

Because the job interview is a dynamic and individualized process, it is impossible to provide an exact list of questions for any given interview. Every interviewer will choose questions tailored to the needs of the organization and position with the purpose of discovering the best candidate for the position.

As you read the following questions and answers, please remember they are only examples to give you an idea of possible responses. Please do not rehearse these answers or adopt them as your own. They are meant to help you reflect on how to answer the broad range of questions you will be asked. Be familiar with your responses without memorizing them word for word. Prepare your answers in order to respond naturally. Take a few seconds to think through your answer before beginning to speak. Be confident, not arrogant. Know yourself and, to the best of your ability, know the employer.

20 Sample Interview Questions and Answer

1. Tell me about yourself.

Assume that you will be asked this question, and prepare your response ahead of time. Research the employer and the position to identify how you can make a valuable contribution. Prepare up to a two-minute commercial-style response featuring your past experiences (successes) and challenges (which you have overcome). Frame your answer as to how you can contribute to meeting the needs of the employer: "My background has been devoted to preparing myself to become the best professional possible. For example..." Talk about your experiences, qualifications, and accomplishments rather than specifics of your childhood, family, or hobbies. You may include reasons why you developed a passion for your field as well as your long-range professional goals.

2. Why are you motivated to apply for this position? Why are you attracted to our company?

Talk about the interesting details of the job and why they fascinate you. Discuss the skills you have that the job requires. Know what distinguishes this employer from competitors. Reflect on why this employer appeals to you versus other employers in the industry. Research the web site and the company's mission statement and core values; this information will you intelligent and insightful comments: "Through my internship experience, I discovered just how much I love this profession. That's when I started researching employers that had worthy goals and results. There is no company to compare with yours. After reading your core values on the company web site, I knew that there was no other organization with whom I'd rather be associated."

3. What qualifications do you have?

Name a skill, list your qualifications, provide a brief example of why, and move on to the next skill.

4. How do you believe you best fit in this organization?

This question is designed, in part, to see how much you know about the organization. Thanks to your prior research, you will know of services that are needed or areas where the employer is expanding. You can base your response on that information. However, unless you are interviewing for a specific job in a specific department, keep your response general by indicating several areas of interest: "If I understand correctly, you are expanding your marketing efforts to include the Texas area. I am particularly interested in that possibility. My excellent internship with a competitor gave me a familiarity with the Texas market, and it would be exciting to help you in that effort."

5. Tell me about your education. How has your education prepared you for your career?

Explain your education, training and skills. Mention a course in which you excelled or a project that was especially beneficial to your skill development. Explain how your education has contributed to successful life and leadership experiences.

6. How did you learn about our organization?

Let the interviewer know that your decision to interview with this employer was not just a random choice. Demonstrate a genuine interest in the organization. You are not applying just because you happened to see a poster on the bulletin board. Cite any contact you have had with employees, customers, or products that has given you a positive impression.

7. What are your strengths?

Don't list more than three strengths, as some recruiters may ask you to list the same number of weaknesses. Cite from one to three areas where colleagues have praised you in the past. Provide specific examples of what they have said and how you utilize these strengths to benefit others: "My co-workers have always sought me out to ask advice in sticky situations with difficult people. They say that I know how to work with all kinds of people, which means a lot to me. As a result, I would say that my biggest strengths are adaptability and strong interpersonal communication skills."

8. What are your weaknesses?

There are a variety of ways to handle this question. You may use something that could be viewed as both a positive and a negative trait, such as the fact that you have a tendency to work too much. Be careful, however, as this response tends to be overused and may send the wrong message. You might also name a personal challenge which you have overcome. Another approach would be to name a characteristic not essential to the job. Answer the question and allow a moment of silence to follow. Some interviewers encourage silence in order to see how if the candidate handles it comfortably. Remember, however, that each weakness should be followed with actions you are taking to overcome the weakness.

9. Did you ever have a disagreement/conflict with a supervisor? Why? Why not?

Be wise in answering a question of this nature. You do not want to give the impression of being either a troublemaker or someone who avoids conflict at all cost. Neither is valuable to an organization. Conflict is a fact of life. In fact, employers value people with the skills necessary to get through difficult situations: “Yes, my boss had asked me to do something they did not appear totally ethical. I asked to speak with him after work when we could have a private conversation. I was able to share my personal dilemma about the situation. Thankfully, he had not realized all the implications and quickly made appropriate adjustments. We were both very happy about the outcome. I was able to be true to my values, and we developed an even more productive working relationship.”

10. What kinds of people rub you the wrong way?

Be careful how you respond to such a personal question: “People who claim they are going to do something and do not follow through,” While you may want to share this information with the interviewer, you need to keep the conversation positive and include how you deal positively with these types of people.

11. Which course did you find most difficult and why?

The interviewer wants to know if you have perseverance when faced with a difficulty: “After earning a ‘D’ in my first semester, I was devastated. The benefit, however, was that it revealed my poor study skills. As a result, I joined a study group and hired a tutor. After taking the course again, I was able to bring the grade up to a ‘B.’ The valuable study skills I learned have dramatically improved my overall academic achievement.”

12. What is your greatest failure? What did you learn from it?

Everyone, at some point or another, fails. Being able to admit failure shows maturity. However, avoid examples that might reflect on your ability to do the job. You might want to use an example like the one given in the previous question. For example, you can show how you dealt with the failure, learned from the experience, and how it helped you succeed in the future.

13. Do you work best in a team environment or independently?

Think about your response to this question in light of the requirements of the position while being true to your nature: “Although I have thoroughly enjoyed group projects and teamwork, the hours required to work independently to solve complex problems is equally satisfying to me. Let me give you an example.”

14. Are you a team player?

Be honest about yourself and strive to highlight successful team experiences: “Yes, I am very much a team player. In fact, many opportunities in both athletics and academics have developed my skills as a team player, both a member and a team leader. I’ve seen the value of working as a team to achieve a greater goal than any of us could have achieved individually. Let me share the following example.”

15. Would you rather be in charge of a project or work as part of the team?

Different situations will call for different types of involvement. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate to the interviewer that you know when it is appropriate to lead and when it is better to follow: "I am happy to follow the leadership of someone else. In fact, some of the best learning experiences have come in that manner. I must be honest, though, to say that it has been very encouraging in the past when the group decided that I would be the best person to lead the project. I'm honestly very happy in either role."

16. What are your long-term goals? Where do you want to be in 5, 10, or 15 years?

Spend quality time reflecting on this question prior to the interview. Have several professional goals in mind. You may want to research a typical career path for a person that is successful with this employer. Tell the manager you plan to be working for him or her in that position: "Although it's certainly difficult to predict things that far into the future, I know what direction I want my career path to follow. Within the next five years, I would like to become the best ___ your company has. I will work toward becoming the expert that others rely on. And, in doing so, I feel I will be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities that might be presented in the long term."

17. Give me an example of a time when _____.

Whenever you are given a question starting with give me an example when or tell me about a time when, know that it is a behavioral question. The interviewer is trying to determine how you would behave in specific situations common in the workplace. Knowing your past behavior will facilitate predicting your future behavior. Common behavioral questions fall in the areas of teamwork, conflict resolution, or leadership. Think "story" when you are asked a behavioral question. You may find it helpful to tell your 2-minute story using the "STAR" format. Tell about a Situation or Task. Explain the Action you took. Many people drop the ball at this point by neglecting to finish the story with the Result. Explain a quantifiable result that was achieved and emphasize the role you played in the successful outcome. Work-related examples may be more effective than school-related examples.

18. What motivates you?

There are many potentially effective answers; however, money is not necessarily the best answer. Are you motivated by solving problems, helping people, a sense of accomplishment, or the respect of others? The possibilities are endless. Make your response honest and personal: "Having responsibilities and being acknowledged when the job is done well is very motivating for me."

19. What kind of salary are you looking for today?

You should know what a competitive salary is for the position, but do not offer a figure. Quoting a figure too low may get you an offer that is too low, or may communicate that your qualifications are not up to par. A number that is higher than the employer has in mind may knock you out of the running. Respond by saying that you expect to be compensated fairly for the education, skills, and qualifications that you bring to the job: “While finding the right opportunity is more important than money, I have looked at salary comparisons and the cost of living in the area. I would expect to receive compensation at a fair value for my skills and qualifications.” You may choose to politely transform your answer into a question for the employer: “While I am aware of the general salary range in the industry, I have no set salary. What salary is usually offered to someone with my qualifications?” If the interviewer persists, respond that your market research shows that salaries falls in the range of ___ to ___, but avoid setting an exact figure for yourself.

20. Do you have any questions?

This is one of the most often overlooked questions by candidates, and as a result candidates are often ill-prepared. One or two strategic and purposeful questions can make a huge difference in the interview. By asking your own questions, you may reiterate areas of strength or discover any point that needs clarification. Prepare well. Always ask questions. It reflects your interest level and initiative: “Could you tell me what characteristics the ideal candidate possesses?” After the interviewer responds, you then have the opportunity to add any information you may have inadvertently omitted. You may also highlight your own qualifications as they relate to the interviewer’s answer. Remember that if an employer supplies you with literature about the organization before the interview, it is assumed that you will read it, study it, and formulate your questions from it. Make certain that your questions are relevant and not easily found on a brochure that you failed to read.