

Interview Practice Questions

Background and skills

1. Tell me about yourself.

This is your Introductory Positioning Statement. This is also an opportunity to build rapport, and give the interviewer a frame of reference. Focus on what you know this employer needs, and select the most relevant material you have. Be sure this is concise and of reasonable length (no more than two minutes). Another thing to note: tie this to your personal brand or to the value you bring. Use present tense (I am, I do, etc.) in discussing what you do and the value-add you bring. Avoid giving just a chronology of the jobs you've held in past 10 years.

2. Why should we hire you?

Respond by emphasizing your unique qualities and value proposition. Relate them to the position at hand whenever possible. Be prepared to back them up with accomplishments, situations where you have utilized these skills. It is important to do research online (Google company, check company website, Glass Door, and/or OneSource to speak knowledgeably about the company or organization.

3. How would you describe your work style?

Your research may have given you a sense of the work style the company believes in. Is the company highly collaborative, directive, or more authoritarian in its approach? If you don't know the company's style, keep your answer situational and refer to examples from your accomplishments that demonstrate your style. If your work style differs significantly from the organization's, you probably do not want to work there. Like many other questions, this one can be turned around: What kind of work styles are predominate in this organization?

4. What do you consider the single most important idea you contributed in your most recent position?

As you prepare, select 1–3 specific accomplishments that you think were most important. Identify the transferable skills, pick the accomplishment that best matches the challenges you expect to face in the new role. Read the job description for clues as to what they are looking for, e.g., innovative ideas, improved processes, or bottom-line results. If you prepare this ahead of time, this question will be much easier to answer confidently.

5. Give me an example of a difficult decision you've made in the last two years and how did you come to that decision?

Prepare for this one by reviewing your accomplishments over the last few years that have, like most situations, taken a sometimes difficult path. This is another opportunity to point out accomplishments, conflict management, and problem-solving skills. In selecting material, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer who asked the question.

6. What was the last project you headed up, and what was its outcome?

Be prepared to give detail on the last project you led. You may not have had the title of lead; however, you may have held leadership roles in certain areas of the project. Use the SOAR framework to enhance your response. When describing the Situation, talk about why the project was started and why it was important to the organization. When describing the Obstacle, share what challenges you faced in terms of timelines, resources, and budget. As you move into describing the Actions you took on the project, be sure to give specifics on 3–5 actions (both independently and as part of the team). Conclude with the Results of your actions and the results as they impacted the obstacles and the overall situation. Try to use an example that is relevant to the role you are interviewing for.

Goals and objectives

1. What is your ideal job?

To prepare for this question, ask yourself what are your satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the workplace. Emphasize the positives and de-emphasize the negatives; however, a clear understanding of these will help you answer the question. Example: You may be a very results-oriented person so you may need fast-paced, action-oriented role and organization. Handling details may be your strength, so a position where you can use this skill may be important to you and the employer. Again, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer and the position. Be prepared to talk about examples of the type of work that makes up your ideal job using the SOAR methodology.

2. Where would you like to be in your career three years from now?

The interviewer is usually looking to see if your aspirations fit the culture of the organization. This question can also be a way of gauging your level of ambition. If possible, suggest career paths that you know are realistic and reasonable for the organization. You can also turn this question around, asking your interviewer: What kind of career progress is possible? What is the typical career path for someone who has the skills and strengths we have discussed?

3. Tell me about how you set your career goals in your last job and what was the outcome?

Your career goals can be very personal and/or may be influenced by the organization you are working in. If your career goals were set for you by your former company or leadership, communicate that and answer specifically why that excited you, and why your former leader saw you in that career progression. If you set personal career goals, communicate those goals and the motivation behind the drive to accomplish them. Be sure and keep your examples relevant to the role you're interviewing for. For example, if you're interviewing for a business analyst, don't share that your ultimate career goal is to go back to school to be a nurse.

4. Describe the work environment that would allow you to thrive in your next opportunity.

The major reason for this question is for you to be able to easily convey your motivators. Companies are looking for individuals who are aware of how and where they do their best work. Through this awareness, they are able to make the best employment decision for themselves and the company. Their fear here is that you will accept the position at hand only as a stopgap measure, and will leave as soon as you find something better.

5. Describe a career goal you didn't meet. What happened and how did you handle it?

Clearly identify the goal. Emphasize the steps you took to create success, the obstacles that you had to overcome, and how you attempted to achieve the intended goal. Emphasize what you learned and how your behavior is different as a result of the experience.

6. What has been your most significant career achievement?

Be prepared to define success for yourself and then respond with details. Try to choose achievements that relate to the organization's needs and values.

Education, training and professional development

1. What are you looking for in terms of career development?

When asking about advancement desires, interviewers want to see drive and initiative from candidates. Without clear goals for the future or defined career aspirations, you may seem like a bad investment. Remain realistic with replies about career goals. Keep aspirations manageable and sensible. Research on the company can help with this one. If the company is fast-growing, they may be looking for candidates who want to grow with the organization. If the company is slow-growing, then longevity in each position may be valued.

2. How do you stay on top of trends and developments in your field?

This is an opportunity for you to showcase how you stay relevant and effective with changing business climates, which is a major part of most businesses today. Share how you use several research tools to stay on top of trends and developments in the field. Include researching current topics, reading blogs, following thought leaders on social media, attending continuing education webinars and seminars, attending industry conferences and webinars, and watching TedTalks on YouTube.

Also show how you build networking relationships, showcasing that you never underestimate the power of learning from others. Discuss how you participate in forums, on social media, and are active in your industry associations. While it's a great thing to always be consuming new information, what may be most helpful is building on it via discussion.

3. If I were to ask a former colleague to recommend additional training or professional development for you, what would he or she suggest?

The interviewer is looking for how were you perceived by your co-workers and what development needs were easily apparent. A safe way to answer is to note possible development areas *you are interested in* that relate to the position. Don't be excessive on development needs due to the potential cost to the employer. Also, you don't want to raise concern with the company that you don't have the skills to do the job.

4. What was the most enjoyable or valuable course you've taken, or business-related book you've read in the last two years? Why?

Identify a course or book related to the skills needed in the position. Be sure it is a recent one. The interviewer is trying to see if you are staying current on development and trends in the industry. Be prepared to talk about how you have used this development.

5. Tell me about a time when you used your education or training to solve a problem.

Relate specifically to an education/training that would benefit you in the position you are applying for. Be prepared to include details utilizing the SOAR methodology.

6. Give me an example of something that was difficult for you to learn, and how you handled it.

Emphasize how you have taken the challenge of learning something difficult and the steps you used to achieve the knowledge. The interviewer is looking for how you analyzed the situation, developed a plan, and the resources you used to achieve the learning. This is more about problem solving and resource utilization than the acquisition of knowledge.

Strength, weakness and potential problems

1. What are your strengths?

This is an opportunity to match your skills and accomplishments to the requirements of the job.

- To elevate the credibility of your answer, communicate in a second voice, e.g., I have been told my strengths are...; Others describe my strengths as...;
- Demonstrate the strength by adding a SOAR story, e.g., My prior managers would say that project management is a key strength. Last year I consistently had 17 projects going at one time with zero missed deadlines.

2. What feedback do you consistently receive from peers, colleagues, or managers?

This helps measure your team effectiveness and your relationships with the people you work with. Think about what would be relevant to the person interviewing you; most often they want to know if you will be a good fit within the existing team. Share answers that would help them see you working effectively in their organization.

- Describe relevant themes from many sources, including performance reviews.
- Describe a time when you had a dispute with a supervisor/colleague and how it was resolved.
- This is an opportunity to showcase your conflict resolution skills. Beware of criticizing anyone.

3. Give me an example of a time when your biggest weakness at work kept you from reaching an important objective.

"What are your weaknesses?" is a predictable and often-asked question. The interviewer knows we all have weaknesses, so saying that you don't have any, may cause them to think you've got a blind spot. One key thing an interviewer is looking for is how you learn from mistakes or overcome your weakness. Use the SOAR format to answer this question. Fully describe the situation, but more importantly, explain what actions you took to recover, and what the result was.

4. Individuals vary in their ability to use power to influence others, or to exercise a strong point of view. Give me a specific example of a time when you used power and it backfired.

This question is similar to the question "What are your weaknesses?" in that the interviewer is most likely looking for examples of how you recovered from a mistake, and to discover how you influence others in the workplace. Come across as someone with leadership ability, and someone who is confident in sharing their point of view, but humble enough to admit when it didn't work. Use an example that is relevant to the current position and shows how you used your learning to be even more influential with the team.

5. Tell me about one of the toughest teams/groups you've worked with. What made it difficult and how did you handle the situation?

Use this to communicate your power and influence on a team. Don't focus on the team's behaviour, other than a brief explanation to frame the rest of your answer. Focus on the actions you took to engage the team and get the work done. Finish by talking about the results, and how the team is better because of your influence. Stay away from answers like, "I told the boss," or "I just did it myself," as those answers imply that you don't take the initiative to work with the team to resolve issues.

Salary and sensitive issues

1. What was your salary in your last job and what are you looking for in your next job?

Use one of the following approaches:

- **Defer** by letting the interviewer know that once more information is known, the two parties can discuss salary. (e.g., I'm sure we will be discussing salary expectations as we get further along in our conversations.)
- **Inquire** by asking more questions regarding the position to gather more information, (e.g., Can you tell me a little more about the level of responsibility for this position?)
- **Reveal** after doing research and understanding the market rate for the position, and present that in a salary range, (e.g., My research uncovered the market rate for this position would be \$90–100K; if an offer was extended in that range, I'm sure we could come to an agreement.)

2. You are overqualified for this position. Why would you be interested?

Think about the motivation behind asking this question. Most often, interviewers think you'll take this job and leave as soon as you find something more suitable for you. Or they may think you are too expensive for the salary range for the role. Ask the interviewer to identify the real concerns. You might ask: "Are you concerned that I don't plan to stay with this company for the long term?" Then you need to provide credible reassurance. It is also possible that they have a misunderstanding of your past compensation or responsibilities. If so, get them back on track. The key here is to show how you are a great match for the job and how you can hit the ground running and make an impact right away. If you are truly overqualified for the job, explain what motivated you to apply, so they can hear the excitement you have for the job regardless of the added skills you might have.

3. Why did you leave your last employer?

This is an opportunity to use your exit statement. This question is usually asked to determine whether you have some problems or flaws that led to your leaving your last position. You need to reassure your interviewer that there are no such problems. Your confidence and tone are nearly as important as your words. This is a predictable question so your answer should be well thought out and thoroughly rehearsed. If your departure was performance or personality related, you need to rehearse your response and make sure your references will support your explanation.

4. Tell me about a time when your work was criticized.

Present an answer that shows you understand that everyone's work is criticized from time to time. This is an opportunity to talk about your proven ability to use criticism as an opportunity to improve. Use the SOAR format to demonstrate this to the interviewer.

5. Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. What was the outcome?

This is an opportunity to talk about how you deal with conflict and move things forward with your team. Demonstrate how you prepared for the conversation rather than avoided it, and how you were able to use feedback techniques that engaged the team member rather than angered them. Finish with the result of the feedback session to ensure you answered the question asked.

6. What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?

Again, this is an opportunity to showcase how you are able to recover from mistakes. Use the SOAR format to briefly describe the situation just to frame the story, and then move quickly to the actions you took, and finally the results of the learning. Acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes and it's the lessons that make you better. You can prepare this answer ahead of time so choose a scenario that is relevant for the position.

Supervisory/managerial

1. How would you describe your management style?

It is a predictable question, and people seeking management roles should be prepared to answer it. As with most questions, a carefully thought out, honest answer is the best approach. Conduct research of the company culture prior to the interview. If your management or leadership style differs significantly from the organization's, you probably do not want to work there. Like many other questions, this one can be turned around: What kind of leadership and management styles predominate in this organization? What is top management's style?

2. How would your former colleagues describe your management style?

This is another question that gives you the ability to showcase your leadership style. Don't say, "I don't know what they would say," or "I would hope they'd say...". Be confident in your answer and use terms that convince the interviewer that you've actually been described that way, such as "they've said I am...." or "They frequently tell me I'm...". Do some research ahead of time and ask others how they experience you as a leader. Confirm with them how you perceive your leadership style so you're not saying one thing in an interview and then showing up the first day as someone else.

3. Tell me about a time that someone on your team was underperforming. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?

Building a high performing team is critical for leadership roles. This question tests your ability to respond when someone isn't meeting expectations. You can have several answers to this question as there may be several reasons why someone might be underperforming. Explain each situation with confidence, even if you chose to transfer or move someone out of the organization. Focus on the process you used and your thought process, and always finish with the result of your action.

4. Give me an example of what you have done to establish credibility quickly with a new team.

It's important that a leader earn credibility with their team quickly as they enter a new organization. Describe a situation in the past when you were successful in doing this. Offer your strategy for building credibility when you get this job, so they can visualize you onboarding quickly at their organization.

5. What are you doing to ensure that you continue to grow and develop as a leader?

When asked these questions, most often, the interviewer is looking for someone who can continually develop in the role and grow the business. Showcase how you are a lifelong learner, curious about how to continually grow personally and how you can continuously grow the business. Don't focus on the specific learning but rather the mindset you have around continuous improvement and growth. Demonstrate this with a story about how you have continually developed in your career in the past.

6. Tell me about a time when you had to build support for a difficult project or idea, and how you did it.

In the current business climate, many times you will need to get projects pushed through people who do not have a direct reporting relationship to you. The interviewer is usually looking for how strong your influencing skills are. Choose a relevant example for the job, use the SOAR format when describing the situation, the actions you took, and showcase the results.