

# Thursday: Answering General Interview Questions

## General Interview Questions

### “Tell me about yourself”

This seems like such a simple question, but it can really make you sweat especially in an interview. This is not an invitation to recite your entire life story or your CV. Instead, it's your first and best chance to pitch the hiring manager on who you are and why you're the right one for the job. Use your personal narrative to answer this question, tailoring to the job you're applying for and person you're talking to.

- So, first start with the present, where you are right now.
- Then, segue into the past. If you have had an employment history, talk a little bit about the experiences you've had and the skills you gained at previous positions. Also, Just because you didn't get paid for something doesn't mean that it doesn't count as experience. Responsibilities volunteering and side jobs count! You can apply the skills you learned doing those tasks to any position.
- Aim to focus on skills that are relevant to the job you are interviewing for.
- Finally, finish with the future, why you are really excited for this particular opportunity.

### Example

Use your personal narrative.

### “What do you know about our company?”

This question is asked to gauge your real interest in the job and the employer. Make a point of researching the potential employer, including:

- What they do
- Products or services
- Major partnerships
- Size of the company
- Major competitors and how they compare with those competitors
- Plans for growth or expansion
- Company culture
- Work environment
- Values, mission, and vision

Your answer should highlight why you are a good fit for the position in context of the information you have about the company. Your potential employer wants to see that you are aware of the nature and strengths of the business and how you can contribute.

You can also weave this information into your answers to other questions they ask to show that you've researched the organization and are genuinely interested in the role.

### Example

I see that your company has been in business for fifteen years now, with an excellent reputation for creating Mobile Apps and payment systems for major companies in Africa. Your clients range from the common man to major companies and banks. I am very interested to learn about the Mobile Apps that you create to support payments systems for different clients and I am particularly attracted to the vision of your company. I appreciate that the business has focused on meeting customers needs in a friendly and innovative way. Your approach is admirable, and I believe my orientation to customer service plus my software engineering skills will allow me to build products for [company name] that are high-quality and user-focused.

## “What do you find interesting about this job?”

When asked this question, the interviewer wants to know why you decided to apply specifically for this job, and why the position fits you and your career plans. Here are a few tips on how you can answer this question:

- Be specific: make sure that your answers are to the point and not ambiguous. Mention specific job qualities and career advantages that you find on this role that interest you.
- Be truthful: simply put, if you like a job you will excel at it. If you are working somewhere just for the money, there are chances that you will not like the job and will leave quickly.
- Be real: show your true excitement over the problems you will be solving, and how you and the organization will grow through your contributions.

### Example

I'm really excited about this role because of the opportunity to work in such a solid team environment. I always wanted to work with hard-working, professional, experienced people. I love contributing to the team effort, bringing out the best in myself and in my teammates for fulfilling our work goals and reaching top results.

I trust that I can perform well by applying sound principles of teamwork. I appreciate receiving timely and consistent feedback designed to improve not only my performance as well but the team's performance as well. I consult with people, try my best and treat everyone positively and equally.

I also love the agriculture sector - in my last job, I worked in agriculture and decided to become a software engineer to solve problems faced by people like myself.

## “What do you consider to be your weaknesses?”

When the interviewer asks you this question, they are trying to see how well you respond to a question that is intentionally meant to throw you off. When you prepare for this question, you will want to pick a weakness that is a strength in disguise, or one that presents a current strength as a recovered weakness. The answer to this question has two parts. First is the confession to the problem. The last part is the recovery: how did you minimize the weakness, and how are you working to improve on it.

### Example

I do not like confrontation, and in the past found myself at times compromising what I wanted or needed in order to keep the peace. This was a real problem, especially in team situations or when I was supposed to be leading a group because there are times when you need to tell people things they might not necessarily want to hear. Since then I've realized this is a weakness of mine and I've worked very hard to overcome it. Now instead of avoiding those situations, I take it as an opportunity to practice being more assertive without coming across as difficult. I take the time to listen to each side of the situation and make sure that if I have any comments or criticisms that they are constructive and that the solutions I offer are actual solutions and not just “peace patches” (which in this case means opting for peace for the sake of keeping the peace but the truth is that the situation has not been solved. You choose to maintain peace by sweeping everything under the rug).

## “What is your greatest achievement?”

Choose an achievement that is related to the position and is fairly recent. Review the job description. What skills are listed as necessary for the job? This will guide you to the most relevant answer for this employment interview question. Reflect upon achievements that demonstrated the required skill. Describe your accomplishment and highlight the job-related skills you used. Point out how the results of your accomplishment.

### Examples

Recently I was asked to implement a new system to reduce our debtors days. I analyzed the problems with the current system, got input from all the stakeholders, and developed a faster way of getting the accounts out and monitoring follow up. Our debtors days reduced significantly and we are currently on target for collections.

I was part of the rowing team that recently won the championships. It was a particularly satisfying win as we had trained very hard, requiring a lot of discipline and perseverance, to come up from the bottom of the league. We also really had to work together as a team and keep each other motivated.

## “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”

The interviewer wants to understand more about your career goals and [how this position would fit](http://biginterview.com/blog/2012/01/what-employers-want-job-interview.html) (<http://biginterview.com/blog/2012/01/what-employers-want-job-interview.html>) into your grand plan. They care about your career goals because they want to hire someone who is motivated, proactive, and likely to stick around and work hard if hired. To answer this question:

- Keep your answer fairly general and truthful, but broad enough that it doesn't raise doubts about whether you would be a good fit for this position at this organization.
- Stress your interest in a long-term career at the company because the interviewer wants to know that you're ready to settle in and grow with the firm.
- Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job as an exciting next step for you. Most importantly, make it clear that you are motivated to take on this opportunity right now.

### Example

I am driven to be the best at what I do and I want to work somewhere where I'll have opportunities to develop my skills, take on interesting projects, and work with people I can really learn from. Most importantly, I want to work for an organization where I can build a career.

## “Given a tight deadline how would you handle the pressure?”

Pressure and stress are unavoidable aspects of the world we live in. The interviewer will be looking to identify that you recognise that pressure and stress are facts of life, that you understand the effect pressure and stress has on you and that you are sufficiently robust to be able to take them in your stride.

The key to formulating your answer to this question is to:

- Seize this as an opportunity to talk about a situation or an occasion where you were under pressure and you how rose to the challenge.
- Avoid conveying the impression that the fact you were under pressure was in any way your own fault or due to your own personal failings. Place the 'blame' firmly on external factors outside of your control.

### Example

From a personal perspective, I manage stress by prioritizing my responsibilities so that I have a clear idea of what needs to be done when it needs to be done. This has helped me effectively manage pressure when working on projects. For example, there was a time I not only had my own personal projects to work on but a group project as well that we were working on with a few friends for a client and they were all due in a week's time and on the same day. When faced with such a situation I usually prioritize my tasks by working on the easier projects first then narrowing down to the most challenging projects that need more time. And in this case that is what I did and I was able to complete all projects and deliver quality work..

## “How would you handle a case of criticism?”

Interviewers might be interested to hear about some mistakes you have done in your experience as a developer, but what they are really asking is how you respond in stressful situations and whether you can take correction with a good attitude. They are wondering if you are able to work well under a variety of management styles or if criticism will make you feel angry or undervalued.

When you answer this question, you want to emphasize your ability to handle criticism. This is your opportunity to showcase how you are willing to humbly make improvements in projects or professionalism when required.

- Talk about how you listened and made changes when a someone critiqued your work.
- Explain a situation where you improved your performance after receiving constructive criticism.
- Emphasize that you enjoy doing quality work and have learned to value the input of experienced leaders.
- Mention why you are flexible and professional when working with others with whom you may at times disagree.

### Example

During my stay at Moringa School I received input from my Technical Mentor that helped me to see how my work could be improved. Once I was asked to revise a project that I had spent a lot of time on, but after listening carefully to the critique, I saw how I could make changes that would strengthen the finished product. Through fixing those critiques, my project was much higher quality and I became a much stronger engineer in the process. I am eager to learn from people with different views and experiences, and appreciate constructive feedback.

## “How much are you looking to get paid?”

Depending on your answer, you can price yourself out of a job offer by saying a number that is too high, or you can get less than the company can afford to pay you by saying a number that is lower than their budget for the position (companies always create budgets of what they can pay for each position they hire for).

This is one of the trickiest questions to answer since it's so easy to give a self-defeating response. The key to answering this question well is to prepare in advance by researching salaries at the company, and in similar positions in the same industry. Here are some strategies to try when asked how much you expect to get paid.

By providing a number, two big things can go wrong:

- You say a number that is too high for the company's budget, and they remove you as a candidate for the position because you are too expensive.

- You say a number that is lower than their budget for the position, and you end up not making as much money because you have told them that you are willing to work for less.

Instead, say:

- “I am very interested in this opportunity, and am excited to contribute to [company name]. Given my skills and experience, I believe my salary should be competitive to market rates. What is your budgeted range for this position, and what do you think is fair based off other people in the organization in this position?”

Other important tactics:

- Do your research. Not only should you know the average salary for your industry, but it's also wise to know geographical information as well. Salaries can vary widely based on the cost of living in the area, as well as the number of qualified applicants nearby.
- Play it coy. Avoid saying a number first. You can say something like, "I would love to know more about the position and its responsibilities before thinking about salary."
- Keep your cost-of-living needs in mind. It can feel game-like to negotiate a strategy, but it's important to keep your financial needs front and center. Will the salary you request cover your expenses? If not, how will you make up the difference? Weigh your needs against the research you've done about salary and if the two numbers aren't as close to each other, it could be a sign that the role isn't a good match.
- Get information from the interviewer. Use this question as an opportunity to flip the tables on the interviewer, and find out what the salary range is for the position. You can ask
  - “What is the range you have in mind for the position?”
  - “What are some non-salaried benefits available?”
- If you have to answer, provide a range, rather than an actual number.

## “Why should we hire you and not anybody else?/ What makes you the best candidate for the job?”

When a hiring manager asks you this question she or he is really asking, “What makes you the best fit for this position?”

Your answer to this question should be a concise “sales pitch” that explains what you have to offer the employer. Remember that employers hire workers to solve a problem, whether it's boosting sales or streamlining processes or building a brand. Your goal when making your pitch is to show that you're the best person to solve that problem. The better you do that, the better your chances of landing the job.

- You want your answer to be brief no more than a minute or two long.
- Begin by explaining what you believe the employer is looking for, and how you fulfill that need.

- The interviewer wants to know how you stand out among the other applicants. Therefore, focus on one or two qualities you possess that are different from what other interviewees might offer, or are more difficult to find in candidates generally.

## Example

You describe in the job listing that you are looking for a junior developer who is hardworking and has a quick learning ability. Having served as a tutor an intern at Craft Silicon, I have developed my ability to be extremely hardworking and handle pressure. My experience as an intern has taught me strategies for working in a professional environment for example team work, time management and flexibility.

## “Do you have any questions for us?”

### !!!ALWAYS HAVE QUESTIONS TO ASK TO THE INTERVIEWER!!!

Your answer to this question should **always** be yes. It shows that you’re engaged and interested in the position, and you are seriously considering the role.

You will have to use your judgment about the number of questions you ask and when to ask them. Think of this as a [conversation \(https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/interview-as-a-conversation\)](https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/interview-as-a-conversation). There will be an appropriate time to ask certain types of questions, like those about benefits and vacation. Don’t ask about those questions upfront, they make it sound like you’re just looking for an easy paycheck. Instead, concentrate on questions about the job’s responsibilities and how you fit the position until you get the actual offer.

When you begin to think of the interview as a two way process, you will see it is important for you to find out as much as possible about the company. Questions will give you the opportunity to find out if this is a good place for you to work before you say yes.

## Examples

1. What are the first three projects that I would be working on?
2. What does a typical day look like?
3. What are the biggest challenges that someone in this position would face?
4. What are the skills and experiences you’re looking for in an ideal candidate?
5. What attributes does someone need to have in order to be really successful in this position?