

Information Sheet: Common Interview Questions

The key to a successful interview is in being prepared. It means knowing as much as possible about the job and the employer. Below are a few tips to ensure that you have your best interview yet. You only have one chance to make a first impression. The following is a list of questions that you better have an answer to!

What should you take to the interview?

You may not be required to take anything into the interview, but, just in case, it is worth having the following with you:

- Copy of the application or resume
- A typed list of at least 3 references
- Position description and selection criteria
- Licenses, qualifications and certificates
- Academic transcript if feasible
- Preparatory notes to refresh your memory and questions that you might want to ask.

Please place the above items safely in a folder or notebook fastened. You don't want to drop a pile of papers onto the floor or open a folder to crumpled, dirty papers.

Common Questions and tips

1. The "Tell me about Yourself Question"

This is usually the "starter" question in every interview. It is sort of an icebreaker but don't underestimate its importance. The interviewer is forming their impression of you during this time so you need to have a prepared answer to this question. It can set the tone for the rest of the interview. This is the perfect opportunity to make your first face to face impression.

Usually, the interviewer means your professional accomplishments but sometimes you may be asked about your hobbies and pastimes. If your hobby is hunting you may not want to mention it as

a hobby because many people are sensitive to animal rights issues. Stick with hobbies that are more mainstream.

Professionally, you should talk about your achievements on the job. If you have accomplishments as a volunteer that are noteworthy and job related you should mention these also. Give specific examples of how your experience meets the requirements that the employer is looking for. Describe qualities that are relevant to the position. What did the job posting say they were looking for? Remember the job ad when answering the question. Begin your sentences with "I am." This will sound more confident than "I believe or I think."

You must be able to describe yourself with confidence in your skills and knowledge of the job that you are applying for. Make a list of your career highlights before the interview and practice articulating them with confidence.

Caution – It is not wise to respond with, "What would you like to know," you will seem unprepared. This is an opportunity to showcase your strengths you should already know what they would like to know.

2. The "Tell me about your Skills and Work Experience" Question

When asked about your past work experience, you should explain its relevancy to the position that you are now applying for. This is your opportunity to discuss your professional experience in depth. You have a captive audience hanging on your every word as you tell how your past work experience can benefit their company. Talk about your career successes and bring in details that were not included in your resume or cover letter.

Interviewers will ask questions about your skills to find out whether you can perform certain tasks. Give examples of when you have used those skills in the work environment. Now if you have limited skills and or work experience you must show that you are confident in the experience and skills that you do have and you are willing to learn. You have to be able to convey that you are not completely unfamiliar with the position. After all, limited skills and/or experience do not mean no skills or experience at all!

3. The “Tell me about your Strengths” Question

It has been said over and over but you need to do your research of the employer as well as the position that you are seeking. The interviewer does not care to hear about your general strengths. Relate your strengths to the employer and/or the job. Don't just say, “I'm a good leader” give an example of your leadership skills. They want to hear solid examples of your ability to contribute to the company right from the start.

Most employers are looking for strengths:

- Leadership
- Team Player
- Self directed or motivated
- Problem solver
- Hard worker
- Critical thinker
- Quick learner
- Creative
- Punctual
- Organizer

Remember, the interviewer is looking for strengths that match the requirements for the job. Take a moment to identify your strengths. What do your friends and co-workers compliment you on the most? What are you most confident about? Maybe you are good at sports or a hobby. You can relate your competitiveness on the field or your ability to work as a team to the job. With some thought you can turn almost any strength into a job-relevant attribute that will assist you in answering this question.

4. The “Tell me about your Weaknesses” Question

It's ok to state a weakness but explain what steps you have taken to improve and follow that with an example of how you have utilized what you have learned. A good interviewer will ask you to give an example of how you have addressed your weakness so be prepared.

Never state a weakness that is really important to the job! If you are applying for an accounting position and you state that you are bad with numbers or you don't pay attention to detail, you are stating problems with the key duties of a successful bookkeeper. No amount of explanation will help in this case. You have blown it! It is best to talk about a true weakness and show what you are doing to overcome it. It may help to replace the word weakness with the word challenge. Think of an area that you want to explore more fully by taking more classes or taking on more responsibility or job shadowing an expert.

5. The “What do you know about the Position” Question

You had better know about the position that you are applying for. You should almost have the job description memorized if you are really interested in the position. Read each duty and responsibilities of the job carefully. Make sure that you understand each task. Next, make sure that you understand how these duties and tasks are to be performed on the job. Finally, consider the work environment where the duties will be performed. Being a secretary at a small office can be different from being a secretary at a large office although they perform the same duties. When answering the question discuss the specifics of the position and not general terms. Know the job description and match your skills and work experience to the job description and you should be fine.

6. The “What do you know about our Company” Question

You would be surprised how many people do not research the employer before an interview. You can't convince an interviewer that you want to work for them when you don't know very much about them. You should search for information about the mission, motto, accomplishments, products and services, the target audience and even competition if applicable.

Look on the employer's website, maybe the organization has brochures or a newsletter. Perhaps there was a recent magazine or

news article on the company or its president or CEO. Don't mention the article if it was negative. If all else fails ask someone who works there or call a receptionist or secretary and ask where you can find additional information about the company or organization. You only need to be able to show that you have made an effort to find out more about them. You don't have to memorize the names of the board of directors or the head of the company's favorite color! Remember, your goal is to understand what it is that the company does, and importantly, how you can bring more value to the company.

The same question may be asked in a different way like, "Why do you want to work for us?" Both questions will show whether you've done your research or not. Most employers will expect you to at least show your knowledge and understanding of who they are.

7. The "Why should I hire you" Question

When asking this question the interviewer wants to ascertain your motives. Are you looking for a job – any job or do you want to work for this company in particular? If you do want to work for this company in particular you will have to convince the interviewer. He wants to know how you'll make his company better as a result of hiring you.

Naturally, you are inclined to say that you are the best person for the job. But don't end there; you have to back that up with details and specific examples that show that you are the best person for the job. Do you really think you are the best person for this job? If you do, show your passion. What distinguishes you as the best candidate from the other good candidates?

This question shows the importance of researching the employer prior to the interview to discover the needs of the company. If you know the needs of the employer you will be able to give better reasons to hire you. Your answer to this question should give

concrete examples of your skills, strengths and experience linking them to the employers' needs and desires for the position.

Give them reasons to hire you. Isn't that what they're asking, anyway? Outline the things that will benefit the employer. Most employers are looking for employees who are leaders, good communicators, problem solvers, critical thinkers, organizers, self starters or team players to name a few. Talk about what you've done to prepare yourself to be the very best candidate for the position. Use an example or two to back it up.

8. The "Why do you Want to Leave your current position or Employer" Question or "What do you like least about your last job?"

The question is not about leaving a difficult situation behind but it is about looking forward to working with this new employer. With this in mind, you should answer by discussing opportunities to advance and to grow professionally, developing new skills or enhance existing ones, more challenges. In some cases you may consider changing jobs because the commute is long and the new job would make the commute a lot shorter. This is ok to mention but I would couple it with some job related opportunity the new job will provide. Never speak negatively about your current or past employer in any way, even if it is true. It will only backfire. You will be seen as negative person and it will be presumed that you will bring that same negativity to this company if hired.

Remember, the interviewer does not know your former employers so they are totally not interested in what amounts to gossip.

9. The "Do you Work better Alone or part of a team?"

When asked this question, interviewers want to find out if the work culture /environment in their company is similar to your current or former work environment. This gives them a clue if whether or not you will perform as well as you did in your previous company. Be prepared to give some examples of teamwork experiences as well as independent work experiences.

Be smart when answering this question. If the position you're applying for requires you to spend most of your time alone, then of course, you should say that you like to work alone but if it requires

teamwork then you should answer that you are able and willing to work with other people. If you have a sneaky interviewer who asks you for a preference, be honest but add that you are very flexible and can easily adapt to working alone or with others.

10. When can you start?

This question seems harmless and it usually is but if you are anxious to leave your current position or employer this question may cause you to blow an interview. It is expected that most employees at least give a 2 -week notice to their present employer. Those working in upper management positions are expected to give longer notice. It is highly unwise to tell your prospective employer that you will quit your current job as soon as you get a job without giving notice. The interviewer is left to conclude that you will show him the same disrespect.

Telling the interviewer that you will be unable to start for several weeks because you want to take time off is not a good idea either. When employers begin an interview process it is because they need to fill a position – now more than later. This response may very well disqualify you from the job. If you have to delay your start because of a work project that needs to be completed and you are an integral part of the initiative let the interviewer know this. Try telling the interviewer that you plan to start learning about your new position during your off-hours and give them a date that you will be able to relinquish your role in the project.

11. Do you have any questions?

This question is usually the last one an interviewer will ask as the interview comes to an end. Always prepare questions to ask the interviewer. This is a way of showing your interest in the position and the company. This will show that you did your homework. Sample questions:

- Why is this position available?
- Is this a new position? How long has this position existed?

- Who would be my supervisor? To whom would I report?
- With whom will I be working most closely?
- What would a successful candidate look like in this position?
- How will my performance be measured and by whom?
- What issues will need to be addressed immediately if hired?
- What is a typical day like for the person in this position?