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Interviews and Job Offers

TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

(Adapted from Co-op & Career Services CDEV resources)

Below are some of the typical questions with a description of how you should answer each one incorporating your own skills and qualifications. In a job interview, the applicant needs to be aware of what the interviewer is really trying to determine by his or her line of questioning and then to respond correctly. For each question what the employer is trying to determine is in italics below each question.

1. Tell me about yourself.

"What are your skills and qualifications? What kind of person are you? Are you lazy? Motivated?"

Your answer should be a combination of information, including some or all of the following factors:

- Skills related to the job
- Your present/past work experience
- Your training or education
- Your strong interest and enjoyment of your work

Activities and special interests: Tell the interviewer what your hobbies are, especially if they are job related, such as drawing, building gadgets, designing your own clothes, fixing cars. Also, include a couple of non-job related special interests such as being a strong football fan, coin collecting. These things will demonstrate that you are a well-rounded individual.

2. Have you ever done this kind of work before?

"Can you learn to do the job in a reasonable amount of time?"

Mention all of the experience you have had that makes it likely that you can learn quickly to do the work required in this specific job.

Tell the interviewer about:

- Major projects/assignments you have completed
- Your past work experience
- Your education and training related to the job
- Non-paid experience related to the job
- How quickly you have learned that type of work in the past

3. Why should we hire you instead of someone else?

"What can you do for our company?" How can you contribute to our company?"

If you have to hesitate or can think of only one or two reasons, then the interviewer will feel that the reasons are not too obvious or are not sufficient. You should quickly list your key skills, qualifications and positive characteristics and how you benefit the company.

Benefits companies may desire:

- Maintain a high level of customer satisfaction.
- Efficient organizational abilities
- Save time
- Improve its appearance
- Improve the look of its packaging
- Expedite work flow
- Get faster delivery
- Project a professional company image
- Maintain high quality
- Save money/cut costs
- Increase sales
- Improve the bottom line

4. How often were you absent from work in your last job?

"Are you reliable? Can I depend on you to be at work?"

If you were absent a lot for some reason, tell the interviewer what the reason was and why you feel that it will no longer be a problem. In answering this question, stress what your past reliability has been and give assurance of your future reliability.

5. When are you available for work?

"How soon can you start work?"

Tell the interviewer as soon as possible. Many factors may be causing your hesitation about committing yourself but now is not the time to mention them. You may not be sure you want the job but this is something you can go home and think about and discuss with family and friends. However, if you express your hesitation now, you may not receive the offer.

6. What was your last employer's opinion of you?

"What kind of an employee are you?"

The best answer to the general question about your last employer's opinion of you is to have a letter of reference from your last employer which you can then summarize and show to the interviewer. A letter of reference will speak for itself and you should give it to the interviewer. If not, suggest to the interviewer that s/he contact your employer and express your assurance that you would receive favourable comments.

7. Can you work under pressure or under tight deadlines?

"Can you handle pressure? Do you fall apart in pressure situations?"

This question indicates that your job will involve working under pressure and meeting deadlines. Reassure the interviewer by giving examples from paid or unpaid activities. You might mention how you managed to prepare for three final exams in one day at college. If possible mention several examples, stressing how capable you were and how you did not mind the stress and possibly enjoyed it.

8. Why do you want to work here?

"Will you be satisfied with your job? Will you stay? What have you heard about this company?"

Discuss the good reputation that the company has and any positive information you have obtained through your research about the company products, philosophy, fair policies, etc. You should also discuss your confidence in your ability to do the particular job in question and how much you enjoy that type of work.

9. What are your greatest strengths?

"How confident are you? What do you see as your skills?"

This is a very standard question and is your biggest opening to market your skills and your accomplishments. These should include both job related and interpersonal skills. Mention things such as your number of years' experience in your field, your job related skills and qualifications, your reliability, enthusiasm, good organizational abilities, pride in a job well done and so on.

10. What are your weaknesses?

“Can you be honest about your short comings? How much training are you going to need? What are your problem areas going to be?”

It is important to be honest and open yet to turn this question around so that you are responding with weaknesses that will not interfere with your ability to do the job. For example, being over-conscientious, taking things seriously, etc. You could state that you get frustrated when others don't pull their weight, or you get frustrated when someone is late for an appointment. If you answer this way elaborate on your response and explain why this frustrates you and what you do to overcome the weaknesses. For example, “I get frustrated when others do not pull their own weight as I am very much a team player. Therefore, I am always encouraging others to work together in a team environment.” Never describe anything which would imply that you are not able to meet the requirements of the job.

11. What are your long range goals?

“Are you somebody that is career oriented? How important will this job be to you? Is this a stepping stone to something else or will you make a commitment to this position?”

Respond with your intention to stay with the company and grow in your career within the company. If you know beforehand that this company has many opportunities for advancement and encourages it, tell the interviewer that you “hope to become valuable to the company and to be promoted as you earn it.” Be careful not to show dissatisfaction with the job at which you will be starting.

It is also appropriate to be open about long-range career goals, such as returning to school to get a degree, if the goals are in the same field as the company and/or they are far enough in the future that they will not interfere with your stay at the company. Emphasize that whatever advancement you are making can be an asset to the company's future.

12. Do you have any questions?

Remember that the interview is a two-way street. You need to determine if the job is right for you. The questions should be geared to the company with which you are interviewing. The questions should be thought out in advance and be serious. Questions about salary and benefits should not be asked at the first interview. The information is important in assisting you to make your decision about the job but should only be asked at a second interview OR when you have received the job offer. Asking questions shows enthusiasm for the position/company and your initiative.

This is an opportunity to demonstrate you have done your research. Your questions will also show enthusiasm and interest, and can show how strong a thinker you are, if they are good questions! You should write down your questions – you will probably think of a few while you are researching the company before your interview – and bring them with you to the interview.

Avoid asking about something that you would easily be able to find out prior to the interview. Instead, ask for clarification on something you have learned. Your questions can help you determine if this is a company for which you would like to work.

You can choose from the list below if they have not already been covered in your research or during your interview.

- How does this position complement your department's objectives?
- What qualities or skills do you look for in an employee?
- If I am not the successful candidate, may I follow up with you for feedback?
- What is expected of a new employee?
- How would you describe a usual day for someone in this position?
- To whom would the successful candidate report?
- What type of equipment is operated in this position?
- What computer programs and software are utilized in this position?
- How would my performance be evaluated and how often, should I be selected?
- What additional training is offered for those in this position?
- What are some challenges typically faced by someone in this position?
- What new initiatives has this department undertaken recently in which the successful candidate might be involved?
- What potential growth are you anticipating at this time and for the future?
- Can you tell me more about your company's safety orientation and training program?
- What initiatives are in place to build and foster teamwork?
- How does upper management view the role and importance of this department and this position?
- What do you most enjoy about your work with this organization / company / agency?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are some examples of the best results produced by people in this position?
- What types of assignments might I expect besides what was in the job description?
- What personal qualities have contributed to the success of others in this role?
- In your opinion, what do you think I will learn most from a job with your organization?
- Are there other Conestoga alumni at your organization?
- How much opportunity will I have for decision-making in my first assignment?
- Do you have additional company literature that I may review?
- When may I expect to hear about a hiring decision?