Project management

1. Tell me about yourself.

A common question to open any type of interview, this statement is a chance for you to describe yourself and your story in your own words.

How to answer: There are several ways you can approach this question. One effective way is to start with the present, then go into your past and finish with your future. Describe what your role is and what you do. Then describe past experiences relevant to the role you are applying to. Finally, talk about what kind of work you are hoping to do next and why you are interested in the role you have applied to.

2. Can you tell us about the last project you worked on?

An interview might ask you about your last project to get a sense of what types of projects you are used to, what project management approaches you have used, the number of people on your team, and other details.

How to answer: Describe the important information about the project, like the overall goal, team size, and how you approached it. Speak candidly about what went well, and be sure to mention something you might have improved or that you learned. Having some metrics on hand to show the results of the project can be useful here.

3. Tell us about a time something went wrong in a project you were managing.

Setbacks are normal in managing projects. Hiring managers will want to know how you have dealt with them in the past to understand what you do when things do not go as per the plan.

How to answer: Since dealing with unforeseen challenges is a core part of project management, you will want to have a few examples to point to for your interview. You can also mention how you would implement change processes in your project.

Consider using the STAR method when asked for specific examples from your past. Here is how to put the method into action:

1. **Situation**: Start by describing the facts of the situation and why it happened—in this case, what had gone wrong.
2. **Task**: Go on to describe what task you were expected to do to solve the situation.
3. **Action**: Next, explain what you did and how you did it.
4. **Result**: Finish by sharing the outcome. Also, describe what you learned from the experience.

4. How do you prioritise tasks in a project?

Knowing what to prioritise is key to a project. There is a chance you will receive a question asking what you decide to prioritise and why. You might also be asked how you would juggle working on multiple projects at once.

How to answer: Tie your answer back to the interest of the project. Your answer might include some combination of deadlines, stakeholder needs, or determining tasks that make up a critical path. You can pull from some examples in the past or work your way through some hypothetical situations.

5. What was your most successful project?

This question can demonstrate to recruiters what you consider a success. Projects can be successful for meeting goals, deadlines, and budgets, but success can also mean being able to incorporate change.

How to answer: Take this opportunity to demonstrate your strengths. Modesty is a great asset, but do not undersell yourself. If your team pulled out a success, what did you do to keep the project on track or be more efficient? Think about the key elements you and the team took that led to success.

6. What is your experience with budget management?

Hiring managers might ask questions specifically about various skills like budget management. It is probably not a deal-breaker if you have no experience in most cases—they may just be trying to get a better sense of where you stand.

How to answer: Managing a budget includes cost estimation, deciding how to allocate funds, keeping a record of how money was spent, and planning for unexpected expenses. It is great if you can point to some examples from the past. If you do not have much experience, you can share what you know about budget planning or talk about budgeting experience you have in your personal life, if it is relevant. It is also good to show that you are able to pick up new skills.

7. How would you describe a project plan?

An interviewer can try to gauge your technical knowledge of basic project management concepts.

How to answer: Start by answering the question—describe what elements you know to be an important part of a project plan (like tasks, milestones, and team members). You can then go into an example of how you have typically implemented them in the past.

8. How would you create an environment of collaboration on your team?

Knowing how to motivate team members and make them feel like they can surface any questions and concerns is often central to a project's success.

How to answer: In this situation, it can be helpful to point to an example of when you were able to foster good communication in your team. Think about any processes or methods you rely on to get people feeling like they are working toward a common goal. This might include simple methods like

incorporating icebreakers in kickoff meetings or building communication structures within a project.

9. What tools do you use to plan a project?

Interviewers might want to get a sense of how familiar you are with different project management tools.

How to answer: In preparing for your interview, make a list of all the project management tools you have used before. These can include common project management tools like RACI charts, or collaboration software like Asana or Trello. Mention what you like about them and how they might be improved.

Do some research to see if you can find what kind of tools you will be expected to use. You can try to familiarise yourself with the tool or see if you have used any similar tools.

10. Describe your experience in this industry.

Familiarise yourself as much as you can with the company's industry before the interview. Learn what the top issues are by reading news articles and listening to podcasts, or reaching out to project managers in similar roles and asking about their experiences.

How to answer: Come prepared to talk about any experience you have had in the industry. Academic or professional background is great. If you do not have these, you can talk about what you have learned about the industry and why you want to work in it. Mention any skills or knowledge that are transferable as well.

11. One of your team members is asking for more time to complete a task. How would you handle this situation?

Situational questions like these are common in project management interviews. This is a chance for hiring managers to see your thought process and gauge how you think on your feet.

How to answer: As a project manager, you will be expected to help team members that have not been able to complete tasks on schedule in the interest of the project. You will want to know why the issue arose in the first place and apply an appropriate fix. You might talk about adding another member if the team is feeling overloaded, implementing time buffers in the planning phase for certain tasks, or negotiating with a stakeholder for more time or resources.

12. How would you deal with a difficult stakeholder?

This situational question aims to get clarity into your people skills, a crucial part of being a successful project manager.

How to answer: Communication and negotiation are likely to be an important part of your answer here. Knowing your team's needs, capacity and the project's available resources might also influence your answer.

What if I do not have any formal project management experience?
Project management is a field where workplace skills can make or break a candidate. If you are less familiar with the technical side of project management, emphasise workplace skills you have like leadership, communication, and organisation. Even if you are not a formal project manager yet, chances are good that you have done some elements of project management in the past. Go through your experiences and find moments when you have helped to improve, plan or execute new processes.
And do not worry—if you have landed an interview, your interviewer probably already knows that you do not have formal experience but sees potential in you. Convey your enthusiasm for the job and willingness to learn.

Project manager interview: General tips

Keep these tips in mind as you prepare for your project manager interview.

- **Be prepared to think on your feet:** Project management sometimes requires making sound judgement calls in a limited time. Practice responding under pressure by having somebody you trust to ask you different situational questions.
- **Ask questions at the end:** Though this is a common tip for all interviews, it is especially important for project management interviews. In projects, your ability to ask the right questions can be the difference between success and missing key goals. Come prepared with a list of questions you want to ask. You can also take notes during the interview on points you want to clarify.
- **Read case studies:** If you are feeling stuck, try finding some case studies about projects that went well and a few of those too that did not. This can help you learn from other people's experiences and jog your inspiration to know what to talk about in your own interview.
- **Interviewing remotely:** Remote interviews have their own challenges. Watch the video below for tips.

Spikes are an invention of Extreme Programming (XP), are a special type of user story that is used to gain the knowledge necessary to reduce the risk of a technical approach, better understand a requirement, or increase the reliability of a story estimate. A spike has a maximum time-box size as the sprint it is contained in it. At the end of a sprint, the spike will be determined that is done or not-done just like any other ordinary user story. A Spike is a

great way to mitigate risks early and allows the team ascertain feedback and develop an understanding on an upcoming PBI's complexity.

Project managers have a number of tools in their arsenal that can help them address potential challenges and obstacles. One such tool is the project risk register. But what is a risk register, how do you use one, and how can it keep your next project from being derailed?

In this guide, we'll walk you through exactly what to include in your project risk register and provide details on when and how to build and maintain one for your next project.

What is a risk register?

A project risk register is a tool project managers use to track and monitor any risks that might impact their projects. Risk management is a vital component of project management because it's how you proactively combat potential problems or setbacks.

Using a project risk register, also called a risk log, is an essential part of this risk management process.

What is the purpose of a risk register?

The purpose of a project management risk register is to identify, log, and track potential project risks. A risk in project management is anything unexpected that could happen that would positively or negatively affect your project.

Any time someone identifies something that could impact your project, it should be assessed by the team and recorded in your risk register.

Why do you need a risk register?

You need a risk register because, as projects get larger, longer, and more complex, it becomes increasingly difficult to stay on top of everything. If risks aren't tracked in a central location and reviewed regularly, something may be missed or forgotten.

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Do some research to see if you can find what kind of tools you'll be expected to use. You can try to familiarize yourself with the tool, or see if you've used any similar tools. These Guided Projects on Coursera are free, can be completed in two hours or less, and can introduce you to some common project management tools:

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Interviewing remotely: Remote interviews have their own challenges. Watch the video below for tips.

Research the company: Learning about the company you're interviewing with can help build confidence prior to the meeting. Show an understanding of the company's goals and vision and how your background aligns with the position.