Manage difficult interview questions

All interviews are difficult, but they can be challenging in different ways. Your interviewer will want to understand how you respond to problems without clear solutions, which you'll undoubtedly face in a job as a UX designer. In this reading, you'll learn how to answer various types of difficult interview questions.

 Introductory questions

Some interview questions are intentionally vague! Your interviewer may ask vague questions to understand how much you've prepared for the interview and determine how well you think in fast-moving situations. The more you prepare responses to vague questions, the better you'll be able to answer them. Let's explore a few types of vague interview questions and strategies for how you can successfully answer them.

One of the first questions you'll be asked during many interviews is: "**Tell me a little about yourself.**" Of course, you can answer this question in lots of ways depending on the context. But here's a pro tip: consider how you'd answer this question if you were on a first date. You might talk about your family, where you grew up, and the work that you do. Or if you were meeting a teacher for the first time, you might talk about your hobbies and your reason for taking the class.

Similarly, in an interview, you should tailor your answer to the situation. In other words, what's important for this person, the interviewer, to know? As you prepare a response to this question, consider sharing:

- Your educational background
- Your first interest in the field of UX design
- Your specific interests within the field, like interaction, visual, or motion design
- Your training (like this program) where you've created original designs
- The reasons you're interested in this company and this job
- Your past positions or current job that have prepared you for this role

Keep in mind that you should be able to answer this introductory question in just a minute or two. Before your first interview, whether it's a phone screen with a recruiter or an in-person interview with a lead designer, you should know what you'll say when asked this question so that you can share the best parts of yourself and keep your answer concise.

During many entry-level UX designer interviews, you might also be asked: "**What's your favorite design tool? Why?**" In most cases, the interviewer isn't looking for a "correct" answer here. They're mostly interested in learning whether you're comfortable using a particular tool, like Figma, Adobe XD, or others. When answering this question, you should show that you've perfected your design technique by taking advantage of the tool's features. Plus, it's great to highlight that you feel comfortable learning new skills with different software as it's released or depending on the tool the company uses. Ideally, you should frame your response to this question in a way that demonstrates your broad knowledge of design tools and how to best take advantage of them.

 Experiential questions

Other vague interview questions might focus on your past and expected future experiences. Experiential questions are also commonly referred to as behavioral questions. Some common experiential questions include:

- Tell me about a challenging (or successful) experience you've had in a job and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a conflict you had in the past and how you resolved it.
- Why should we hire you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

The key to answering experiential questions is to be specific. Choose one experience and explain what happened, how you handled it, and what you learned from it. When responding to these questions, it's usually better to go deep on one example than to share a sentence about many examples.

Even if you're asked to recall bad experiences or conflicts, try not to say something negative about a past coworker, manager, or company. Instead, focus on what you learned and how you persevered. If you experienced something extremely negative in the past, like harassment or an unsafe workplace, it's best not to bring it up in an interview unless you're asked about it directly.

To help you prepare to answer experiential questions with ease, write down a few past experiences that you can mold to multiple questions. For example, think about a specific event from work or school when you accomplished a major goal. Your story should exemplify how you demonstrated leadership or grit, or you did something that you're proud of. Chances are, you can share this story in response to many experimental questions that are asked. If you have three to five key stories from your past to focus on, you can frame them to answer most experiential questions!

 Technical questions

As a UX designer, you'll need to have a lot of technical knowledge to do your job well. For example, during an interview, you might be asked to **explain how to design a product from start to finish**, or **create a wireframe from scratch on paper**. The knowledge you've gained through this certificate program has prepared you to answer these questions. However, if these questions are hard for you to explain when you're put on the spot, it's perfectly fine to get out the notebook you brought to the interview and write out your response, if that helps you process your thoughts better.

It can be tempting to go into great detail during your explanation of any process or design theory, but remember that it's important to **be concise** in your answers. Consider what you learned about presenting research earlier in the program: Be brief, cite specific examples, tell engaging stories, and remain purposeful. Think of your interviewer as an audience to be won over.

 Discriminatory questions

The last type of interview questions you should consider are discriminatory or offensive questions. Hopefully, you won't ever encounter a question during an interview that makes you feel uncomfortable, but it *can* happen. To be prepared, it's a good idea to be aware of what can and can not be asked during an interview.

Laws are different depending on where you live and where the company in question is located, but for the most part, consider the following topics off limits.

1. Age
2. Citizenship status
3. Disability status
4. Family status (like whether you have children or plan to have children)
5. Gender
6. Marital status
7. Pregnancy status
8. Race or national origin
9. Religion
10. Sexual orientation

If you are asked a question that falls under these categories, or anything else that makes you uncomfortable, you're within your rights to say that you'd prefer not to answer. If the interviewer pushes you to give an answer, it might be time to end the interview. You certainly don't have to provide any personal information that you don't want to share.

Sometimes, you might be asked a question that seems to fall in a gray area, like "Are you willing to work nights or weekends?" This can be seen as a sneaky way to ask whether you have childcare responsibilities or attend religious services. It's fine to answer honestly without giving any specific details, such as: "I'm looking for a role that falls within the standard 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. time frame," for example.

Check your local laws to learn more about what someone can and can't ask during an interview. Here are some more resources to get you started:

- [Are Your Job Interview Questions Illegal? What You Need to Know](#) ↗ from The Balance
- [Illegal Interview Questions](#) ↗ from the Office of Career Strategy at Yale University
- [Legal and Illegal Questions for Candidates](#) ↗ from Skidmore University

 Concluding questions

Finally, most interviews end with: "**Do you have any questions?**" By this point, you might be mentally exhausted by your conversation to think of anything on the spot. Prepare for this ahead of time by making and bringing a list of questions to ask interviewers.

Don't ask anything that's already been adequately answered in your conversation, but there are likely specific questions you have about the company's culture, like remote work setups or professional development opportunities, that you can wrap up your interview with. Plus, you can always ask about the next steps in the interview process.

No matter what questions you're faced with in your interview, the trick is always to prepare. When you've thought through the many possibilities beforehand, it's always easier to give clear and concise answers. Listen carefully, take a breath, and answer confidently!

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