Hi, I am [Varun Negandhi from Beyond Grad](#). 👋🏽

In this document, I share exact recipes for the 10 most common interview questions asked by recruiters and hiring managers.

These strategies have helped my mentees land multiple rounds of interviewing at Google, Amazon, Meta, Oracle, State Street, etc.

Nail these, and you're ahead of 90% of candidates.

The 10 most common questions are:

1. [Tell me about yourself.](#)
2. [Why do you want to work here?](#)
3. [Walk me through your resume.](#)
4. [What are your salary expectations?](#)
5. [Why are you leaving your current job?](#)
6. [Are you interviewing anywhere else?](#)
7. [Why are you interested in this role?](#)
8. [What is your biggest weakness?](#)
9. [What is your biggest strength?](#)
10. [Why <your special case>?](#)

Special cases such as:

- [Laid off](#)
- [Fired](#)
- [Multiple jumps](#)
- [Career gap](#)
- [Self-employment](#)
- [Big pivot](#)

Tell me about yourself.

Beginner way: Repeat your resume
Intermediate way: Share specific experience
Advanced way: Weave the above in a narrative story

A great way to weave a narrative is using a 3-act story format.

- Act 1: I enjoyed doing A, so that led me to pursue B
- Act 2: That's when I fell in love with C, and I achieved D
- Act 3: Now I am ready to do E for a company like NAME

Here's an example of a data engineer interviewing at one of the Magnificient 7 companies.

"[Take a 3 second pause and smile]

Hi I am <insert name>, and I am excited to tell you more about myself. I always had a passion for engineering and chose to major in electronics and telecommunication in India. While pursuing my bachelor's, I followed Wired and Inc. magazines and started to hear the importance data will play in decision-making and strategy for all industries.
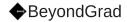
To bridge the gap between my degree and this exciting field, and since the publications romanticized the cutting-edge work US companies were doing [pause, smile wide], I took the opportunity to come to Syracuse for a Master's in Data Science.

In the last three years, I have worked in the Data Engineering field for companies like X and Y. My biggest achievement was working with the <brand name> sales team to reduce the pre-sales discovery journey by X% and improve the closing rate by Y%. How we did it was by evaluating spending data, applying statistical modeling such as <insert industry terms>, and presenting pertinent information to the sales team using Tableau. It was an exciting project, and I loved to see my work being a part of increasing a unicorn company's revenue. I know this position will require <insert JD keywords> and we specifically used those in this project.

So now I am excited to learn more about the tech hardware OEM world and leverage my data engineering skills to aid in the strategic decision-making for <Magnificent7 company>."

Remember to include transitions from one act to another. Examples from this post:
- To bridge the gap between my degree and this exciting field…
- In the last three years, I have worked in…
- So now I am excited to learn more about…

Why do you want to work here?

Beginner: Umm… I need a job.
Intermediate: I love that you do Y, and I like the role
Advanced: Here are three specific reasons

You need three **specific** ingredients for this creation:

A. Personal passion for their company or product
B. Why you would enjoy working in the role
C. Why you would be successful there

Then, here's the recipe:

1. I would love to work here because of A, B, and C
2. Point B is of particular interest to me (any one)
3. Conclude by making it about them

Here's an example of an automotive engineer interviewing at one of the top OEMs.

(You can use this structure for any field.)

> *"[Take a 3-second pause and smile]*
>
> *I would love to work at OEM for 3 key reasons: First, you are the only US company that has cracked the code on electric vehicle technology. Second, I can make a huge contribution given my experience in advanced powertrain research using 1D simulation. And third, I am fascinated by the company's intrapreneurial nature.*
>
> *The last point is really important to me. Based on my discussions with the Director of X and the Sr. Engineer of Y, I love that the company puts ownership on the business unit and particularly the team members. The confidence the culture imparts in allowing technical people to achieve business goals fascinates me. As you can see, I have played an entrepreneurial role in X and Y, and I look forward to bringing those skills and honing them at OEM.*
>
> *When I think about these 3 reasons, OEM being the leader in electric vehicle technology, my skills in advanced engineering, and my passion for taking ownership, it fills me with excitement for this opportunity. I appreciate you discussing this role with me today."*

Important Addition for Top Companies:

For example, if you are asked, "Why Google?"

You will have to give an advanced level answer because they have heard 1000s of answers for this question.

A way to do that is -- **Mission Mate**:

Mating ideas (you can mix and match):

- Mission + Your experience with a product
- Googlyness + Working with current Googlers
- Culture value + How it inspired you to build a thing

Examples from me and my mentees:

- Google Maps savings us during a trip to Italy
- GPay enabling parents to adopt internet banking
- Google's 10% policy inspired me to create a side project
- How Google's AI use for climate change impacted thesis
- How Sundar Pichai's growth inspired me as an immigrant

You will have to spend time brainstorming a Mission Mate.

When you do, personalize the Why Do You Want To Work Here with a Mission Mate.

Walk me through your resume.

Beginner: Here's my experience chronologically
Advanced: Here's the highlights you care about

Here is the recipe:

- Start with an impact statement
- Share your career growth and tool stack
- Conclude with 3 most significant impact

Example. (Choosing a SW Engineering Manager at Google.)

[Impact Statement] Hi, I am Dhirendra, and I've driven engineering teams to optimize critical systems in cloud products like IAM and Dataflow, delivering 30% faster performance, 20% cost savings, and scaling solutions impacting millions of users globally.

[Structure for the rest of the answer] Let me briefly describe my career growth, tool stack, and three biggest impacts on my current org.

[Career growth] Over the last 5 years at Google, I've grown from leading individual engineering projects to managing teams of up to 15 engineers and budgets exceeding $5M.

[Tool stack] My tool stack includes GCP, Kubernetes, and Apache Beam, which I've leveraged to architect secure, low-latency systems for real-time data processing. Using Stackdriver and Prometheus, my teams have implemented proactive monitoring to detect anomalies 40% faster, ensuring high availability across mission-critical pipelines.

[Three most significant impacts] My recent three big impacts are:
1. Optimizing Shuffle infrastructure to cut memory usage by 20%, driving cost savings of $2M annually for Google's Dataflow customers.
2. Redesigning IAM GDC air-gapped system to achieve 30% faster API response time, enabling secure scaling via modular architecture updates.
3. Streamlining Dataflow pipelines for 50M+ daily events, reducing processing latency by 25%, and enabling real-time insights for enterprise clients.

[Forward focus and tie-in] Now, I am eager to bring my expertise in leading high-performing teams, optimizing large-scale systems, and driving innovative solutions to Meta and building business strategy at the Director level.

What are your salary expectations?

First, you try to push the discussion down the line:

> *"At this stage, I want to ensure we are the right fit for each other and know more about what is expected in this role. If we are the right fit, I am happy to discuss compensation down the line." (Say this with a smile and confidence.)*

If they push for an answer, *you can hold your ground* or give them the following answer.

> *"My research shows that this company and its competitors pay $X-$Y for *top performers* with <insert skills> and <insert work experience>. With my experience, I would expect to be in that range."*

Let's break it down this recipe:

- *"My research shows"*
  - That's a great start.
  - Here are [12 sources](#) you can use to research salaries.
- *"This company AND its competitors"*
  - They are negotiating with you, but they are mainly negotiating with a *competitor* that they will lose you to.
- *"$X - $Y"*
  - Let X be a great scenario for you and Y be an excellent scenario.
  - It is OK to give the lower range as high as X because of the next section.
- *"For **top performers**"*
  - You are not anchoring yourself with an average performer.
  - You are a top performer.
- *"Insert specific skills and work experience"*
  - Specificity is important because you want to ensure the recruiter knows you will be a great fit.
- *"With the experience I bring to the table, I would expect to be in that range."*
  - You are anchoring your ask with the market and not with your previous salary or even their company's current budget

Why are you leaving your current job?

What we wish we could say is:
- I am looking for more money
- I am looking for a better position
- I am looking for a better work environment
- I am looking for a better brand on my resume
- I don't see any growth prospects in my company

However, tact is necessary when answering this question if there is no long-standing relationship with the interviewer.

(Think about all the things you shouldn't say on the first date 😅)

What we can honestly say is:

- I am grateful for my current role
- This is what attracts me to this new role
- Here's how I am confident I can create an impact
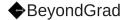
Here's a templated example you can use:

> *"Absolutely, I am grateful for the opportunity I have in my current role at <insert company>. It has taught me about X, and I was able to impact <insert impact>.*
>
> *The experience of being in the startup environment taught me the importance of product market fit and its role along with engineering. That is what attracted me to <interviewing company>. Based on <specific research>, you are uniquely placed <to solve for product market fit>.*
>
> *So, I am excited to bring <insert technical skills> and <insert soft skills> to advance my career and impact the growth stage of <interviewing company>."*

The middle paragraph is essential.

This is where you bridge what you learned in the current role and share how it helps you see this new role as a better opportunity.

Are you interviewing anywhere else?

You would love to say, *"Yes, and you better make an offer soon."* 😄

What you should say (example):

> "I am at different stages with three companies in the gaming and ecommerce space. This opportunity at Company is extremely exciting for me because what you are doing to leverage AI for voice-to-text generation is a great fit with my background in GRC compliance and as the company grows, this function is going to have a critical impact."

If you get a follow-up such as:

"Can you share the names of the company / more info about where you are with them?"

There are two ways for you to answer.

If you really want them to move quickly, say:

> *"I am at the final stages with <insert obvious hint for a company> and expecting an offer soon. I am really excited about this particular role we are discussing so it would be good to move quickly through the process if we continue to feel we are the right fit for each other."*

If you prefer to maintain privacy, you can say:

> *"I am not at liberty to discuss that, and I would like to extend Company the same courtesy if another firm asks this question. This role at Company is one of my top choices because of the reasons I mentioned and I am excited to explore if we are the best fit for each other."*
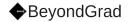
Here's why it works:

A. It shows clarity and honesty while being professional.

B. You get to position yourself strategically:
↳ They are competing with firms in exciting industries
↳ You reiterate that you're excited for this role
↳ You understand the role and how you fit

And C: You share that you have leverage in the process.

A desirable trait in a candidate.

Why are you interested in this role?

Similar to the "Why do you want to work here" question but with a different focus on the role.

Beginner: It looks like a good fit.
Intermediate: I like the responsibilities, and I feel confident I can do them well.
Advanced: Here are three specific reasons why I'm excited about this role.

(I love the psychology principal of [The Rule of Three](#).)

The 3 key ingredients for the recipe

- What about the role excites you (specific responsibilities)?
- How your skills and experience align perfectly with the role's needs.
- How this role fits into your broader career goals or values.

The recipe:

- I'm excited about this role for three reasons: A, B, and C.
- Let me emphasize why B really resonates with me…
- I see myself contributing to your team's success in X

Example (Senior Product Manager)

[Take a 3-second pause and smile]

> "I'm excited about this role for three reasons: First, it offers the opportunity to lead end-to-end product development for high-impact features that directly improve user experience. Second, your company's commitment to data-driven decision-making aligns with my approach to building successful products. And third, this role emphasizes cross-functional leadership, which is an area where I excel and thrive."

> "Let me highlight the first reason. Leading high-impact product development is where I bring the most value. At Company X, I launched [specific feature or product], which increased user retention by 15% and added $2M in annual recurring revenue. I worked closely with engineering, design, and marketing to align on goals and deliver a product that customers love. I see a similar opportunity here to make meaningful contributions to your roadmap."

> "When I think about these three reasons—leading impactful product development, aligning with a data-driven culture, and thriving in cross-functional leadership—it's clear this role is a perfect fit for my skills and career goals. I appreciate the chance to discuss how I can contribute to your team's success."

What is your biggest weakness?

Beginner: I am a perfectionist
Intermediate: Share an actual weakness
Advanced: Above + ways I am working on it

Let's break down the advanced way of answering this question.

You need three specific ingredients for this creation:

- An actual weakness/challenge you face
- How it impacts you or your work
- How are you correcting it

Here's how I answer this question.

(You can use this structure for any weakness.)

> *"[Take a 3-second pause and smile]*
>
> *True introspection is a skill I have had to develop in my career. It is not always easy to proactively introspect or ask for critical feedback, but it has been one of the most rewarding.*
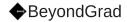>
> *My biggest weakness or challenge that I actively manage is procrastination. It roars in when a particular task is too difficult. In the past, the intensity of a deadline has jolted me out of it, but when I push work close to the boundary, I am not satisfied with the quality.*
>
> *I am actively managing it in three ways:*
>
> *[Using hand gestures ✌🏽] Internally, I break big tasks into smaller actionable chunks.*
> *✌🏽 Publicly, I hold myself accountable by sharing status messages with my team.*
> *🤟🏾 I set weekly meetings with stakeholders to share progress.*
>
> *Accountability has been immensely helpful, and I will also bring that skill to this team."*

What is your biggest strength?

Beginner: I work really hard.
Intermediate: I'm great at [insert generic skill].
Advanced: Share a specific strength + how it's helped you succeed.

Let's break down the advanced way of answering this question.

You need three specific ingredients for this creation:

- A tangible strength that sets you apart
- An example of how you've applied it successfully
- How it will benefit the team or company

Here's how I answer this question.

(You can use this structure for any weakness.)

> "One of my biggest strengths is my ability to synthesize complex information into clear, actionable strategies. I've found that this skill is particularly valuable in high-uncertainty environments where teams need clarity and direction to move forward."

> "For example, at Company X, we faced a challenging situation where conflicting data from customer surveys and user behavior analytics made it hard to prioritize features for an upcoming release. I worked with data scientists to refine the metrics, created a decision framework, and facilitated a cross-functional workshop to align on the most impactful solutions. This process led to a product update that increased feature adoption by 25%."

> "I see this strength as highly relevant to this role, where synthesizing data and aligning teams is critical for driving product success. I'm excited to bring this skill to your team and help deliver impactful results."

Why <insert your special case>?

Special cases: laid off, fired, multiple jumps, career gap, self-employment, big pivot.

Laid off:
"Why were you laid off!?"

No matter how you slice it – it's a loaded interview question.

It just plain sucks when a group of decision-makers somewhere decides your fate, and you now have to explain the reasoning behind it.

To anyone in this situation, here's a potential answer.

> *"Well, it was a painful process as I was caught off-guard because my job looked stable, the company was doing well, and I had high-performance ratings!*
>
> *Unfortunately, my entire department was eliminated as part of broader cost-cutting measures. While disappointing, I understand it was a business decision, not a reflection of my performance or capabilities. I'm proud of my work there, namely examples X and Y. Now, I look forward to bringing my skills and experience to a new opportunity."*

This answer focuses on:
   A. The Truth
   B. Re-aligns top performance
   C. Applies experience to the role

A friend shared that when she answered the question similarly, she was even asked a follow-up:

"But what do you think about why you were laid off? I'm sure you'd have your own opinion on this. Walk me through that."

If you find yourself in this case, reply:

> *"For me, I had three data points: My performance ratings, what our competitors were doing in this landscape, and the bets my company had made. All three pointed this to be an unfortunate situation of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I view it as a forced event to reprioritize my career goals while being super confident in my skills. Which is why I am pumped to have this conversation with you."*

Fired:

"Why were you fired!?"

This question can feel intimidating, but honesty and accountability go a long way. Here's a potential answer:

> *"It was a tough learning experience, but also a valuable one. My departure came down to a mismatch between my approach and what leadership was expecting. For example, I focused heavily on [specific aspect], but in hindsight, I could have prioritized [another aspect]. Since then, I've actively worked to develop better alignment and communication skills with leadership. I'm proud to say that in my next role, I [specific improvement or success], which resolved that issue. I view this as a growth moment that shaped me into a stronger professional."*

Multiple jumps in a short period:

"Why so many job changes?"

Frequent changes can raise eyebrows, but a thoughtful narrative can reframe it as adaptability and intentional growth.

> *"I understand how this could look, but there's a pattern of deliberate learning and growth behind these transitions. For example, at [Company A], I sought experience in [specific skill or domain], and at [Company B], I focused on [another skill or goal]. Each role gave me a unique perspective and added to my expertise. Now, I'm looking for a longer-term opportunity where I can combine these experiences and build deep value in [specific area related to the role]."*

Career gap:

"What were you doing during your career gap?"

Turn the gap into a story of resilience, growth, or intentional decision-making.

> *"I took this time to focus on [specific activity: e.g., caregiving, upskilling, or personal growth]. During this period, I [describe actionable achievements, like earning certifications, volunteering, or working on personal projects]. For example, I completed [specific skill or training], which has sharpened my expertise in [relevant area]. Now, I'm ready to re-enter the workforce with new skills, fresh energy, and a clear focus on making an impact in [specific role or industry]."*

Self-employment:

Explain your entrepreneurial journey while framing the transition as a strategic decision.

> *"Running my own business has been an incredible experience. It sharpened my skills in [specific skill: leadership, project management, client relations], gave me a deep appreciation for [business operations, strategic decision-making, etc.], and taught me how to manage complexity. Now, I'm excited to return to a collaborative team environment where I can focus deeply on [specific area] without the broader demands of running a business. I look forward to bringing my entrepreneurial mindset and skills to this role."*

Big pivot:

"Why are you making such a significant career change?"

Reframe the pivot as intentional and rooted in transferable skills.

> *"I've always been passionate about [the new field/role] but spent the early part of my career building a strong foundation in [your past field]. Over time, I realized my skills in [specific skill: leadership, data analysis, strategy, etc.] translate directly to this new field, and I've been working to make the shift by [specific actions, like certifications, side projects, or relevant experience]. For example, I recently [describe a concrete success related to the new field]. I'm excited to bring my transferable skills and new expertise to this opportunity."*

Conclusion

Mastering these 10 questions can transform how you approach interviews, giving you confidence, clarity, and a competitive edge.

Your next great opportunity starts with preparation. This document is your starting point—make it count!

I am rooting for you!