

Interviewing Skills
For Scientist Positions in Biotech Industry

Interviewing Skills

for scientists moving into the biotech industry

UCSF Office of Career & Professional Development

Interviewing and Compensation Negotiation Skills for U.S. Research Scientist Positions in Biotech Industry

Agenda

- Guaranteed opening questions
- Questions about your interpersonal and team skills
- Tips: Phone interview, site visit and job talk
- Tips: Difficult questions and situations

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Anatomy of an Interview

Or, why is the Hiring Manager asking you that question?

1. Opening/Agenda Setting
 2. Interpersonal skills and team-fit questions
 3. Questions about your science/their science
 4. Your Questions
- Conduct your interview preparation with this structure in mind.

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Typical Questions

- When are you available to start?
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in the position/company?
- Why do you want to leave academia?
- Where do you hope to be in 5 or 10 years?

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Tell me about yourself (15-30 sec)

I am a PhD level biochemist, current postdoc at UCSF

+

Past five years been studying cancer biology (more detail)

+

I'm really interested in this position because it would allow me to...

=

Tell me about yourself

Academic training

+

Relevant scientific/technical skills and background

+

Interested in/skilled for job because

=

Tell me about yourself

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Tell me about yourself

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Relevant scientific/technical skills and background

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Tell me about yourself

The "pivot" →

Focus the conversation on your qualifications for this job

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Activity

Tell me about yourself, practice session

Write your response in bullet form.

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Activity

Tell me about yourself.

In pairs:

1. Tell your partner the type of job you aspire to, and what your ideal job description would entail, incl scientific qualifications.
2. Practice interview skills:
 - Your partner/interviewer asks you: “Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. Why don’t you start by telling me a little bit about yourself in the context of this position.”
 - You respond.
 - Your partner critiques:
 - Delivery: Vocal tone, eye contact, flow. How was the pivot?
 - Content: Did they convince you they had the skills

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Why are you interested in this position?

- Question is about what motivates you
- For initial interviews, focus on job description
- Later interviews, mention what you've learned from earlier interviews
- Talk first about what components of the job you like to do, then move to the fact that you are good at those tasks as well.

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Why are you leaving academia?

- Do not focus on the negative, what you are moving away from
- Focus on what you are moving toward, what's attractive about industry
 - applied nature of research
 - team based
 - fast paced

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Why are you leaving academia?

- Balance: Do not sound naïve. Ok to be realistic but not overly negative about academia. Refer to conversations with experienced industry scientists.
 - “I’ve realized how much I enjoy working toward goals as a member of a team, and while my time in academic research has been rewarding and productive, the further I’ve progressed, and the more independence I’ve gained at the bench, the more isolating my daily work has become. I’ve had several long conversations with others who have moved from UCSF to industry settings, and it’s clear to me that moving to an industry environment will allow me to balance my love for research activities with the opportunity to work more closely with others.”

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?

- Do not focus on job titles
- If you want to move away from research long-term, an interview for a Scientist 1 position might not be the place to bring that up
- Focus on *characteristics* of your ideal job in 5-10 years
- Start with list of career-related values: What’s important to you?
 - Values Assessment tool at myidp.sciencecareers.org
 - Handout
 - Authenticity

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Values Assessment

Overview Summary

Personal Information

Assessment

Skills Assessment

Interests Assessment

Values Assessment

Career Exploration

Consider Career Fit

Read About Careers

Attend Events

Talk to People

Choose a Career Path

Set Goals

Career Advancement Goals

Skill Goals

Project Goals

Implement Plan

Mentoring Team

myDP Summary

Quick Tips | My Assessment | Summary

Rate how important it is to you that your future career path matches each of the following values, where:
1 = Unimportant
5 = Essential

1 = Unimportant | 5 = Essential

<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Help Society: contribute to betterment of world
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Help Others: be involved with directly helping individuals or small groups
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	People Contact: have day-to-day contact with clients or colleagues
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Teamwork: work in collaboration with others as part of a team
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Friendships: Develop close personal relationships with people at work

1 = Unimportant | 5 = Essential

<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Congenial Atmosphere: work with friendly colleagues
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Competition: engage in activities that test my abilities/achievements against others'
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Make Decisions: have authority to decide courses of action, policies, etc.
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Fast Pace: work in a busy atmosphere with frequent deadlines
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Supervision: be directly responsible for work done by others

1 = Unimportant | 5 = Essential

<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Influence People: be in a position to change attitudes or opinions of other people
<input type="radio"/> 1	<input checked="" type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 5	[clear]	Work Alone: work on projects by myself, with little contact with others

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Opening/Agenda Setting

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?

- It's difficult to predict the exact title or position I will have in the future. But I hope that I'll be playing some sort of leadership role within the research enterprise...but...it's really rewarding for me when I am recognized as an expert in a skill or knowledge. So I hope that within 5 years I can build a reputation for deep expertise in one or more areas. Also, it would be really rewarding if, in 5-10 years, I will have realized a connection between my efforts and a product that will one day make a positive difference for patients. This is why I got into science in the first place...One thing that draws me to this particular position and this company is that it seems all of these goals are possible to achieve.

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Activity

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Generally about non-technical aspects of position.
- Basic principle: **Past** behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.
- Questions are about your **past** behaviors to see if you have demonstrated behaviors considered critical for success
- Behavioral questions designed to help the employer learn how you handled a situation in the past, so the employer can predict how you will respond in the future.

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Behavioral questions generally start with:

- “Tell me about a time when...”
- “Give me a past example of a situation when you...”

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Typical questions focused on past behaviors

- Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.
- Give me an example of a crisis situation you have handled successfully.
- Tell me about a tough group you had to get cooperation from. What was the issue and how did you go about delegating tasks to that group?

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Typical questions focused on past behaviors

- Handout: Review list of 15 questions taken from biotech company interviewer scripts

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Typical Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.
- Give me an example of a crisis situation you have handled successfully.
- Tell me about a tough group you had to get cooperation from. What was the issue and how did you go about obtaining “buy-in”?
- SITUATION, TASK, ACTION, RESULT

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Responding Effectively: STAR technique

- Respond with very specific past tense stories:

Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a graduate student, I've had to manage multiple projects at one time, some of my own and some of which were collaborations with other researchers. In the past year, I was wrapping up a set of experiments for a first author paper. At the same time, I was collaborating with a postdoc in another lab on some animal studies. In both cases, there was sense of urgency to get results.
Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So I knew that if I didn't carefully organize my time, I would not be able to hit all of my deadlines.
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The animal studies were time-consuming, requiring daily measurements. Therefore, first I met with my postdoc collaborator and set a schedule that divided up the responsibilities for that project and set sub-deadlines for each step. • Then I sat down and mapped my manuscript-related deadlines on top of that other list. This ensured that we would complete the experiments in a timely manner and allowed me the time I needed to complete my independent experiments and draft a manuscript.
Result	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuscripts for both sets of experiments were submitted within 1 month of each other, and both have been accepted for publication now. One is even going to be in a top journal!

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Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Responding Effectively: STAR technique

- Select a behavioral style question.
- Organize your response in bullets
- Practice answering a behavioral style question with a partner.
- Ask each other different questions.
- Critique:
 - How could your partner improve on the S-T-A-R organization of their response?
 - How could your partner improve their content/story?

Situation
Task
Action
Result

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Your Questions for

- Have some!
- Write them down; get the agenda as early as possible
- Remember your purpose/goal is to find out if you'd like to work there AND to get an offer.
- Before the interview, think about what you want to learn and research the company or unit.
- Questions should reflect your particular interest in the position and the company; base Q's on the job desc
- Examples:
 - What are the day to day responsibilities?
 - Boss: What are your priorities for this position?
Challenges faced by the group?
 - What characteristics are rewarded/valued in this position?

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General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for Phone Interviews

- Express enthusiasm
- Politely ask to call them back
- Call on a land line, quiet place
- Focus on brevity
- Stand up, walk around



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General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for the Site Visit

- Get the schedule as soon as possible
- Talk/email w someone at employer; ask questions
 - Know why they are interested in you, in advance
 - Know what the specific priorities are, in advance
 - Know what their main challenges are, in advance
 - Refer to these conversations during the interviews!
- Read up on their business news and history; build questions in advance; show curiosity
- Preface your pre-interview questions with “I’d like to be as prepared as possible...”

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General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for the Job Talk

- Less about your current research project
- More *you* than an academic talk
- Find out who will be in your talk audience; then start big and funnel down to your talk topic
- Less *data* than in an academic talk
- Make it clear what *your role* was
- Very little about future directions
- Instead, what challenges is the group facing? How are you going to help?

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General Interview Tips

Make a Good *First* Impression

- There are many ways you can make a first impression
 - Web presence
 - Voice message
 - Email address
- Entrance: Look your best, arrive early, be extra-pleasant with the administrators, smile
- Greeting: Firm handshake, smile, eye contact, practice!
- Eye contact and smiles throughout
 - Uncomfortable? Look at their eyebrows, periodically to “check in”...it works.

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General Interview Tips

Make a Good *Last* Impression

- Close with a mature summary statement
 - This comes after they ask if you have any final questions
 - Prepare a 10-20 second statement that tells the interviewer that you want the position and why you are good fit
 - Keep in mind that you may need to adapt your statement based on what you learn in the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to share your skills and experiences and learn more about the position
- Take their business card/contact information so you can send a thank you note within 48 hours
- Make sure you know their hiring time frame before you leave

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Difficult Interview Situations

- What's your greatest weakness?
 - Motivations: Are you self-aware? Can you self-correct?
 - Choose something that you are working on that is completely or mostly corrected,
 - Describe the correction process and how it's a now diminished problem.

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Difficult Interview Situations

- What if you are stumped, forget or make an obvious error?
 - *Error: Acknowledge the error*
 - *Forget: Tell the interviewer you are sure you can come up with the answer and will get back to them*
 - *Stumped: ask the interviewer to clarify, say more about the question in the context of the job*

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Difficult Interview Situations

- What if the interviewer asks an “illegal” question?
Age, ethnicity, marital status, children, disability, religion, sexual orientation...
 - *Answer the question*

OR

 - *Avoid the direct question but address the underlying question*

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