Behavioural and Fit Questions (Investment Banking)

Interview preparation summary · IB track

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INT.BH.1.a · Motivation and fit

Answer why investment banking, why this bank and why this division with specific reasons, evidence from your own record and no flattery or clichés.

Interviewers ask why investment banking to find out whether you understand the job and will stay through the hard first years. A strong answer has three parts. First, a reason about the work itself, such as advising a client on a decision that matters, and a piece of evidence from your own experience that shows you enjoy it. Second, a reason about what you want to learn and why banking teaches it faster than other routes. Third, a reason specific to the bank and division, drawn from real research, such as a recent transaction, a conversation with an analyst or the structure of the training. Test every sentence by asking whether it would work for any bank. If it would, it is too generic. Avoid pay, prestige and flattery as lead reasons, and avoid saying you are open to anything. Keep the answer to about 90 seconds, then stop and let the interviewer follow up.

WORKED EXAMPLE: BUILDING A 90-SECOND ANSWER

Noor Halden (invented) is a final-year economics student who led a three-week stock pitch in a student investment society and spent eight weeks at a small advisory boutique. She must answer why investment banking and why Ashgrove Securities (an invented bank) in 90 seconds, at about 150 words a minute. Plan the word budget for an opening, three reasons and a close, and set a test for how specific the answer is. Convention: allow 60 words for each reason, an opening of 25 words and a close of 20 words.

Answer: The answer should be about 225 words: 25 for the opening, 60 for each of three reasons and 20 for the close. Reason three is 26.7% of the answer and is the part that is specific to the bank.

Interview tip: Say why you want the work, show one piece of evidence, and name one specific thing about the bank and division. Then stop. Do not mention pay or prestige first.

INT.BH.1.b · Motivation and fit

Answer questions on hours, stamina and pressure honestly, using evidence from your own record, and show how you protect accuracy when tired.

Investment banking analysts often work long and unpredictable hours, with weeks of 70 to 90 hours around live deals and quieter periods in between. Interviewers ask about this because they need to know that you understand it and have evidence that you can sustain it, not because they want a boast. A strong answer acknowledges the reality, gives a specific example of a demanding period with the hours and the commitments involved, and explains what you did to keep standards high, such as planning, sleep, exercise and asking for help early. The key risk the interviewer has in mind is not tiredness but errors, so show that you protect accuracy when fatigued. Avoid claiming that you never get tired, that work-life balance does not matter to you, or that you have no life outside work. These claims are not credible and suggest poor self-awareness.

WORKED EXAMPLE: TURNING A TERM INTO EVIDENCE

Over a ten-week term, Noor Halden (invented) worked 50 hours a week in weeks 1 to 7 (study, a part-time job and a society role) and 70 hours a week in weeks 8 to 10 (exams and a society event). She wants to use this as evidence of stamina, and compare it honestly with an analyst week of about 80 hours in a busy deal period. Work out the total hours, the average week, her peak against her normal week, and her peak against the analyst week.

Answer: Her term totalled 560 hours, an average of 56.0 hours a week, with three peak weeks at 70 hours, 40% above her normal. An analyst week of about 80 hours is a further 14.3% higher, so she should present her record as relevant but not equal.

Interview tip: Give the numbers, say what you did to keep accuracy high, and acknowledge the gap to the real job. Honesty about the gap is more credible than a claim to be ready for anything.

INT.BH.1.c · Motivation and fit

Structure a two-minute tell me about yourself and a behavioural answer in situation, task, action, result form, with a time budget and the word I for your own part.

Tell me about yourself is the first question in many interviews and sets the tone. A good answer takes about two minutes and follows present, past, future: what you do now, the experiences that matter for this job, and why you want this role. Behavioural questions such as tell me about a time you led a team need a structure so that the answer is complete and short. The usual structure is situation, task, action and result. Spend about 15% of the time on the situation, 10% on the task, 50% on the action and 25% on the result. Most candidates spend too long on the situation and too little on what they personally did. Use I for your own actions and we for the team's result. Quantify the result where possible, and end with what you learned. Rehearse out loud and to a clock, since an answer that reads well may take too long to say.

WORKED EXAMPLE: A TWO-MINUTE BEHAVIOURAL ANSWER

Noor Halden (invented) has two minutes to answer: tell me about a time you led a team. She speaks at about 150 words a minute. Work out her total word budget and the budget for each part using the split of 15% situation, 10% task, 50% action and 25% result, and say what a first draft with 120 words of situation and 90 words of action should change.

Answer: The answer should be 300 words: situation 45, task 30, action 150 and result 75. The draft's situation is 75 words too long and its action 60 words too short.

> **Interview tip:** Spend half your time on what you did, finish with a result and a lesson, and practise against a clock. Cut context first.

INT.BH.2.a · Character under pressure

Describe a real error you made, with its size, how it was caught, how you fixed it and the specific control you now use, and say how you would handle an error you find in a live document.

Attention to detail is the first quality a bank screens for, because a wrong number in front of a client damages trust. Interviewers ask about an error you made to test honesty, ownership and learning. Choose a real and modest error, not a disguised strength and not a disaster. A strong answer states what went wrong, how large the effect was, how it was caught, what you did immediately, and the specific control you added, such as tying every share count to the latest filing or having a second person check each page. Say I, not the template or the team. If you discover an error in a live document, tell the person responsible straight away, say what is wrong and what it affects, and propose the fix. Never correct it silently or hope that no one notices. The common mistake is to say I am a perfectionist, which answers nothing.

WORKED EXAMPLE: SIZING AN ERROR YOU MADE

In an internship, Noor Halden (invented) built a trading comparables page. For one peer she used 100m basic shares instead of 108m diluted shares. The share price was 5.00, net debt was 150m and EBITDA was 80m. Work out the equity value, enterprise value and EV to EBITDA multiple both ways, the size of the error, and the control she should describe. Convention: no cash or other adjustments, one decimal place for multiples.

Answer: The error understated enterprise value by 40m (5.8%) and the multiple by 0.5x (8.1x against 8.6x). It was caught by the associate. The control is to reconcile every share count to the filing and have a second check.

> **Interview tip:** Give the size of the error in numbers, say it was yours, and end on a specific check you now use. Do not say you are a perfectionist.

INT.BH.2.b · Character under pressure

Describe a team conflict, a disagreement with a senior and a clash of priorities in a way that shows respect, evidence, communication and a constructive outcome.

Investment banking is a team sport run on short deadlines, so interviewers look for how you behave when others disagree with you or each other. A strong teamwork answer names your specific contribution, the difficulty, what you did about it and the result for the group. For a conflict, show that you listened first, tried to understand the other person's view, took the issue to the person directly before involving others, and kept the focus on the work. Admit your own part where it existed. When working with seniors, accept feedback without defensiveness, clarify what is wanted, and raise a concern once, privately, with evidence and an alternative. When two seniors give conflicting instructions, do not pick one silently. Tell both of the conflict and ask for a decision. The common mistakes are painting a colleague as a villain and presenting a conflict where you were simply right.

WORKED EXAMPLE: TWO SENIORS, ONE AFTERNOON

Noor Halden (invented), now an analyst, has 5 hours before a 9pm deadline. A vice president asks her to update the comparables, which takes 3 hours. An associate asks her to reformat the appendix, which takes 2.5 hours. A second vice president asks for a new sensitivity table, which takes 1 hour. Work out the total workload, the shortfall and how she should handle it. Convention: tasks cannot be done in parallel and she needs no break.

Answer: Total work is 6.5 hours against 5 hours available, a shortfall of 1.5 hours (30% over capacity). She should not choose silently, but tell all requesters and ask for a priority. A plan of 4 hours of work plus 1 hour of checking fits.

> **Interview tip:** Show that you spot a conflict early, tell everyone affected, offer a sensible plan and let the person responsible decide.

INT.BH.2.c · Character under pressure

Give an honest answer on a failure, a high-pressure moment and an example of leadership, showing ownership, specific learning and evidence that the learning worked.

Failure, pressure and leadership questions test character. Choose a failure with real stakes where you contributed to the problem, not a failure of luck and not a strength in disguise. State what you were responsible for, what went wrong, what you did, and what you changed. Then give evidence that the change worked, such as the next project coming in on time. For pressure, state the constraint, the steps you took to prioritise and communicate, and what the outcome was. For leadership, remember that most graduates have no title. Show that you took initiative, organised others, made a decision and delivered, and be honest about what the team did. The common mistakes are choosing a trivial failure, blaming others, giving a lesson that is too general to check, and presenting an answer that gives the interviewer no sense of what you actually did.

WORKED EXAMPLE: FROM A FAILURE TO EVIDENCE OF CHANGE

Noor Halden (invented) led a five-day society research project and delivered it on day 6. She traced the delay to having no check before the final day. For the next five-day project she set checkpoints at 40% and 80% of the time. At the day-2 checkpoint she found a data gap that would have cost a day. Work out the overrun, the checkpoint days and the time saved, and how to present this in a failure answer.

Answer: The first project overran by 1 day, 20%. Checkpoints fell on day 2 and day 4. The day-2 checkpoint caught a gap that would have cost about a day, and the second project was on time.

> **Interview tip:** Own the failure early, be specific about the change and give evidence that it worked. Do not stop at the lesson.