



Interviews & Technical Assessments for Product Managers

Check out these articles from our Blog – they’ll be particularly useful for you in preparing for this step of the interview process 🕶️

- o [Client Happiness Vs Development Realities: How I Strike the Balance](#)
- o [Leading a Team – A Short Introduction to CHAOS](#)
- o [Dean Broadley, Designing Humans: Why Self-Awareness Builds Better Tech](#)
- o [What I Learned From Interviewing For A New Job](#)

We’ve also gathered some tips from other sources that we think are pretty cool! 💻

Preparing for Interviews and Assessments: What you can expect in a Technical Product Management Interview

If you want to succeed and have a good interview experience, you are going to have to put in the time and get stuck into some preparation.

Do your research. Luck favours the prepared as they say. This is your moment to reach out to everyone you know who can help you with information about the company and product. Treat the company as if they were your client. Diagnose their business and product, and think of what you’d advise them. Bring your notes to the interview and read from them.

Treat every meeting like a conversation that's part of a discovery process where both you and the employer find out whether you're right for one another.

Networking

Before the interview, see if you can speak directly with someone who has actually worked as a product manager at the company you are interviewing with, or at the very least a PM in a company that is in a similar industry, market or business model. If you are interviewing at a market place, speak to another PM at another marketplace. Essentially try to find a PM at a company that is as similar as possible to that which you are interviewing. They can provide a real world context into the PM role that you won't get anywhere else. This will equip you well for the role itself, and to ask better questions throughout the interview process.

Product design

Product Managers are generally zealous about creating the best customer experience. It starts with customer empathy or working backwards from the customer. In a PM companies are looking for a candidate with a passion for products and an attention to the smallest of details. To validate these skills you could get asked questions like:

- What is your favorite product and what do you like/dislike about it?
- Design an alarm clock for the blind?
- How would you improve the LinkedIn sign-in flow?

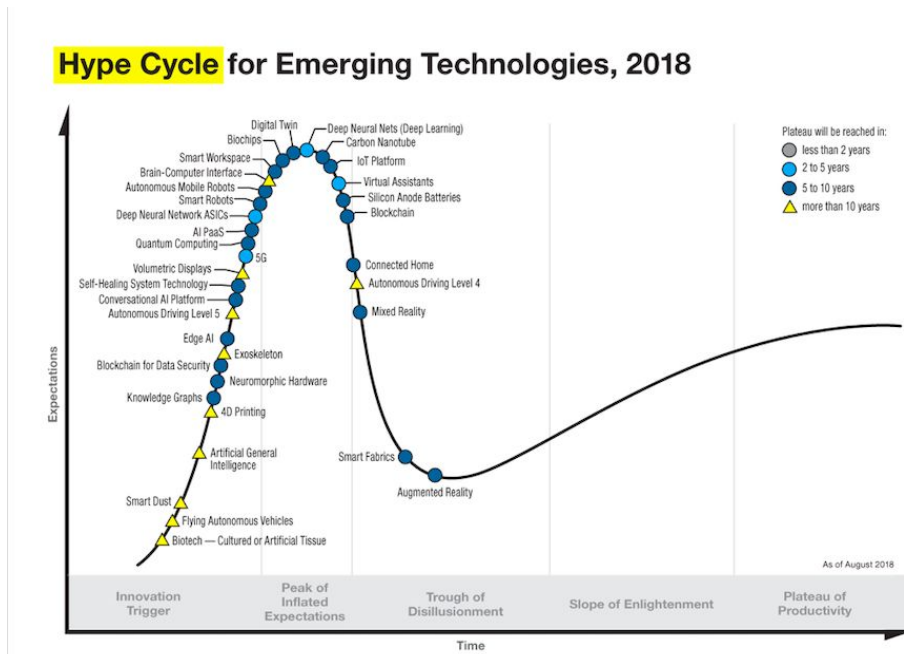
It's a bit tricky to prepare for the above questions. But the world is filled with bad products. As a Product Manager, you need to have a keen product design eye for every product you encounter in your daily life. Then brainstorm solutions and ideas to improve them. Think of creative solutions and how you can scale them. Interviewers are evaluating your creativity, and they place a big emphasis on out of the box ideas. Excite them with unique, compelling ideas. Drawing wireframes on a whiteboard will help illustrate your ideas. To practice, download a wireframing tool like [Balsamiq](#). Also study popular web and [mobile design patterns](#) for inspiration.

Strategy/Business Acumen

PM's are business leaders too. You need to be familiar with the business issues as you need to understand how to monetize your products or customer acquisition concepts, and how to engage your users and prevent churn. It's not necessary for PMs to have business experience or formal business training. However, they do expect you to pick up business intuition or judgment quickly along with basic concepts like pricing curves etc.

They also need you to Think Big. Once you have shown that you are perfect for the role and can prove your technical prowess, it is time to link them back to the big picture. Remember that you are a product manager, after all. The company wants you to [provide and defend an original vision, which can be translated and broken up into tasks for other teams to execute](#).

This is where tech and business meet. Whilst it isn't a deal-breaker, having technical knowledge is often an advantage. Show your understanding of the tech industry, as well as whether the business is going. Essentially, you want to know where the industry is going in terms of tech tendencies within the next few years (see Garner's hype cycle below for a visual representation) and be able to innovate with that in mind. You are meant to be the perfect combination of geek and salesperson: think Steve Jobs. You must understand when a decision makes sense and back it with accurate data depending on these two equally important pillars.



Gartners Tech Hype Cycle 2018.

Sample interview questions include:

- If you were responsible for Microsoft phones, what would you do?
- What are the key conflicts between the development and business teams? Can you show examples of how you reconciled them in the past?
- What is the importance of engineers and technical teams as stakeholders? How do you integrate them into the overall product vision? (have a look at the resources at the end of this document for some articles with some useful tips on engaging stakeholders).
- Can you provide an example where a technical solution you or your team designed became a commercial application?
- How do you bring “the user” in as a Technical Product Manager?
- How do you ensure that market-oriented teams fully understand technical challenges?
- How do you align technical goals with business targets?
- How do you measure success with a product?

Use a framework to structure your strategy discussions. If you're not familiar with strategy or frameworks, [Porter's Five Forces](#) is a good start along with [4Ps](#) and [SWOT Analysis](#). Other frameworks are Lean Canvas and goal methods such as OKR's.

Technical Skills

PM's work closely with product development teams and hence should build trust with them. To work effectively with the team, you must have the ability to influence and build credibility with engineers. This is the meaty part, where you have to demonstrate an understanding of whatever systems they use at the company. These kinds of interview questions try to flesh out how much of a "technical" PM you are. It is one thing to know a thing or two about tech landscape (e.g. coding, software architecture, data, DevOps and security); it's another to be able to use it under pressure.

Be honest and direct. In fact, even if you have to admit that you ignore a particular software tool, you could get through the question if you manage to show a keen interest in learning and growing. This will let the person you're interviewing with know that you are adaptable: everybody knows that techniques change every few years whatever the industry, so nobody can ever dominate the full skill set. Show humility and an eagerness to enlarge your toolbox. Examples questions include:

- How would you design and develop a spell corrector?
- What happens when you type google.com in browser?
- Write an algorithm to detect meeting conflicts?
- Our engineering teams are pretty used to employing X methodologies. What is your opinion of them? Have you used them in the past?
- Are you familiar with X/Y/Z system that we use here? Can you clarify how you have used them in the past?
- Is there a particular life experience that shows your willingness to learn new techniques?
- We are very interested in training our PMs on the technical side of the business. Do you have any mentoring experience you can bring to the table?
- Before, we used to rely on X company to provide Y service, but we are currently bringing it in-house. Would you be comfortable with this type of project?
- How would you face a technical challenge you have never encountered before? Describe your methodology step by step.
- What are your favored tools to manage X process (workflow, people management, wire-framing)? Why?

It's unlikely that you would be asked to write a program with the perfect programming syntax. What you would be required to is that you have sufficient mastery of technical concepts so that you can participate in technical discussions and help make technical trade-offs. Be prepared to

describe key technologies including search engines, machine learning or large scale design systems.

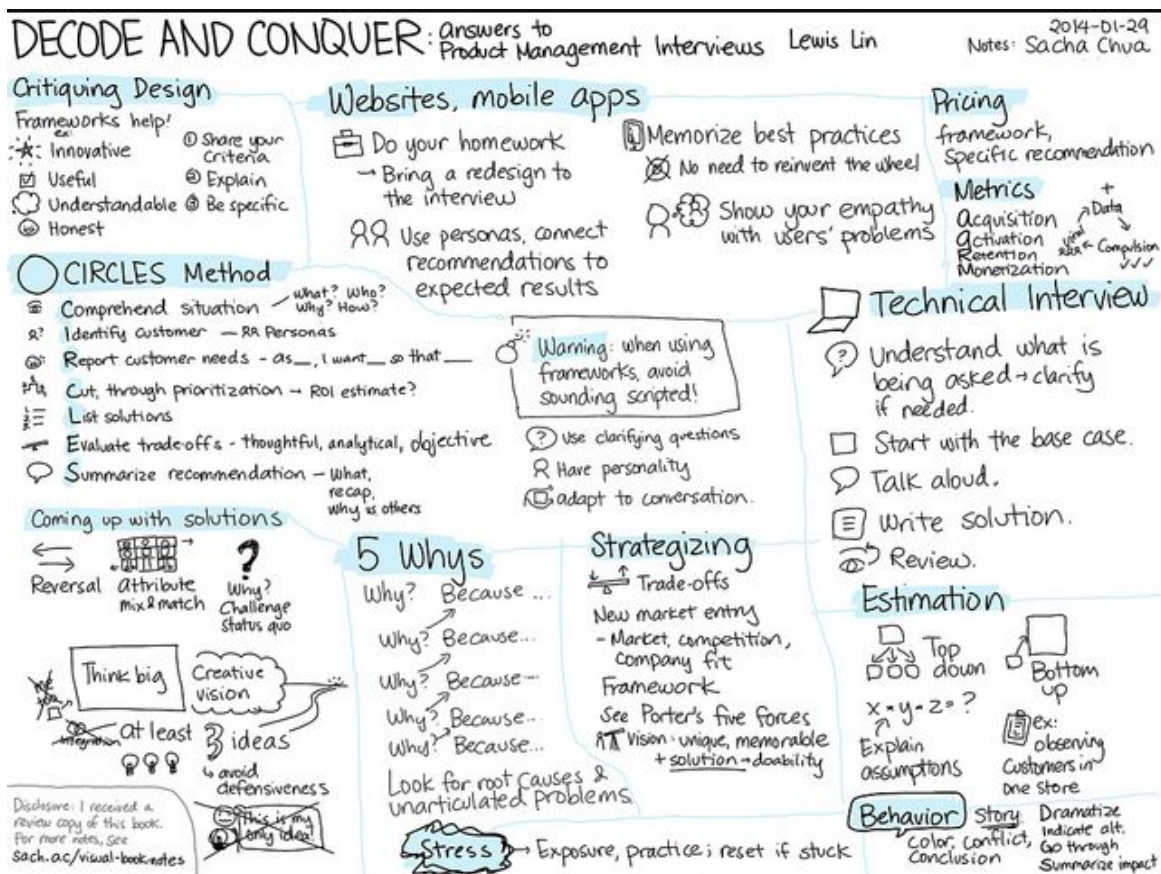
Analytical Skills

All good PM's need to be data-driven. They need to define the success criteria for the products. And once the product is launched need to interpret the results (such as A/B test numbers) and make further iterations to the product. Now, to evaluate those skills the interviewer can ask the following questions:

- How would you launch a store/category for Amazon.com?
- How would you launch the Google Self-Driving Car?
- How much money does Facebook make in ads every year?

Get well-versed in product launch metrics and testing, including interpretation of results. Also prepare for estimation based questions. An important aspect to the above is being able to prioritise, and to be able to justify your list of priorities. That prioritisation needs to be backed by data, frameworks, and the needs of the business

[Lewis Lin](#) (founder of impact interview and a leading authority in this space) has created a wonderful & detailed [2 week plan](#) that covers all the above topics to prepare for a PM interview.



What companies are looking for in Technical Assessments and Interviews

- Be able to identify the problem (you will need to understand the product, market, competitors and users)
- Be able to look at business strategy and how it plays out with the above. Then enter solution mode that will help in fixing those problems
- Know how to build a roadmap in terms of the solutions and be able to prioritize them (This is NB).
- Be able to know why you have selected the method you have for prioritisation (e.g. weighted scoring), and be able to back why you chose a particular method. The point is knowing what methods are out there, that are most appropriate for that road map that you have come up with, then be able to defend “why” this is the most appropriate.
- Product Design: this includes discovery. Road map has themes and this is uncertain. Increase certainty through wireframes, prototypes, story mapping, user personas etc. As well as looking at data.
- Linked to the above, build reports and data to be able to justify solutions. You also need to be able to have success metrics for whatever solution you come up with. (This metric is related to the business).
- Be able to give a plan for delivering a solution (must include development, QAing and roll out).
- Explain how you monitor your success metrics and have a feedback loop to call it a success or iterate on the solution and improve it.

Additional Articles and Resources you may find useful

Commonly Interview Questions

[90 Commonly asked Product Manager questions](#)

[23 Best Project Manager Interview Questions](#)

Engaging with Stakeholders:

[10 Ways to Engage Stakeholders](#)

[How To Effectively Manage and Engage Project Stakeholders](#)

Other Useful Resources

[Why I Hire Product Managers Based on Emotion over Experience](#)

[How to work as a Product Manager at big and small companies](#)

[Seven common product management interviewing mistakes, and how to avoid them](#)

Sources:

<https://medium.com/@diemkay/how-i-prepared-for-a-product-manager-interview-26122f2c80ba>

<https://hackernoon.com/how-to-prepare-for-a-product-manager-interview-6204b1ba5d6d>

gartner.com/SmarterWithGartner

<https://medium.com/pminsider/the-3-sets-of-technical-product-manager-interview-questions-7465fbcc613>