Getting Through a Technical Interview

Your Opportunity for Success

Hi, there. My name is Rob Clifton, and I'm a Program Manager at Google. My career in IT started about 17 years ago. At the time IT knowledge was mainly self-taught. I took certificate course as much like this one, and learned as much as I could along the way while I continued to go to college part-time to get an associate's degree. Finding that first job wasn't easy. I had to convince someone to take a chance on me, even though I had no degree and no advanced education in IT. I applied for a lot of jobs, got a few interviews, received a lot of rejections, and eventually landed my first job fixing computers at a big box retailer. Over the next few years, I jumped around to different jobs, getting more experienced while I continued to go to school and finish my degree. I eventually landed at Google as a support tech in our Ann Arbor office. Twelve years later, I now lead the hiring efforts for our junior IT support roles. I've interviewed hundreds of candidates, and I help train our interviewers and how to find the best talent in the industry. Today, I'm excited to share what I've learned to help you prepare for your next interview. Going into an interview is a moment that lots of people dread. We're all afraid that we could say something wrong, that were not ready for that next step, or just that will be rejected. These are all normal feelings, but it helps to look at the interview as an opportunity. It's an opportunity for you to hone your interpersonal skills, learn more about the company, and make sure that the job is a good fit for you. It's an opportunity to advance your career and gain more work experience. Doing these lessons will give you some tips that will help you prepare for the interview. We want you to walk into your interviews feeling confident and excited. We'll show you what a technical interview on the subject at hand may look like.

Standing Out from the Crowd

To land an interview for a job you want, make sure your resume and online professional presence are in order. This will help you stand out from the other applicants when you apply. Your resume is your first introduction to a new company. Make sure your resume is easy to read and clearly shows the recruiter or hiring manager that you're a strong fit for the job you're applying for. Avoid using lots of filler text in your resume. If you're new to the industry, you may not have a lot to put on your resume, but that's okay. You don't need to list out every piece of software you've used or networking protocol you've ever learned about, stick to your relevant qualifications. Use a standard resume template and be consistent with your formatting and structure. Proofread your resume and have someone else review it too. You don't want grammar and spelling errors to be your first impression with a potential employer. There's a lot more to say about resumes, so I've included more material in the supplemental reading. You should also make sure you have an up to date online presence. Your profile should look professional and have the most current resume, a photo and updated contact info. Don't forget to do this, employers are using sites like LinkedIn more and more to reach out to candidates. Now, when you find a job that you want to apply for, you want to learn as much as you can about the role. First place to find this information is in the job description. The description will usually include the roles responsibilities and requirements and some information about the company. Take some time to understand those details and make sure it's a good fit for you. Feel free to ask your recruiter any additional questions you have about the role or the company.

Knowing these expectations and requirements, will also help you prepare for the interview. For any IT role, make sure that you know the fundamentals of IT really well, and spend extra time reviewing any specific areas that are called out in the job description. This program will get you started with some of those fundamentals like, networking and operating systems, but you'll still need to do some research on your own. On top of the specific job requirements, you should also take time to research the company that you're applying to. Learn about the main characteristics of the company, what their primary products or services are, who their customers are and where they're located. Look for things that are new, interesting and exciting about the company's future. Try to learn about some of the challenges the company might be facing. If the company has a code of conduct or mission statement online, make sure to read it, as it will illustrate what the company prioritizes. Knowing the company's values will help you decide whether it's a company you want to work for. Some of these facts may come up during your interview, either as part of a scenario or in a question by itself, so you want to be prepared. Lastly, once you have an interview scheduled, make sure you know where to go when you need to be there and what the appropriate attire is for the interview. This particular tip was especially important for me when I first interviewed with Google. At the time, Google was in a temporary space above a restaurant Inn Arbor, a town I was not very familiar with. There was no sign or address, so when I got there I had no idea where to go. Thankfully, I arrived with some time to spare. So when I got to the right block for the address, I went around to the back alley, found the address on the fire escape and climbed into the second floor. The door was open and the woman behind it was a little surprised to see me entering. Everyone had a bit of a laugh when I told him I couldn't find the front entrance and I didn't want to

be late for my interview. To this day, my manager still talks about my entrance and says it showed him I was resourceful and determined. Who knows? Maybe that's why they decided to give me the job

Crafting Your Resume

Your resume is usually the first impression that companies have of you, so you want to make sure that you include relevant information in it. If you'd like to build your resume from scratch, make sure to scroll down to the bottom of this page to download PDFs of resume templates to help you get started. Keep in mind, these are just sample resumes, and you should customize them as you see fit!

What you want to include

- Who you are: name, address, phone number, email

- Education history: where and what you've studied (or are studying)

- Employment history: where and in what roles you've worked (or are working)

- Relevant Skills

When listing out your education, include colleges attended, certificates obtained, and any additional education programs you've completed. You can include a GPA or grade average for degrees if you wish. It is not necessary to include dates for your education section.

If you are a new graduate, or are still studying, you'll want to include a few additional details, like interesting projects that you did during your studying or highlight an elective subject that you took. After a few years of professional experience, though, you may simply include the degree, year and location.

A "Functional" or "Skills based" resume format works well for new graduates or candidates with limited work experience. The focus of this format is more around your skillset, rather than your work

experience. You can include a brief summary of qualifications, followed by a list of skills with examples for each. This format works well for candidates with less employment history, but lots of applicable skills.

For your employment history, you'll want to highlight the skills that are most relevant for the position that you are aiming for. Use a chronological or reverse-chronological format for your employment history. List the month and year for each role accurately. List out achievements, not just tasks performed, and make them quantifiable. Use the sentence format of Action Verb + Specific Task + Quantifiable Point". For example: "Automated imaging process for new computers, reducing 90% of manual work for the IT team." Include responsibilities of your role, but don't fill your resume with lots of bullets about every small task. Summarize and tailor your bullet points around the job description you're applying to. For example, instead of saying "Created new user accounts, deleted old accounts, set passwords….", say "Administered and maintained all user accounts".

Similarly for relevant skills. You want to include the general topics that you are knowledgeable about, as in customer support, networking, system administration, programming, etc. You may list the operating systems that you've worked with and the programming languages that you are skilled in, but don't try to list every networking protocol you've heard about or every IT tool that you've ever used. The noise distracts from the relevant information.

Regardless of the format you decide to use (chronological, functional, etc.), make sure you keep the format and structure consistent throughout. For example, if you use full sentences for your bullets, be sure to use that format for all of them and include proper punctuation and grammar. Check your font sizes and styles to ensure those are consistent as well.

Tailoring the resume

Before sending a resume to a certain job position, it's a good practice to check that the contents of your resume match what's in the job description. You should be tailoring your resume to each job you're applying to. Sending generic resumes to as many roles as possible, is not a good strategy. A targeted approach is always better.

If you are applying for an IT support role, you may want to highlight your customer support experience, even if it only comes from a volunteer organization at your university. Whereas, if you are applying for a programming job, you'll want to highlight your software development experience, regardless of whether it was acquired in university or on the job.

Your online presence

Many companies nowadays contact candidates through online sites like LinkedIn, so it's important to keep your online profile complete and up to date. Start by writing a summary that describes both your current role (if applicable) and your career aspirations. Include a professional photo and up to date contact info (although recruiters may also contact you directly via LinkedIn).

LinkedIn profiles are much more in depth than resumes. You can include specific accomplishments from as many roles as you like, but use the same format as your resume (Action Verb + specific task + quantifiable point).

Adding in personal projects can also be helpful, especially if you have something tangible to show from it. For example, if you've created an application, a website, or similar type of product as part of a hobby or school project, include it and provide a link to it.

Just like a resume, list your skills, your experience and what you are looking for as your next step. Make sure that you include all the relevant background information that a recruiter looking at your profile might be interested in. Make sure you are descriptive, don't assume the reader will have context.

Resume Example 1_Google IT Support.pdf
PDF File

Resume Example 2_Google IT Support.pdf
PDF File

Resume Example 3_Google IT Support (1).pdf
PDF File

Getting Ready for the Interview

A lot of us are quite nervous when we go through our first interviews. There are a lot of things at stake and it might be hard not to freak out, but don't panic. You can do this if you prepare. With interviews as with lots of other things in life, practice makes perfect. In order to get this practice try doing mock interviews pretending that you're in an interview even if it's not real will help you perform your best. You'll be more comfortable thinking out loud and providing clear answers to complicated questions. To do these mock interviews, recruit a friend or family member that's willing to practice with you. Even if they don't know the actual content, they can still help you get into interview mode. By practicing you'll get used to articulating yourself clearly which is key to nailing an interview. It's not just about knowing the answers. You also need to share your ideas clearly and concisely, for example, take some general technical subjects like DHCP, DNS, Active Directory, or any other technical area you've learned about. Have a friend or family member ask you to explain the concept to them. What's it for? How is it used? Practicing explanations for a non-technical audience will get used to breaking down complicated ideas and sharing them in basic terms. They can also create their own troubleshooting scenarios like asking you to explain what you did the last time you fix their printer or got their network online. While you're practicing answering questions you should also practice active listening habits, maintain eye contact with the other person, not understanding when they speak, and ask relevant follow-up questions. If you can, it's great to practice with someone who also plans to interview for similar roles. This way you can take turns being the interviewer and the interviewee. This will allow you to put yourself in the interviewer's shoes and understand how best to answer each question. Now keep in mind, I don't recommend trying to script or memorize all of your answers. Instead, try explaining the same concepts in different ways. This allows for a more natural conversation and will help you adapt your answers in the actual interview where you won't know the questions. What you can write down and memorize is your elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is a short summary of who you are and what kind of career you're looking for. Make sure to include information like what you're passionate about, how you would like to grow, and what you're looking for in a new role. Practice delivering this pitch to different people and see how it sounds, even if you have it memorized, stay flexible, you never know in which context you may need it. Reading your first elevator pitch from scratch can be hard. I've included a few examples in the next supplemental reading when developing your own, make sure that you keep it personal. Again, the key to getting interviews right is to practice practice practice. This will help you feel less nervous and show your best self during the actual interviews.

Creating Your Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is a short description of yourself. The name comes from the fact that you want it to be so short that you can deliver it to someone that you are meeting in an elevator ride.

The goal of the elevator pitch is to explain who you are, what you do and why the other person should be interested in you.

For example, this is my elevator pitch for this program:

My name is Rob Clifton, and I'm a Program Manager at Google. I manage all of our hiring efforts for our junior IT support roles. I've interviewed hundreds of candidates, and I help train our interviewers on how to find the best talent in the industry.

I'm telling you who I am, what I do, and why you might be interested in what I have to say.

In an interviewing context, you want to be able to quickly define who you are, what your current role is and what your future goals are.

For example, if you are a student, you'll want to include what and where you are studying, and what you are looking to do once you have graduated.

Hi! I'm Jamie, I'm in my senior year at Springfield University, studying Computer Science. I enjoy being able to help people and solve problems, so I'm looking forward to putting my tech skills into practice by working as an IT Support Specialist after I graduate.

If, instead, you already have a job and you are looking for a change, you will want to include what you do and what difference you are looking for.

Hi! I'm Ellis, I've been working at X Company as an IT Support Specialist for the past two years. During those years, I've learned a lot about operating systems and networking and I'm looking to switch to a system administrator position, where I can focus on large scale deployments.

Remember that you want to keep it personal, you want to get the attention of the other person and let them know why they are interested in you. Even if you don't meet them in an elevator, you want to be ready to give people you meet a quick impression of yourself.

What to Expect During the Technical Interview

When you're interviewing for a technical position, you'll likely have one or more interviews where you'll specifically need to demonstrate your technical skills and knowledge. These interviews may take the form of technical troubleshooting scenarios or explanations of technical concepts and subjects. As we've said, you want to have a solid foundation for all the fundamental concepts. A good interviewer will push you to the limits of your knowledge. This means it's very likely that during an interview you'll reach a point where you're not sure you know the right answer, this is expected. But you shouldn't just say, "I don't know." If you were supporting a user, you wouldn't say it then either. It's okay to admit you're not sure, but you should then explain what you would do to find the answer. As an IT support specialist, you should expect to often face new and unfamiliar problems. Having a good problem solving strategy is more important than knowing all the answers. If the question you're answering is big and complex, outline how you'd break down the work needed to solve the problem before going into the exact details of what needs to be done. If you're thinking about what the best solution could be, share your train of thought with your interviewer so they can follow along. Thinking aloud not only helps the interviewer see your thought process, but it also helps you work through the problem. For example, if you get stuck with a technical troubleshooting scenario, you can try and recap what information you've gathered and state potential causes that can be ruled out with certainty and then try to figure out what info is still missing to rule out other causes. When you mention concepts or technologies, you should be ready to explain them and articulate why you might choose one thing over another. For instance, if you're working through a networking problem and say something like, the problem might be related to the DNS settings. Be ready to explain what DNS is, and why it relates to the issue. You should also clarify the questions constraints. Don't assume anything, it's okay and even expected to ask the interviewer follow up questions to ensure that the problem is correctly framed. Always use the data and evidence you have from the interviewer to inform your next steps. For example, if you need to solve a problem about a user being unable to connect to an internal system, you should ask follow up questions like, what operating system the user is using, how their computer is supposed to connect to the network, what error messages they are getting, whether other users are affected? Your goal is to narrow the scope to find the root cause. If the question is very complex, it might become difficult to follow or explain the solution. In this case, it's useful to take notes and use diagrams to illustrate the problem. You can use this process when it makes sense. It doesn't mean you need to write everything down during an interview. Sometimes the answer is straight forward and you can just go ahead and explain it without writing anything down.

Showing Your Best Self During the Interview

Being your best self for the interview starts the night before. Being fully rested will help you have more energy, be more focused, and minimize anxiety. So make sure that you get a good night sleep. Don't try to cram in any last-minute studying, this will only make you more anxious. Instead, try to relax and go to bed early. On the day of the interview eat a proper breakfast. It's never a good idea to be hungry during an interview. Aim to arrive earlier than the scheduled time and give yourself enough travel time for any mishaps along the way. Make sure you're comfortable before you begin the actual interview. Don't be afraid to ask for something if you need it. Use the restroom, grab a glass of water, and ask for a notepad and pen for notes or to illustrate answers when necessary. Be fully present for the duration of the interview. This means turning off your phone to avoid interruptions and giving the interviewer your full attention. Use those active listening skills that you've practiced. Make eye contact, nod, indicate understanding, and ask follow-up questions. Don't forget to be yourself. You want the interviewer to remember you, so let your personality show. Make sure that you highlight what makes you unique. Remember that the interview is also an opportunity for you to ask questions about the things that you care about. You're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you. Find out if this is a company that you want to work for and whether you'll be able to achieve your career goals there. Finally, remember to slow down. Most people start talking faster and faster when they're nervous, so be aware of your pace. If you notice that you're getting nervous, pause for a moment to take a few deep breaths, and then consciously slow down. Well, that's a lot of tips to remember. Feel free to re-watch these videos when your next interview is approaching to make sure that you have these ideas fresh in your mind.

Interview Role Play: Customer Service

Hi, thanks for coming in. For a jump into my technical questions, I'd like to know a bit more about you. Tell me why you're interested in this position?

When I came into college, I was a pre-med major and eventually, I led down the path to take an introduction to IT course. After that course, I realized how impactful IT was and I became more curious to how computers work and why did they break. I changed my major to IT after that class. After two years of being in the major, I got a job at the IT services [inaudible] where I was able to help students with their computer issues. I believe having the job will allow me to advance my knowledge and troubleshooting skills and then also I'll be able to learn new things. Cool. Can you tell me what in particular you find appealing about IT? I like IT because it allows me to be very creative. Then it also allows me to hone in on those problem-solving skills. Also, I like IT because it's very broad. I felt like the trajectory of my career, it could be in multiple IT fields such as database management, software engineering, IT support, and networking.

That's awesome. All right, well, let's get started with our first question then. Let's say that you're the only person supporting a help desk and you're currently helping me with an issue when a VP walks in and they ask you for help and they say they have a presentation to give in 15 minutes, how would you handle this situation?

I want to prioritize issues based on severity, it seems the VP the issues are little bit more time-sensitive. I would ask you if it's okay, if I would help out the VP.

That's fair. I'm okay with that. Now, how would you help the VP?

I want to get the VP up and running as soon as possible. I will offer them a spare laptop and then in the meantime, I'll be able to fix their computer while they're at the meeting.

Great. Now let me rewind for a second. Let me change things up. What if you were helping me, and my issue was actually very critical and it was part of a larger issue that was affecting a number of users. Say maybe our wireless network was having issues. How would you handle that?

If I was able to help the VP right away, by offering a spare laptop, then I would do that. But if that's not the case, then either let the VP know that the issue that I'm dealing with is a little bit more severe because it affects the business. I hope the VP will be a little bit more understanding and I would probably have to have a co-worker come and help the VP or I could tell the VP to probably reschedule their meeting if that's possible.

Great. I think that's fair and you're right. We should take into account what's most important to the business in that type of scenario. Good job.

In this scenario, we saw Candice deliver her elevator pitch and show why she's passionate about IT and becoming an IT support specialist. We also saw one typical complication of troubleshooting problems. Getting priorities right. Time-sensitive issues usually have higher priority, but issues that are preventing a large number of users from getting work done should be dealt with first, even if the person asking for help is a director or a VP. That's it for now. See you again at the end of the next course.