
Top 10 questions (general) and answers for any Job Interview: Explained

1. Tell me about yourself / Walk me through your resume and your background.

This is the very popular interview-opener. One way to do this in a focused way is to use the three-part model

Who You Are:

Why you're Qualified:

Why you're here

Example Answer:

"I've been working in marketing for the last two years since graduating from Cornell and I love it.

I'm currently working as a marketing coordinator at a fashion e-commerce startup.

I'm responsible for our social media marketing presence and also work closely with our marketing manager on running our marketing events, which is a lot of fun.

Previously, I spent a year as an assistant in the Global Marketing team at American Express.

That was a great experience. I supported two VPs in the group, managed their calendars, handled expense reports, and made sure everything in the office ran smoothly.

I loved how every day was a bit different and I got to work with great people who had a lot to teach me about marketing.

I also volunteered to work on some creative projects outside of my role because I realized how much I loved the creative side of marketing and wanted to get some experience.

I helped coordinate a few big client marketing events and worked on copy for a few email newsletter campaigns.

Unfortunately, due to a reorganization of the team, my position was eliminated and that's when I was recruited for my current position.

Although I like my job, at this stage of my career, I realized I need to find a company where I see a long-term career path and I think this position would be a great fit with my skills and goals."

2. Why are you interested in this position?

The interviewer wants to see that you are genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity and that you took the initiative to learn about the company and the opportunity offered.

Example Answer:

"I have always admired your company's products and I was really impressed with the recent Forbes interview with your CEO and his description of the collaborative company culture. The job description also emphasizes communication skills and leadership -- two of my greatest strengths. I really feel that it's a role and organization in which I could excel."

3. Describe your current or most recent job role. / Describe your key accomplishments in your last role.

Your current or most recent role is almost always the most interesting to the interviewer. Be prepared to describe your top achievements and responsibilities in this job. As always, you should focus on the areas most relevant to the work that you would be doing if hired.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- 1) Don't just rattle off your job description. Focus on your accomplishments and how you went above the normal call of duty.
- 2) Stress any impressive statistics, numbers, or details.
- 3) Don't try to describe absolutely everything that you do. Focus on the highlights that this particular interviewer will care about.
- 4) Keep your audience in mind. Define any unfamiliar terms and skip or explain details that could be confusing.

Example Answer:

"I have been the marketing manager for Smith, Jones, & Smith law firm for the last two years, responsible for managing all of the firm's marketing activities. This includes brochures and RFPs, public relations, management of the firm's website and social media accounts, and advertising and sponsorships.

I have two direct reports -- a graphic designer and a junior marketing associate. I wear a lot of hats and I love the fast pace of the job and the ability to be innovative. Most recently, I took the lead in rolling out a new referral program to existing clients -- it has been a huge success and led to dozens of leads within just the first two months of the program."

4. Why are you looking for a new opportunity now?/ Why do you need to find a new position now?

This question (or a close variation) will come up in every job interview. Your interviewer wants to know why you are pursuing this opportunity. Your answer should address:

1) **If you are not currently employed, why did you leave your last position?** Your interviewer will be looking for any red flags that you were let go as a result of poor performance or attitude problems.

In the current job market, layoffs are very common, so there's no reason to feel embarrassed about being laid off. If you can emphasize that the layoff was a budget issue (perhaps one that affected an entire group or class of employee), this can reinforce the fact that it was not linked to your performance.

Avoid displaying any bitterness or negativity toward your previous employer. If you have been between jobs for a long period of time, describe the proactive steps you have been taking to improve your skills -- training, volunteer work, or consulting projects.

2) **If you are currently employed, why are you interested in leaving your position?** Your response should state your positive reasons for seeking a new role and emphasize why you feel you are ready for new challenges that aren't available in your current position.

Make it clear that you have not made the decision lightly. Employers want to know you are a committed and reliable employee.

Avoid displaying any bitterness or negativity toward your current employer. Be diplomatic and accentuate the positive experiences and learning gained.

Example Answer (Employed):

"Well, I have learned a lot at XYZ Inc. over the last two years and I'm not in a rush to leave. However, I do feel that I am ready to take on the challenge of managing a larger team with a more global scope of responsibility. I'm not sure if that opportunity exists at XYZ right now and I was very excited when I heard about this position -- I think it would be a great fit given my experience and my goals."

Example Answer (Laid Off or Let Go):

"I learned a lot at Company X and earned excellent performance evaluations over my 3.5 years there. Unfortunately, there was a management change recently and a major reversal in direction that ultimately led to my position being terminated. It was not related to performance and I stand by my track record of success at both Company X and Prior Company Y and would be happy to provide references who can speak about my performance record."

5. What are your strengths?/ What are the top 3 strengths that you would bring to this role?

Embrace this question as an opportunity to talk about your best qualities. To prepare your answer, write down a list of your top strengths and decide which 3 are most relevant for the position at hand. Don't wimp out with general statements that you're a "hard worker" or "people person." Be specific and prepare an example to demonstrate each strength.

Example Answer:

Instead of saying that you're a hard worker, say:

"One of my strengths is my strong work ethic. When I commit to a deadline, I do whatever it takes to deliver. Last week, we had a report due and got some numbers back late from our team in Singapore. I pulled an all-nighter to finish the spreadsheet because I knew that the client needed to receive the report on time."

6. What are your weaknesses? / What are 3 of your greatest weaknesses?

Everybody dreads the "weakness" question and with good reason. There is no perfect answer to this question and it's easy to screw it up. However, with some preparation and practice, you can handle it gracefully and improve your odds of getting hired.

1) **Don't try to play strength off as a weakness.** Many experts recommend that you claim a bogus weakness like "I care too much" or "I work too hard." Trust me, interviewers see right through this ploy. In fact, a fake weakness may raise concerns that you have something to hide or are so deluded you think you're perfect.

2) **Don't choose a weakness that could limit your ability to do the job well.** If the job calls for someone detail-oriented, don't share that your weakness is being disorganized. If it's a management position, don't tell the interviewer you can't delegate. Pick a weakness that is real, but benign.

3) **Don't be defensive or dwell on the negative.** You have to answer this question, but your best bet is to do it quickly and then move on to more positive topics. Some applicants find themselves over explaining or making excuses at length because they feel uncomfortable. This just drags out the topic and leaves less time for talking about your strengths and accomplishments. Name your weakness, provide a little bit of detail, and then quickly move on to how you are addressing it.

4) **Show that you are aware of the weakness and striving to improve.** Choose a weakness you are already working on improving. Prepare to describe how you are addressing the weakness and make it clear that it's a non-issue for the position. This allows you to show that you are driven to improve yourself and helps you conclude your answer to the question in a positive way.

Example Answer:

"Sometimes I can be a bit too honest when I provide feedback to coworkers. My personality is naturally very straightforward and to the point, and most of my colleagues really value that, but I have learned that there are times on the job when more diplomacy is required. I took a training class on conflict management and it really opened my eyes to the need to communicate differently with different people. So now I am much better at providing constructive feedback, even if it doesn't always come naturally."

7. Why do you want to work for us? / What do you know about our company and why do you want to work here?

This is a variation on, "Why are you interested in this position?" In this variation, the emphasis is more on the company than the job, but you should talk about the appeal of both in your response. Research is key to answering this question effectively. Before every interview, research the company and the job description so you can speak intelligently about why it appeals to you.

Example Answer:

"I have always admired your company's products and I was really impressed with the recent Forbes interview with your CEO and his description of the collaborative company culture. The job description also emphasizes communication skills and leadership -- two of my greatest strengths. I really feel that it's a role and organization in which I could excel."

8. Where do you see yourself in five years? / What are your long term career goals?

This question is about your long-term career goals. Realistically, it's hard for any of us to predict exactly what we will be doing in five years (let alone 10 or 15, which some interviewers will ask about).

What the employer really wants to know is that you have goals and that the position at hand is a good fit for your long-term planning.

Hiring managers want to confirm you'll stick around if they hire you and that you envision a career path with the company. The key here is to stress your interest in a long relationship with the company. This is particularly important if you have any job hopping or short job tenures (less than a year) on your resume.

Example Answer:

"My goal right now is to find a position at a company where I can continue to grow and take on new challenges over time. Ultimately, I'd like to take on more management responsibilities and get involved in product strategy. But most importantly, I want to work for an organization where I can build a career."

9. Why are you the best candidate for this job?/ What makes you qualified for this position?/ Sell me on why I should hire you over so many other candidates.

Here's your chance to wow them with your highlight reel.

What are the top three or four best reasons to hire you? What makes you stand out from the competition?

This is an opportunity to reiterate key strengths and/or describe your most memorable selling points. One approach is to mention any unique combination of skills and experience in your repertoire. For example, many candidates may have strong programming skills, but what if you combine those with team leadership experience others don't have? Sounds like a great recipe for most any position.

It's also very important to come across as confident and enthusiastic here. Make them believe in you -- your abilities and your commitment.

Example Answer:

"Honestly, I almost feel like the job description was written with me in mind. I have the 6 years of programming experience you're looking for, a track record of successful projects, and proven expertise in agile development processes. At the same time, I have developed my communication skills from working directly with senior managers, which means I am well prepared to work on high-profile, cross-department projects. I have the experience to start contributing from day one and I am truly excited about the prospect of getting started."

10. Do you have any questions for me?

You should prepare at least three questions to ask each interviewer.

During your first interview or two, the goals of asking questions are to 1) show your interest in excelling in the position and 2) learn more about the employer's needs to help you form responses to future questions.

At this point, it's not about you and what the employer can do for you. Refrain from asking questions about benefits, vacation time, promotion possibilities, etc. There will be plenty of time to get this information once there's an offer on the table and you have some leverage.

Example Questions:

What qualities do you think are most important for someone to excel in this position?

What do you like most about working for this company?

What are the most important priorities for the company/department right now?

What more can you tell me about a typical day on the job?

Review Yourself:

Category	Marks(5)
Answers the question well	
Conveys relevant qualifications	
Communicates enthusiasm	
Keeps answer concise	
Does not use fillers (UMS/UHS)	
Speaks clearly	
Steady eye contact	
Appropriate body language	
Appropriate attire	
No nervous gestures	

Upcoming videos for this interview series:

- Internship interview question
- Entry Level job interview questions
- Specific industry job interview question such as : Data analytics, Marketing, Technology etc.