

Interview Questions

Whether you are interviewing for a residency or for a job, **preparation** is key. You need to know about the **hiring entity** (residency program or hospital/clinic/company) and about **yourself**. The latter may seem obvious but, when you are nervous and confronted by an interviewer's unexpected question, you may find yourself unable to think of a relevant situation or example from your past to relate. You may end up stammering and "ummming" at best or looking like a deer in the head lights at worse.

So, again, prepare.

Visit the hospital/clinic/company Web site. Learn what you can about their structure, program, clients, competitors, etc. During the interview you'll then be able to talk with confidence about what makes them different/exciting to you, and you'll be able to respond to interview questions with appropriate information and ask the interviewer suitable questions. You'll also be better able to determine if the hiring entity and you are a good "fit."

Preparing for questions about yourself can help prevent or calm those jitters everyone suffers during an interview and permit you to appear poised and professional. Probably the most practical way to prepare for this aspect of your meeting is to stage mock interviews with fellow students or friends. This will point out possible weaknesses (Do you say "Like" or "You know" a lot?) and can simply make you feel more comfortable during the "real deal" since you've already gone through the experience. Ask for honest feedback. Don't forget to ask them about things in addition to the content of your answer—speech patterns (Do you talk too quickly or quietly or use slang?), body language, etc. If possible, you may want to video or audio record the session so you can see and hear yourself as others do.

Questions to Prepare For

Some common questions asked in a **variety of employment interview settings**:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in five to ten years?
- What do you think makes you the best qualified for this position?
- How can you contribute to this organization?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What are your positive qualities and shortcomings?
- Do you have a plan to correct/overcome your shortcomings?
- How do you handle criticism?
- What makes you angry?
- What do you worry about?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What was the last book you read for pleasure? Tell me about it.
- If I were to ask preceptor X to describe you, what would he or she say?
- If you had to describe your personality in 3 words, what would they be?

Some common questions asked during **residency** interviews:

- Why do you want to do a residency? What do you expect to gain from a pharmacy residency?
- Why did you apply to our residency program?
- What do you plan to do after your residency?
- Why did you attend pharmacy school?
- What is your definition of pharmaceutical care?
- What is your definition of a clinical pharmacist?
- What are your overall career goals?
- What do you see yourself doing in pharmacy in 10-15 years?
- What other residencies have you applied to? Have you interviewed at any other residency programs?
- What qualities do you have that would make you a good resident?
- Describe your most memorable experiences from clerkship rotations.
- Can you describe your most memorable or satisfying patient case? What made it so meaningful?
- Tell me about the best/most favorite teacher/preceptor you've ever had.
- Tell me about the worst teacher you've ever had. If you look back, is there anything you might have done to change that bad experience?
- What did you like most about your favorite clerkship rotation? What was your least favorite rotation?

Some other questions that fit in a variety of employment interview settings may be more reflective and ask **how you react** in certain circumstances.

- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully move someone to your point of view
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.

- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation and how you coped with the problem.
- Give me an example of your typical way of dealing with conflict.

Sometimes (maybe often) you won't be able to think of a situation that is work-related. But you can think of other kinds of situations (school or volunteer, for example) in which the behavior being asked about was called into play. You may never have had to "fire a friend," but did you have to confront a non-contributing team member on behalf of the rest of your study group? When you were president of a student organization, did you ever name someone the chairperson of a project, delegate responsibility to that person, and hold him/her accountable? Think about the skills and experiences being asked about regardless of the setting.

You won't be able to prepare for every question. Take time to think before you respond and, if you don't understand what is being asked, ask the interviewer to restate the question.

Your Questions

Generally the interviewer will ask if **you** have any questions. Make sure you do, and that they are relevant to the position you are applying for. Here's where your homework on the hospital/clinic/company comes in. Ask questions that specifically pertain to the program or the hospital, clinic or company. Your questions will show *your interest in them*, and the answers will help you to evaluate the organization to see *if it's what you want*.

Questions about day-to-day job duties, common experiences, projects you may work on, the facility, etc. are also acceptable to ask during the interview. You won't be able to ask all of the following general questions, but select a few whose answers are important to know.

For Residencies:

Questions You Should Ask....the faculty

- When was your last accreditation visit? How long were you re-accredited for?
- How does your program demonstrate its commitment to the resident's education?
- Where are your most recent grads and what type of practices have they gone into from the residency?
- What qualities are you looking for in a resident?
- Describe opportunities to teach during the residency.
- Do you encourage your residents to attend conferences?
- May I see a copy of the residency contract?
- What makes your program different from other programs?
- Who are your faculty and what are their special interests?
- Will I have interaction with any other residents?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your program?
- What are the patient demographics?
- Do you anticipate any changes in your program in the next year?
- What does the package include (salary, health insurance, etc.)?
- What is a typical workweek like?
- What are your current residency research projects?
- How does the program facilitate my development as a person?
- Why are you at this institution?

.....the residents

- What made you decide to come to this program?
- What is a typical workweek like?
- What are your plans after you finish the residency?
- What do you do for fun? What is it like to live here?
- Where do you feel you most of your learning is coming from?
- What are the strong points of the program?
- Where do you feel the program could be improved?
- How does the faculty respond to your concerns?
- Are you glad you picked this residency?

For clinical positions

- Are there any opportunities to teach or precept pharmacy students?
- Are there any opportunities to publish?
- What current research projects are other pharmacists at this institution working on?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this department?
- Does the pharmacy faculty ever work with the medical faculty on research projects?

- How would you describe the relationship between the distribution pharmacists and the clinical pharmacists?
- Is the staff given the opportunity to attend national pharmacy meetings? If so, is funding available?
- Do pharmacists ever give lectures to medical house staff?

For retail positions

- What is a typical day like?
- How many pharmacy techs will be working with me?
- What other non-pharmacy responsibilities are involved with this position?
- How often will I be working alone?
- What is the policy for working on holidays?
- What are the actual shifts I could work?

After asking a question, listen carefully to the answer and ask follow-up questions if necessary. Maintain eye contact during the interview to show your interest.

Two Minute Drill

Sometimes an interviewer begins with something like, “So, tell me something about yourself.” This “soft” question is a good icebreaker but make sure you don’t get carried away with your answer. Interviewers aren’t really interested in your hobbies, spouse and children, and your last vacation. The best answer is brief (about two minutes long) and focuses on work-related skills and accomplishments.

A good answer to this question is about two minutes long and focuses on work-related skills and accomplishments. Tell the interviewer why you think your work-related skills and accomplishments would be an asset to the company. You could describe your education and work history (be brief) and then mention one or two personal character traits and tell the interviewer how the traits helped you accomplish a task at school or work.

Think of it in terms of four-30 second themes:

- your education
- what you do (job title or student status)
- one or two things you’ve accomplished or excel at that directly relate to the position
- why you are applying for this position

Something along the lines of

I'm in my last year at the School of Pharmacy at Wilkes University in my home town of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. At the school I _____ and I am an intern at _____. Recently I _____. Because of my interests in _____ I decided to _____.

Remember, just use these as **guidelines**. You don't want to make it sound like a speech you memorized.

Practice telling the same "story" using different words, so you won't come off as rehearsed and so you can change it on the fly, match the interviewer's values or the situation as you see it at the time.