Interview answers: the structure employers ask for, plus notice, salary and visa

This guide covers three things employers, career services and governments publish about interviews: the answer structure they expect, the kind of questions they ask about how you work, and the practical questions about notice, salary and visa that you will meet in the Gulf.

The full page on our website
careermena.com/guides/interview-questions/

1. Read the job posting and mark its 5 main requirements.
2. Prepare 3 to 5 short, real stories from your work or studies that show those requirements.
3. Rehearse each story aloud and time it.

The answer structure employers ask for

The UN's careers site tells candidates: "The structure of your answer should be: Situation, Action, Result." Career services often teach the same idea as **STAR**: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

- **Situation:** the background, in one or two sentences.
- **Task:** what you were responsible for.
- **Action:** what *you* did. This is most of the answer.
- **Result:** what happened, with a number if you have one, and what you learned.

MIT's career centre suggests spending most of the answer on the Action and preparing 3 to 5 stories as notes, not a memorised script.

Worked example (fictional: Sara Malik, procurement)

Question: "Tell me about a time you improved a process."

- Situation: purchase orders at my company took 18 days on average, and departments were complaining.
- Task: I was asked to find where the time went.
- Action: I mapped every approval step, found that paper approvals waited for signatures, and moved them into SAP Ariba with the finance team. I trained 12 approvers.
- Result: the average cycle fell to 14 days, a 22% cut, and it held for the next year.

Questions about how you work

These are behavioural questions: they ask for a real example, so answer with the structure described above. MIT's career centre uses these as examples (the "Tests" lines are our editors' reading):

1. **"Tell me about a time when you worked as part of a team to successfully execute a project."** Tests: working with others.

2. **"Do you have any experience with solving complex problems?"** Tests: problem solving and creative thinking.
3. **"What is a project that you are most proud of?"** Tests: what you value and what you can deliver.
4. **"Tell me about a time you failed."** Tests: honesty and learning. Choose a real, small failure and spend most of the answer on what you changed.

Applying to the UN? The UN asks candidates to review the competencies listed in the job opening and to prepare examples for them. It also looks for three core values: Integrity, Respect for Diversity and Professionalism. Prepare one real example for each.

Role and technical questions test whether you can do the tasks in the posting. Prepare from the posting's own requirement lines: for each line, one example from your work and the tools you used. If you have not done a task, say so and explain the closest thing you have done.

Practical questions you will meet in the Gulf

"What is your notice period?"

What it tests: when you can start.

What to know: your notice period is in your contract. In the UAE, the government portal states that notice is between 1 month (30 days) and 3 months (90 days). In Saudi Arabia, the Labor Law sets minimum notice periods; check your contract and the Ministry of Human Resources' page.

How you might answer: "My notice period is 30 days under my contract. If the start date matters, I can ask my employer whether an earlier release is possible after a proper handover."

"What are your salary expectations?"

What it tests: whether your expectations fit the budget.

What to know: Gulf offers are often built from a basic salary plus allowances (housing, transport and others). Our guide explains how to read an offer: careermena.com/guides/reading-a-gulf-job-offer/

How you might answer: "For similar roles in [city], I am looking at a total monthly package of [range you have checked]. I would like to understand how the package is built: basic salary and allowances."

"What is your current residence or visa status?"

What it tests: whether and how the employer can hire you.

What to know: in the UAE, a visit or tourist visa does not give you the right to work, and a residence visa cannot be processed while you are outside the UAE (u.ae). In Saudi Arabia the employer pays the work permit and Iqama (residence permit) fees (Labor Law, Article 40).

How you might answer, depending on what is true:

- "I hold a transferable residence visa and can start after my notice period."
- "I live in [country] and would need the employer to sponsor my work visa."

Never misstate your status: employers verify it.

Graduates, video interviews and after the interview

First interview after graduating? (fictional: Adam Hassan)

Use your graduation project, internship or volunteering as stories.

Question: "Do you have any experience with solving complex problems?"

- Situation: our campus garden sprinklers ran on a fixed timer and wasted water.
- Task: for my graduation project I set out to water only when the soil needed it.
- Action: I connected soil-moisture sensors to a microcontroller and built a Python dashboard to set limits.
- Result: over a six-week test on two plots, it used 30% less water than the fixed-timer plot.

Before a video or phone interview

- [ ] Test the link, camera, microphone and internet 30 minutes before.
- [ ] A quiet room, light in front of you, your CV and the posting open on screen.
- [ ] Phone on silent, notifications off.
- [ ] Interviews happen on the employer's official tools or by phone. An "interview" that is only a text chat on Telegram or WhatsApp is a warning sign (see our fake-offer check).

After the interview

- Send a short thank-you the same or next working day (our cover letter templates include one).
- Write down the questions you were asked while you remember them.

Sources

Our editors read these official pages on 10 Nov 2026. If anything differs, the official page is the reference.

1. "The structure of your answer should be: Situation, Action, Result"; review competencies in the job opening; core values Integrity, Respect for Diversity, Professionalism
   https://careers.un.org/how-to-apply
2. STAR; most of the answer on Action; 3 to 5 stories as notes; the 4 example questions ("Tests" lines labelled as our reading)
   https://capd.mit.edu/resources/the-star-method-for-behavioral-interviews/
3. UAE notice period 1 to 3 months (30 to 90 days)
   https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/Sector-of-employment/employment-in-the-private-sector/terminating-employment-contracts
4. Saudi minimum notice periods
   https://hrsd.gov.sa/en/knowledge-centre/articles/306
5. Visit visa gives no right to work; residence visa not processed for applicants outside the UAE
   https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/visa-and-emirates-id/Visa-information/tips-to-avoid-labour-and-visa-fraud
6. Saudi Art. 40
   https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/en/knowledge-centre/articles/64434-0