



Top 20 Most Often Asked Interview Questions and Answers

1. What were your responsibilities?

When you are asked questions related to your current or previous positions, it's important to be specific and to be positive about what you did in your previous position(s). The best way to respond is to describe your responsibilities in detail and to connect them to the job for which you are interviewing. Try to tie your responsibilities in with those listed in the job description for the new position. That way, the employer will see that you have the qualifications necessary to do the job. Focus most on your responsibilities that are directly related to the new job's requirements. It's also important to be honest. Don't embellish your job because you don't know with whom the hiring manager will be checking when he/she checks your references.

2. What did you like or dislike about your previous job?

When you're asked what you don't like about your previous job, don't be too negative. You don't want the interviewer to think that you'll speak negatively about the new job or the company when you're ready to move on, if you get this job. Rather, it makes sense to talk about yourself and what you're looking for in a new role.

3. What were your starting and final levels of compensation?

Interviewers expect a candidate for employment to be able to provide the details of their compensation history. Be prepared to tell the interviewer how much you earned at each of your prior positions. Make sure that what you tell the interviewer matches what you listed on your job application. Refresh your memory prior to the interview by reviewing your salary history so you can speak in detail and accurately. Don't exaggerate or inflate your earnings. Many employers will check references and confirm your salary history prior to making a job offer. A discrepancy between what you reported and what your previous employer says could knock you out of contention for the job.

4. What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?

When asked the job interview question "How did you handle a challenge?", be sure to include specific examples of how you handled a particular difficult situation. Discuss how you researched the issue and contributed to finding a solution.

5. What is your greatest strength?

"What is your greatest strength?" is one of the easier interview questions you'll be asked. When you are asked questions about your strengths, it's important to discuss attributes that will qualify you for the job. The best way to respond is to describe the skills and experience that directly correlate with the job for which you are applying.

6. What is your greatest weakness?

When asked what your greatest weakness is, one option is try to turn a negative into a positive. For example, a sense of urgency to get projects completed or wanting to triple-check every item in a spreadsheet can be turned into a strength; i.e., you are a candidate who will make sure that the project is done on time and your work will be close to perfect.

7. How do you handle stress and pressure?

Think hard before you answer this one. If you are not comfortable in stressful situations, be honest and explain how you deal with it. If you thrive under pressure, expound on that. Examples of good responses include:

- "I react to situations, rather than to stress. That way, the situation is handled and doesn't become stressful."
- "I actually work better under pressure and I've found that I enjoy working in a challenging environment."
- "I find a fast pace to be invigorating and thrive when the pressure is on."
- "I've done some of my best work under tight deadlines where the atmosphere was very stressful."
- "I'm the kind of person who stays calm under pressure and handles stress fairly easily."
- "From a personal perspective, I manage stress by visiting the gym every evening. It's a great stress reducer."

8. Describe a difficult work situation / project and how you overcame it.

There is no right or wrong answer to questions like "What are the most difficult decisions to make?" or "Describe a difficult work situation / project and how you overcame it." These are behavioral interview questions designed to discover how you handled certain situations. The logic behind these types of questions is that how you behaved in the past is a predictor of what you will do in the future. Give concrete examples of difficult situations that actually happened at work. Then discuss what you did to solve the problem. Keep your answers positive.

9. What was the biggest accomplishment / failure in this position?

Your potential employer will want to know what you accomplished and what you didn't in your current or last position. The best way to respond is to give an example of something you accomplished that is directly related to the job for which you are interviewing. Review your resume and review the job posting. Find the best match and use that to show how what you accomplished will be beneficial to the company with which you are interviewing. If you didn't fail at anything, say so. If you can think of an example, be sure that it's a minor one and turn it into a positive.

10. How do you evaluate success?

This is another behavioral question where there is no right or wrong answer. Think about the best answer for you and practice your response. The interviewer is trying to get a sense of your values. Be honest and give an example of an example of what you find to be successful.

11. Why are you leaving or have left your job?

This can be a tricky question and should be handled with thought. If you left on your own accord, be honest and explain why. If you were fired or let go, be honest, but turn the negative connotation into a positive. For example, "Being let go was a blessing in disguise. Now I can apply myself to something I am really good at." Keep your answer simple and keep moving so you can address the new job possibilities and talk about why you are qualified for this job.

12. Why do you want this job?

This question is often the most difficult to answer off the cuff. Be sure to think about it and prepare your answer. Be honest and sincere and take this as another opportunity to sell your skills and talents.

13. Why should we hire you?

The best way to respond is to give concrete examples of why your skills and accomplishments make you the best candidate for the job. Take a few moments to compare the job description with your abilities, as well as mentioning what you have accomplished in your other positions. Be positive and reiterate your interest in the company and the position. This is an opportunity to give your opinion and validate the interviewer's opinion on why you are the best candidate for the job.

14. What are your goals for the future?

The best way to respond to this question is to refer to the position and the company with which you are interviewing. Don't discuss your goals for returning to school or having a family. These are not relevant and could knock you out of contention for the job. Rather, you want to connect your answer to the job for which you are applying.

15. What are your salary requirements?

Before you start talking pay (and salary negotiations) with a prospective employer, you need to find out how much the job (and you) is worth. You will need to take the time to research salaries. That way you will be prepared to get what you're worth and to get a job offer that's realistic and reasonable.

16. Tell me about yourself.

Remember what we discussed in working on your 30-Second Commercial. This is the perfect time to use it!

17. Who was your best boss and who was the worst?

The interviewer is trying to discover if you assess blame or carry a grudge. The interviewer also wants to determine if you are a match for the leadership style of the company. Be honest and be fair, but don't put down your former bosses. If you had an issue with someone in the past, address it professionally and don't make it personal.

18. What are you passionate about?

When you're asked what you're passionate about during a job interview, it's a good opportunity to share what is important in your life. It's also an opportunity to show your dedication and why it is important to you. Your response doesn't need to be work focused, but be sure that what you share isn't something that could potentially cut into your working hours.

19. How do you balance work and life?

The interviewer wonders if you've made arrangements for the days when your child is too sick to go to school and/or daycare or if you're "out of there" as soon as it's quitting time. Be honest with your answer and if you have challenges, offer a solution of how you would handle it.

20. What did you do during your six-month gap in employment?

Everyone, at some point, will probably have a gap in employment. Do not let the interviewer think you wasted your time. If you worked on "to do" lists, say so. Remember to include that you accomplished a lot. If you don't have a list of things you accomplished, you can talk about being well rested and ready to reenter the work force.

Acing the Interview Resources

General Interview Resources (Many resources covering all interviewing topics)

- Career One Stop Career Resource Library
http://www.careerinfonet.org/crl/library_CRL.aspx?LVL2=31&LVL3=n&LVL1=7&CATID=79&PostVal=2

Types of Interviews

- Career One Stop Job Interview Types
<http://www.careeronestop.org/ResumesInterviews/Interviews/JobInterviews.aspx>
- Positively Minnesota Types of Interviews
http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/Creative_Job_Search_Guide/The_Job_Interview/Types_of_Interviews.aspx

Company Research

- Quintessential Careers Guide to Researching Companies, Industries, and Countries
http://www.quintcareers.com/researching_companies.html
- Business Week <http://www.businessweek.com/>
- Hoovers is world's largest database of company and industry information. It allows you to find contact information, get competitive reports, and build targeted lists.
<http://www.hoovers.com/>
- Forbes Private Company List: <http://www.forbes.com/2002/11/07/privateland.html>
- The Inc. 500: <http://www.inc.com/inc5000/>

Finding Information on Nonprofit Organizations:

- GuideStar Nonprofit Information <http://www.guidestar.org/>
- About.com Nonprofit Charitable Organizations
<http://nonprofit.about.com/od/qathebasics/>

Interview Questions and Answers

- About.com Interview Questions and Answers
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewquest.htm>

Illegal Interview Questions

- About.com How to Answer Illegal Interview Questions
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewsnetworking/a/answer-illegal-questions.htm>

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

- About.com Interview Questions to Ask
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewquest2.html>

Interview Body Language

- Forbes.com Interview Body Language Mistakes That Can Cost You The Job
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/jacquelynsmith/2012/08/20/interview-body-language-mistakes-that-can-cost-you-the-job-2/>

Guidelines for Men's and Women's dress

- Virginia Tech Career Services Interview appearance and Attire
<http://www.career.vt.edu/interviewing/interviewappearance.html>
- Transition Assistance Program Workshop Participant Manual, U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service November 2002 edition
http://vaforvets.va.gov/veterans/resources/Documents/InterviewTechniques_01062012.pdf. pg 30.

Thank You Notes

- Sample Thank You Letters
<http://jobsearch.about.com/od/thankyouletters/a/samplethankyou.htm>
- Career One Stop Thank You Notes
<http://www.careeronestop.org/ResumesInterviews/Letters/ThankYouNotes.aspx>

Job Interview Checklist

- Interviewing Prep: Job Interview Checklist for Job-Seekers
http://www.quintcareers.com/job_interview_checklist.html

Analyze your performance

- Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Information
<http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/tap/tapmanualmar06.pdf> pg 135