

Practice Interview Questions

In an interview questions may be used to assess your personality, preparation, communication skills and ability to think on your feet. Below are some common questions that get asked in interviews to help you prepare in advance.

"Why did you leave your last job?"

Respond positively — "...for career advancement or promotion opportunities, increased responsibility, greater variety at work,"

"What do you know about the company?"

Demonstrate your understanding of the organization and industry. Talk about the research you did into the company's key areas of interest, its size, its main customers or current status, making reference to your source of information.

"Why do you want to do this job / work for this company?"

Demonstrate your knowledge of the company and re-emphasize your suitability for the position. Refer to your skills.

"Why do you believe you are qualified for this position?"

Pick two or three main factors about the job and about yourself that are most relevant. Including specific details. You may mention a technical skill, a management skill and/or a personal success story.

"What do you like/dislike most about your current or last position?"

The interviewer is trying to determine compatibility with the open position. Be careful; don't say you dislike overtime, like management, or get too detailed. It's safe to say that you like challenges, pressure situations, opportunities to grow, or that you dislike bureaucracy and frustrating situations.

"How do you handle pressure? Do you like or dislike these situations?"

High achievers tend to perform well in high-pressure situations. These questions could imply that the open position is pressure-packed and out of control. Know what you're getting into. If you do perform well under stress, provide a good, detailed example. Be descriptive.

"The sign of a good employee is the ability to take initiative. Can you describe a situation where you did this?"

The proactive, results-oriented person doesn't have to be told what to do. To convince the interviewer you possess this trait, give a series of short examples describing your self-motivation. Discuss one example in-depth: describing the extra effort, your strong work ethic and your creative, resourceful side.

"How have you grown or changed over the past few years?"

Matured, increased technical skills and increased self-confidence are important developmental aspects. Overcoming personal obstacles or recognizing manageable weaknesses can help identify you as an approachable and desirable employee.

"What do you consider your most significant strength?"

Know your key five or six strengths—the ones most compatible with the job opening. Discuss each with specific examples. Don't include your management or interpersonal skills unless you can describe specific examples of good management, or how your relationship skills have been critical to your success.

"What do you believe are your weaknesses?"

No-one readily admits real weaknesses in an interview situation. This is an opportunity to turn the question into a positive. Think of something that relates to your experience of work that is plausible as a weakness but is not really a negative point. For example. "I am very particular about detail", "I become very focused on the projects I am involved in"

"Deadlines, frustrations, difficult people and silly rules can make a job difficult. How do you handle these types of situations?"

Most companies, unfortunately, face these problems daily. If you can't deal with petty problems, you'll be seen as uncooperative. How you overcome these are important. Diplomacy, perseverance and common sense will prevail in difficult circumstances.

"One of our biggest problems is... What has been your experience with this? How would you deal with it?"

Think on your feet. Ask questions to get more details and break the problem into subsections. It is highly likely that you will have had some experience dealing with the big issues. If you can't answer directly, state how you would go about solving the problem. Be specific.

"What are your career goals? Where do you see yourself five or ten years from now?"

Be realistic! Pie-in-the-sky goals label you as immature. One or two management jumps in 3-5 years is a reasonable goal. If your track record indicates you're in line for more responsibility, and then mention it. If you've had a rocky road, be introspective.

"Why should we hire you for this position? What kinds of contributions would you make?"

This is a good chance to summarize. Discuss your skills and experience. Don't be arrogant—instead demonstrate a thoughtful, organized and strong attitude.

"Do you have any questions you would like to ask?"

Always prepare a question to ask the interviewer. Ask about the position, general information about the company. If they have already answered your questions tell them (be specific) so they know that you have thought about the position in preparing for the interview.

For example:

- What do you see as being the main focus of this role?
- Am I correct in saying that the position involves mediating between A and B departments?
- Who will I be reporting to?
- What office will I be working from?

Inappropriate Questions

Equal Opportunity (EO) guidelines limit the questions that can be asked in job interviews. By being aware of EO considerations you can recognize possibly discriminatory questions when they are asked. If asked a question that you consider inappropriate or that you suspect may be the basis for discrimination, you are under no obligation to answer it.

For example, an employer may ask whether you have children as part of idle chatter, or they may be motivated by their prejudice that working mothers are not able to commit fully to a full-time position. Alternatively, in asking about your childcare arrangements they may be trying to assess your level of preparation and professionalism.

If you are uncomfortable with any question, politely and professionally refuse to answer it or request clarification on its relevance to the position. Some suggestions are:

"I don't think we need to talk about this. I would rather focus on issues relevant to the position and the requirements of your organization."

"I don't understand how this question is relevant to the position or my ability to perform in the role. Could you clarify for me why you think it is important, and I will try to provide you with the relevant information?"

Questions requesting confidential information about a previous employer

This may be a testing of your discretion and professionalism. It is best to reply that you would prefer not to divulge any confidential information (sales figures, for instance), advise the fact that you are sure your interviewer would expect the same discretion from their employees.

'Difficult' Questions

If you have had a negative experience with an employer (retrenchment or redundancy, sexual harassment, or clashes with colleagues), prepare to be asked about them in job interviews. The best strategy is to be honest, positive, and to avoid criticizing former employers or expressing grudges.

Termination:

"I was asked to leave that company. The grounds my employers gave were dissatisfaction with my performance / attitude..."

- "But I disagreed with their assessment and believe that the termination was based on personal differences rather than performance issues. If you check with my referees from other positions, you will find that I have not had problems of a similar nature anywhere else and I am confident that they will not occur again."

- "Unfortunately, that year I had some personal commitments that I had to deal with. I had to make a choice to focus on these commitments or on my job, and I chose to concentrate on personal commitments. Unfortunately, this did mean that my work suffered, but I am now able to fully commit myself to my work again and am confident that I will be able to meet your performance requirements"

Sexual harassment / personal clashes:

"I decided to leave because of some personal issues within the workplace which I would rather not discuss."

If legal proceedings took place: "There have been some legal proceedings regarding my position and so for confidentiality reasons I would prefer not to discuss it."