

## **Interview questions and answers**

It takes a lot of effort and hard work to get to the interview stage, so the last thing you want to do is blow your chances once you get there. No matter how many interviews people have been through they can still be stressful occasions right from the build up to the actual meeting and questioning.

The thought of not getting past this stage weighs heavily on many candidates minds, with the main reasons for apprehension being:

- Not knowing what questions are likely to be asked of them.
- The dread of being interrogated by strangers who also happen to be professionals in their field.
- The uncertainty of how to answer and reply to tough questioning.
- The fear of doing or saying something wrong.

However it does not have to be like this, you can eradicate much of the uncertainty and anxiety by planning, preparing and following some simple rules. On this page discover tips and guidance on how to conduct yourself during a interview and also how to reply to tough or awkward questions. This advice is suitable for both experienced and inexperienced job seekers.

When giving answers always provide enough information to satisfy what the interviewer. However at the same time make sure that you do not go into so much detail that it sounds like you are rambling.

Virtually all the questions you are asked will carry weight, answer them accurately and you will move onto the next stage. Get them wrong and you will not. It is important to remember that all interview questions can easily be answered correctly as long as you prepare for them beforehand.

### **Common questions asked during a interview and how to answer them:**

#### **Tell me about yourself?**

They want you to tell them (in your own words) a bit more about your background, work experience, attitude and ambitions. Make your answer brief and to the point. Do not talk about your hobbies, personal likes or dislikes. Finish the answer by focusing on your Unique Selling Proposition, do this by mentioning what you are good at etc.

Answers:

- I'm a experienced Sales Manager who has worked in the marketing industry for over 10 years. I have a successful track record of setting targets, developing sales teams and then motivating and training these teams to achieve goals.

#### **What are your strengths?**

You should have already mentioned your main strengths and weaknesses in your CV or cover letter. To answer any questions like this simply go over what you have written in your resume. However always be prepared to back up any answers you give with an example. Try not to appear big headed or someone with an inflated ego. Add a bit of modesty to any answers you give.

Answers:

- I have been told that I am honest, reliable and ethical.
- Your sense of urgency, if you know that a task is important, then you will work hard to get it done on time.
- You are a fast learner.
- Ability to communicate with people.
- Flexible enough to handle changing environments.
- Able to cope with setback and learn from my mistakes.

**What are your weaknesses?**

Mention that you have a flaw, but then also add a suggestion of improving that flaw or demonstrate any actions you are taking to address any weakness. The key to answering questions like this is to show you have learnt from your mistakes and are taking concrete steps to address it.

Answers:

- Occasionally I have been told that I take longer than other colleagues to complete complicated projects or tasks. But this is only because I want to make sure the work I do is to the highest standards.
- My MS PowerPoint skills are weak, so I have enrolled on an evening course to improve them.
- I am sometimes accused of being over friendly.

What NOT to say:

- You are a workaholic.

**Why did you leave your last job?**

The golden rule here is never to criticize any previous employers.

Answers:

- There was no real room for growing my career.
- The position you are advertising seems like an excellent match for my knowledge, abilities and qualifications.
- I am keen to use my skill sets and abilities in a different capacity than I have in the past.
- I am looking for a job that has more responsibility.
- The reason for leaving my last job was that I wanted to spend more time with my family. I am now ready to go back into full time employment.

**Why do you want to work for our company?**

This is essentially the same question as 'Why did you apply for this job?' & 'Why do you want to work here?'. Reply to it by showing that you have researched the employer and have logically thought out reasons why you think you are a good match for their requirements. Turn the answer into a compliment to the company you are interviewing for.

Answers:

- There are only a limited number of opportunities for advancement with my current employer. Which is why I'm keen on working for a larger corporation like yours where I believe there are more possibilities to show what I'm capable of.
- I'd like to work for a company where I feel I can make a real difference.
- A common way to reply to this is to research the company beforehand, find something unique about them and then give that as your answer. For instance they may have opened up a new store or launched a new product.
- Give examples of positive things you have heard about them and say you want to be associated with a reputable brand.
- You believe their work environment is more fun, energetic and rewarding.
- My main reason is financial, my complimentary reasons are the opportunity to work for a market leader and also future promotion.
- After researching your company I have discovered that it is an industry leader and has an excellent reputation. I was also greatly impressed by your company's mission statement, values and culture. I feel strongly that yours is an organization that I would like to work for and be associated with.
- I feel that your vacancy ideally fits my work experience, skills and qualifications. Therefore I will be able to make a significant contribution to your business as well as fulfill my potential.

- I believe your company will help me to develop my career in the direction I want it to go.

### **What do your work colleagues think of you?**

Be positive but do not go over the top. For instance comment on how associates have in the past remarked on your friendly attitude, thoroughness and ability to get things done on time.

### **Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?**

You are likely to get this question thrown at you towards the end of the interview.

Answers:

- What do you believe are the biggest challenges your company faces in the near future?
- Can you tell me what brought you to work for the company, (this question is aimed at the interviewer).
- What do you believe are the coming trends in your industry and how do you feel your company is positioned to take them on.
- Following on from our conversation today and my belief that I am a suitable candidate for your position. If my application is successful when do you think I would be required to start work? (ask this right at the end).

### **What have your achievements been to date?**

Give a solution that is related to work and if possible the job you are applying for. Demonstrate something that shows how you saved a previous employer money, made them more efficient or increased revenue.

### **Tell me about a problem you have solved.**

This can be a tricky question to answer, especially if you have never held a supervisory / managerial position or had any form of responsibility. In your replies you need to display resourcefulness, an ability to solve problems, your decision making skills and be able to clearly explain the approach you used. No matter how little work experience you have you should always be able to lead and come up with creative solutions. Describe situations where you came up with an idea that increased efficiency in your office or cut costs after you discovered a cheaper supplier etc.

### **Where do you see yourself in say four years' time?**

This is also the same question as 'Where do you want to be in 4 years?' The recruiter does not want to know about your personal goals i.e. you want a house in the south of France etc. They are only interested in your career ambitions.

Try not to sound too ambitious, for instance saying you want to have been promoted to the head of your department. This can scare off some interviewers who may think your after their job! Instead sound ambitious but realistic.

Answers

- In four years time I aim to have improved my abilities and to be a leader in my field. This will mean that I can contribute more to my employers and their business.
- That really depends on how well I perform in my job and also what career opportunities come my way. However the bottom line is that I want to have improved my skill sets and be making a ongoing contribution to any organization that i happen to be working for.

### **What is the biggest mistake you have ever made?**

There is no danger in admitting to making a mistake. However to correctly answer this type of query there are certain guidelines that you should follow. Firstly always mention that you identified where you went wrong and have learnt from the experience. Secondly

try to give an example of something that happened as far back in your past as possible. This way you can shrug it off as a youthful error and something you would not fall for now that you are more mature and experienced.

Answers:

- If I had a time machine I would go back to University and taken a degree in Business Studies rather than Hospitality.
- I stayed too many years in a job that was stable but didn't offer me enough challenges or opportunities for growth.

### **How would you cope with a difficult colleague?**

Answers:

- This really depends on what my co-worker is doing, the severity of their actions and the specific problems or disruption that they may be causing. Having said that no matter what the situation is, I would always remain in control of any situation and concentrate on my work. I would not take any arguments or heated discussions personally or hold grudges against work colleagues.
- I would avoid them and only talk to them or cooperate with them when required to in the course of my daily duties.

### **What do you like about your present job?**

Try to link what you 'like' to any of the requirements of the job you are applying for. Also keep in mind that you are looking to leave your present jobs so don't make a big list.

Answers:

- It provides me with constant new challenges to test my abilities.
- Communicating and meeting with new people.
- Able to use your initiative.
- Working as part of a team.

### **What do you dislike about your present job?**

Remember not to directly criticize or be negative about the company, managers or supervisors. Instead find other general issues to focus on.

Answers:

- Sometimes it is difficult for me to get a sense of my own achievement in a big company like my present employer.
- There are very few opportunities for advancement with my present employer who are a small company.

What NOT to mention:

- Overtime issues.
- Salary expectations.

### **You've changed jobs five times in the past five years, why should we think you are likely to stay here for a long time?**

This is the same as asking why have you changed jobs so frequently? It is likely to be asked if your [curriculum vitae](#) shows that not held down a long term position but have regularly jumped from one job to another. When answering you have no real option but to lump all your previous employers together. At all costs avoid showing that you are a difficult personality to get along with or that you have a habit of leaving jobs abruptly.

Answers:

- I do not believe that my career history is an accurate reflection of my character or abilities. Stability is important to me and I am anxious to work long term for one company. Although my CV shows that I have worked for a five different companies over a short period of time, the reason for this was that I had a elderly and frail relative to look after during this period.
- Say that previous job roles failed to challenge you.

- State that your current desire is to find long term employment and then give a reason for this i.e. you recently bought a house, just got married or are in a new committed long term relationship etc.
- Mention and highlight any jobs you have held for long periods.
- Point out the duties in the job you are applying for and state that these are the challenges you have been looking for.

### **What do you do outside of work?**

If possible highlight interests and hobbies that are related to the role you are applying for. Talk about any foreign languages you know or exotic places you have visited. Also give examples of activities that portray you as a responsible, sociable person who has a friendly personality and who can get along within a team. These type of responses will help set you apart from other candidates.

Answers:

- Travelling.
- Foreign languages.
- Football.
- Winning any competitions i.e. chess, karate.
- Running marathons.
- A member of any societies or charities.

### **What's your current salary?**

Questions about your current compensation may sound personal, but they can still be asked at interviews. Never lie or stretch the truth, as if you are found out it could jeopardize your entire application.

Answers:

- My present employer pays me well outside of the norm, however I would not like to limit my job prospects by using that salary as a comparison.
- As a highly valued member of the company, I am paid on the very high end of current market rates.

### **What do you enjoy about the industry you are in?**

This can be a tough question that will put you on the spot. When responding be polite, diplomatic and give a good business related answer.

Answers:

- I can't really give you an accurate answer because at this time I don't know the scope of the job, its responsibilities, hours, etc.
- The job I perform, the salary I receive and the circumstances at my current company are not really comparable to the opportunity we are discussing today. However when I consider my skill sets, academic qualifications and work experience, I am confident that a salary between £25,000 - £33,000 would be appropriate.

### **Typical interview questions and answers for different job roles:**

Accountancy  
Bank manager  
Sales assistant

Interview questions about a candidate's academic qualifications  
Competency based interview questions and answers

### **Preparation and practise are key to conducting a successful interview.**

Rehearse your answers before the interview

Reread your CV just before the interview

Research the company

This way you will have the knowledge to be able to answer any questions about the company you are applying to.

Making the best entrance to the interview room

Developing a rapport with the interviewer  
How to look confident

### **Show enthusiasm**

Appear eager, be enthusiastic and show you have a personality.  
What clothes to wear for a interview  
Answering open ended questions  
Replying to leading questions  
Be positive and upbeat  
Questions a candidate should NOT ask at a interview  
questions about salary etc.  
Practise for the interview

### **Coping with nerves before a interview**

Many candidates worry that their mind will go blank one they are in a interview room and are being grilled.

### **What not to do in a interview**

Tell jokes or try to be funny.  
Become flustered and nervous.  
Do not become shy, highlight relevant skills and abilities.  
Chew gum.

Try to link every answer you give to the actual job you are applying for

### **The interview from a employers perspective**

The interviewer has a number of objectives, including: finding out if you are a suitable candidate, confirming that you have the skills listed in your CV and seeing how you would react under pressure.  
they want to find out: (1) who he is right now, (2) what he has done in the past, and (3) what he will become in the future.

Body language in a interview

### **Be sociable**

Appear relaxed and friendly  
What is a exit interview?  
Job promotion interviews  
What is interview coaching

### **Telephone interviews**

Phone interviews are becoming a increasingly popular way for recruiters to further screen applicants. If a candidate successfully passes this stage then they will join a small pool individuals who will be invited to personal interviews.

Telephone interview have certain advantages for both employers and job seekers. They are useful in interviewing potential employees who may live far from the company, thereby saving all concerned travelling expenses and time. There are benefits for applicants as well, the main ones being:

- Not having to be in front of a live panel, thereby making it a less stressful experience than a 'real' interview.
- Being able to have your CV and also notes ready in front of you to refer to. These can be very useful in helping you to give the right answers.

Tips for holding a telephone interview:

- Write down a list of questions you are likely to be asked, and also note down suitable answers next to them.

- Make sure you take the phone call alone in a quiet room. So that there are no distractions from children, pets, family members etc.
- Have a pen and piece of paper nearby.
- Have a glass of water ready, in case your mouth goes dry.
- When the interviewer is talking do not interrupt them, only answer a question once they have finished.

### **Interview techniques that professionals and media personalities use Bridging techniques.**

## **J O B I N T E R V I E W**

**Job interviews** are usually the clincher in the job application process. Even the most intelligent candidate can fail if he doesn't know how to handle an interview. The best way to make sure that we succeed in this very important step is not only to know what possible questions will be asked but also to know the best answer to give for each question. Eunice Estipona, spa consultant and director gets to interview prospective applicants and shares the most useful questions for screening and choosing the right candidates. She also gives suggestions on how to begin to answer these questions as she contributes her knowledge to the Manila Bulletin Classified Readers Section (January 25, 2009). She further reminds the readers that there is no wrong or right way to answer these questions but they can practice expanding on the suggested answers on their own. So you can put your own words and personality in these statements....Here's what Ms. Estipona wrote:

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: I put my heart into everything I do, whether it be sports or work. I find that getting along with your peers and being part of the team makes life more enjoyable and productive.

Q: How much is the salary you are expecting?

A: I'm looking for a job and a company to call home. The most important thing to me will be the job itself and the company. If I am the right person for you, I'm sure you'll make a fair offer appropriate to my job responsibilities, experience, and ability to do the job successfully. May I ask what figure you have in mind or perhaps the salary range for this position?

Q: Why do you want to work here?

A: I am not looking for just another paycheck. I enjoy my work and I am proud of my profession. I believe ( name the company you are applying for ) has superior service and reputation. I share the values that make this possible, which should enable me to fit in and complement the team. I believe that the company can provide me with a stable and happy working environment. I think that your company has that reputation and that such an atmosphere would encourage my best work. (Please make sure that you have read the company's profile before you answer this)

Q: What did you dislike about your last job?

A: I really liked everything about the job. The reason I left is to find a position where I can make a greater contribution and a greater intellectual challenge.

Q: What have you learned from the jobs you have held?

A: More than anything, I have learned that what is good for the company is also good for me. So, I listen very carefully to directions and always keep my superiors informed of my actions.

Q: What do you think are your biggest accomplishments?

A: Although I feel my biggest achievements are still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with ( mention the job or project you are most proud of and how you contributed to accomplishing its goals ). I made my contribution as part of that team and learned a lot in the process. We all did it with hard work, concentration, and an eye on the bottom line.

Q: How long would you stay with our company?

A: I take directions well and love to learn. As long as I am growing professionally, there is no reason for me to make a move. How long do you need me to be of use there?

Q: Can you work under pressure?

A: Yes, I usually find it stimulating. However, I believe in planning and proper time management to reduce panic deadlines within my area of responsibility.

Q: How do you handle tension?

A: Tension is caused when you let things pile up. It is usually caused by letting other areas of responsibility slip by for a period of time. I find that if you break those overwhelming tasks into little pieces, they aren't so overwhelming anymore. So I suppose, I handle tension by handling the causes of it, by not letting things slip in other areas that can give rise to it.

Q: What interests you most about this job?

A: Before I answer, could I ask you to describe a typical day for me? I am looking for a challenge and an opportunity to being a team player and an opportunity to make a contribution.

Q: Describe a situation in which your work or idea was criticized.

A: I listened carefully and resisted the temptation to interrupt or defend myself. Then I verified what I heard to be sure my facts were straight. I asked for advice, we bounced some ideas around, then came back later and re-presented the idea in a more viable format. My supervisor's input was invaluable.

Q: Why should I hire you?

A: I believe I have the qualifications that you need; I am a team player; and I take directions and have the desire to reach success.

Q: What can you do for us that no one else can do? Why do you feel you are a better candidate than others?

A: I can bring to this job a determination to see projects through to a proper conclusion. I listen and take directions well. I am analytical and don't jump to conclusions. And finally, I understand we are in business to make a profit, so I also keep an eye on cost and return.

Q: What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with?

A: People who have a blatant disregard for others and do not follow procedures or are slackers - the occasional rotten apples who don't really care about the quality of their work. They are long on complaints but short on solutions.

Q: (follow-up to the previous question) How will you handle these people?

A: I would stick to my guns, stay enthusiastic, and hope some of it will rub off. If no amount of good effort on my part solves the problem, I will still maintain cordial relations. Life is too short to be affected by people who always think their cup is half empty.



Q: What do you think of your last boss?

A: I liked him/her as a person (if applicable ), respected him/her professionally and appreciated his/her guidance.

Q: Were there things that your supervisor did that you disliked?

A: I have never thought of our relationship in terms of like or dislike. I have always thought our role was to get along together and get the job done. We had a very good relationship as far as I can remember.

Q: Can you take instructions - and criticism - without feeling hurt or upset?

A: Yes, I can take instructions - and more importantly, I can take constructive criticism without feeling hurt. Even with the best intent, I will still make mistakes and at times someone will have to put me back on the right track. I know that if I expect to rise in the company, I must first prove myself to be manageable.

Q: How do you take directions? How do you handle criticism?

A: I take directions well and I believe that there are two types: carefully explained directions - when my boss has time, and then there's the other, a brusque order or correction. While most people get upset with the latter, personally, I always believe the manager is troubled with bigger problems and a tight schedule. As such, I take the direction and get on with the job without taking offense so my boss can get on with his/her job as well. It's the only way to accomplish our tasks.

Q: What is your greatest strength? What do you consider your outstanding qualities?

A: Perhaps my greatest strength is the ability to stick to a difficult task yet be able to change course rapidly when required. I believe in planning and proper management of my time and yet I can still work under pressure.

Q: What is the most difficult situation you have faced?

A: (Give an example which is specific to your case; what follows is an example ) Perhaps one of the most difficult decisions is to fire someone but I would like to emphasize that once I had examined the problem and reached a conclusion, I acted in a timely and professional manner, with the best interests of the company at heart.

Q: Are you willing to take calculated risks when necessary?

A: Naturally, I would never take a risk that will in any way jeopardize the safety or reputation of the company or colleagues. In fact, I don't think any employer would appreciate an employee at any level taking risks of any nature without first receiving a thorough briefing and a chance to give input.

Q: Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest.

A: Perhaps an 8 or 9, as I always give my best shot, but in doing so, I always increase my skills and therefore always see room for improvement. About The Author: Eunice Estipona is a spa consultant, mentor, advisor, speaker, lecturer & author. One of her advocacies is to make healing & information regarding the field of spa, massage & wellness accessible & affordable to everyone.