unique value, not just list qualifications.

SAY THIS (MEC)

"What makes me different is [your unique combination: skill + perspective + experience]. For example, at [Company], I [achievement that no one else could easily replicate]. That combination of [X and Y] is what I'd bring to this team."

NEVER SAY: "I'm a team player" or any generic quality. Be specific about what only YOU bring.

QUESTION 10

"Do you have any questions for us?"

Why they ask: To test genuine interest and critical thinking. Saying "no" is an instant red flag.

ASK THESE

"What does success look like in this role in the first 6 months?"

"What's the biggest challenge the team is facing right now?"

"How would you describe the culture on this team, not the company, but this specific team?"

NEVER ASK: "What does the company do?" or anything about salary/holidays in the first round.

Want the deep dive? My "Tell Me About Yourself" playbook gives you industry-specific scripts for Tech, Banking, Manufacturing, and Consulting. The "Tough Questions Playbook" covers word-for-word scripts for the 7 hardest objections. DM me "PLAYBOOK" to get them.

SECTION 6

Handling Curveball Questions

The unexpected questions aren't random. They're designed to see how you think on your feet.

Curveball questions come in three types: objection-based (they doubt something about you), hypothetical (they want to see your thinking process), and personal (they want to see how self-aware you are). Here's how to handle each.

When They Challenge You

"You seem overqualified." / "You don't have industry experience." / "There's a gap in your CV."

These are objections, not rejections. The interviewer is giving you a chance to address a concern. If they'd already decided against you, they wouldn't bring it up.

THE A.B.P. FORMULA FOR OBJECTIONS

Acknowledge the concern (don't get defensive)

Bridge with transferable skills

Prove with a specific result

EXAMPLE: "YOU DON'T HAVE INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE"

"That's fair, and I understand why it matters. What I bring is [transferable skill] which I applied at [Company] to [specific result]. I've also already started [concrete action, e.g., getting certified / researching your market]. I learn fast, and here's the proof: [example of rapid ramp-up]."

When You Don't Know the Answer

- **Pause.** Take 3–5 seconds. Silence is better than rambling.
- **Think out loud.** "Let me break this down..." shows analytical ability.
- **Ask for clarity.** "Could you elaborate on what you mean by...?" is professional, not weak.
- **Redirect to what you know.** "I haven't encountered that specific scenario, but here's how I'd approach it based on [related experience]."

Go deeper: The "Tough Questions Playbook" has word-for-word scripts for the 7 hardest interview objections, including "Why did you leave?", "You're overqualified", and "What's your biggest weakness?" DM me "TOUGH" to get it.

SECTION 7

The Salary Conversation

The 3 mistakes that cost candidates the most money, and what to do instead.

Salary negotiation isn't a separate skill. It starts the moment they ask about your expectations, and most candidates lose thousands before the negotiation even begins.

MISTAKE 01

Revealing your current salary

When you tell a recruiter you're on \$55K, they calculate the cheapest offer that still feels like a raise. The budget might be \$80K, but they'll offer \$63K and call it a "generous 15% increase." You just negotiated against yourself.

SAY THIS INSTEAD

"I'd prefer to focus on the value I can bring to this role rather than anchoring to my current compensation. What's the range you've budgeted for this position?"

MISTAKE 02

Accepting the first offer

First offers almost always have room. Companies expect you to negotiate. When you accept immediately, they wonder if they offered too much.

SAY THIS INSTEAD

"Thank you, I'm really excited about the opportunity. I'd like to take 24 hours to review the full package and come back to you with any questions."

MISTAKE 03

Negotiating base salary only

Base salary is just one piece. Bonus, equity, pension, remote flexibility, learning budget, extra holidays, signing bonus, these are all negotiable and often easier for the company to move on.

SAY THIS INSTEAD

"The base is close to what I had in mind. Could we explore the overall package? I'm particularly interested in [bonus structure / equity / remote flexibility / professional development budget]."

Go deeper: My "5 Negotiation Mistakes" guide covers all 5 errors with full scripts, data sources for salary research, and the complete 3-step negotiation framework. DM me "MONEY" to get it.

SECTION 8

During the Interview: The Rules

What separates good answers from great interviews.

Do This

- Pause before answering (2–3 seconds shows confidence, not hesitation)
- Use the interviewer's name naturally, once or twice
- Match their energy (formal if they're formal, relaxed if they're casual)
- Take notes, it shows you're serious
- End strong: your last answer is the one they remember most

Avoid This

- Answering for longer than 90 seconds (you've lost them)
- Badmouthing any previous employer, ever
- Saying "we" for everything (they want to know YOUR contribution)
- Apologising for your experience level
- Asking about salary, benefits, or holidays in the first round

Body Language Basics

- **Eye contact:** Hold it for 3–4 seconds at a time, then break naturally. On video calls, look at the camera, not the screen.
- **Posture:** Sit forward slightly. It signals engagement. Leaning back signals disinterest.
- **Hands:** Keep them visible and still. Gestures are fine. Fidgeting is not.
- **Voice:** Slow down. Most candidates speak too fast when nervous. Pause between points.

Small Talk Matters

The first 2–3 minutes of casual conversation aren't casual. Interviewers are assessing your social skills, warmth, and whether they'd enjoy working with you. Be genuine, ask a question about their day, and don't rush to "get to the real questions."

Go deeper: My "OPEN Small Talk Framework" gives you a complete system for the first 5 minutes of any interview, including exact conversation starters. DM me "OPEN" to get it.

QUICK REFERENCE

The One-Page Cheat Sheet

Screenshot this page. Review it 10 minutes before every interview.

THE M.E.C. FRAMEWORK

M Message, Lead with your point. One sentence.

E Evidence, Prove it. One specific example with a result.

C Close, Bridge to them. Connect your answer to this role.

Pre-Interview Checklist

- I know the company's top 3 priorities from the job description
- I've researched the interviewer on LinkedIn
- I have 5-7 stories ready (leadership, problem-solving, collaboration, failure, initiative)
- I can answer "Tell me about yourself" in 60-90 seconds
- I have a salary range ready (based on market data, not my current salary)
- I have 3 smart questions to ask at the end
- I've tested my tech setup (if video)
- I know exactly how to get there and I'll arrive 10 minutes early

Quick Answer Rules

RULE	WHY
Keep answers to 60-90 seconds	Longer = rambling. Shorter = vague.
Lead with the message, not context	They decide in the first 10 seconds if your answer is good.
Every answer needs a number	"Improved efficiency" means nothing. "Reduced by 30%" does.
End with them, not you	Your close should reference their company, team, or challenge.
Pause before you answer	2-3 seconds of silence = confidence, not hesitation.

REMEMBER

The person who gets the job isn't always the most qualified.
It's the person who communicates their value most clearly.

SECTION 10

Your Deeper Toolkit

This playbook is the overview. For each topic, there's a complete deep-dive guide ready for you.

I've built a full library of playbooks covering every stage of the job search. Each one goes much deeper than what we covered here, with complete scripts, frameworks, real examples, and checklists.

YOUR CHALLENGE	THE GUIDE	DM KEYWORD
Not landing interviews	Top 1% CV Playbook + ATS Survival Guide	"CV"
"Tell me about yourself"	Tell Me About Yourself Playbook (by industry + seniority)	"TMAY"
Tough objections (gaps, overqualified, fired)	The Tough Questions Playbook	"TOUGH"
Weakness / strength questions	Weakness & Strength Playbook + AIP Framework	"WEAKNESS"
Switching industries	The Industry Switch Playbook	"SWITCH"
Salary negotiation	5 Negotiation Mistakes + The Money Playbook	"MONEY"
Small talk & first impressions	The OPEN Small Talk Framework	"OPEN"
After the interview	The Post-Interview Playbook	"AFTER"
First 90 days on the job	30-60-90 Day Plan	"90DAYS"
Getting promoted	The Promotion Playbook	"PROMO"

HOW TO USE THIS

Identify your biggest challenge from the table above and start with that guide. Each one is designed to be actionable in under 30 minutes and gives you complete scripts you can use immediately.

READY TO GO DEEPER?

Get the **Full** Toolkit Free

DM me on Instagram with the keyword for any guide above and I'll send it to you. All free. No catch.

Need personalised help?

1:1 interview coaching with an HR Director

Resume & LinkedIn optimisation

Mock interviews & salary strategy sessions

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DM me "COACH" for 1-on-1 coaching

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