VOLUME 02 · INTERVIEWS

The Interview Playbook

How to prepare for the five interview formats that account for 90% of hiring decisions worldwide.

AUTHOR — Coach Andeh — Organisational Psychologist & Founder, MJC

EDITION — 2026 Edition

PAGES — 8 sections

myjobconcierge.com

Built for ambitious professionals worldwide.

© Phoenix Fortunes (SMC) Ltd · 2026

01 Introduction

> *The interview is not a test of your knowledge. It is a test of how you think under time pressure, how you handle disagreement, and whether the interviewer wants to spend three years in a room with you.*

Most interview prep guides fail because they treat the interview as a knowledge test. It isn't. It is a structured assessment of three things: how you think when the answer is not obvious, how you behave when challenged, and whether you fit the team well enough that someone wants to spend three years next to you.

Across every formal hiring process worldwide — from a tech startup in Berlin to a Big Four firm in São Paulo to an investment bank in Singapore — five interview formats account for the vast majority of what you'll face: behavioural, technical, case study, panel, and the executive partner round. This guide walks through each one and gives you a preparation system that scales.

01 Format 1 — The behavioural interview

STAR is necessary. STAR alone is not enough.

The behavioural interview asks you to describe past situations in your own words. The interviewer is testing whether your stories evidence the competencies the role demands.

The standard advice is to use the STAR framework — Situation, Task, Action, Result. STAR is necessary; it organises your story so the interviewer can score it. But STAR alone produces formulaic, interchangeable answers. The candidates who stand out add three things on top of STAR.

1. **Specificity.** Real names (anonymised where needed), real numbers, real dates. "We launched in March 2024 and hit 1,200 users by June" beats "we launched and got users".
2. **A complication.** The first version of your story should fail. Then you describe what you did about the failure. This is where the interviewer learns whether you can think under pressure.
3. **A reflection.** One sentence at the end describing what you'd do differently. This signals self-awareness, which is the single competency hardest to fake.

Prepare 10-12 stories from your career, mapped to the most-asked behavioural questions: tell me about yourself, tell me about a time you led, a time you disagreed, a time you failed, a time you persuaded someone. The same 10-12 stories should each cover 2-3 questions. Reuse is fine; recyclability is the test of a good story.

> ★ **PRACTICE**
>
> Record yourself answering five behavioural questions out loud, with no script. Listen back. Where do you ramble? Where is the result vague? Where would you score yourself low if you were the recruiter? That gap is the work.

02 Format 2 — The technical screen

The actual job interview, except faster and more uncomfortable.

Technical screens vary by role. For software engineers, it's a coding question on a shared screen. For finance, a modelling question or accounting puzzle. For product managers, a metric or design question. For management consultants, the case study (covered next).

The format is consistent: an interviewer sets you a problem, watches you solve it, and asks follow-up questions. The mistake most candidates make is to focus on producing the answer. The interviewer cares about the answer, but they care more about **how you got there** — the questions you asked, the tradeoffs you named, the assumptions you flagged.

Three habits that change the outcome:

1. Restate the problem in your own words before solving. Confirms understanding and buys 30 seconds of thinking time.
2. Talk through your approach before writing or building. Lets the interviewer redirect you if you're heading the wrong way.
3. Name your assumptions out loud. "I'm assuming the data fits in memory; is that right?" If wrong, the interviewer corrects you. If right, you've demonstrated rigor.

03 Format 3 — The case study

A five-minute structure beats a fifty-minute solution.

The case study format dominates management consulting (McKinsey, BCG, Bain, the Big Four), is increasingly common in product and strategy roles at large firms (Amazon, Google, Microsoft), and shows up in MBA admissions interviews.

The candidate's job is to take a real or invented business problem, structure an approach, identify the key drivers, do enough quantitative work to support a recommendation, and present the recommendation crisply.

The interviewer is not testing whether you reach the right answer. They're testing whether your structure is logical, whether you can do mental arithmetic under pressure without losing the thread, and whether you can hold ambiguity without panicking.

The three highest-leverage habits:

1. Spend the first five minutes structuring before you compute anything. The structure is what gets scored, even when you don't finish.
2. Talk through your reasoning out loud at every step. Silent thinking is invisible to the scorer.
3. Round your numbers aggressively. 17.83 × 4.21 is not the question. The question is roughly what your answer means.

> ★ **DRILL**
>
> Find five published case studies online. Time yourself: 5 minutes structuring, 10 minutes solving, 5 minutes presenting. Record. Listen back. The structure is what improves with practice; the maths is just a side-effect of the structure.

04 Format 4 — The panel interview

Three to seven people on the other side. Different rules.

Panel interviews are common in academic, public sector, large enterprise, and most regulated industries (banking, energy, healthcare). They are also the default for competency-based assessment centres at multinationals worldwide.

The mistake is to treat the panel like a single interviewer. It isn't. Each panelist has a separate score sheet and a separate competency they're scoring you on. Your job is to make sure each one feels heard.

Three behaviours that lift panel scores:

1. **Eye contact distribution.** Begin your answer looking at the questioner. Move your gaze across the panel mid-answer. End looking back at the questioner. Each panelist registers being addressed.
2. **Reference each panelist's prior question.** If panelist A asked about leadership earlier, and panelist B now asks about strategy, weave a sentence linking the two. "When I was leading that team — to build on what A asked — we had to make this strategic call..." Demonstrates active listening.
3. **Use names if you remember them.** "Thanks Priya, that's a great question." Panelists score you higher when they feel acknowledged personally.

05 Format 5 — The executive / partner round

The only round where personal chemistry decides the outcome.

The final round at most senior hires is one-on-one with a senior executive — partner at a consulting firm, VP at a corporate, founder at a startup. By this stage they've already verified your competence; the interview is about whether they want to work with you.

This round breaks most of the structured-interview rules. The conversation is intentionally meandering. The interviewer is testing how you think across topics, how you handle silence, how you respond to provocation, and whether you have something interesting to say beyond your CV.

What works:

1. **Have an opinion.** On the industry, the company's strategy, the macro environment, the role itself. Vague answers lose. Specific opinions — even ones the interviewer disagrees with — win.
2. **Ask sharp questions.** Senior executives are tired of "what's the culture like?" Ask something specific: "How has the firm's view on [recent industry shift] changed in the last year?"
3. **Be comfortable with silence.** The interviewer will let pauses run. Don't fill them. The candidate who can hold a silence has presence.

07 Regional variants

Where the universal pattern shifts by market.

US

United States — tech sector

Multi-loop interviews are standard at FAANG and most series-B+ startups. 4-6 back-to-back interviews on one day, mix of behavioural + technical + system design + culture. Lunch interview is an evaluation; treat it as one.

UK

United Kingdom — corporate

Structured competency interviews dominate FTSE 100 and public sector. Civil Service uses Success Profiles framework with 4-5 strict behaviours. STAR is mandatory and explicitly scored.

DE

Germany — Mittelstand

Multiple rounds over weeks, not days. Final round often includes a written presentation or take-home assignment. Decisions are slower; do not interpret the gap between interview and offer as rejection.

JP

Japan — large corporate

Group interviews common at graduate level. Multiple rounds with same panel members. Final shacho (president) interview is highly ceremonial; preparation in Japanese protocol matters as much as content.

AFRICA

African corporate hiring

Panel interviews are the default at large employers (banks, telcos, NGOs). Aptitude tests + competency interview + final partner are the standard funnel. Punctuality matters; arrive 10 minutes early.

IN

India — engineering and consulting

Technical depth weighted heavily. Multiple rounds of coding/case before any HR contact. References checked thoroughly post-offer; never inflate.

Ready to put this into practice?

Reading about interviews builds awareness. Practising them builds capability. Run a real mock with our AI Interview Prep tool — it scores your competency evidence and your communication quality, and gives you a PDF report on what to fix before the real thing.

Interview Prep

Recorded mock interview with AI scoring on competency evidence + communication. PDF report with specific gaps. Pay-per-use.

myjobconcierge.com/ai-tools/interview-preparation/

AI Career Coach

24/7 voice + text coaching. Walk through a behavioural answer, get feedback in real time, refine.

myjobconcierge.com/ai-tools/career-coaching/

CV Gap Filler

A tailored CV makes the interview easier. Map your CV to the JD before the interview.

myjobconcierge.com/ai-tools/cv-diagnostics/

Career Guides Hub

Salary negotiation, psychometric testing, career pivots — all in the same series.

myjobconcierge.com/career-guides/

© Phoenix Fortunes (SMC) Limited · 2026