CHARTA LEARNING · INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Personal Experience and Judgement

Interview preparation summary · AU track

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INT.UJ.1.a · Using your experience

Turn a student job, society role or project into evidence of audit skills by naming the task, the check you made and one number.

Interviewers rarely expect audit experience from a trainee. They want evidence that you already do the things auditors do, and your own jobs, societies and projects are where that evidence lives. The method is to translate. Take a task, say in plain words what you did, name the check or control that made it reliable, and give one number. A till count at closing is a reconciliation of cash to a record. A refund that needed a manager's signature is an authorisation control. A society ledger checked against a bank statement is a reconciliation too. The common mistake is to list duties and job titles, or to claim you audited something, which sounds inflated. Describe what happened and let the interviewer draw the link. Choose stories where something was checked, a difference appeared and you followed it up. Avoid the word we for the check itself: say what you personally counted, compared or questioned, and keep the numbers small enough to remember under pressure.

WORKED EXAMPLE: CASH-UP AT THE LARKFIELD COFFEE BAR

Larkfield Coffee Bar is an invented student cafe. You worked weekend closing shifts and, after each shift, counted the till and compared it with the till roll total. Over 24 shifts the till rolls added to 29,760.00 and you counted 29,736.60. Five shifts had a difference: -2.10, +1.50, -0.80, -9.40 and -12.60, all in pounds, with a minus meaning cash short. Turn this into an interview story. Convention: percentages to one decimal place unless small, differences measured against the till roll.

Answer: Over 24 closing shifts I compared my cash count with the till roll. The net shortage was 23.40, 0.08% of takings, but the gross differences were 26.40 across five shifts, and I reported the largest, 12.60, to the manager with a note of what I had checked.

> **Interview tip:** Open with the check, then the number, then what you did. Do not call it an audit, and do not pretend you found the cause if you did not.

INT.UJ.1.b · Using your experience

Show professional scepticism and attention to detail through a real example in which you questioned a figure and traced a difference to its cause.

Scepticism in audit means a questioning mind and a habit of looking at evidence critically, without assuming that people are dishonest. Attention to detail means catching the small unexplained difference rather than rounding it away. In an interview, the best evidence is a time you compared two sources, found they disagreed and refused to accept a plug. Typical settings are a society bank reconciliation, a stock count at a part-time job, a spreadsheet for a group project or a data set for a dissertation. A strong story names the two things compared, the size of the difference, the steps you took to explain it, and what you recorded. Say whether the difference was a real error or only a timing item. Be careful not to make small differences sound bigger than they were, or to suggest that you suspected a person when you only suspected a figure. The usual weak answer says you are detail-oriented without a single example. A modest difference explained properly beats a dramatic story told loosely.

WORKED EXAMPLE: THE HOCKEY CLUB BANK RECONCILIATION

As treasurer of an invented hockey club you compare the club ledger with the bank statement. The ledger cash balance is 4,386.20 and the bank statement balance is 4,912.45. Two cheques of 612.50 and 195.00 have been written but not yet presented, a deposit of 280.00 was paid in but has not yet cleared, and a bank charge of 14.25 is on the statement but not in the ledger. Reconcile the two balances and decide what to do with any remaining difference. Convention: all amounts in pounds; the difference is expressed as a percentage of the ledger balance.

Answer: The adjusted bank balance was 4,384.95 and the adjusted ledger 4,371.95, leaving 13.00 unexplained, about 0.3% of the balance. I traced it to a subscription recorded at 26.00 instead of 39.00 and corrected it, rather than plugging a small difference.

> **Interview tip:** Say that the amount was small and that you traced it anyway. The point is the habit, not the size. Never describe it as fraud when it was a typing error.

INT.UJ.1.c · Using your experience

Describe how you met a deadline and worked in a team, with the plan, the progress measure, the point you raised a problem and your own share.

Audit teams work to fixed reporting dates, so interviewers look for evidence that you plan, notice slippage early and say so. A strong story has four parts: the deadline and the work, a simple plan with a number such as hours or tasks, a moment when progress was behind plan and what you did, and your own contribution inside the team. The signal is not heroics. A candidate who worked all night to rescue a late project shows effort, but a candidate who spotted the gap halfway and told the team with a number shows judgement. Use measures that are easy to check: hours remaining against hours available, tasks done against tasks planned. Name what you gave up, such as removing a section, rather than claiming you did everything. The common mistake is to describe the team's success in the first person plural and leave the interviewer unable to tell what you did. Say we for the team's result and I for your own tasks, and keep both honest.

WORKED EXAMPLE: THE 16-DAY GROUP REPORT

Four students must deliver a group report in 16 days. The work is estimated at 156 hours. Each person can give 3 hours a day. After 8 days the team has logged 52 hours. Work out whether the team is on track and what you would say. Convention: all four people contribute equally, and hours are counted in whole hours.

Answer: At the halfway point we had done 52 of 156 hours and had 96 hours of capacity for 104 hours of work, so we were 8 hours short. I told the team that day, proposed either 3.25 hours a day each or dropping an appendix, and we agreed to cut scope.

> **Interview tip:** Show the moment you raised the problem and the number you used. Do not say you stayed up all night, which suggests poor planning.

INT.UJ.2.a · Honest answers

Answer questions about thin finance experience or a gap in your CV truthfully, by saying what you lack, what you have done about it and what you can show.

Many strong audit candidates have no finance job and some have gaps in a CV, such as a year out, a resit or a change of degree. Interviewers are not looking for a perfect history. They are testing whether you are honest, whether you understand what you lack and whether you have acted. A good answer has three parts: say plainly what you do not have, say what you have done to close it, with a number or a date, and say what you can already show. Do not pad. Claiming a course you have not finished, or hinting that a short placement was longer, is the worst move because auditors are trained to check claims, and an interviewer may well do so. Equally, do not apologise at length or over-explain a gap. Give the reason in a sentence, state what you learned, then move to the present. Keep every figure exact, and say what you will have done by when, so the plan is checkable.

WORKED EXAMPLE: SEVEN MODULES OUT OF TWELVE

You studied history and have no accounting job. You have started an online introductory accounting course with 12 modules and have completed 7. Each remaining module takes about 4 hours. Your interview is in 21 days. The interviewer asks: you have no finance experience, why should we believe you are ready? Write an honest answer. Convention: hours spread evenly over the days left.

Answer: I have not worked in finance. I have completed 7 of 12 modules of an accounting course, 58%, and the other 5 need about 20 hours, which I plan to finish in the 21 days before this interview. I have also built a ledger for my society, and I would like to learn the rest on engagements.

Interview tip: Say the gap in one sentence and move on to the action. Do not claim the course is complete until it is.

INT.UJ.2.b · Honest answers

Describe a time you disagreed with a number or a person by checking the evidence first, raising it politely and accepting the outcome.

Auditors disagree with management, with colleagues and sometimes with seniors, so interviewers ask about a time you disagreed with a figure or a person. The best stories are about a number, because evidence can settle a number. A strong answer follows an order: you noticed something that did not look right, you checked your own working first, you went to the source, you raised it with the person privately and without blame, you showed the evidence, and you accepted the result, including if you were wrong. Say what was decided, even if it was not what you wanted. Avoid two traps. One is the story where you were simply right and everyone else foolish, which shows no judgement. The other is a story with no disagreement at all, which shows nothing. If the person insisted on their view and you could not persuade them, say what you did next, such as noting the point for a more senior person. Report the figures exactly as they were.

WORKED EXAMPLE: A RESPONSE RATE OF 62 PERCENT

In a group dissertation project a teammate reports a survey response rate of 62.2% because 143 replies came back from 230 invitations. While cleaning the data you find 17 of the replies are duplicate submissions from the same people. You think the rate is wrong. Work out the correct rate, decide how to raise it and write the answer you would give. Convention: the response rate is valid replies divided by invitations sent, shown to one decimal place.

Answer: The reported response rate was 62.2%, but 17 of the 143 replies were duplicates, so the valid rate was 126 out of 230, which is 54.8%. I showed my teammate the matched list privately, we corrected the report and I now keep a log of removals.

Interview tip: Make it about the figure, not the person. Show you checked your own work first and that you would accept being wrong.

INT.UJ.2.c · Honest answers

Describe a mistake you found and reported, and describe your own contribution and the outcome honestly, using I for your work and we for the team's.

Interviewers ask about a mistake because everyone makes them, and audit work depends on people who find errors and report them early. A good answer is specific: what the error was, how big it was in numbers, how you found it, who you told and how quickly, what was corrected and what you changed afterwards. Prefer a mistake of your own, since a story about a colleague's error tests your loyalty more than your honesty. Do not choose a fake weakness such as working too hard. The second half of the question is contribution. Use I for what you did and we for what the team did, and give your share honestly even if it is modest. Be equally honest about outcomes: if the event lost money or the project got a lower grade than hoped, say so, and say what you took from it. A candidate who reports a small error immediately and plainly is showing the behaviour the firm needs from a trainee.

WORKED EXAMPLE: A TRANSPOSED VENUE DEPOSIT

You were the budget lead for a charity ball organised by a team of 5. The budget total of 14,200 included the venue deposit as 5,400. Two days before the sponsors' report you checked it against the invoice and saw the deposit was 4,500. Also, the team raised 6,000 in sponsorship and you personally secured 1,350 of it. Work out the effect of the error and your share, and write the answer. Convention: whole pounds; the effect expressed against the corrected total.

Answer: I had entered the venue deposit as 5,400 instead of 4,500, overstating costs by 900, 6.8% of the corrected total of 13,300. I found it checking to the invoice, told the chair that day, and we added a second check. I personally raised 1,350 of the 6,000, 22.5%, and the team the rest.

> **Interview tip:** Own the mistake in the first sentence, give the size, say when you reported it, and keep I and we separate.

Summary of the Charta interview-preparation topic. Companies and figures in the examples are invented. Draft content, not yet expert reviewed.