

TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND HOW TO PREPARE FOR THEM

While no two job interviews will follow the exact same format, there are some questions that are very popular among employers when screening potential candidates. By preparing confident answers to some of the more common interview questions, you can give yourself the edge over other potential candidates. Here we explore some of the more common interview questions, how best to answer them and how you can prepare your responses most effectively.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS? /WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS TIME?

An interviewer will be impressed if you have considered your short-term and long-term goals. Talk about the kind of job you'd eventually like to do and the various steps you will take to get there.

Show that you have the ambition and determination to make the most of every job you have held to get where you want to be.

Always relate this back to the position you're interviewing for and be realistic in terms of your aspirations. Avoid telling the interviewer that you want their job.

What to consider in your answer:



Do your expectations align with what the employer can provide?



Do you see yourself at the company in five years?



Do you have strong career ambition and drive?



What are the key driving factors to wanting to work for this company?

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES?

This question is often seen as challenging by many candidates, even those with significant experience. However, if approached correctly it is easily possible to avoid 'bragging' when discussing your strengths or seeming excessively negative when talking about your perceived weaknesses.

Strengths

Based on the job description, choose three examples of traits the employer is looking for and give examples of how you have used these strengths in a work situation. Ideally, include a mixture of tangible skills, such as technical or linguistic abilities, and intangible skills, such as management experience.

Weaknesses

The best approach here is to pick a trait that you have already made positive steps to address. Don't include a weakness that would jeopardise you getting the job offer, for example if you're an accounting professional, avoid saying your weakness is data or maths.

What to consider in your answer:



How you have approached your perceived weaknesses in the past and what you have done to address them



If your IT ability is not at the level it could be, state this as a weakness before telling the interviewer about training courses or time spent outside work hours you have used to improve your skills



Focus on weaknesses relating to either skills, habits or personality traits and use them constructive, spin them into strengths

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WHY SHOULD I HIRE YOU?

Focus on your assets - what makes you different and where do your major strengths lie? Outline what you can offer in terms of experience, personality and enthusiasm.

The job description should give you a good indication of what they are looking for. Make sure you address the particular qualities the employer has stated they are looking for and provide specific examples of what you have done so far in your career that demonstrates how you are particularly suited for the role.

What to consider in your answer:



Use your previous experience to justify your ability to fulfil the position



Do you have any 'bonus' skills that can set you apart from other candidates?



Use voluntary and charity experience here if you are early on in your career

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF / YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE

This is usually the opening question for most interviews and can be one of the most important. First impressions are key, so keep it brief – know your CV inside out and focus on delivering a one to two minute advertisement for yourself, highlighting the key achievements in your employment history. Know what you want to say and how you are going to say it beforehand.

Begin your answer with an overview of your highest qualification then run through the jobs you've held so far in your career.

You can follow the same structure as your CV, giving examples of achievements and the skills you've picked up along the way. Don't go into too much detail - your interviewer will ask you to expand on any areas where they'd like more information.

What to consider in your answer:



Present: refer to your current role or situation (if you've just graduated) and discuss your biggest accomplishments



Past: Tell the interviewer how you got there and why this aligns with the position you are applying for



Future: Digress on what you are looking for in the future and why you're interested in this position and it will help you achieve your career goals

WHY DO YOU WANT THIS JOB?

Do your research - this gives you the chance to discuss all you know about the job and the company and why you are a good match for them. The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought, so do your homework properly.

You should have a good inside knowledge of the company's values, mission statement, development plans and products. Describe how your goals and ambition match the company ethos and how you would relish the opportunity to work for them.

What to consider in your answer:



How does this career move fit in with your career plan and aspirations?



How will it develop and challenge your existing skill set



Why does the company appeal to you? Refer to your personal values and interests, do they align with the companies?

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WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY EXPECTATIONS?

While you should never mention salary unless asked or prompted, it's important to understand the value of someone with your skills. Be flexible - indicate that you are willing to negotiate for the right opportunity and confirm that you value the position strongly.

"All too often, problems arise from pricing yourself out of the position or stating a figure less than the company is willing to pay. If a guideline salary has been provided with the job description, you could mention this and say it's around the amount you're looking for," Janine Blacksley continued.

What to consider in your answer:



Do you know your worth? The interviewer(s) will have a budget in mind, so make sure you do your research on market salary averages and work from that



To determine your value, factor in your level, years of experience and career achievements

WHAT SKILLS OR EXPERIENCE DO YOU OFFER THAT WILL HELP YOU SUCCEED IN THIS ROLE?

You should use the interview as an opportunity to say something interesting about your skills and experiences that relate back to the role at hand. Remember that interviewers will be looking for you to demonstrate key skills, so prepare examples in advance that you can call on when required.

What to consider in your answer:



Project management skills



Problem solving



Managing stakeholders



Demonstrating sound technical knowledge, backed up by good business understanding



Delivering on targets or goals



Do your research

Above all, it is vital that you do your research. Make sure you have a look at the company website and understand as much as you can about their business and how they operate, as well as the products or services they provide. It is also important to go prepared with questions to ask them – after all, the interview is a two-way process. Don't be afraid to write questions down ahead and take them with you.