

## 60 non-technical interview questions and description for how to answer it...!

If you were to search “sample interview questions and answers” on the Internet, you would get over six million results. That’s six million different opinions about what the most common interview questions are and how to answer them. That’s a lot to absorb. So where do you turn and which are correct? Truth be told, it’s difficult to say and it will vary by person and by interview. However, you can certainly prepare for the interview by looking at the most common type of questions that come up and writing down your potential answers so that you can be prepared.

Using our experience and additional research, we’ve compiled a list of 60 tough interview questions that could come up in your interview. We have added ideas suggesting the interviewers’ issues, and then your best answers for each question. These, of course, are general questions. You will likely get some specific to the industry, occupation and position for which you are applying.

### **Question 1: Tell me about yourself.**

**TRAPS:** Beware, about 80% of all interviews begin with this “innocent” question. Many candidates, unprepared for the question, skewer themselves by rambling, recapping their life stories, delving into ancient work history or personal matters. (Note: Do NOT ask “What would you like to know?” Take the initiative, interpret the question for yourself, and go forth.)

**BEST ANSWER:** Start with the present and tell why you are well qualified for the position – and if you wish to add more, mention personal traits you want them to know about (professional, detail-oriented, strong verbal and written skills, get along w/ co-workers well, etc. etc.). Remember, the key to all successful interviewing is to match your qualifications to what the interviewer is looking for. In other words you must sell what the buyer is buying. This is the single most important strategy in job hunting, and interviewing.

### **Question 2: What are your greatest strengths?**

**TRAPS:** This question seems like a softball lob, but be prepared. You don’t want to come across as egotistical or arrogant. Neither is this a time to be humble.

**BEST ANSWER:** Prior to any interview, you should have a mentally-prepared list of your greatest strengths. You should also have a specific example or two illustrating each strength, chosen from your most recent and impressive achievements. Have this list of your greatest strengths and corresponding examples from your achievements so well-committed to memory that you can recite them cold after being shaken awake at 2:30 AM. This is a chance to brag, so make the list as numerous as you’re comfortable with.

### **Question 3: What are your greatest weaknesses?**

**TRAPS:** Beware - this is an eliminator question, designed to shorten the candidate list. Any admission of a weakness or fault could earn you an “A” for honesty, but an “F” for the interview.

**PASSABLE ANSWER:** Disguise a strength as a weakness.

Example:

“I sometimes push my people too hard. I like to work with a sense of urgency and everyone is not always on the same wavelength.”

Drawback: This strategy is better than admitting a flaw, but it’s so widely used, it is transparent to any experienced interviewer; also, it sounds like working with you is probably difficult.

**BEST ANSWER:** While acknowledging you’re flawed, as we all are, assure the interviewer that you can think of nothing that stands out as a weakness where THIS job is concerned.

**Example:**

"I believe we all have weaknesses – I have some, and most likely you have as well – but based on what you've told me about this position, I believe I'd make an outstanding match, and see no significant weakness where this work is concerned."

**Question 4: Tell me about the greatest mistake you ever made in your life.**

**TRAPS:** Some interviewers ask this question on the chance you'll admit to something major and disqualifying, but if not, at least they'll see how you think on your feet. Some unprepared candidates, flustered by this question, unburden themselves of guilt from their personal life or career, perhaps expressing regrets regarding a parent, spouse, child, etc. All such answers can be disastrous.

**BEST ANSWER:** As with faults and weaknesses, never confess a major blunder. However, don't seem as if you're stonewalling either. Best strategy: Pause for reflection, as if the question never occurred to you. Then say, "You know, I've made my share of mistakes in life, but really can't think of anything I'd call the 'greatest.'" (Pause again, then): "I would add that as a general principle, I've found that the best way to avoid regrets is to prevent mistakes in the first place. In being detail-oriented, I try to cross all t's, dot all i's; and manage financial matters diligently; and in my relations with people, if misunderstandings or difficulties arise, I try to speak directly with those involved to head off any chance of festering or lingering issues."

**Question 5: Why are you leaving (or did you leave) this most recent position?**

**TRAPS:** Never badmouth your previous industry, company, board, boss, staff, employees or customers. This rule is set in stone: never be negative. Any mud you hurl will backfire. Especially avoid words like "personality clash", "didn't get along", or others which can cast you in a bad (or discontented) light.

**BEST ANSWER:**

If you currently have a job: If you're not yet 100% committed to leaving your present post, don't be afraid to say so. Since you have a job, you are in a stronger position than someone who does not. But don't be coy either. State honestly what you'd be hoping to find in a new spot.

If you do not have a job: If you were fired or quit under bad circumstances, rehearse your response to this question well beforehand. Choices include: a) the whole truth, even if it hurts, - candidly, succinctly and without a trace of bitterness - from the company's point of view, indicating that you can understand why it happened, and might have made the same decision yourself; or b) some version thereof, depending on the circumstances. Recognize that in some cases, the prospective employer can learn the true details, or some of them, by checking. If your firing was the result of a takeover, merger, division wide layoff, etc., that can help. Decide how you wish to proceed.

For all prior positions: Make sure you've prepared a brief reason for leaving. Best reasons: more money, opportunity, responsibility, growth, or geography (too-lengthy commute).

**Question 6: Why should I hire you?**

**TRAPS:** Believe it or not, this is a killer question because so many candidates are unprepared for it. If you stammer or ad-lib, you've blown it.

**BEST ANSWER:** Whether your interviewers ask you this question explicitly or not, this is the most important question of your interview, because they must answer this question favorably in their own minds before you will be hired. So help them out! Walk through each of the position's primary requirements as you understand them, and follow each with a reason why you meet that requirement so well.

**Examples:**

"As I understand your needs, you are first and foremost looking for someone who can manage the sales and marketing of your book publishing division. As you've said, you need someone with a strong background in

trade book sales. This is where I've spent almost all my career, so I've chalked up 18 years of experience exactly in this area. I believe that I know the right contacts, methods, principles, and successful management techniques as well as any person can in our industry."

"You also need someone who can expand your book distribution channels. In my prior post, my innovative promotional ideas doubled, then tripled the number of outlets selling our books. I'm confident I can do the same for you."

"You need someone to give a new shot in the arm to your mail order sales, someone who knows how to sell in space and direct mail media. Here, too, I believe I have exactly the experience you need. In the last five years, I've increased our mail order book sales from \$600,000 to \$2,800,000, and now we're the country's second leading marketer of scientific and medical books by mail." Etc., etc., etc.

Every one of these selling "couplets" (their need matched by your qualifications) is a touchdown that runs up your score. It is your best opportunity to outsell your competition.

### **Question 7: Aren't you overqualified for this position?**

**TRAPS:** The employer may be concerned that you'll grow dissatisfied and leave.

**BEST ANSWER:** As with any objection, don't view this as a sign of imminent defeat. It's an opportunity to rearrange the interviewer's thinking about this situation, seeing advantages instead of drawbacks.

Examples:

"I believe that there could be very positive benefits for both of us in this match."

"Because of my unusually strong experience in \_\_\_\_\_, I could start to contribute right away, perhaps much faster than someone who'd have to be brought along more slowly."

"I bring the value of all the training and years of experience that other companies have invested in my employment. With me, you'll receive all that value at no cost or training effort; with someone who has yet to acquire that experience, he'd have to gain it on your nickel."

"I can help your business in many areas, including... (how to hire, train, motivate, etc.) When it comes to knowing how to work well with people and getting the most out of them, there's just no substitute for what I've learned over many years of front-line experience."

"Although my past job titles have included more responsibility and salary than the one you have available, this position is the role I love best, and in which I find the greatest satisfaction. I'll be happy doing this work, and that's what matters most to me, far more than money or title."

"Most important, I'm looking to make a long term commitment in my career now. I've had enough of job-hunting and want a permanent spot at this point. I also know that if I perform this job with excellence, other opportunities cannot help but open up for me right here. In time, I'll find many other ways to help this company and in so doing, help myself. The long-term commitment is the key element."

**NOTE:** The main concern behind the "overqualified" question is that you will leave your new employer as soon as something better comes your way. Anything you can say to demonstrate the sincerity of your commitment to the employer and reassure him that you're looking to stay for the long-term will help you overcome this objection.

### **Question 8: Where do you see yourself five years from now?**

**TRAPS:** One reason interviewers ask this question is to see if you're settling for this position, and using it merely as a stopover until something better comes along. Or they could be trying to gauge your level of ambition. If you're too specific, i.e., naming the promotions you someday hope to win, you'll sound presumptuous. If you're too vague, you'll seem unfocused.

**BEST ANSWER:** Here again, assure your interviewer that you're looking to make a long-term commitment...that this position entails exactly what you're looking to do, and what you do extremely well. As for your future, you believe that if you perform each job at hand with excellence, future opportunities will take care of themselves.

Example:

"I am intensely interested in making a long-term commitment to my next opportunity. Judging by what you've told me about this position, it's exactly what I'm looking for and what I am very well qualified to do. In terms of my future career path, I'm confident that if I do my work with excellence, opportunities will inevitably open up for me. It's always been that way in my career, and I'm confident I'll have similar opportunities here."

**NOTE:** This question can also be a probe for learning of "older" workers' intentions to retire in the near future; if you are within range of retirement age, it is wise to assure the interviewer that you expect to remain with the employer for an indefinite period of time, and certainly for five years, if both parties are happy.

### **Question 9: Describe your ideal company, location and job.**

**TRAPS:** This is often asked by experienced interviewers who view you as possibly overqualified, but know better than to show their hands by posing a concern directly - so they'll use this question instead, which can often get a candidate to reveal that indeed, he or she is looking for something other than the position at hand.

**BEST ANSWER:** The only right answer is to describe a very close version of what this company is offering, being sure to make your answer believable with specific reasons, stated with sincerity, why each quality represented by this opportunity is attractive to you.

**NOTE:** Remember that if you're coming from a company that's the leader in its field, or from a glamorous or much admired company, industry, city or position, your interviewer and his company may well have a "less-than" complex. That is, they may feel a bit defensive about being "second best" to the place you've left, worried that you may consider them a lesser light.

This anxiety could well be there even though you've done nothing to inspire it. You must go out of your way to soothe such anxiety, even if it's not expressed, by putting their virtues high on the list of exactly what you're looking for, providing credible reasons for seeking this opportunity.

If you do not express genuine enthusiasm for the firm, its culture, location, industry, etc., you may fail to answer this self-esteem issue and, as a result, leave the interviewer suspecting that a hot shot like you, coming from a Fortune 500 company in New York, just wouldn't be happy at an unknown manufacturer based in Podunk City.

### **Question 10: Why do you want to work at our company?**

**TRAPS:** This question tests whether you've done any homework about the firm. If you haven't, you lose. If you have, you win big.

**BEST ANSWER:** This question is your opportunity to hit the ball out of the park, thanks to the in-depth research you should do before any interview. Best sources for researching your target company: annual reports, the corporate newsletter, contacts you know at the company or its suppliers, advertisements, articles about the company in the trade press, and (absolutely) any company website.

### **Question 11: What are your career options right now?**

**TRAPS:** The interviewer is trying to find out, "How desperate are you?"

**BEST ANSWER:** Prepare for this question by thinking of how you can position yourself as a desired commodity. If you are still working, describe the possibilities at your present firm and why, though you're greatly appreciated there, you're looking for something more (challenge, money, responsibility, etc.). Also mention that you're seriously exploring opportunities with one or two other firms.

If you're not working, you can talk about other employment possibilities you're actually exploring. But do this with a light and confident touch, speaking only in general terms. You don't want to seem controlling and coy – or desperate.

### **Question 12: Why have you been out of work so long?**

**TRAPS:** A tough question if you've been on the sidelines a long time. You don't want to seem like "damaged goods."

**BEST ANSWER:** You want to emphasize factors which have prolonged your job search by your own choice.

Examples:

"After my job was terminated, I made a conscious decision not to jump on the first opportunity to come along. I decided to take time to think through what I do best, what I most want to do, where I'd like to do it...and then identify those companies that could offer such an opportunity."

"The recession (consolidation, stabilization, etc.) in the (banking, financial services, manufacturing, advertising, etc.) industry had a powerful ripple effect on people in my previous position."

"Between my being selective and the companies in our industry downsizing, the process has taken time. But in the end, I'm convinced that when I do find the right match, all that careful evaluation will have been well worthwhile, both for the company that hires me and myself."

"I'd had a lengthy period of very consistent hard work, and felt ready for a breather, so I \_\_\_\_\_ (spent time with family, traveled, built an in-law unit behind the house, etc.) before commencing an active job search."

### **Question 13: Tell me honestly about the strong points and weak points of your (former or present) boss (company, management team, etc.).**

**TRAPS:** Skillful interviewers sometimes make it almost irresistible to open up and air a little dirty laundry from your previous position. DON'T bite!

**BEST ANSWER:** Remember the rule: Never be negative. Stress only the good points, no matter how charmingly you're invited to be critical. The interviewer doesn't care a whit about your previous boss. He wants to find out how loyal and positive you are, and whether you'll criticize co-workers and supervisors if invited to do so by someone in your new workplace. This question is your opportunity to demonstrate your loyalty to those with whom you work.

### **Question 14: What good books have you read lately?**

**TRAPS:** As in all matters of your interview, never fake familiarity you don't have. Yet you don't want to seem like a dim bulb who hasn't read a book since high school English.

**BEST ANSWER:** Unless you're up for a position in academia or as book critic for *The New York Times*, you're not expected to be a literary lion. But it wouldn't hurt to have read a handful of any recent and influential books in your profession and/or on management. Consider it part of the work of your job search to read up on a few of these, but make sure they are quality books that reflect favorably upon you, nothing far out of date or considered within the field to be unworthy. Finally, add a recently published bestselling work of fiction by a world-class author and you'll pass this question with flying colors.

### **Question 15: Tell me about a situation when your work was criticized.**

**TRAPS:** This is a tough question because it's a more clever and subtle way to get you to admit to a weakness or past mistake. You can't dodge it by pretending you've never been criticized; we all have. Yet it can be damaging to admit potential faults and failures that you'd just as soon leave buried. This question is also intended to probe how well you accept criticism and direction.

**BEST ANSWERS:** Begin by emphasizing the extremely positive feedback you've gotten throughout your career and (if it's true) that your performance reviews have been uniformly excellent.

Mention that of course, no one is perfect, and you always welcome suggestions on improving your performance. Then, give an example of a not-too-damaging learning experience from early in your career and relate the ways this lesson has since helped you. This demonstrates that you learned from the experience, and the lesson is now one of your strongest assets.

If you are pressed for a recent criticism, choose something fairly trivial that in no way is essential to your successful performance. Add that you've learned from this, too, and over the past several years/months, it's no longer an area of concern because you now make it a regular practice to...etc.

Another way to answer this question would be to describe your intention to broaden your mastery of an area of growing importance in your field. For example, this might be a computer program you've been meaning to sit down and learn... a new management technique you've read about...or perhaps attending a seminar on some cutting-edge branch of your profession. Again, the key is to focus on something not essential to your brilliant performance and usual excellence, but which adds yet another dimension to your already solid knowledge base.

### **Question 16: What are your outside interests?**

**TRAPS:** This question is usually about balance and quality of life: you want to be well-rounded, not a complete workaholic. But your potential employer could also be concerned that a heavy extracurricular load will interfere with your commitment to work duties.

**BEST ANSWERS:** Try to gauge how this company's culture would look upon your favorite outside activities and be guided accordingly. (Probably best to avoid sky diving, bungee jumping, and motocross, for example.)

You can also use this question to shatter any stereotypes that could limit your chances. If you're over 50, for example, describe pursuits that enhance physical health. If younger, mention an activity that connotes wisdom and institutional trust (serving on the board of a popular charity).

But above all, remember that your employer is hiring you based on what you can do for the company, not your family, yourself or outside organizations, no matter how admirable those activities may be.

### **Question 17: How do you feel about reporting to a younger person (minority, woman, etc)?**

**TRAPS:** It's a shame that some interviewers feel the need to ask this question, but many understand the reality that prejudices still exist among some job candidates, and it's better to try to flush them out beforehand; it could also reflect the fact that the company harbors some prejudicial attitudes of a particular nature.

The trap here is that in today's politically sensitized environment, even a well-intentioned answer can result in planting your foot neatly in your mouth. Avoid anything that smacks of a patronizing or an insensitive attitude, such as "I think they make terrific bosses" or "Hey, some of my best friends are..."

Of course, since almost anyone with an IQ above room temperature will be trying to steadfastly affirm the right answer here, your interviewer will first be judging your sincerity. You must make your answer believable and not just automatic. If the firm is wise enough to have promoted people on the basis of ability alone, they're likely quite proud of it, and prefer to hire others who will wholeheartedly share their strong sense of fair play.

**BEST ANSWER:** You greatly admire a company that hires and promotes on merit, and you couldn't agree more with that philosophy. The age (gender, race, etc.) of the person you report to would certainly make no difference to you.

### **Question 18: On confidential matters...**

**TRAPS:** When an interviewer presses you to reveal confidential information about a present or former employer, you may feel it's a no-win situation. If you cooperate, you could be judged untrustworthy. If you don't, you may irritate the interviewer and seem obstinate, uncooperative or overly suspicious.

**BEST ANSWER:** Your interviewer may press you for this information for two reasons.

First, many companies use interviews to research the competition. It's a perfect set-up. Here, in their own lair, is an insider from the enemy camp who can reveal prized information on the competition's plans, research, financial condition, etc.

Second, the company may be testing your integrity to see if you can be cajoled or bullied into revealing confidential data. What to do? The answer here is easy. Never reveal anything truly confidential about a present or former employer. By all means, explain your discomfort diplomatically. For example, "I certainly want to be as open as I can about that. But I also wish to respect the rights of those who have trusted me with their most sensitive information, just as you would hope to be able to trust any of your key people when talking with a competitor..."

And certainly you can allude to your finest achievements in specific ways that don't reveal the combination to the company safe.

But be guided by the golden rule. If you were the owner of your present company, would you feel it ethically wrong for the information to be given to your competitors? If so, steadfastly refuse to reveal it.

Remember that this question pits your desire to be cooperative against your integrity. Faced with any such choice, always choose integrity. It is a far more valuable commodity than whatever information the company may pry from you. Moreover, once you surrender the information, your stock goes down. They will surely lose respect for you.

Occasionally an interviewer will press candidates unmercifully for confidential information. If he doesn't get it, he grows visibly annoyed, relentlessly inquisitive, yet it's all an act. He couldn't care less about the information. This is his way of testing the candidate's moral fiber. Only those who hold fast are hired.

### **Question 19: Looking back, what would you do differently in your life?**

**TRAPS:** This question is another usually asked to uncover any life-influencing mistakes, regrets, disappointments or problems that may continue to affect your personality and performance.

You do not want to give the interviewer anything negative to remember you by, such as some great personal or career disappointment, even long ago, that you wish could have been avoided.

Nor do you wish to give any answer which may hint that your whole heart and soul will not be in your work. However, if there was a crossroads moment in life that you can use here without fear of a negative result, go ahead and use it – just think carefully beforehand.

**BEST ANSWER:** Indicate that you are a person who sees the bright side of just about everything, and that in general, you wouldn't change a thing.

### **Question 20: Could you have done better in your last job?**

**TRAPS:** This is no time for true confessions of major or even minor problems.

**BEST ANSWER:** Again, never be negative.

Example:

"I suppose with the benefit of hindsight you can always find things that could have been made better, but off the top of my head, I can't think of anything of major consequence."

**NOTE:** Another possibility is to describe a situation for which you were not directly responsible, but which created difficulties that were unfortunate. It could be a team-related misfortune.

For example, describe the disappointment you felt with a test campaign, new product launch, merger, etc., which looked promising at first, but led to underwhelming results. "I wish we could have known at the start what we later found out (about the economy turning, the marketplace changing, etc.), but since we couldn't, we just had to go for it. And we did learn from it..."

### **Question 21: Can you work under pressure?**

**TRAPS:** An easy question, but you want to make your answer believable. Have a success-oriented anecdote prepared.

**BEST ANSWER:** Absolutely! (...and then prove it with a vivid example or two of a goal or project accomplished under severe pressure.)

### **Question 22: Who has inspired you in your life and why?**

**TRAPS:** The two traps here are unpreparedness and irrelevance. If you grope for an answer, it seems you've never been inspired. If you ramble about your high school basketball coach, you've wasted an opportunity to present qualities of great value to the company.

**BEST ANSWER:** Have a few heroes in mind, from your mental "Board of Directors" - Leaders in your industry, from history, or anyone who has been your mentor – work-related when possible.

Be prepared to give examples of how their words, actions or teachings have helped inspire your achievements. As always, prepare an answer which highlights qualities that would be highly valuable in the position you are seeking.

**Question 23: What was the toughest decision you ever had to make?**

**TRAPS:** Giving an unprepared or irrelevant answer.

**BEST ANSWER:** Be prepared with a good example, explaining why the decision was difficult...the process you followed in reaching it...the courageous or effective way you carried it out...and the beneficial results. (And again: work-related is best.)

**Question 24: Tell me about the most boring job you've ever had.**

**TRAPS:** You give a very memorable description of a very boring job. Result? You become associated with this boring job in the interviewer's mind.

**BEST ANSWER:** You have never allowed yourself to grow bored with a job, because there's always a way to keep it interesting, including taking on tasks to help others when your work is finished.

Example:

"Perhaps I've been fortunate, but I've never found myself bored with any job I've ever held. I've always enjoyed hard work. As with actors who feel there are no small parts, I also believe that in every company or department there are exciting challenges and intriguing problems needful of energetic and enthusiastic solutions – one just has to look for them."

**Question 25: Have you been absent from work more than a few days in any previous position?**

**TRAPS:** If you've had a problem, lying could result in the interviewer discovering the truth; you could be found out. Yet admitting an attendance problem could raise many flags.

**BEST ANSWER:** If you have had no problem, emphasize your excellent and consistent attendance record throughout your career. Also describe how important you believe such consistent attendance is for a key employee...why you feel an obligation to set an example ...and why there's just no substitute for being there with your people to keep the operation running smoothly.