



HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BA JOB INTERVIEW

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Lesson Objective:

After completing this lesson, you'll be able to use time-tested techniques to prepare for a business analyst job interview so that you can enter each interview with confidence.

How to Prepare for a BA Job Interview

Interviews are *conversations* about a job opening and your qualifications. The employer wants to discover if you are truly a qualified candidate; you want to discover if this is a job you want. In this topic, we'll discuss how to prepare for the interview – both to answer and ask questions – and outline the potential perspectives of those who might be involved in your interview process.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

The hiring manager is interested in finding the most qualified candidate. New hires are a risk and you want to help them diminish their perceived risk in hiring you. Just like in your resume, your past career experience provides evidence that you can successfully contribute to their organization. When preparing for an interview, you want to prepare to speak confidently about your experiences and share real-world stories, often in a fair amount of detail.

Consider your most relevant career experiences for this position. Practice talking about your experiences. Your tendency at first will be to present this information. Through practice you will become comfortable with the information so you can participate in a conversation about your experience.





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Because you may have tailored your resume to reference specific terms from the job description, you'll want to review the resume you submitted and practice talking about your career experiences using those terms. Don't get thrown off guard when someone asks you about a technique you listed in your resume if you still think about that experience with different terminology.

If the job description listed specific skills, you should be prepared to answer questions about these skills and provide examples of your experiences. For example, if the job description indicates that the business analysts document requirements in use cases, be prepared with what a definition of a use case is. You might even want to create a sample (in your work if possible, otherwise in your personal life) to show some initiative in learning the technical skills you'll need for the job. Some managers will not be content with a book definition. For example, I used to ask candidates what they saw as the limitations of a use case, thereby assessing their understanding of the technique and their ability to use it in context.

What If I Don't Have a Skill That's Asked About?

If you really do not have experience with a skill that is required (or asked of you), the very best thing you can do when asked these types of questions is be humble about what you know, explain what you learned through research, and describe your most closely related experiences. Just as you don't want to oversell your qualifications in your resume, you don't want to do so in the interview either. For one thing, most hiring managers will see right through it and discover your true qualifications by asking follow-up questions. Being open about your qualifications also keeps the door open for other opportunities within the organization.

Who Will I Interview With?

You'll typically interview with more than one person in an organization. If you know their names ahead of time, spend a bit of time researching the individual on LinkedIn or on the web. Even if you don't know specific names, the following



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sections will help you appreciate the perspectives of your Interviewers. You can be prepared by anticipating the perspective of the hiring manager and other interviewers, bringing questions to ask, and practicing talking about your BA experiences.

PERSPECTIVES OF YOUR INTERVIEWERS

Hiring Manager

Consider carefully the perspective of the hiring manager. Find out what you can about their background and the breadth of their responsibilities. Remember, this position solves a problem for them or alleviates a pain. The better you can understand that pain, the better you'll be able to speak to how you can help address it.

If the hiring manager is in the IT group, you will likely be their primary contact with the customer, alongside some people in other key roles such as project manager. Business analysts often work fairly independently, so the manager needs to trust that you will be a good communicator, will be proactive, will learn quickly, and come to them with any issues. Most importantly, they want to know you will communicate, communicate, communicate and then, communicate some more. And that this communication will not be the bowl people over type of communication but the open, honest, and collaborative style that will help all people on the team shine. You will have a critical role in shaping the business's perception of IT by setting realistic expectations, asking questions and doing the analysis that ensures IT can deliver on its promises.

If the hiring manager is within a business group, they are probably bringing you in to help keep their communication with IT organized. You might be helping facilitate alignment across a variety of business stakeholders or working with the main stakeholder (likely the hiring manager) to see his or her vision through to implementation. They are likely looking to find someone who can help IT





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accomplish the objectives of their specific business unit or project team. People on the business side are often tired of hearing “it’s a requirement issue” or “I didn’t know what to do.” Especially if this is a new position, they want to know that you’ll handle the IT communication on their behalf.

Some other aspects of the hiring manager’s perspective could include:

- Is this a new position? If so, they will want to know how your skills will save them time in whatever communication issues they are currently dealing with, and also that you can bring experience from different kinds of projects to build a process that will work best within their organizational dynamic.
- Will you be part of an established team with a formal process? If so, they will be looking for you to be knowledgeable in the basics of their methodology (to the extent it’s publicly available) and possibly the tools they use. They may want to be sure you are willing to work within their process.

Most BA interviews I’ve participated in as a manager or candidate and spoken with others about involve more situational-based questions than technical ones. This is not to say that your technical skills are not important, they are just not as important as your ability to communicate, facilitate, and help people solve problems.

Hiring managers want to understand how you will approach different situations that you will face in their organization.

- How do you help people prioritize?
- How do you handle people who go off-topic in meetings?
- How do you approach change?

Often a hiring manager will want you to talk through one or two projects you’ve worked on, especially those that involved the relevant responsibilities you list on your resume. Be prepared to speak specifically to what you did and how you



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achieved specific objectives. List the deliverables you created, the meetings you organized, and the people you interviewed. Talk about how you managed the discussions and be specific with examples whenever you can.

Other Business Analysts

Most hiring managers with an existing BA team will bring one or more business analysts into the interview process. Other business analysts will want to gauge how you'll fit in with the team and organizational culture. One or more of them may be a senior BA who could potentially be overseeing your day-to-day work and mentoring you in the role. Within any team, there will be various perspectives.

Common perspectives include:

- **Process orientation.** Do you know what you say you do about a specific deliverables or methodology?
- **Tool orientation.** Do you know what you say you do about a specific system, industry, or requirements tool?
- **Inter-personal orientation.** Do you have the skills necessary to deal with the more challenging personalities they work with on either the business or implementation team? Questions like “How do you handle someone who goes off topic in a meeting?” or “Tell me about a time when you negotiated a solution with a developer” might be looking for specific inter-personal experiences.
- **Team orientation.** Are you flexible? Are you going to learn their existing process before suggesting radical changes? Do you bring a new perspective that adds value? Will you be cooperative?

Developers and Development Managers

Most developers who have been in their profession for more than a few years have been burned at least once by bad requirements. They will want to make sure they do not get burned by you. But developers also want to be involved in the



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process, so look for questions that are gauging if you are going to cut them out of the loop and micro-manage them through your requirements. Developers want to participate in the requirements process, but most prefer not to own it.

Quality Assurance Engineers and QA Managers

Like developers, QA engineers want to make sure they do not get burned by bad requirements. QA people will probably be looking for more detail and precision. They want your requirements to be testable and give them a clear indication by which they can evaluate whether or not everything is working as expected. QA professionals often want to be involved in the requirements process and have the opportunity to provide feedback.

Business Subject Matter Experts

Business subject matter experts might be product managers, marketing managers, or internal process owners from any function within the company. Some business SMEs have been doing the BA job (if this is a new role) or have been suffering from a lack of support (if you are replacing someone who left). They want to understand how you are going to obtain their perspective and how involved they will be. Business SMEs can run the gamut from people who want very little direct involvement and will just be glad to have someone to talk to the techies for them, to those who want complete control and see your role as cutting them off from direct contact with the implementation team.

Project Managers

A good BA is a project manager's best friend. An inadequate BA throws the brunt of their inadequacy on the project manager who often is forced to step in to fill the gap. Schedule-driven PMs will ask about your planning skills and how quickly you can get things done. They are often on a deadline before you are even hired, so efficiency is a key value to them. They will want to know how you help the business prioritize new requests as well as manage scope.





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Human Resources

At a larger company, every candidate is interviewed by a representative from human resources. Sometimes a human resources professional performs the initial interview for screening purposes. HR professionals may have a limited perspective of the business analyst role. These interviews tend to focus on the specific job position qualifications or on personality and organizational fit.

THE SIMULATION

It is possible that a potential employer will ask you to simulate business analysis in an interview. This technique is designed to ascertain your true BA abilities. Simulations provide a hiring manager with a sense of your personal poise and how you deal with pressure situations. For example, the interviewer might ask you to elicit requirements about a feature and then document them. Or, they might have you lead them through a problem-solving session or elicitation session.

I once had a hiring manager ask me to elicit requirements from someone playing the role of Bill Gates about a bathroom redesign project. There is not much you can do to prepare for a simulation. If you are qualified for the role, a fit for the organization, and maintain your composure, you should do fine. The most important thing is to remain relaxed and confident.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

An interview should not be a one way street. You should be given ample opportunity to ask questions and some interviewers will judge you more by your questions than your answers. As Karie Price wrote in a comment on the blog post “What questions should I ask in a BA job interview?”:



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“When I interview candidates and they don’t have questions, I actually find that slightly concerning. Our nature is to be inquisitive and to want to know more.”¹

Your questions could be perceived as evidence of your interviewing and listening skills and your analytical abilities.

Be prepared with the following types of questions:

- **Business model.** Ask detailed questions that show you understand the business and have thought about it. Do a little analysis...how does the company generate revenue? What are its highest value services? How does technology support or constrain those efforts?
- **Projects.** What kind of projects will you be working on? What is the strategic impact of those projects? How does the project fit into the larger objectives of the organization? What do they hope to achieve?
- **Expectations.** What will an ideal candidate look like? What are the expectations of someone in this role? What kind of support will I have? Product knowledge is important, how will I be able to learn about the product?
- **Culture.** What is the team like? How do people work together? What do you like about working here? What’s your least favorite thing about working here?
- **Process.** Find out what’s in place in terms of a software development process and what your role will be within it.
- **Systems.** Ask questions about the tools and technologies the organization uses to support the process and the product.

¹ <http://www.bridging-the-gap.com/help-a-ba-what-questions-should-a-ba-ask-in-a-job-interview/>



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SOME FINAL TIPS

Never, ever say anything negative about your previous employer or job situation. An insightful hiring manager will infer the truth and respect your discretion. **Many managers prompt for negative experiences because they want to avoid hiring negative people.** A prompt for a negative experience is not a license to complain.

Be prepared to think big picture. Hiring managers are looking for BAs who will think outside the box. Even though you might be gathering requirements for a specific project, understanding the implications of what you have learned in the past can provide a lot of value for future projects. I used to ask candidates, “What are some of the things you feel the company could have done better?” I was looking for people with a positive attitude toward change and a broad perspective.

TURNING REJECTIONS INTO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

While the process you’ve gone through in this course will help you increase your chances of finding the right position, it will not save you from rejection. Even with a focused search, there will be mismatches. You might find special qualifications that are not listed in the job opening. You might meet with the hiring manager and not be able to build a solid relationship. The recruiter might not understand the position so your prep work sends you in the wrong direction. You might apply or interview for a job only to have the hiring manager hire an internal candidate.

So first, you need to believe something about your job search:

Being turned down for a job is not a reflection on you or your potential value as an employee.

Say this to yourself again and again because it’s 100% true.





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This truth frees you from dwelling on what you did wrong and permits you to learn from the experience.

At any point in the job search process, ask yourself some questions about the job to discover how you can improve your job search process. Here are some questions you might consider. (These are also included in the “Learning from ‘No’” worksheet for quick reference.)

1. Were the qualifications for the position what I thought they were? Did I learn something new about a qualification?
2. Was I truly qualified for this position? Do I need to modify my target position?
3. Which of my qualifications did this employer value the most? Did I learn something new about how to position myself for future opportunities?
4. Did I make it through the resume-to-contact funnel? If so, why was I selected? Was this reason appropriate? If not, is it possible I’m misrepresenting myself in some way?
5. Where did “no” happen? What was the reason for “no”? If this was a valid reason, how could I have gotten to “no” earlier in the process and save myself some time? If this was not a valid reason, how could I strengthen my positioning to overcome “no” next time?

The purpose of these questions is to help you take a “no” and turn it into a positive. Each and every “no” is an opportunity to learn something about your job search process.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Along with this topic you’ve received a worksheet to help you prepare for the interview. Use this to help yourself stay focused and be as prepared as possible. You’ve also received a worksheet titled “Job Interview Retrospective.” Use this





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worksheet after each interview to reflect on what you learned about the job and about your interviewing skills. Remember, just because you interviewed doesn't mean that the job is a good fit. It might not be a job you want or you might discover that you aren't fully qualified. Don't get bogged down in taking this personally. Use these insights to improve your job search.

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