

## What to do Before, During, & After an Interview

Because the interview is the “make or break” moment for your effort to land a job, it is very important to be fully prepared.

### Pre-Interview

- Be sure that you’ve researched the company. Know what their product or service is, who they serve, and who their competitors are.
- Look over typical interviewing questions and think about how you will answer them.
- Confirm your appointment within 24 hours.
- Be on time; plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early. Check your appearance before checking in with receptionist.
- Ask ahead to know the interviewer or interviewers names and how to pronounce them. If you don’t know, ask the scheduler of appointment or the recruiter.
- Bring extra copies of your resume. Also bring a copy of your transcripts, a list of references, and supporting materials that you want to showcase.
- Bring a portfolio and pen and paper for jotting down information during and after the interview.
- Be friendly with those you meet and politely show an interest in them, recognizing that they are at work and have other things to concentrate on.
- Dress appropriately and professionally; a business suit is appropriate for most interviews. Make sure your hair and nails are neat and clean. Polish your shoes. Go easy on the perfume/cologne and jewelry.

### The Interview

- Pay attention to your posture, eye contact, and other non-verbals (watch out for those pesky “ums” and “ahs”).
- Think “inward” not “outward”. If you think “inward” you are concentrating on your qualifications, what you can offer the company, and what makes you qualified. If you think “outward” you are concentrating more on how you look or how nervous you are.
- Talk about the experiences and knowledge you have.
- Be sure you understand the question. If not, ask for clarification.
- Emphasize the positive and use examples to back up your statements.
- Let the interviewer bring up the subject of salary. This may not occur until after an offer is made. However, be prepared for the question, “What salary are you expecting?” ([See negotiating an offer, page 53](#))
- Emphasize what you can do for the organization.
- Never speak negatively a former employer, teacher, or institution. If there were problems with previous experiences, try to make your answers positive.
- If you catch yourself making an error, correct it. Don’t try to cover up.
- Don’t expect an offer on the spot. However, do ask as a final question about when the team hopes to make a decision.
- Be yourself. You don’t want to get hired on the basis of something you are not or, worse, miss out on a great opportunity by being seen as inauthentic.
- Thank each person you meet and ask for a business card so that you can stay in touch.

### Post-Interview

- Take a few moments to jot down notes about the meeting and how things went. Jot down things like deadlines, tricky questions, or points that you made that seemed to make an impact.
- Within 48 hours, send a thank you note or thank you email to those you have contact info from. Personalize the messages as best as you can based on things you said to them during your interview.
- If you promised additional information, be sure to follow through with it as soon as possible.
- Inform people who are your references that they may be contacted and to give them an idea of points that would be helpful for them to discuss and/or send the job description.
- If you do not receive a call or email about their next step or decision when it was supposed to happen, pick up the phone and follow-up with the key point of contact.
- Be prepared to discuss accepting the position if it is offered, including considering points of negotiation.
- If you are interviewing with other organizations, it is probably good to mention it if an offer has been made, because you may need to ask for time to fully consider multiple offers.
- If you receive news that you were not selected, follow-up with a call and ask for input that may help you to succeed in another role with the organization or with another employer.
- Finally, continue your job or internship search full-speed until you have accepted an offer and signed an acceptance letter.
- Inform any person who has been helpful to you in your job search that you have accepted an offer and thank them for their support.

# Interview Questions

**Interview questions by their design are intended to help an employer to know two main things about you:**

1. Do you have the necessary skills to do the job?
2. Will you fit in to the culture of the organization?

The interview for you is a chance to discern whether your credentials and career goals match up with what the company seeks and to understand the work environment. Being prepared to answer and ask questions during the interview is important to practice and master to be successful in your job search. It is also important to be able to handle difficult, and in some cases illegal questions that you may be asked. Finally, you should be prepared to ask questions of your own that help you to understand the job and how you can be successful in the role.

## Questions You Could be Asked

Knowing how to prepare for your interview will make the results of your interview that much more successful. Before your interview, take the time to review questions that you could be asked. It is not necessary to have prepared answers memorized, but be prepared to talk about yourself, your skills, and your experiences. The following questions can serve as a guide to prepare you for an interview.

### Personal

These are intended to understand how you best function and what your strengths are.

- Tell me a little about yourself. (Keep your answer career oriented).
- What are your strengths?
- What causes you stress and how do you handle it?
- Give me three adjectives that describe you.
- What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?

### Career Goals

These are intended to understand how you plan and what your ambitions may be.

- Where do you see yourself in five years? (Again, focus on your career goals).
- How do you define success?
- What type of supervision do you prefer? What do past supervisors say about you?
- What type of steps do you take to stay informed of new developments within your career field?
- How do you feel about working nights and weekends for special events/activities?

### Employer Information

These are intended to know what you understand about the organization, and about your preparation and enthusiasm levels.

- What do you know about our company/organization?
- What do you know about this position?

### Education

These are intended to understand how your education “fits” with the job and also your level of self-reflection about it.

- How did you decide on your career/field/major?
- What classes have you enjoyed the most/least during college and why?
- How have the activities that you have been involved with during college influenced you?
- Do you have future plans of furthering your education?
- What electives did you enjoy the most? Why?

### Experience

These are intended to understand how your experiences have given you needed skills and relevant experiences related to the position for which you are interviewing.

- How would your co-workers/supervisors describe you?
- Tell me about a time when you had to influence someone to accept your idea.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make an important decision and how you came to that decision.
- Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person and how you handled it.
- Tell me about your position with \_\_\_\_\_ and the valuable skills you learned.
- Please give me an example where you have demonstrated the ability to be an effective member of a team.
- Give me three reasons why I should hire you.
- Is there anything you would like to add?
- What did you like the most and the least about your last place of employment?

### Atypical Questions

These are intended to understand how you think on your feet, understand your decision making process or address how creative you may be. There are no correct answers.

- If you were a fork, knife, or a spoon, which would you be and why?
- Why are manhole cover round?
- Sell me something in this room, anything.
- What did you do poorly in you last position or on your last project?
- If you had to choose, would you be an elephant or a giraffe? Explain why.
- Create an argument for one of these statements: salt is better than pepper or pepper is better than salt.
- If you had to pick a title for an autobiography about your life (at this point in time), what would you name the title?
- If you were a type of food, what type of food would you be and why?
- If you could have dinner with anyone from history, who would it be and why?

# Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral based interview questions are the most popular among recruiters. The purpose of behavioral questions is to identify how a potential new employee would act in future situations. Behavioral questions are often open ended, leaving the interviewee to fill in the blanks. To answer these questions in the most effective way, follow the STAR method below. Remember to spend most of your time talking about the Result—that is what employers are most interested in hearing.

## STAR Method

During the interview, your responses need to be specific and detailed. Tell them about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. Briefly tell them the situation, what you did specifically, and the positive outcome or result (i.e. what did you learn). Your answer should contain these four steps: Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

### Situation

Set up the situation in which you had a positive outcome or result that relates to the question asked. For example, it can be something from class, an internship or a volunteer experience.

### Task

What goal were you working toward?

### Action

What did you do specifically to make an impact? What was your role?

### Result

Describe what happened as a result of your actions. What did you learn? The result is what they are really looking to hear in your response, so spend the most time talking about the result.

### Example of Behavioral Interview Question

Tell me about a time when you took on a difficult project and what were the results?

### Example STAR Answer

Situation	Task	Action	Result
During my internship last summer, I was charged with managing and improving events.	I noticed attendance was dropping each summer and wanted to improve attendance and event quality.	I designed a new marketing campaign and focused on social media and other free venues. I surveyed focus groups to hear what our target population would like to see changed with our events and made recommendations to the event manager.	We utilized some of the ideas we gathered and promoted events daily. Our attendance grew by 80% last summer, and this resulted in more money raised. Our board of directors was very pleased with this increase.

## Sample Questions About You

- Tell me about a time when you had a list of things to do and your supervisor/instructor came to you and said “I need this project/assignment completed by 5 o’clock”. How did you handle the situation?
- Give me an example of a time where you failed to meet a goal. What did you fail to do? What were the consequences? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you were assigned a task but were provided little direction about how to complete the task. What steps did you take to complete the task? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about how you keep yourself organized so to meet deadlines or goals.

## Sample Questions About Working with Others

- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker or fellow student on a project.
- How did you handle the situation? What were the outcomes?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult decision that affected those with whom you worked. What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you were a team leader. Who was on the team, and what did you do to help your team be successful?
- Tell me about a time when you had to persuade someone to see your point of view. What tactics did you use? What were the outcomes? What did you learn?
- Give me an example of a time when you used creativity to complete a project, work with someone else, or develop a new idea. How did you communicate your idea and how was it received?
- Tell me about a time you were involved in a project with a group.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to supervise someone.
- Describe a time when a co-worker criticized your work. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?
- Provide me with an example of a time when you had to motivate others. What were the outcomes?

# Illegal Interview Questions

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 indicates that discrimination based on national origin, citizenship, age, marital status, disabilities, arrest record, military discharges, or personal information is illegal. Various federal, state, and local laws regulate the questions a prospective employer can ask you. Questions must relate to the job for which you are applying.

## You have options if you are asked an illegal question:

1. Choose to answer the question knowing you are providing information that isn't job related. You take the risk that a "wrong" answer could harm your chances for a position.
2. Refuse to answer the question. You will be within your rights, but you may come off as uncooperative or confrontational which could put off potential employers.
3. Examine the intent behind the question and respond with an answer to this. For example, if asked if you are married or engaged, you might choose to respond that your personal life allows you to meet the requirements for the position.

Status	Legal Questions	Illegal Questions	Sample Responses
<b>Marital Status</b>	No questions	Are you married? Is this your married name?	Can you help me understand how being married relates to this position?
<b>Parental Status</b>	Name of an applicant's relatives already employed by company.	Are you pregnant? How many kids do you have?	Are you concerned about my time constraints? If so, you should not be because...
<b>Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity*</b>	No questions	What is your sexual orientation? Are you transgender?	Can you help me to understand how my sexual orientation is relevant to this position?
<b>Age</b>	Discussion should be kept to questions about the applicant's career stage.	How old are you? When were you born? When did you graduate high school?	I have the experiences you are seeking which can be seen on my resume...
<b>Personal</b>	Are you a member of any professional societies or organizations? (Exclude the organizations' name or character of which indicates race, creed, color, or national origin of its members)	How much do you weigh? What is your political affiliation? What is your religious affiliation?	Can you help me understand how my religion relates to the position we are discussing?
<b>Military</b>	Applicant's work experience, including names, addresses of previous employers, dates of employment, reasons for leaving	Were you honorably discharged from the Military?	I left the military in good standing and received excellent leadership training which I can go into greater detail, if you'd like.
<b>Citizenship**</b>	Are you legally authorized to work in the United States?"	Where are your parents from? What is your native language?	I can assure you that I possess the communication skills necessary to be successful in this position.
<b>Disabilities</b>	Can you lift packages up to 50 pounds?	May we see your medical records? Do you have a disability? Have you been hospitalized recently? Why?	I am very confident in my abilities to do this job.
<b>Arrest/Criminal Record</b>	Have you ever been convicted of a felony?	Do you have a criminal record? Have you ever been in jail? What for?	If you'd like to see my legal history, I am willing to give you written permission to perform a background check.

Information excerpted from "Guide to Unacceptable Interview Questions" from Yale University:

[provost.yale.edu/sites/default/files/guide\\_to\\_unacceptable\\_interview\\_questions\\_09-01-2015.pdf](http://provost.yale.edu/sites/default/files/guide_to_unacceptable_interview_questions_09-01-2015.pdf)

\*Any dialog or questions regarding sexual preference are inappropriate and illegal.

\*\*To determine work authorization, employers may lawfully ask two questions of all applicants: 1. Are you currently authorized to work in the United States on a full-time basis for any employer without restriction? 2. Will you now or in the future require employment visa sponsorship, such as H-1B? If the applicant answers yes, the employer may ask what the applicant's current employment eligibility is based on, what the applicant's immigration status is, and how long it will last. (Information excerpted from Rhoads, M. B. (2013) Interviewing and Hiring International Students. NACE Journal, 8-15.)

# Questions to Ask Employers

Always feel free to ask questions to clarify details you need to understand. Be prepared to ask questions at the end of your interview that show an interest and enthusiasm for the job and the company to which you are applying. This is also your opportunity to interview the interviewers so to determine your own fit for the position. Researching the company ahead of time can help you develop questions and avoid asking questions available on their website or company literature. Be sure to prepare at least 4-5 questions as some of them may be answered during the interview. Below are some sample questions to ask at the interview.

## Company/Organization

- What types of people seem to do well in this department/organization?
- What opportunities exist for advancement?
- Do you most often promote internally or externally?
- What are the opportunities you see for this department/organization in the next year?
- What are the greatest strengths of this organization?
- What would you change about this organization if you could?
- How well do departments interact with each other?
- Will the organization continue to be competitive? How?
- How does your organization react to adopting new technology? New ideas?
- What type of growth do you foresee in the next few years? Why?

## Position Specific

- What is a typical day like in this position?
- Is there anything else I should know that would help me understand the position?
- Why is this position available?
- How many people have held this position in the last three years? (If it seems like there has been high turnover, ask for an explanation.)
- What are the typical hours of this position? Will overtime, night or weekend work be required?
- What new tasks or responsibilities do you see someone in this position taking on?
- What type of supervision would I receive in this position?
- What traits have you observed that have made a person successful in this role?
- What other positions in this company might I grow toward as a result of being successful in this job?
- Besides those who have interviewed me, who else might it be typical for a person in this job to interact with?

## Personal Experience

- What do you like best about working here?
- How does this organization encourage personal and professional growth?
- How did you start with the organization?
- What do you like about working for this organization? How would you compare it to others you have worked for?
- Where in the organization do you hope to be in five years? (A good way to sense potential growth.)
- What are the biggest changes that you have observed in this company and has the change been managed well?
- If you were starting your career over at this company, what would you do differently now?
- Do you value creativity (independence, spontaneity, teamwork, etc.) in your coworkers?
- In your opinion, what makes a person good at their job here?
- This job requires 40% travel, how do you balance the requirements of your work with other parts of your life?

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