

5 COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE READY TO ANSWER

You can't predict exactly what questions are going to come up in a job interview, however, you can prepare answers for some of the more common interview questions. Within an interview you have one chance to tell the hiring manager why you're interested in the job, what you have achieved in your career to date and what you can contribute to the company if successful. Ensuring you prepare in advance and practice answering and structuring common interview questions will enable you to maximise your chances as well as heighten your confidence throughout the interview process.

1. Tell me about yourself

What appears a harmless ice-breaker is actually a critical component of your interview. Your answer is often the first opportunity (after body language) to create a positive impression. The interviewer asks this to get a rounded sense of you as a person and how you might fit into the team and organisation. Your interviewer is not looking for a 10 minute speech here. Instead, offer a focussed paragraph or two that sets the stage for further discussion.

How to structure a great answer

Be concise and relevant. Aim for a few paragraphs and make sure your answer is no longer than 2-3 minutes. There are 4 key stages that you can include in your answer:

Skills – Find out in advance the key skills required for the job. Structure the first part of your response to match the skills and back up with evidence.

Background - Provide a brief snapshot of your career or background, focussing on the most recent. You could pick 2 examples of relevant achievements.

Personal Qualities – Include key personal qualities such as committed, hardworking, loyal, reliable, responsible, team player.

Aspirations – What are you looking for? State your aspirations and why the company AND industry is very attractive to you.

Remember, they are looking for where you can add value to the company, so sell yourself!

2. What do you know about us?

Any potential employer wants to know you have a genuine interest in them as a company and what they do. This is a perfect opportunity to showcase the research you have completed in preparation for the interview, which should include what you understand about their strategy, clients, performance, competitors and challenges.

Use a range of sources to search for information (not just the company website), use reliable online news and trade press sources alongside social media.

Who is the company? – Consider location(s), structure, ownership, key dates, number of employees, turnover, etc.

What do they do? – List and understand the products, services, industry they operate within.

Who are the clients? – Sectors they come from, examples of specific clients, understanding of why they buy.

Who do they compete with? – Company names, market share, anecdotes about how they compete.

What current news or economic issues affect the company? – Identify appropriate magazines/journals/newspapers and review company and industry news.

What key skills are needed? – As required by the company and the industry.

Who are the key people? – Leadership team, structure, hierarchy.

What is the culture? – Typical employee, demands of clients, style of work.

Researching the above thoroughly should give you a couple of pages of notes and will give you a great knowledge base to refer to throughout the interview.

3. What are your strengths?

The interviewer wants to know what you are good at and how you are going to add value to the company. What are your unique selling points? Think of 2 or 3 strengths that are really important to the role that you are applying for and make sure you say why they are relevant to this role and relate them back to the job description. To strengthen your answer you can structure examples of how you have applied this skill using the **STAR** technique:

Situation

The first thing you have to do is to find a context or an environment that allows you to answer the question or describe your skill. This is the start of your answer and it should be short, sharp and succinct.

Task

The next thing you should talk about is what you had to do. This should link to the question you are being asked and the skills required by the job. Again this can be fairly brief. Be specific and describe a task that you handled well. Try to choose a task that is as similar as possible to ones that you would encounter at the job you are seeking.

Action

This is the important bit as it will tell the interviewer exactly what YOU did. For some employers the context is less important than what you actually did. This is because they think that you will be able to apply the same process of team working or problem solving to different situations. Describe, in detail, the positive and appropriate action you took to resolve the issue or complete the task.

This means that this section will be longer than the others. To provide the detail you may need to reflect back on what you did. Do this by breaking it down step by step. Remember to tell them what **you** did, especially when explaining how you work in a team (not what the team did).

Results

Explain what the result was. Ideally the result of your action should be positive but if it is negative make sure you describe what you have learnt and what you would do differently next time. Describe the result and quantify it if possible. The potential employer is looking to see what benefit to the company your actions had.

4. What are your weaknesses?

This is where the interviewer wants to know about your self-awareness and self-perception. Saying you have no weakness can be seen as arrogant. Be honest and provide a weakness that is not a central competency for the role. Identify a weakness that you had in the past and then describe what you did to overcome it and how you developed in that area. This demonstrates the steps you take to develop yourself and helps the employer predict measures you would take in the future if in a similar scenario occurred.

5. Why should we hire you?

In other words, what makes you unique and separates you from the other candidates? You should be ready to give a concise summary of the top reasons to choose you. Think of yourself like a product – why should they buy you? Try to relate your answer to current problems and needs within the company based on the job description with a clear focus on why this makes you unique.

Taking the time to prepare thoroughly before your interview will ensure you perform well on the day. You will need to be able to not only articulate your skills and experience but also sell yourself through your achievements, behaviours and attitudes. Role playing or practicing your answers out loud, really will improve how effectively and convincingly you answer questions on the day. The interview is where you will win or lose the role, so make sure you are ready to go in there and shine.

Remember the 5 Ps – Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance!

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