

Sample Interview Questions

Questions an interviewer may ask you, and suggestions for responses!



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Sample Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself.

This is an open-ended question often asked to “break the ice.”

- Keep your responses brief (less than two to three minutes), and focus on highlights of your educational and work experiences
- It is suggested that you start with your most recent accomplishment, such as getting your college degree, perhaps why you chose your major, and discuss some of the courses you completed that pertain to the requirements of the job, as well as any relevant team projects on which you have worked in your classes.
- Discuss related work experiences and involvement in student organizations (if applicable). Make sure you mention the specific knowledge and skills you’ve acquired in these experiences, and how they will contribute to your being successful in the position (this could be developed into a “closing statement” to summarize what you’ve just discussed.
- *Limit disclosing personal information as this is not pertinent to your ability to perform on the job* (e.g. DO NOT mention your age, marital status, children, health, etc.).

Which college course or courses have you enjoyed the most, and why? The least? Why?

- For the courses you like the most, discuss those that allowed you to develop knowledge/skills the employer is seeking for the position, if possible. Or, choose courses that allowed you to grow intellectually and/or interpersonally - such as a course that allowed you to develop the ability to view things from different perspectives, or the opportunity to work as part of a team on a special project.
- For the courses you liked the least, you may state that there were no courses you disliked; that you enjoyed all of your courses because you learned something in each. Or, you may choose a course that **does not** relate to the position - such as Algebra if you are interviewing for a social work position. Although you should be able to explain **why** you disliked it - even if just to say that Algebra is a subject in which you have little interest - still try to end on a positive note; for example, by stating that although you didn’t particularly *like* Algebra, the course allowed you to improve your critical thinking skills. Another response could be that, although you did not have an interest in the course, you chose to view it as a challenge, and that you applied yourself, determined to persevere and succeed in the course. And you did!

Name three of your greatest strengths.

Remember to answer this question based on how it is asked.

- If the interviewer asks for three strengths, name them - for example: “Communication skills, organizational skills, and problem-solving skills.”
- The interviewer may ask another form of this question: “Name three words your co-workers would use to describe you.” In this case, your response should consist of **three words**: “Organized, detailed, and determined.” for example.
- Also be able to **provide examples** of how you’ve successfully applied these strengths to resolve a problem situation (see “Behavioral Interviewing”).

What is your greatest weakness?

- Design your response so that your weakness is really a “positive” in disguise. For example, you may refer to your tendency to approach a task or project with the attitude, “If you want it done right, do it yourself,” but then you find that you are not managing your time effectively, nor delegating appropriately so that your subordinates are learnign responsibility on the job. Then, describe a situation in which you did NOT take this approach, and the positive results that occurred from you “new” approach.
- Or, you can address this question from a personal or professional growth perspective. For example, you may tell the interviewer that “public speaking” is an area in which you do not have a lot of experience, but that each time you have had the opportunity to do a class presentaion, you have worked to improve your public speaking skills. Be able to describe specific techniques you’ve used to improve in this area, and discuss successful outcomes. In a sense, you are not directly responding by naming a “weakness;” but you are alluding to an area that you recognized you needed to improve upon.
- However, NEVER choose a characteristic, skills, etc., that is required for the job; for example, do not use the “public speaking” example is interviewing for a marketing, sales, public relations, etc., position. Or, do not use the “If you want it done right, do it yourself” example above, if applying for a management position, as managers must manage their time effectively, and delegate work tasks appropriately.

Tell me what you have learned from your involvement in extracurricular activities.

- Focus on the knowledge and skills required for the job in responding to this question, and tailor your response accordingly.
- Also, if you served on campus activities or community service committees as part of membership in a student organization, discuss these experiences and what they taught you (team work, leadership skills, communication skills, ability to plan and organize activities, etc.)
- Be able to describe real-life examples: "I learned to work effectively as part of a team, for example..." and then provide specifics as to what you accomplished, and how!

Which of your work experiences has been most rewarding? Why? Least rewarding? Why?

- Again, relate positive work experiences to the requirements of the job for which you are interviewing. In other words, focus on the knowledge/skills you acquired in a past job and describe how such knowledge and skills will allow you to be effective in this position.
- As for "least rewarding" experiences, **NEVER say anything negative about a former employer, professor, etc.** You may indicate (as with the "favorite courses" question above) that you have learned something from each job you've held, OR, if a job did not offer opportunity for you to learn or grow professionally, you may relate this information to the interviewer; however, still attempt to find something positive about the job, and communicate this to the employer!

Describe your leadership style.

This statement may be offered primarily for management or administrative positions; however, it is suggested that you think about situations in which you have exercised leadership abilities, exactly what steps you took to serve as a leader, and the positive results that came from those efforts - for example, leading a class team project, a student organization activity or event, training new employees at work, motivating others in volunteer experiences, etc. Think in terms of guiding/motivating people, AND managing tasks - both are crucial elements of leadership. Also, even though the position for which you are interviewing may not require you to supervise others, you should still view your role and the scope of your duties as requiring leadership skills - i.e., *you should think of yourself as a leader or you are of responsibility, even if you do not have anyone "working under you."*

Describe an accomplishment, and how you achieved it. What does "success" mean to you?

- Choose to describe an accomplishment that demonstrates the setting of a goal, and commitment to and perseverance in achieving that goal. Provide a specific example from college, work, or extracurricular activities.
- Describe the process you went through to achieve that goal, and what you learned "along the way."
- OR, choose to describe an obstacle that you overcame, perhaps a challenge for you in one of the aforementioned areas of your life, and how you addressed and met that challenge successfully.
- Also, your accomplishment does not have to be something that "changed the world"! Anything that illustrates positive qualities about you and results from your efforts is enough!
- Regarding your definition of "success," let your response reflect your values - that is, what basic attitudes and beliefs you possess regarding life, career, yourself, and others.

Do you work well under pressure?

Answer in the positive: "Yes, I work very well under pressure. In fact, pressure can generate a certain energy level that can be the driving force for getting things done. It can also be the source of creativity in solving problems." Remember too, that this question can also be used to learn more about your ability to manage your time effectively, to multitask, to organize and prioritize your responsibilities. You may want to mention that you always try to effectively plan, organize, and accomplish your tasks in a timely manner so that if something unexpected occurs that requires an impending deadline, you will not have a lot of unfinished business that would prevent you from meeting the deadline.

Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate.

Again, let your response reflect your basic core values, then provide a specific example of a positive relationship you've experienced with a former, or current, supervisor. You should **also** answer this question from a supervisory perspective, that is, with yourself in the role of the supervisor, if you have had such an experience. If you haven't you may still address the approach you would take if you are placed in a supervisory position over others. Note that this question may be an opportunity for you to elaborate on your leadership and team work styles. Also, **DO NOT** compare "good supervisors" you've had to "bad supervisors"! **NEVER** say anything negative about a person, departmental or company operations, etc.

Why do you have a gap in employment from _____ to _____?

College students can always explain a gap in employment as a deliberate move to spend more time focusing on their studies.

Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your career goals?

Be careful with your response to this question. DO NOT describe career goals which will take you away from the current job opportunity. In other words, do not state that you plan to pursue an advanced degree if you know (or don't know) whether this is what the company/organization with which you are interviewing is expecting, or if they can provide adequate reward for such an accomplishment. Instead, use this question as an opportunity to emphasize your strong desire for a career path with THIS company.

What do you know about our company/organization? Why do you want to work here?

This frequently asked question begs you to DO YOUR HOMEWORK in researching the company/organization THOROUGHLY before interviewing. The type of information you should gather in your research is outlined in the *"How Do I Research Companies?"* document on the Career Services web site, under the *Ace the Interview* drop-down menu and *Interview Preparation*.

What do you have to offer to this position/company that would "set you apart" from other applicants?

- This question presents a great opportunity for you to highlight, in a summary statement, what you have to offer, and you should base your response on the research you have done on the position and the company. Of course you cannot know the qualifications of the other candidates.
- You should also prepare for this question by carefully listening to the interviewer describe the position, the company, and the qualifications sought, which he/she will most likely do at some point during the interview.
- Then, at the conclusion of the interview, you can refer to this information in your summary statement by describing specifically how the qualifications you have to offer fit what they are seeking.

Appropriate questions for you to ask during the interview.

You should refrain from asking questions until the interviewer asks you for questions (this opportunity usually takes place at the conclusion of the interview). An exception to this "rule" may occur if you do not understand, or need clarification of, a question you are asked during the interview, in which case you may ask the interviewer to explain. Following are some appropriate questions for you to ask - and DO ASK QUESTIONS - this shows interest and initiative!

- What qualifications do you think are necessary to be successful in this job?
- What majors do you usually hire?
- Could you describe the training period/program?
- How would I be supervised? How would my performance be evaluated?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What is the organization's policy regarding continuing education/training?
- Does the company encourage participation in professional organizations?
- When can I expect to hear from you regarding your hiring decision?

Inappropriate questions for you to ask during the interview.

- DO NOT initiate discussion of salary, vacation, or benefits during the first interview.
- DO NOT push for an early decision by mentioning the other opportunities you have awaiting you.
- DO NOT ask for feedback on your interview performance.



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