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7 Data Scientist Interview Questions and Answers

Whether you are preparing to interview a candidate or applying for a job, review our list of top Data Scientist interview questions and answers.

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What tools or devices help you succeed in your role as a data scientist?

This question's purpose is to learn the programming languages and applications the candidate knows and has experience using. The answer will show the candidate's need for additional training of basic programming languages and platforms or any transferable skills. This is vital to understand as it can cost more time and money to train if the candidate is not knowledgeable in all of the languages and applications required for the position. Answers to look for include:
Experience in SAS and R programming
Understanding of Python, PHP or Java programming languages
Experience using data visualization tools

"I believe I can excel in this position with my R, Python, and SQL programming skill set. I enjoy working on the FUSE and Tableau platforms to mine data and draw inferences."

How do you identify a barrier to performance?

This question will determine how the candidate approaches solving real-world issues they will face in their role as a data scientist. It will also determine how they approach problem-solving from an analytical standpoint. This information is vital to understand because data scientists must have strong analytical and problem-solving skills. Look for answers that reveal:

Examples of problem-solving methods
Steps to take to identify the barriers to performance
Benchmarks for assessing performance

"My approach to determining performance bottlenecks is to conduct a performance test. I then evaluate the performance based on criteria set by the lead data scientist or company and discuss my findings with my team lead and group."

Why do you want to work at this company as a data scientist?

The purpose of this question is to determine the motivation behind the candidate's choice of applying and interviewing for the position. Their answer should reveal their inspiration for working for the company and their drive for being a data scientist. It should show the candidate is pursuing the position because they are passionate about data and believe in the company, two elements that can determine the candidate's performance. Answers to look for include:

Interest in data mining
Respect for the company's innovative practices
Desire to apply analytical skills to solve real-world issues with data

"I have a passion for working for data-driven, innovative

companies. Your firm uses advanced technology to address everyday problems for consumers and businesses alike, which I admire. I also enjoy solving issues using an analytical approach and am passionate about incorporating technology into my work. I believe that my skills and passion match the company's drive and capabilities."

How has your prior experience prepared you for a role in data science?

This question helps determine the candidate's experience from a holistic perspective and reveals experience in demonstrating interpersonal, communication and technical skills. It is important to understand this because data scientists must be able to communicate their findings, work in a team environment and have the skills to perform the task. Here are some possible answers to look for:
Project management skills
Examples of working in a team environment
Ability to identify errors

A substantial response may include the following: "My experience in my previous positions has prepared me for this job by giving me the skills I need to work in a group setting, manage projects and quickly identify errors."

How do you overcome challenges to your findings?

The reason for asking this question is to discover how well the candidate approaches solving conflicts in a team environment. Their answer shows the candidate's problem-solving and interpersonal skills in stressful situations. Understanding these skills is

significant because group dynamics and business conditions change. Consider answers that:
Encourage discussion
Demonstrate leadership
Acknowledges recognizing and respecting different opinions

"I would acknowledge the validity of their findings. Then I would describe how I came to my conclusions using my data. I would also invite an open discussion of the results."

How do clean up and organize big data sets?

Data scientists frequently have to combine large amounts of information from various devices in several formats, such as data from a smartwatch or cellphone. Answers to this question will demonstrate how your candidate's methods for organizing large data. This information is important to know because data scientists need clean data to analyze information accurately to offer recommendations that solve business problems. Possible answers may include:
Automation tools
Value correction methods
Comprehension of data sets

"My data cleanup techniques involve determining if the data that I am collecting makes sense and correcting any values that are not logical after I have adequate information. I also use tools to help automate the cleanup process, such as Paxata."

What methods do you use to identify outliers within a data set?

Data scientists must be able to go beyond

classroom theoretical applications to real-world applications. Your candidate's answer to this question will show how they allocate their time to finding the best way to detect outliers. This information is important to know because it demonstrates the candidate's analytical skills. Look for answers that include:

Raw data analysis

Models

Approaches

"I like to use practical methods and analyze the raw data first. I will then think about which model will help me to detect any outliers."

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