

Did you ever get an unexpected answer during interview? [closed]

Asked 16 years, 1 month ago Modified 15 years, 10 months ago

Viewed 2k times

9

votes



Closed. This question is [off-topic](#). It is not currently accepting answers.

Closed 13 years ago.



Locked. This question and its answers are [locked](#) because the question is off-topic but has historical significance. It is not currently accepting new answers or interactions.

When interviewing for a programming position, did you ever get an answer to your question that you didn't quite expect? The answer could've been quite smart that you didn't even know or it could've been a dumbest answer you never expected. I'm expecting technical type of questions but anything interesting is fine.

jobs

Share

edited Jan 5, 2009 at 1:46



Jeff Atwood

63.9k ● 48 ● 151 ● 153

asked Nov 14, 2008 at 8:30



BlueGene

1,129 ● 3 ● 20 ● 31

Comments disabled on deleted / locked posts / reviews

13 Answers

Sorted by:

Highest score (default)



36

Q: "Do you have any weaknesses?"

votes



A: "Kryptonite"

Share



answered Nov 14, 2008 at 8:57



NM.

818 ● 6 ● 11

2 I am so going to give that answer next time! :-)

– [Alister Bulman](#) Nov 14, 2008 at 9:10

1 That is a MUST-HIRE. He cannot be beaten down by incompetent management or slimy customers! We have a winner here. – [icelava](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:59

14 A light-hearted one...

votes



Towards the end of an interview, which I thought went reasonably well with the candidate asking sensible questions, showing interest and a good general rapport I asked a closing question because I wanted to know

whether to proceed, "so what do you think, would you be interested in the position?".

He replied "I think it is the most boring job I have ever heard of and there is no way I would come and work for *you* and I think your whole company is lame" (the company was a nasdaq listed software house turning over around a billion dollars). I looked at my co-interviewer, who was a seasoned development manager who worked for me. He smiled and we showed the guy out.

In almost 20 years of interviewing that is the most surprising response I have had.

Share

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 9:04



[Simon](#)

80.6k ● 26 ● 92 ● 119

That is awesome. Having worked at Reuters in real-time data feeds I can safely say that this domain is certainly not boring or lame... – [Tim](#) Nov 14, 2008 at 20:18



o.O Why waste all that time going through the interview process only to turn the job down in a most insulting way? – [Erik Forbes](#) Nov 14, 2008 at 20:20

3 @Erik, interview is a two-way process, and you can't always figure out the job is a bad fit just from the job posting. Rude as the interviewee was, he did save time and aggravation to both sides. – [dbkk](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 2:00

@dbkk is right. It was badly handled, but then techies are often not blessed with a full set of social skills, and it did bring the whole thing to a tidy conclusion. – [Simon](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 15:37

- 1 @Simon, I'm trying to think of what a tactful response would of been for him in that situation. Perhaps, "I have a few more interviews to do this week but I'll give you call?" I dunno.
– [mmcdole](#) Feb 5, 2009 at 23:15
-

9
votes

We were looking for an application programmer. After putting up some pseudo code on a white board I ask the candidate a question about it. His answer "is this some type of programming thing?"

Share



answered Nov 14, 2008 at 20:28



[Jim C](#)

4,981 ● 23 ● 25

5
votes

As an interviewer I never had a big surprise, but as a candidate I was shocked and appalled at one company where I was not allowed to ask questions... WTF? I left pretty quickly.

Share

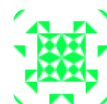
edited Jan 5, 2009 at 1:57



[Graeme Perrow](#)

57.2k ● 24 ● 86 ● 125

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 20:19



[Tim](#)

20.4k ● 24 ● 122 ● 219

4
votes

Not really an answer, and a long dead question, but anyway... I was once one of several people interviewing a



candidate. It wasn't going very well for him, but not a complete disaster either. At one point during the interview, his phone rang.

At this point, I kind of felt bad for him - he was obviously nervous and now had forgotten to turn off his ringer.

What I didn't expect to happen was for him to TAKE THE CALL, speaking for several minutes. In a foreign language. My coworkers and I looked at each other incredulously.

When he was finished on the phone, he simply hung it up and proceeded with the interview as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

He didn't get the job.

Share

answered Feb 5, 2009 at 23:03



JK.

1,121 ● 3 ● 13 ● 18

2

votes



Not any questions, but I was once told that I had to hold a presentation about the company after he had given me information about it. Made me really pay attention to what he told me about the job and organization (I got the job).

I have also been doing a lot of interviews and hired several of my co-worker, something I wrote about for this question:

<https://stackoverflow.com/questions/194543/for-interviews-how-do-you-gauge-whether-the-candidate-would-be-a-good-coworker#285594>

Share

edited May 23, 2017 at 12:19



Community Bot

1 ● 1

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 8:54



Eigir

2,069 ● 2 ● 15 ● 19

2

votes



I remember once I was interviewing at Microsoft and the manager told me that he was on the fence with me about whether to hire me or not. I told him, "Then don't hire me," which I think may have been a bit of a surprise to him.

Share

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 20:21



JB King

11.9k ● 4 ● 40 ● 49

That would interest me as well... – [boutta](#) Nov 20, 2008 at 15:53

1 Maybe he was angling for a \$50 note :-)) – [paxdiablo](#) Nov 25, 2008 at 5:02

This is the sort of questions salespersons get in an interview. Let me guess. Was it an interview for PM? – [wilhelmtell](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:34

I think he may have been considering Joel Spolsky's principles... – [icelava](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 4:02

No, it was a developer position. – [JB King](#) Jan 6, 2009 at 0:53

1
vote



I asked someone to sketch some Java code on a whiteboard when interviewing and was surprised to see the candidate put some Python up instead. Turned out the person's Java skills were, shall we say, over inflated on the CV...

Share

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 9:24



David Collie

665 ● 2 ● 7 ● 21

Was this some sort of short term position or something? I don't see that language-specific knowledge would be too important, a good programmer is a good programmer. Of course, lies on a resume are a HUGE red flag. – [TM](#). Jan 5, 2009 at 3:35

1
vote



Not an answer I heard, but one that I gave.

An interviewer asked me if it was possible to write object-oriented programs "using only a C compiler". I was a little bit amused by the peculiar word choice, so I jokingly answered that, in C, you could write a compiler for an object-oriented language and do it that way.

The interviewer didn't give me a chance to say how I understood that structs aren't really objects, functions aren't really tied to their data strongly enough, and there are a bunch of other OO features missing, so you can't really do it in C, which was probably the answer he was going for. I thought I had screwed up until he ended the interview with an offer for the position.



I'd probably answer similarly... I'd say I'd use function pointers and structs to achieve this. But I'd have to be well, well past the ballmer point to do this. – [wilhelmtell](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:36

1

vote



As an interviewer I had not been surprised very often. Most of the people have been respectful and intelligent. I had only been surprised by how quiet and nervous some people get or how little they tried to answer some of the technical questions.

As an interviewee I've given answers that were not expected. There was one occasion where I gave an answer at an early stage interviewer for large multinational company- and they simply did not understand the solution. Lesson learned: never give a 'different' or 'out of the box' answer unless it is in writing and the person receiving it is technical in that area. Otherwise, they may simply regard it as incorrect. Give the answer you think will be the norm- because in most cases the early interviewer has a very short list of the 'possible' answers.

Update: The interview I was referring to was a 4th or 5th stage phone screen- so I guess it is not as applicable. The question was one of those ones that involve 'assume you have infinite memory' so I played on that coming up with

some strange 'what if' scenario. The 'best' answer was one that was more to the point using traditional methods.

Share

edited Jan 9, 2009 at 5:36

answered Nov 14, 2008 at 8:40



[Klathzazt](#)

2,454 ● 19 ● 27

Man, I disagree. If the interviewer doesn't understand my answer I'd hope he asks me questions. I'd then be delighted to explain. But if they give me a blank stare and then say "that's wrong" I'd probably show myself the door. – [wilhelmtell](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:29

0 This doesn't apply just to the single item I mention below.

votes



We did ask an applicant for a C++-centric software engineering position one time to talk about classes and objects in C++, which he could not answer. The final thing that ended it all was "do you even have any experience with C++?" The response: "No." "You had a school class and you list it on your resumé..."

Share

answered Jan 5, 2009 at 3:19



[Kris Kumler](#)

6,307 ● 3 ● 25 ● 27

0

votes



I interviewed a guy for a C++ job. He had lots of C++ buzzwords on his resume, including 'smart pointers'.

I wrote a little example program that used a raw pointer in a loop, the pointer was never deallocated. There were several if() statements that had if() statements inside of them, so stuff was going in and out of scope a lot.

I told him that this program ran fine for a while, but eventually it would bog down my computer or throw some kind of error message from the OS. I asked him to please take a look at this and see if you can see a problem or suggest an improvement.

After what seemed like forever, but was really on five or ten minutes, he noticed that several of the if statements would reassign my pointer without deleting the thing it was currently pointed at. He went through and added delete statements before these lines. So far, so good, if a little slow.

I asked him if there was anyway to make this code cleaner and less dangerous. I tried for over ten minutes to get him to say 'use a smart pointer', but I just could not do it. At one point I even said 'the answer is on your resume'. Still, total brain lock.

I really expected that using a smart pointer would occur to a guy who put 'smart pointers' on his resume would. I had anticipated we would discuss the different flavors of smart

points that exist in the C++ universe, I didn't expect a total vacuum on something listed on his resume.

After more talking the fellow it came out that in his current position in a defense contractor he spent almost all his time going to meetings and wrote almost no code at all.

I liked the guy, but didn't feel good about putting in a full time C++ job so we passed on him.

Share

answered Feb 16, 2009 at 19:39



[Jim In Texas](#)

1,534 ● 4 ● 20 ● 31

-2
votes

Sorry, I misread the question. But since I've also done interviewing I can adapt my answer.



Where I work, the first question we ask in every interview is "tell us a joke". (Yes, I know, it isn't technically a "question"). This tends to lead to some unexpected answers, but they'd only be entertaining in person.

Share

edited Nov 14, 2008 at 20:15



[Chad](#)

2,131 ● 1 ● 22 ● 29

You can't state that this is not an answer until you know the question. If, for example, the question was "is there anything

else we can do for you before you leave?" then "tell us a joke" is a possible answer. – [Simon](#) Nov 14, 2008 at 12:58

That is one of the worst things I can think of to ask a candidate in an interview. It is a useless waste of time and can really hurt an otherwise good interview process. – [Tim](#) Nov 14, 2008 at 20:20

It makes me think of the early seen with Rocco in Boondock Saints. – [Kris Kumler](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:14

There is now way I could ever tell a joke in the beginning of an interview... I'd simply be too nervous to remember one. And then I'd be even more nervous during the interview, because "I didn't answer the first question." – [Paulius](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 3:32

- 2 Certainly very unprofessional for interview sessions; interviews need to gather as much as information on how well the fella works and learns, not how quickly they can make you laugh. Unless your company performs stand-up comedies and hosts events for the software industry. – [icelava](#) Jan 5, 2009 at 4:08
-