

INTERVIEWS.

An interview is a discussion between you and the prospective employer to find out if you can do the job you are seeking. It's your chance to make a good impression.

1.1: DO'S AND DON'TS;

What to do:

- ❖ Dress smartly, look bright and attentive, and speak clearly and confidently.
- ❖ Don't forget that in the first few minutes only 7% of the interviewer's opinion of you is formed by what you say - the rest is judged on how you look, act and sound.
- ❖ Find out where the venue is beforehand, how to get there and how long it takes.
- ❖ Get your outfit ready the night before.
- ❖ Find out what kind of interview it will be so you can prepare.
- ❖ Examine the personal specification and your CV/application form, and think about what type of questions they will ask you.
- ❖ Prepare answers for the main questions - for example, why do you want the job, what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are the main tasks in this job?
- ❖ Make about three or four points in each answer.
- ❖ Quote real examples of when you've used certain skills - just saying you've got a skill isn't enough.
- ❖ Take your time when answering the questions: make sure you understand the question and take your time if you need to think.
- ❖ Sell yourself: no one else is going to! Be positive about yourself and your experiences
- ❖ Prepare some questions to ask at the end of the interview - use it as an opportunity to find out more about your role if hired and the company.

- ❖ (Don't ask about money or perks just yet!)
- ❖ When discussing salary, know your market worth and start by quoting a little higher than this.
- ❖ Get feedback on your performance, whether you were successful or not.
- ❖ Turn off your mobile phone: treat the interviewers with respect and give them your undivided attention.
- ❖ Keep your answers focused on what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you.

What not to do:

- ❖ Don't be late.
- ❖ Don't swear or use slang words.
- ❖ Don't slouch in your seat or do anything that makes you look uninterested.
- ❖ Don't smoke.
- ❖ Don't lie: the interviewer may see through you. Even if you get the job, your employer can dismiss you if they find out that you have not been honest.
- ❖ Don't let your nerves show too much; a few nerves are normal but extreme nerves will affect your performance. Use breathing techniques and try to remember that it's not a life and death situation - there are plenty of jobs out there! Just RELAX.
- ❖ Don't be arrogant and assume you've got the job. Nothing turns off employers more than someone who is disrespectful and over-confident.
- ❖ Don't discuss controversial topics such as religion, politics and gender relations.
- ❖ Don't read from notes or your CV — you should be familiar enough with your own history to be able to talk about it unprompted.
- ❖ Don't criticize former employers or colleagues. Interviewers may mark you down as a troublemaker and a gossip.
- ❖ Don't argue with the interviewer, no matter what. Remember to keep things positive!

These rules apply for most jobs. However, employers in some industries can use more relaxed and informal interviewing techniques. In some creative fields (design and media for example) it may be expected that you turn up for the interview in casual clothes, as that is the dress code in the office. However, smart casual is better than very casual. If you're in any doubt, do some research on typical interview techniques in your line of work.

Above all, preparation is the key to performing well in interviews. Research the role and organisation, and prepare evidence and examples of your skills and competencies.

1.2: TIPS ON HOW TO WIN IN AN INTERVIEW ACCORDING TO, STEVE FOGARTY, STAFFING PARTNER AT WAGGENER EDSTROM.

1. Be Concise;

Interviewee rambling on is one of the most common interview blunders Fogarty sees.

"You really have to listen to the question, and answer the question, and answer it concisely," he says. "So many people can't get this basic thing down. You ask them a question, and they go off on a tangent. They might think you want to hear what they're saying, but they didn't answer your question."

2. Provide Examples;

It is one thing to say you can do something; it's another to give examples of things you have done. "Come with a toolbox of examples of the work you've done," advises Fogarty. "You should come and anticipate the questions a recruiter's going to ask based on the requirement of the role. Think of recent strong strategic examples of work you've done, then when the question is asked, answer with specifics, not in generalities. You should say, 'Yes, I've done that before. Here's an example of a time I did that...', and then come back and ask the recruiter, 'did that answer your question?'"

3. Be Honest;

Somehow, candidates get the impression that a good technique is to dance around difficult interview questions. "If you don't have a skill, just state it. Don't try to cover it up by talking and giving examples that aren't relevant. You're much better off saying you don't have that skill but perhaps you do have some related skills, and you're happy to tell them about that if they like."

4. Keep Your Guard Up;

According to Fogarty, you can split recruiters into two schools. There are those who are very straight-laced and serious, and candidates had better take the process seriously as well when dealing with them.

"Then you have recruiters like me," he says, chuckling. "I'm going to be that candidate's best friend when they call me. My technique is to put them at ease, because I want them to tell me everything, and a lot of candidates mess up in this area. They start to think, 'Oh, this guy is cool. I can tell him anything.' And then they cross the line." And that can take a candidate out of contention. Remember: Always maintain your professionalism.

5. Ask Great Questions

Another of Fogarty's interview tips is to come ready with good questions to ask. He says nothing impresses him more than a really good question that not only shows you've researched the company in general, but also the specific job you're hoping to land in particular. "That makes me go, 'Wow, this person has really done their homework. They not only know the company, but they know the role.'"

1.3: AT THE INTERVIEW;

- 1) **Be prepared for common questions.** Interviewers often ask the same sort of questions, like "Where do you see yourself in five years?" or "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" Have the answers to queries like these up your sleeve.
- 2) **Rehearse to a live audience.** "Writing down what you want to get across in an interview is only part of the challenge," "Make sure you can express yourself in an articulate fashion by asking a friend to throw likely questions at you."
- 3) **Create an "elevator speech" about yourself.** You should be prepared to tell about whom you are and what you do. "Get ready to talk about your skills and experiences," "How does your personality fit? What is your vision for the job? Why are you the best person to do it?"
- 4) **Turn the tables on your interviewer.** Prior to an interview, you should assume a potential employer will have searched for you online – so why not do the same to them? "Try to find out as much as you can about your interviewer," "You will have a head start on other candidates – and you haven't even got anywhere near the interview room."
- 5) **Be prepared to explain gaps in your work history.** Be prepared to address the gaps in your employment history, or the reason why you suddenly had to leave your last position.
- 6) **Be honest.** Don't claim to have degrees or experience you don't. "Remember that many organizations check references "Any inconsistencies could lead to an employer rescinding a job offer."
- 7) **Look the business.** Dress appropriately for the job you want. Presentation can make the difference in whether or not you are hired or even the salary you are offered. "Dress at least as well as you would when actually turning up to do the job – preferably better," "If you feel you look good, you will come across as confident and relaxed."

- 8) **Be nice to everyone you talk to, especially when you aren't 100% certain who they are.** "You can assume a girl who greets you and think she is a secretary – but when she sat down and started the interview you realized she was the boss," Take care!
- 9) **Be on time.** Phone in advance to confirm time, place and directions if needed. It's also worth scouting out the location in advance to check parking, public transport, cafes where you can loiter and so on.
- 10) "If an act of God makes you late, phone and offer to reschedule, but don't expect to be taken as seriously as the candidate who has the same experience as you who showed up on time,"
- 11) **Send a thank-you note.** Follow up an interview with a brief courtesy message (an email will do) a few days later. Not many applicants bother with this, and it will keep you at the front of an interviewer's mind. "It doesn't take more than 15 minutes to knock out a well-crafted thank-you letter,"
- 12) **But don't pester an interviewer.** Waiting to hear back after an interview can be stressful, but resist the temptation to bombard your potential employer with emails and phone calls – they'll just think you're a nuisance. Instead, find something to take your mind off things and let the process run its natural course.

1.4: HOW TO PERFORM WELL IN A TELEPHONE, SKYPE OR VIDEO INTERVIEWS.

1.4.1: What are they?

They are real interviews held over the phone rather than face-to-face. You will usually be interviewed by a member of the graduate recruitment or HR team.

A telephone interview will usually be given to candidates who have passed the online application and/or psychometric test stage of the graduate recruitment process and are used to sift out applicants to be invited to a face-to-face interview or assessment Centre.

1.4.2: Who uses telephone interviews?

You are more likely to have a telephone interview with one of the large corporate recruiters than with a small or medium sized company. Telephone interviews are used by all kinds of employers – banks, accountancy and law firms, consultancies, retailers, manufacturing companies etc.

They are especially common for sales-related jobs, such as recruitment consultancy and particularly telesales, where verbal communication skills are paramount.

You may also expect a telephone interview if you are applying for jobs abroad – in which case calls may come in at all hours of the day or night!

1.4.3: How long do they last?

They vary in length from 20 minutes to 1 hour, with the average length being half an hour.

1.4.4: Advantages of telephone interviews

For the employer:

- They are time and cost-effective - most last about 20-25 minutes.
- They test your verbal communication skills and telephone technique.

For you:

- You can refer (quickly!) to your application form; take notes – even hold on to your friend or companion for moral support.
- You don't need to dress up or smarten up.
- You don't need to spend time traveling to interview or wonder if the employer will pay your expenses.

Disadvantages of telephone interviews (for you)

- You can't see the interviewer to judge their response.
- Tension – you never know when an employer might call to interview you.
- They can seem to go very quickly, without giving you much time to think about your answers - so be well prepared!

1.4.5: The advertisement may ask you to phone the company.

This gives you total control over the time and place of the interview – At the time arranged, make sure you are in a quiet location and that you will not be disturbed during the call.

Or they may phone you in response to your CV/application form

You will normally be advised when the telephone call will be made so always be prepared for this:

- Keep your mobile with you, charged, topped up and switched on at the appropriate time! Make sure that the reception is OK.
- If you have given a landline number, and share a house with other students/graduates or live in the family home, try and prepare other people in the house for these calls and prevent replies such as: “Lo. Uh? Who? Oh, right – OI! DAVE! IT’S FOR YOU!”
- Try and take the phone to as quiet and private a location as possible.
- If the call does come unexpectedly and you are not prepared say "Thank you for calling, do you mind waiting for a minute while I close the door/turn off the radio/take the phone to a quieter room?" This will give you a little time to compose yourself.
- If it really is a bad time, offer to call back, fix a time and stick to it.
- Check your answer phone message: is it one that you would want a prospective employer to hear? Does it give a professional impression? If not, change it – just in case you do miss a call for any reason.

1.4.6: More Tips for Phone Interviews.

- Keep a copy of your application and information on the company handy, plus a pen and notepad to take notes. Have your laptop turned on if your application is saved on it.
- Before the call, make a list of your USP's (unique selling points): the things that make you better in some ways than most of the other people who will be applying.
- Don't just read out your notes as this will sound overformal.
- It's useful to have a glass of water during a phone interview (but move the phone away from your mouth when you swallow ...). You will be doing a lot of talking and you don't want your mouth to dry up at a crucial moment!
- Smile when you dial! (And, more importantly, when you speak): it really does make a difference to your tone of voice.
- Although the interviewer can't see you, you may find it easier to come over in a "professional" manner if you are sitting at a desk or table rather than lounging in bed.
- In a face to face interview, you show that you are listening via signals such as nodding your head. Over the phone you have to show this by the occasional "OK", "uh-huh", "I see", "I understand", "yes" or similar interjections.
- Listen very carefully to the interviewer and try to answer with a lively tone of voice. Speak clearly and not too fast.
- Reflect back what the speaker is saying in other words. This shows you're listening carefully and checks you understand. It is often the most useful way of giving positive feedback to someone: "I hear what you're saying and take it seriously". You can't keep saying "uh-huh" or "yes" for too long without it sounding false.
- Immediately after the interview, write down the questions you were asked and any ways in which you could have improved your responses.

1.4.7: Here are some questions that you can be asked at telephone interviews.

- 1) How you choose your university degree?
- 2) Why do you want to work for our organisation?
- 3) Why do you want to work in the job you have applied for?
- 4) What qualities are important to work in the role you are applying for?
- 5) What evidence can you give to show you possess these qualities?
- 6) What do you do for a living?
- 7) Are you willing to be mobile on the job?
- 8) Tell me a time you have demonstrated teamwork/communication.
- 9) Tell me about a time when you have had to cope with pressure.
- 10) Tell me about a challenge you have faced. How did you conduct the challenge?
What were the advantages and disadvantages of your method? The steps you took?
The results?
- 11) Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer?
- 12) When have you used your initiative to achieve a goal?
- 13) Can you mention a time when you have used your leadership skills?
- 14) When have you set yourself a goal? What challenges did you face?
- 15) Describe a time when you have exceeded a customer's expectations.
- 16) Describe when you had to motivate others?
- 17) What do you think is important when communicating with people?
- 18) What skills do you have to offer to a team?
- 19) What is your greatest strength?
- 20) Why shouldn't we hire you?
- 21) Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?
- 22) What do you think your job would involve doing?
- 23) Commercial awareness – what has been in news recently that would affect our organisation?
- 24) Do you have any questions for us?

Will I be given any tests?

Perhaps – tests can quite easily be administered over the phone. The interviewer may read out a series of statements and you will be asked to say if you agree or disagree. Sometimes this can be done by pressing the telephone keys.

The tests involved are more likely to be personality-type questions than reasoning tests. For example, you may be asked to rate the extent to which you felt the following activities reflect your personal style, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot):

- Meeting new people.
- Setting yourself targets to achieve.
- Working on your own.
- Repairing mechanical equipment. Etc.

1.4.8: SKYPE /ZOOM INTERVIEWS.

Conducting interviews via Skype offers employers all the advantages of a telephone interview in terms of cost-effectiveness with the bonus of being able to see the candidate. While they are still not as widely used as telephone interviews, they are particularly helpful for international recruitment when interviewing the candidate in another country. Universities often use them when interviewing candidates for postgraduate study and research.

As the candidate, you are likely to find that face-to-face contact with the interviewer helps to make the interview a slightly less unnatural experience. The disadvantage is that you will have to dress as smartly as you would for a real-life interview (at least from the waist up!) and it won't be quite as easy to refer to your notes or application form during the interview.

A Skype interview will be more like a real-life interview than a telephone interview, but the following points are worth keeping in mind:

- When preparing for the interview, choose your location carefully.
- Use a private room (not a study area) and put a “Do Not Disturb – Interview in Progress” sign on the door.

- Sitting at a desk or table, rather than in an armchair or on the bed, will help you feel more professional as you will be sitting up straight.
- Make sure that the interviewer is not going to be distracted by anything in the background – ragged posters, lamps, unmade bed, piles of unwashed laundry, etc.
- If you live on the ground floor it may be a good idea to pull down the blinds to avoid any of your so-called friends pulling faces through the window, but make sure that the lighting is bright enough for the interviewer to see you clearly.
- Ask a friend to Skype you before the interview to check that everything is working, that the background is clear and that any notes are out of view of the camera.
- Turn off any other programs running on your computer – you don't want to be distracted by an email suddenly popping up while you are speaking.
- Dress smartly as you would for a normal interview as this will make you feel more confident.
- Look at the camera so it looks like you are talking directly to the employer and smile! Make sure the webcam aligns on your face and shoulders. Sit up straight with a good posture rather than bending.
- Speak clearly into the microphone. Avoid speaking at the same time as other people as this can make it difficult to hear what is being said on Skype, so you must allow people to finish speaking to avoid missing information.
- Consider turning off your own picture in the top right corner as this can be distracting.
- Make sure that you have a phone number and/or email for your interviewer, so that you can contact them in the case of any technical problems.

1.4.9: VIDEO INTERVIEWS.

The use of recorded video interviews is increasing. These started with technology companies, but have now spread to mainstream employers. These differ from Skype interviews in that all candidates are usually asked the same questions which can be tailored to the specific job the employer is recruiting for. Recruiters have the opportunity to replay, review, and rate the interviews online, so they can compare candidates without having to remember who said what.

1.4.10: HOW TO GET PREPARED. MANY OF THE TIPS FOR SKYPE INTERVIEWS ABOVE ALSO APPLY,

- Ask for help (available online or by phone) if you don't know how the webcam works or if you have questions.
- Follow the directions carefully.
- Dress just like you would for a face to face interview.
- Practice - record yourself to see how you appear on camera.
- Be aware of your surroundings and the lighting.
- Look at the camera, not down at the desk or table.
- A video interview is a "real" interview, just like when you interview in an office. Given that the interview can be scored and reviewed, it can be even more important than a typical first round phone interview.

1.4.11: TIPS FROM CANDIDATES WHO HAVE HAD TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

- Shut yourself away in a quiet place. Have a glass of water by the phone.
- Be positive and articulate. Initial presentation is vital: you phoning them means first impressions really count. It's actually good fun though, provided you're prepared
- Supply good examples. Talk slowly!
- Relax, speak confidently (Accenture)
- Interviewer was very nice and didn't mind if you took a few minutes to think. Their call Centre is very noisy so you have to speak quite loud for them to hear you properly (HP)

- The structure of the interview was explained well and the interviewer seemed friendly.
- Read your application and give strong examples. They seemed friendly: treat it as a chat and relax as they are quite people-focused and pride themselves on their open approach.
- Calm down and be prepared. Think of examples when you demonstrated the competencies that they are looking for.
- Prior to the telephone interview there were online numerical and verbal tests. Take your time. Keep your answers to a reasonable length. Each competency question was covering a key area. Make sure you read through your application answers beforehand.
- When on the phone, make sure you have a copy of your application form in front of you - and notes!
- Prior to the telephone interview there were verbal tests. Make sure you read through your application answers beforehand. Interview is entirely on soft skills. No need to worry about time limit, you'll even be asked if you wish to add to an earlier statement. Prepare for interviews by researching the company (including recent press releases) and re-reading your original application.
- Just be yourself, try to relax and don't panic when they fire the questions at you. The questions seem to be based on your application and your knowledge. They are checking if you fit in with their business. Asked a lot of questions, and they kept asking similar questions again to check you were telling the truth. They appeared to be checking what you had written on your application form and CV, and were trying to ensure it was true.
- It was a telephone based interview consists of a role play and competency questions. Just prepare answers for all the common questions and you should ace the interview. The telephone interview can be tricky and the interviewer will be difficult during the role, so just stay calm and think practically.

1.4.12: TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF LIFE.

1. **Take some classes.** "Today's emphasis on lifelong learning means you need to show you are someone who wants to learn new things," "Sport or exercise can get you fit; practical skills will gain you confidence, languages can widen your world and academic subjects will boost your CV. It can give you a whole new outlook."
2. **Think about the future.** "Some industries, like energy, healthcare and many others are likely to have huge demands for jobs in future," "Do your research to find out where these gaps will be and if it is an industry that you would be interested in."
3. **Create your own job.** Consider starting your own business, either consulting for your current field, or doing something entirely new.
4. **Don't give up.** It may take a while, but the perfect job for you is out there.
"Remember you are not alone," "Many people have been where you are now, and, if you talked to them, they would urge you not to stop. Be clear on what you want, believe in yourself and keep going."

1.5: 100 POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PERSONAL QUESTIONS.

- 1) Tell us about yourself.
- 2) What are your strengths?
- 3) What are your weaknesses?
- 4) Why do you want this job?
- 5) Where would you like to be in your career five years from now?
- 6) What's your ideal company?
- 7) What attracted you to this company?
- 8) Why should we hire you?
- 9) What did you like least about your last job?

- 10) When were you most satisfied in your job?
- 11) What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- 12) What were the responsibilities of your last position?
- 13) Why are you leaving your present job?
- 14) What do you know about this industry?
- 15) What do you know about our company?
- 16) Are you willing to relocate?
- 17) Do you have any questions for me?

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- 18) What was the last project you headed up, and what was its outcome?
- 19) Give me an example of a time that you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty at work.
- 20) Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
- 21) Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? How did you handle it?
- 22) Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. How did you handle it?
- 23) What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
- 24) What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
- 25) If I were your supervisor and asked you to do something that you disagreed with, what would you do?
- 26) What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
- 27) Give me an example of a time you did something wrong. How did you handle it?
- 28) What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?
- 29) Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.
- 30) If you were at a business lunch and you ordered a rare steak and they brought it to you well done, what would you do?

- 31) If you found out your company was doing something against the law, like fraud, what would you do?
- 32) What assignment was too difficult for you, and how did you resolve the issue?
- 33) What's the most difficult decision you've made in the last two years and how did you come to that decision?
- 34) Describe how you would handle a situation if you were required to finish multiple tasks by the end of the day, and there was no conceivable way that you could finish them.

SALARY QUESTIONS:

- 35) What salary are you seeking?
- 36) What's your salary history?
- 37) If I were to give you this salary you requested but let you write your job description for the next year, what would it say?

CAREER DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS:

- 38) What are you looking for in terms of career development?
- 39) How do you want to improve yourself in the next year?
- 40) What kind of goals would you have in mind if you got this job?
- 41) If I were to ask your last supervisor to provide you additional training or exposure, what would she suggest?

GETTING STARTED QUESTIONS:

- 42) How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?
- 43) How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?
- 44) What do you see yourself doing within the first 30 days of this job?
- 45) If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?

MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU:

- 46) How would you describe your work style?
- 47) What would be your ideal working environment?
- 48) What do you look for in terms of culture -- structured or entrepreneurial?
- 49) Give examples of ideas you've had or implemented.
- 50) What techniques and tools do you use to keep yourself organized?
- 51) If you had to choose one, would you consider yourself a big-picture person or a detail-oriented person?
- 52) Tell me about your proudest achievement.
- 53) Who was your favorite manager and why?
- 54) What do you think of your previous boss?
- 55) Was there a person in your career who really made a difference?
- 56) What kind of personality do you work best with and why?
- 57) What are you most proud of?
- 58) What do you like to do?
- 59) What are your lifelong dreams?
- 60) What do you ultimately want to become?
- 61) What is your personal mission statement?
- 62) What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?
- 63) What negative thing would your last boss say about you?
- 64) What three character traits would your friends use to describe you?
- 65) What are three positive character traits you don't have?
- 66) If you were interviewing someone for this position, what traits would you look for?
- 67) List five words that describe your character.
- 68) Who has impacted you most in your career and how?
- 69) What is your greatest fear?
- 70) What is your biggest regret and why?
- 71) What's the most important thing you learned in school?
- 72) Why did you choose your major?

- 73) What will you miss about your present/last job?
- 74) What is your greatest achievement outside of work?
- 75) What are the qualities of a good leader? A bad leader?
- 76) Do you think a leader should be feared or liked?
- 77) How do you feel about taking no for an answer?
- 78) How would you feel about working for someone who knows less than you?
- 79) How do you think I rate as an interviewer?
- 80) Tell me one thing about yourself you wouldn't want me to know.
- 81) Tell me the difference between good and exceptional.
- 82) What kind of car do you drive?
- 83) There's no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?
- 84) What's the last book you read?
- 85) What magazines do you subscribe to?
- 86) What's the best movie you've seen in the last year?
- 87) What would you do if you won the lottery?
- 88) Who are your heroes?
- 89) What do you like to do for fun?
- 90) What do you do in your spare time?
- 91) What is your favorite memory from childhood?

BRAINTEASERS:

- 92) How many times do a clock's hands overlap in a day?
- 93) How would you weigh a plane without scales?
- 94) Tell me 10 ways to use a pencil other than writing.
- 95) Sell me this pencil.
- 96) If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?
- 97) Why is there fuzz on a tennis ball?
- 98) If you could choose one superhero power, what would it be and why?

- 99) If you could get rid of any one of the US states, which one would you get rid of and why?
- 100) With your eyes closed, tell me step-by-step how to tie my shoes.

7.6: HOW TO ANSWER THE 31 MOST COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

Wouldn't it be great if you knew exactly what a hiring manager would be asking you in your next interview?

While we unfortunately can't read minds, I'll give you the next best thing: a list of the 31 most commonly asked interview questions (and, of course, some expert advice on how to answer them).

While we don't recommend having a canned response for every question (in fact, please don't), we do recommend spending some time getting comfortable with what you might be asked, what hiring managers are really looking for in your responses, and what it takes to show that you're the right man or woman for the job.

Consider this your interview study guide.

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?

This question seems simple, so many people fail to prepare for it, but it's crucial. Here's the deal: Don't give your complete employment (or personal) history. Instead give a pitch—one that's concise and compelling and that shows exactly why you're the right fit for the job. Start off with the 2-3 specific accomplishments or experiences that you most want the interviewer to know about, and then wrap up talking about how that prior experience has positioned you for this specific role.

2. How did you hear about the position?

Another seemingly mild question, this is actually a perfect opportunity to stand out and show your passion for and connection to the company.

For example, if you found out about the engagement through a friend or professional contact, name drop that person, and then share why you were so excited about it. If you discovered the company through an event or article, share that. Even if you found the listing through a random job board, share what, specifically, caught your eye about the role.

3. What do you know about the company?

Any candidate can read and rehearse the company's "About" page. So, when interviewers ask this, they aren't necessarily trying to gauge whether you understand the vision and mission—they want to know whether you care about it. Start with one line that shows you understand the company's goals, using a couple key words and phrases from the website, but then go on to make it personal. Say, "I'm personally drawn to this mission because..." or "I really believe in this approach because..." and share a personal example or two.

4. Why do you want this job?

Again, companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so you should have a great answer about why you want the position. (And if you don't? You probably should apply elsewhere.) First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you (e.g., "I love customer support because I love the constant human interaction and the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem"), then share why you love the company (e.g., "I've always been passionate about education, and I think you guys are doing great things, so I want to be a part of it").

5. Why should we hire you?

This question seems forward (not to mention intimidating!), but if you're asked it, you're in luck: There's no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you can not only do the work, you can deliver great results; that you'll really fit in with the team and culture; and that you'd be a better hire than any of the other candidates.

6. What are your greatest professional strengths?

When answering this question, interview coach Pamela Skillings recommends being accurate (share your true strengths, not those you think the interviewer wants to hear); relevant (choose your strengths that are most targeted to this particular position); and specific (for example, instead of “people skills,” choose “persuasive communication” or “relationship building”). Then, follow up with an example of how you've demonstrated these traits in a professional setting.

7. What do you consider to be your weaknesses?

What your interviewer is really trying to do with this question—beyond identifying any major red flags—is to gauge your self-awareness and honesty. So, “I can't meet a deadline to save my life” is not an option—but neither is “Nothing! I'm perfect!” Strike a balance by thinking of something that you struggle with but that you're working to improve. For example, maybe you've never been strong at public speaking, but you've recently volunteered to run meetings to help you be more comfortable when addressing a crowd.

8. What is your greatest professional achievement?

Nothing says “hire me” better than a track record of achieving amazing results in past jobs, so don't be shy when answering this question! Set up the situation and the task that you were required to complete to provide the interviewer with background context (e.g., “In my last job as a junior analyst, it was my role to manage the invoicing process”), but spend the bulk of your time describing what you actually did (the action) and what you achieved (the result). For example, “In one month, I streamlined the process, which saved my group 10 man-hours each month and reduced errors on invoices by 25%.”

9. Tell me about a challenge or conflict you've faced at work and how you dealt with it.

In asking this question, “your interviewer wants to get a sense of how you will respond to conflict. Anyone can seem nice and pleasant in a job interview, but what will happen if you’re hired and Gladys in Compliance starts getting in your face?” Be sure to focus on how you handled the situation professionally and productively and ideally closing with a happy ending, like how you came to a resolution or compromise.

10. Where do you see yourself in five years?

If asked this question, be honest and specific about your future goals, but consider this: A hiring manager wants to know

- a. if you've set realistic expectations for your career,
- b. If you have ambition (this interview isn't the first time you're considering the question), and
- c. If the position aligns with your goals and growth.

Your best bet is to think realistically about where this position could take you and answer along those lines. And if the position isn’t necessarily a one-way ticket to your aspirations? It’s OK to say that you’re not quite sure what the future holds, but that you see this experience playing an important role in helping you make that decision.

11. What's your dream job?

Along similar lines, the interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is really in line with your ultimate career goals. A better bet is to talk about your goals and ambitions—and why this job will get you closer to them.

12. What other companies are you interviewing with?

Companies ask this for a number of reasons, from wanting to see what the competition is for you to sniffing out whether you're serious about the industry. "Often the best approach is to mention that you are exploring a number of other similar options in the company's industry," "It can be helpful to mention that a common characteristic of all the jobs you are applying to is the opportunity to apply some critical abilities and skills that you possess. For example, you might say 'I am applying for several positions with IT consulting firms where I can analyze client needs and translate them to development teams in order to find solutions to technology problems.'"

13. Why are you leaving your current job?

This is a tough question, but one you can be sure you'll be asked. Definitely keep things positive—you have nothing to gain by being negative about your past employers. Instead, frame things in a way that shows that you're eager to take on new opportunities and that the role you're interviewing for is a better fit for you than your current or last position. For example, "I'd really love to be part of product development from beginning to end, and I know I'd have that opportunity here." And if you were let go? Keep it simple: "Unfortunately, I was let go," is a totally OK answer.

14. Why were you fired?

OK, if you get the admittedly much tougher follow-up question as to why you were let go (and the truth isn't exactly pretty), your best bet is to be honest (the job-seeking world is small, after all). But it doesn't have to be a deal-breaker. Share how you've grown and how you approach your job and life now as a result. If you can position the learning experience as an advantage for this next job, even better.

15. What are you looking for in a new position?

Hint: Ideally the same things that this position has to offer. Be specific.

16. What type of work environment do you prefer?

Hint: Ideally one that's similar to the environment of the company you're applying to. Be specific.

17. What's your management style?

The best managers are strong but flexible, and that's exactly what you want to show off in your answer. (Think something like, “While every situation and every team member requires a bit of a different strategy, I tend to approach my employee relationships as a coach...”.) Then, share a couple of your best managerial moments, like when you grew your team from 5 to 15 or coached an underperforming employee to become the company's top salesperson.

18. What's a time you exercised leadership?

Depending on what's more important for the role, you'll want to choose an example that showcases your project management skills (spearheading a project from end to end, juggling multiple moving parts) or one that shows your ability to confidently and effectively rally a team. And remember: “The best stories include enough detail to be believable and memorable,” “Show how you were a leader in this situation and how it represents your overall leadership experience and potential.”

19. What's a time you disagreed with a decision that was made at work?

Everyone disagrees with the boss from time to time, but in asking this question, hiring managers want to know that you can do so in a productive, professional way. “You don’t want to tell the story about the time when you disagreed but your boss was being a jerk and you just gave in to keep the peace.

And you don't want to tell the one where you realized you were wrong," says Peggy McKee of Career Confidential. "Tell the one where your actions made a positive difference on the outcome of the situation, whether it was a work-related outcome or a more effective and productive working relationship."

20. How would your boss and co-workers describe you?

First of all, be honest (remember, if you get this job, the hiring manager will be calling your former bosses and co-workers!). Then, try to pull out strengths and traits you haven't discussed in other aspects of the interview, such as your strong work ethic or your willingness to pitch in on other projects when needed.

21. Why was there a gap in your employment?

If you were unemployed for a period of time, be direct and to the point about what you've been up to (and hopefully, impressive volunteer and other mind-enriching activities, like blogging or taking classes). Then, steer the conversation toward how you will do the job and contribute to the organization: "I decided to take a break at the time, but today I'm ready to contribute to this organization in the following ways....."

22. Can you explain why you changed career paths?

Don't be thrown off by this question—just take a deep breathe and explain to the hiring manager why you've made the career decisions you have. More importantly, give a few examples of how your past experience is transferrable to the new role. This doesn't have to be a direct connection; in fact, it's often more impressive when a candidate can make seemingly irrelevant experience seem very relevant to the role.

23. How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?

"Choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situation head-on in a productive, positive manner and let nothing stop you from accomplishing your goals,"

A great approach is to talk through your go-to stress-reduction tactics (making the world's greatest to-do list, stopping to take 10 deep breaths), and then share an example of a stressful situation you navigated with ease.

24. What would your first 30, 60, or 90 days look like in this role?

Start by explaining what you'd need to do to get started up. What information would you need? What parts of the company would you need to familiarize yourself with? What other employees would you want to sit down with? Next, choose a couple of areas where you think you can make meaningful contributions right away. (e.g., “I think a great starter project would be diving into your email marketing campaigns and setting up a tracking system for them.”) Sure, if you get the job, you (or your new employer) might decide there's a better starting place, but having an answer prepared will show the interviewer where you can add immediate impact—and that you're excited to get started.

25. What are your salary requirements?

The #1 rule of answering this question is doing your research on what you should be paid. You'll likely come up with a range, and we recommend stating the highest number in that range that applies, based on your experience, education, and skills. Then, make sure the hiring manager knows that you're flexible. You're communicating that you know your skills are valuable, but that you want the job and are willing to negotiate.

26. What do you like to do outside of work?

Interviewers ask personal questions in an interview to “see if candidates will fit in with the culture [and] give them the opportunity to open up and display their personality, too,” “In other words, if someone asks about your hobbies outside of work, it's totally OK to open up and share what really makes you tick. (Do keep it semi-professional, though: Saying you like to have a few beers at the local hot spot on Saturday night is fine.

Telling them that Monday is usually a rough day for you because you're always hangover is not.)”

27. If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?

Seemingly random personality-test type questions like these come up in interviews generally because hiring managers want to see how you can think on your feet. There's no wrong answer here, but you'll immediately gain bonus points if your answer helps you share your strengths or personality or connect with the hiring manager. Pro tip: Come up with a stalling tactic to buy yourself some thinking time, such as saying, “Now, that is a great question. I think I would have to say...”

28. How many tennis balls can you fit into a limousine? 1,000? 10,000? 100,000? Seriously?

Well, seriously, you might get asked brainteaser questions like these, especially in quantitative jobs. But remember that the interviewer doesn't necessarily want an exact number—he wants to make sure that you understand what's being asked of you, and that you can set into motion a systematic and logical way to respond. So, just take a deep breath, and start thinking through the math. (Yes, it's OK to ask for a pen and paper!)

29. Are you planning on having children?

Questions about your family status, gender (“How would you handle managing a team of all men?”), nationality (“Where were you born?”), religion, or age, still get asked (and frequently). Of course, not always with ill intent—the interviewer might just be trying to make conversation—but you should definitely tie any questions about your personal life (or anything else you think might be inappropriate) back to the job at hand. For this question, think: “You know, I'm not quite there yet. But I am very interested in the career paths at your company. Can you tell me more about that?”

30. What do you think we could do better or differently?

This is a common one at startups. Hiring managers want to know that you not only have some background on the company, but that you're able to think critically about it and come to the table with new ideas. So, come with new ideas! What new features would you love to see? How could the company increase conversions? How could customer service be improved? You don't need to have the company's four-year strategy figured out, but do share your thoughts, and more importantly, show how your interests and expertise would lend themselves to the job.

31. Do you have any questions for us?

You probably already know that an interview isn't just a chance for a hiring manager to grill you—it's your opportunity to sniff out whether a job is the right fit for you. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team?

You'll cover a lot of this in the actual interview, so have a few less-common questions ready to go. We especially like questions targeted to the interviewer ("What's your favorite part about working here?") or the company's growth ("What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?")

1.7: 51 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD BE ASKING.

You probably already know that an interview isn't just a chance for a hiring manager to grill you—it's your opportunity to sniff out whether a job is the right fit for you. Which means: It's important to go in with some questions. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team? Etc.

To get you thinking, I've put together a list of key questions to ask in your interview. We definitely don't suggest asking all of them rapid-fire—

some of this stuff will certainly be covered during the course of your discussion, and you can weave in other questions as you go.

But when the inevitable, "So, do you have any questions for us?" part of the interview comes? Use this list to make sure you've covered all your bases.

THE JOB

First, make sure you have a handle on exactly what the day-to-day responsibilities of the job will be—both now and in the future.

1. What does a typical day look like?
2. What are the most immediate projects that need to be addressed?
3. Can you show me examples of projects I'd be working on?
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?
6. What types of skills is the team missing that you're looking to fill with a new hire?
7. What are the biggest challenges that someone in this position would face?
8. What sort of budget would I be working with?
9. Is this a new role that has been created?
10. Do you expect the main responsibilities for this position to change in the next six months to a year?

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT;

Think of each new job not just as a job, but as the next step on your path to career success. Will this position help you get there?

11. How will I be trained?
12. What training programs are available to your employees?
13. Are there opportunities for advancement or professional development?
14. Would I be able to represent the company at industry conferences?
15. Where is the last person who held this job moving on to?

16. Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to?

YOUR PERFORMANCE;

Make sure you're setting yourself up for success by learning up front the goals of the position and how your work will be evaluated.

17. What are the most important things you'd like to see someone accomplish in the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job?

18. What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?

19. What is the performance review process like here? How often would I be formally reviewed?

20. What metrics or goals will my performance be evaluated against?

INTERVIEWER;

Asking questions of the interviewer shows that you're interested in him or her as a person—and that's a great way to build rapport.

21. How long have you been with the company?

22. Has your role changed since you've been here?

23. What did you do before this?

24. Why did you come to this company?

25. What's your favorite part about working here?

THE COMPANY;

Because you're not just working for one boss or one department, you're working for the company as a whole.

26. I've read about the company's founding, but can you tell me more about __?

27. Where do you see this company in the next few years?

28. What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?
29. What are the current goals that the company is focused on, and how does this team work to support hitting those goals?
30. What gets you most excited about the company's future?

THE TEAM;

The people you work with day in and day out can really make or break your work life. Ask some questions to uncover whether it's the right team for you.

31. Can you tell me about the team I'll be working with?
32. Who will I work with most closely?
33. Who will I report to directly?
34. Can you tell me about my direct reports? What are their strengths and the team's biggest challenges?
35. Do you expect to hire more people in this department in the next six months?
36. Which other departments work most closely with this one?
37. What are the common career paths in this department?

THE CULTURE;

Is the office buttoned-up conservative or change oriented kind of place? Learn the fine, but oh-so-important aspects of company culture.

38. What is the company and team culture like?
39. How would you describe the work environment here—is the work typically collaborative or more independent?
40. Can you tell me about the last team event you did together?
41. Is there a formal mission statement or company values? (Note: Make sure this isn't Google-able!)
42. What's your favorite office tradition?

- 43. What do you and the teams usually do for lunch?
- 44. Does anyone on the team hang out outside the office?
- 45. Do you ever do joint events with other companies or departments?
- 46. What's different about working here than anywhere else you've worked?
- 47. How has the company changed since you joined?

NEXT STEPS;

Before you leave, make sure the interviewer has all of the information he or she needs and that you're clear on the next steps by asking these questions.

- 48. Is there anything that concerns you about my background being a fit for this role?
- 49. What are the next steps in the interview process?
- 50. Is there anything else I can provide you with that would be helpful?
- 51. Can I answer any final questions for you?