HubSpot

INTERVIEW GUIDE
for Job Seekers

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Introduction

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"

That question is, as HubSpot recruiter Emily MacIntyre puts it, "so boring."

But love 'em or hate 'em, those tried-and-true interview questions still make their way into even seasoned interviewers' candidate conversations.

And even if you've aced the question in past interviews, somehow you seem to black out the embarrassment of fumbling through your answers. So when it comes time to interview again, you're left sweating and tripping over your words as you try to remember how you tied together your real passion of opening up a skydiving joint with your work optimizing paid search campaigns.

In an attempt at helping you stay dry and composed in your next interview, we've collected a lot of those popular interview questions -- curated from Glassdoor's list of the most popular interview questions in 2015 -- and supplied you with some guidance on how to nail the answers. No sweat. No tears. Minimal stumbling.

How to Answer the

10 Most Common

Interview Questions

1 **What are your strengths/ weaknesses?**

Candidates typically struggle with this question because it forces them to awkwardly toe the line between bravado and confidence, self-defeat and self-assessment. This is why you sometimes get that urge to answer with fake-weaknesses -- the folks over at Glassdoor say a popular one is the whole "I'm a perfectionist" routine. Oh woe is you.

This question may take the form of other questions, too, so listen carefully. "You may hear a recruiter say 'What's one thing you want to learn more about?' when trying to get at a weakness," MacIntyre says.

What interviewers are getting at here is an honest skills assessment -- in terms of both competencies and gaps. The way I stopped getting tripped up on this question is by remembering that a poor skill match in a role is just as bad for the company as it is for me. (If you've never slipped through the cracks in a hiring process and ended up in a role for which you're not suited, just take my word on this one.)

From there, it's simply a matter of having taken the time to reflect on what your strengths and weaknesses are relative to the position for which you're interviewing.

For example, if you're interviewing for an SEO position, a relevant strength to tout might be your analytical abilities. Start with that, and be prepared to explain some real-life scenarios in which you get to flex that muscle. For the same position, a perfectly reasonable weakness might be your writing. You could then go on to explain that while writing is part of your job, it takes you a while to get new pieces of content out the door. Glassdoor also recommends following up with how you're addressing that weakness -- so perhaps you could talk about how you're taking a class in business writing, or working with a colleague who's a skilled editor.

Again, you may find that there are gaps in the skill sets or qualities needed in the role -- but it's better you find out now than six months later when you're back on the job market. Plus, figuring out an honest answer to this question can actually help you be more successful in your next role. In a post all about this very question, HubSpot VP of Business Development Arjun Moorthy notes that weaknesses aren't inherently negative.

"Knowing your weaknesses doesn't necessarily mean that you have to fix it yourself," he writes. "Often weaknesses are endemic to you and you're better off hiring around you to solve it."

And that leaves a lot of room for people that have complementary skill sets to come in and form a strong team.

"Knowing your strengths is the only way to find a career/job where you can be a star. We can't all be strong at everything."

2 Why are you interested in this role/company?

If you're focusing on candidate-centric things -- work-life balance, benefits, compensation, better commute -- you're thinking about this question wrong.

Glassdoor's advice?

"Do your research on the job and company so you can give a few solid examples on why you're good for the company, and how you can add value to them."

Your interests should lie at the intersection of company needs, responsibilities of the role, and candidate competencies.

That being said, it's fine to show a little bit of your personal motivation. For example, if you're interviewing for a podcasting position, here's how you might break down the answer to this question:

Company Needs: We need to keep better company in terms of who we partner with and create content with.

Responsibilities of the Role: Source talent, come up with episode topics, prep guests, and edit episodes.

Candidate Competencies: Skilled with Audition, finger on the pulse of the industry, deadline-oriented, able to sell people on ideas.

Personal Motivation: I want to work with high profile people so I can learn from them and get some good connections.

So, what's the intersection of company needs, role responsibilities, candidate competencies, and personal motivation? You might talk about how you've learned a lot over the years by interacting with, reading, or listening to the heavy-hitters in your industry, and you've seen firsthand the impact exposure to them can have on a company as well as an individual. Not only does an answer like that relate to the needs of the role and the company, but it ties in your abilities and shows that you're personally motivated by the mission.

3 Why do you want to leave your current role/ company?

This is always a fun balancing act, particularly when you're running away from a job rather than to one. (Not the ideal situation to be in, but that's the way the cookie crumbles sometimes.)

The right way to answer this question is to focus on opportunity. Be forward thinking. Talk about what this role or company offers and why that's important to you. Don't focus on what your current role lacks, why you don't like your company, or how you feel like you've hit a ceiling.

So if your next step up at your current company is to a Director role, but that seat is currently occupied by a lifer, frame your answer around how you'd like to make an impact in a certain area that this new role or company provides. Or if you're bored with an aspect of your day-to-day that is less prominent in the role for which you're interviewing, focus on the chance to up your skill-level that the new position offers.

And no matter what you do, no matter how tempting it is, don't badmouth coworkers, bosses, or companies. You're wearing your professional pants today.

4 Why was there a gap in your employment history?

Recruiters are more forgiving of employment gaps than you might think, particularly if you're working in marketing or tech. Often people leave jobs to pursue personal interests or take a professional risk that doesn't end up panning out -- and they're left without a job for a while.

I asked MacIntyre for her perspective on employment gaps just to make sure I wasn't being too lenient as a hiring manager. "There aren't too many red flags, unless they left a company suddenly without having a job lined up," she said.

"I'm just listening for a good reason, whether it's downsizing, trouble finding the right role, or embarking on a career change."

5 What can you offer us that someone else cannot?

I really hate this question, because it puts you in the position of explaining why you're a special flower when, frankly, there are other people out there that can do this job, too. There just are. But alas, people ask it anyway, so here's what I've learned about how to answer this question well.

First, don't harp on skills. Any candidate they're seriously considering for the position will have a similar skill set, so this isn't something unique that you can offer. Where people tend to differ more is in their qualities -- persistence, drive, creativity, etc.

Then, try to align the qualities that make you stand out with the problem or difficulties inherent in the role. For example, if the role requires getting buy-in from a lot of different stakeholders in order to move work forward, that's a really tough thing to do. No matter how skilled you are at your discipline, inability to get over that hurdle will make you ineffective. So maybe you highlight that you're great at building relationships, and talk about how you've done that in the past. Or you could talk about your creative approach to problem solving, and how you've used that to get over people-related hurdles in the past.

These are all qualities unique to you (and, yes, maybe some other people out there), but if you have the skill set and the qualities they need -- hey, you're sitting right in front of 'em, and the other person isn't. ;-)

6 Tell me about an accomplishment you're extremely proud of.

This is a question that you might hear phrased in a couple different ways. One of the ways MacIntyre has positioned it is, "What's something you can do better than a room of 100 people?" She says questions like this are great because they take someone out of the day-to-day, and get candidates talking about something they're passionate about. This gives a great window into who the person is, not just what kind of work they do.

So no matter how this question is phrased, if you hear it, keep in mind that the recruiter is probably looking to understand what makes you tick. What motivates you. What you're passionate about. Some interviewers are open to hearing about accomplishments outside of work, while others will be more interested in hearing about something work-related -- it's alright to ask if they have a preference for one or the other. But be prepared with a few examples on each side just so you're not caught with your metaphorical pants down.

If you're uncomfortable bragging, remember that this question is all about what you're proud of. They specifically asked to hear it! So don't worry about sounding like you're full of yourself, and tell a short but interesting story about what you did, and why it mattered to you.

"The best questions let the candidates shine," MacIntyre shared, "and that's why I love ones like this."

7 Tell me about a time you made a mistake.

The worst way to answer this question is to take the same approach candidates often take in the "what's your weakness?" question. Trying to frame a mistake as someone else's fault, or highlighting an inconsequential mistake to imply that you only make small mistakes, is a total cop out.

There's also a way to answer this question that isn't a monumental failure, but isn't a huge success, either -- and that's thinking of a mistake that's so far back in your career that it's pointless to bring up today. For example, if you've got nine years of experience in funnel marketing and you're talking about the time you failed to copyedit an email in 2007, you've technically answered the question, but not satisfactorily. Yes, you've admitted a mistake, but it's not relevant to the professional you are today or the role for which you're interviewing.

Instead, think about a real mistake from the recent past -- the last year or two -- that has a clear takeaway you can share with the interviewer. Here's a hypothetical example that an interviewer would love to hear for, let's say, a Sr. Manager of PR:

"A few years ago I found myself in dire straits from a hiring standpoint. I misread some cues from someone on my team in terms of how engaged they were, and I ended up losing them to another team internally. It left us without a copywriter, and I ended up having to take on all of that extra workload while scrambling to backfill. In retrospect, I realize I should've been having more proactive conversations with that employee about her career growth. She loved the work she was doing as a writer, but just felt there wasn't enough progression for her on the team -- which I could've outlined for her had I been more communicative with her about it. I ended up finding someone great to backfill her, and I outlined a strong career path for her that we talk about on a quarterly basis."

8 How do you handle stress or pressure?

Not well.

I mean, what do you want me to say? I think that's why this question trips people up a lot -- the kneejerk reaction is that you're being asked how stress makes you feel, not how you react to it. But that's what the interviewer is getting at: what actions you take when stressful situations present themselves.

And you do take certain actions. Try to reflect on the last three to five situations in which you were stressed at work. What did you do to move past the stress? If you jot down what you did, you might see a framework start to emerge.

By way of example, I know a lot of people I work with respond to stressful situations by taking a step back from the chaos and writing down a list of what needs to get accomplished to get their arms around the problem. They find breaking up a big, complex problem into its components makes it easy to start doing productive things to calm down. Try to answer in terms of frameworks like that instead of cringing and saying "Oh, heh, I love stress, heh, bring it on!"

9 What would your direct reports/boss/colleagues say about you?

"This is one of those questions where they'll respond something like 'I'm not a micromanager,' or 'I lead by example,' so you have to take answers to this with a grain of salt," says MacIntyre.

But questions like this that lend themselves to trite or fluffy answers give you an opportunity to stand out. MacIntyre says if she does ask a question like this, she gets excited when she hears an individualized response -- something that tells her more about the candidate as a person. That could be anything from "I'm an unrelenting fan of Bruce Springsteen" -- something (presumably) unrelated to the work at hand -- to, "That I'm a sucker for beautiful design and I totally geek out doing it whenever it pops up in my role." Much like the questions about your weaknesses or a time you've failed, just be sure you don't use this question as an opportunity to humblebrag. Keep your "tendency to work too hard" to yourself.

10 What questions do you have for me?

The biggest mistake you can make with this question is to have no questions. It indicates a lack of curiosity and research.

The second biggest mistake you can make is asking superficial questions. This also indicates a lack of research, but perhaps worse, it doesn't exactly make you sound smart. What's an example of a stupid question? For starters, anything you can find out on your own through a bit of research. These include information like basic company history, product or service suites, key hires, or company performance -- provided the company releases information publicly.

Unless you're in the final stage of the interview, it's also smart to steer clear of questions that are related to HR -- things like time off, salary, or benefits packages. If you're still in the stages of exploring whether there's a mutual fit, jumping to this end stage may advance the interview process too fast, and it could turn out unfavorably for you as a result.

In the next section of this guide, you'll see a list of interview questions hiring managers wish you'd ask with explanations on why they're important.

Interview Questions
Hiring Managers
Wish You'd Ask

1 How does this role contribute to larger company goals?

It's not terribly difficult to find a candidate that can execute on a role. It is terribly difficult to find a candidate that can not only execute, but also understand how their role fits into larger goals so they can self-manage, prioritize high-value activities, and grow their role in a direction that aligns with the company's growth.

How It Helps You: This information can be hard to come by if your company isn't very communicative or transparent, so this is a good chance to get that information while the gettin's good, and use it to guide your decisions if you land the role.

2 What do the most successful new hires do in their first month here?

This question shows that you're the type of person who likes to hit the ground running, instead of spending a week filling out HR forms. It also shows that you recognize patterns of success and want to replicate only the most effective performers.

How It Helps You: Every company has its weird nuances, its own environment, its own unspoken expectations. This helps you start with a little bit of the insider info so you don't suffer a case of "if I knew then what I knew now" in six months.

3 What metrics would you use to measure success in this role?

Asking a question like this shows that you're goal-oriented and aren't afraid to be held accountable for those goals. You don't shirk accountability -- you welcome it, and will work hard to hit the goals for which you're responsible.

How It Helps You: It's shocking how many people don't actually know what they want from their employees beyond a vague idea of some work that needs to get done. Asking this question will force a hiring manager to figure it out -- and then can communicate it to you, so you can execute on it.

4 What are some of the challenges or roadblocks one might come up

A question like this indicates that you're already envisioning yourself in the role, and thinking through a plan of attack should you land the gig. It's also a sign that you're well aware no job comes free of roadblocks, and not only are you not afraid to deal with those challenges, but you're also prepared for them.

How It Helps You: You'll be informed of some of the less-than-ideal aspects of a new job, be it difficult colleagues, bureaucratic processes, or internal politics. You can use that information to decide that the role really isn't a good fit for you … or that you're up for the challenge, armed with approaches to help you deal with those issues.

5 Why did you decide to work here?

This question gives an interviewer a chance to do two self-serving things: 1) talk about themselves and 2) do a no-holds-barred sales pitch on the company. For promising candidates, the sales opportunity is welcomed. And most people love any excuse to talk about themselves. ;-)

How It Helps You: This gives you insight into what motivates your future colleague or manager, as well as insight into what the company offers its employees. If those all line up with what you're looking for in a job, you've got yourself a good fit.

6 What are some of the less tangible traits of successful people at this company?

Ever work with people that just get it? That's who hiring managers are looking for. This question demonstrates that you understand a job is about more than just going through the motions ... successful people have a specific frame of mind, approach, attitude, work ethic, communication style, etc. and you want to know what that mix looks like at this company.

How It Helps You: Because these characteristics are often hard to pin down, this question forces a hiring manager to articulate that "it factor" they're really looking for -- even if it wasn't written in the job description.

7 Do you have any questions or concerns about my qualifications?

This question shows that you're not afraid of critical feedback -- in fact, you welcome it.

People also do weird things sometimes in interviews. One of those weird things is that they see a red flag on your resume or in one of your responses to a question, and they note it down to talk about later with a colleague instead of just asking you about it. I know, I told you it was weird. This question gives them the green light to ask about any of the things that are holding them back from being 100% on board with hiring you.

How It Helps You: You get a chance to address concerns face-to-face without being too confrontational. This could be the difference between an offer and a rejection -- or maybe even a higher opening offer.

Nailing Not Just the Answers, But the Delivery

The contents of one's answers are just one part of the interview. And while they should be enough to move the hiring conversation forward, some interviewers can get thrown by the content of the answer if the delivery is poor.

Poor delivery could be a matter of stammering, saying a distracting number of "likes" and "ums," getting short of breath and speaking in an awkward cadence, or just droning on long after you've sufficiently answered the question. This sounds like trite advice (and maybe it is, but here we are): The interviewer wants you to do well. They don't want to keep interviewing candidates, and they definitely don't want to be in a super awkward conversation for a half hour watching you squirm.

So, remember to ...

- Chill. Breathe.

- Speak slowly so you don't trip on your words or lose your breath mid-monologue. One way to enforce this is via an old theatre trick in which you force yourself to speak just a little bit slower than you think is natural. It helps you enunciate, gives you time to choose your words more carefully, and makes it easier for the listener to absorb what you're saying. Just don't go so slow that they think they're in a time warp or something.

- If you're unsure of how to answer a question out the gate, take a beat and think of how you really want to answer instead of starting a tangent just to fill the silence.

- Look for facial and other physical cues that the interviewer is ready for you to wrap it up on a question.

- Stop saying "like." And "um." Slowing down your cadence a touch will also help with this.

To reinforce the importance of remaining calm, cool, and collected in your delivery, I'll tell you an interviewing story my friend relayed to me about a really kind recruiter that helped her get her current job. In her first in-person interview, she was really nervous and apparently it showed in the first round of feedback.

The recruiter called her back and said, "When you come back tomorrow, drink a beer and just relax."

Final Thought

Everyone bombs some of their interviews. If you bomb the interview because of lack of preparedness, that's one thing. If you bomb it because it just wasn't a fit, try not to get down on yourself by remembering that it's not just that you weren't a fit. It's that you and the company weren't fits for each other. For example, if someone lobbed me one of those [purposefully weird interview questions](#) like "How many zeros can you fit in a Subaru?", I'd be both SOL in the job department and relieved because that's an insane question to ask someone.

You might also do well to remember that interviewing is kind of like dating. If it's been a while, you might really suck at it. But you'll get back in your groove the more you do it. So if you find yourself newly on the job market, try to stack your interviews in order of interest if possible -- scheduling the ones you have more interest in after you've had a few trial runs at less interesting roles.

If you can't stack your interviews, ask a forgiving friend or family member to do some dry runs with you. It'll be awkward, but saying the answers to common questions you might come up against -- like, out loud -- will make it more likely to come out with some degree of eloquence when it really counts.