

Example Questions to Ask A Mentor

The University of Iowa

Department of Chemical and Biochemical Engineering

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Getting the First Job (resume writing, interviewing, etc.)

- What can I do while in graduate school to improve my resume/marketability? For example, course work, research and publications, volunteering activities, other experiences, etc.
- How do I tailor my resume to a specific job opening?
- How do companies evaluate candidates for positions requiring a graduate degree in chemical engineering?
- What types of interviewing processes are used by companies and how do they differ? How should I prepare for each? For example, behavioral based interviews, one-on-one vs group interviews, remote vs on-site interviews, etc.
- Can you please review my cover letter/resume and provide feedback?
- Can you please conduct a mock interview with me and provide feedback?
- Where should I look to find job openings?
- What questions should I ask at an interview?
- How should I evaluate a company when deciding if it's a good fit for me?
- What kind of salary range and benefits package could a recent M.S. or Ph.D. chemical engineering graduate expect to receive?

Business Cultural Norms and Processes

- How would you describe the company culture at your current and past employers?
- How do small and large companies differ in terms of a professional career?
- What are the differences working in private industry compared to governmental entities?
- What are common processes used in managing technology projects (R&D, process and capital engineering, new product development, etc.)?
- How is intellectual property handled in industry?
- What type of human resources (HR) processes are used to evaluate employee performance?
- If I am asked to do something by my employer that is not consistent with my values, what should I do?
- How would you describe your current thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion and how has it changed over time?
- What makes a company's safety culture "good" or "bad"? How do company's track safety performance?
- How are investment decisions made in your company?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had a difficult boss? How did you handle it?

Work/Life Balance

- How do you maintain work-life balance while still progressing in your career?
- What are some habits you've implemented in your personal life to achieve a better work-life balance?
- How many hours do you work in a typical week? What is a reasonable expectation?
- How much have you had to travel for work? Has travel ever interfered with your work-life balance and if so, what did you do?
- What if you find yourself in a job where work-life balance doesn't seem possible?
- Are there times in your career where you've sacrificed work-life balance to achieve a specific goal?
- What does work/life balance look like for you?
- How do you manage stress and fatigue at work?
- When things are extremely busy at work, are there any quick or easy strategies that can help to maintain reasonable work-life balance?

Career Planning/Career Paths

- What sort of career paths do graduate degree chemical engineers typically follow? (R&D, operations, technical service, managerial, etc.).
- How far ahead do you think in terms of your career at any given time?
- What attributes do you think are most important to move ahead in the workplace?
- Can you identify one change you've made in your career that brought a lot of success?
- How can I become more proactive about my career path?
- What are the pros and cons of taking a “stretch” assignment to improve career trajectory?
- How would you choose doing something that makes you happy or something that makes you a lot of money?
- Tell me about the jobs you enjoyed the most and least?
- What are the most and least favorite aspects of your job?
- How should a recent graduate measure success during the first few years of a professional career?

Leadership and Management Skills

- What can I do in graduate school to demonstrate/improve leadership and management skills?
- What interpersonal skills have you developed in order to effectively lead?
- How can you assert yourself as a leader early on in your career?
- How can you lead as an individual contributor before you formally become a team leader/manager?
- Can you give examples of “good” and “bad” leadership you have observed during your career?
- What experiences were helpful to you in becoming a better people manager?
- What qualities do you consider important to be a good team member?
- What does effective communication look like to you?
- How have you improved your communication skills over time?

International Students Job Searches

- Where are good places to look for job openings?
- How many job openings should I apply for?
- When is the best period to start applying for jobs?
- If I don't find a job by the time I complete my graduate degree, what options do I have?
- Do all international students find a job in the US after obtaining the advanced degree here?
- How can my advisor help me as an international student to find a job in the USA?
- Do companies sponsor work visas or green cards?
- Can I self-sponsor for green card? How long does it take?
- What kind of conferences may be helpful to get connected with industry people?
- Is applying to a start-up company a good idea?

Growing A Professional Network

- Where should I look for networking opportunities?
- How do you identify people you can build a relationship with to be more successful?
- How do you maintain relationships with your network contacts?
- Can you give me examples of how your network has contributed to your career success?
- What have you done to help individuals in your network?
- How much time do you spend on networking activities?
- What organizations or memberships have helped you the most in your career?
- What qualities do you look for in a mentor? How do I ask someone to be my mentor?
- Tell me about a mentoring relationship that was helpful in your career growth.

Continuing Education/Skills Building

- What skills have been most beneficial for you during your career progression?
- What sort of formal continuing education courses have the companies you worked for sponsored? Who was eligible? How were people chosen to attend?
- Which company sponsored continuing education courses did you find most helpful and why?
- Have you ever taken a continuing education course which was not company sponsored (i.e., where you paid) and if so, what was the course and why did you enroll?
- Besides formal courses, what opportunities are there to expand your knowledge/skill base? Can you give an example during your career?
- How do you approach time-management?
- How do you approach a project when you have little experience with the related tasks?