

Generic Questions

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1. Tell me about yourself?

- This question seems simple, so many people fail to prepare for it, however it is a great way for you to start an interview and grab the interviewer's attention.

Here's the deal: Don't give your complete *employment or personal* history. Instead give a pitch—one that's concise and compelling and shows exactly why you're the right fit for the job. Start off with 2-3 specific accomplishments or experiences that you most want the interviewer to know about, then add how that prior experience has positioned you for this specific role.

2. How did you hear about the position?

- Another seemingly innocuous interview question, this is actually a perfect opportunity to stand out and show your passion for and connection to the company. For example, if you found out about the opportunity through a friend or professional contact - name drop! Then share why you were so excited about it. If you discovered the company through an event or article, let them know. Even if you found the listing through a random job board, share what caught your eye about the role.

3. What do you know about the company?

- Any candidate can read and regurgitate the company's "About" page. So, when interviewers ask this, they aren't necessarily trying to gauge whether you understand the mission—they want to know whether you *care* about it. Start with one line that shows you understand the company's goals, using key words and phrases from the website. Then make it personal. For example, "I'm personally drawn to this mission because..." or "I really believe in this approach because..." and share a personal example or two.

4. Why do you want this job?

- Companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so make sure you have a great answer about why you want the position. (If you don't? You need to consider applying elsewhere.) First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you for example "I love customer support because I love the unique human interaction and the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem." Share why you love the company - "I've always been passionate about education, and I think your company is doing great things. I would like to be a part of it".

5. Why should we hire you?

- This interview question seems forward (not to mention intimidating!), but if you're asked it, you are in luck: **There is no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager.** Your job is to craft an answer that covers three things: 1. You can not only do the work, you can deliver great results; 2. You will fit in with the team and culture; and 3. You would be a better hire than any of the other candidates – provide specific reasons.

6. What are your greatest professional strengths?

- When answering this question, interview coach Pamela Skillings recommends being **accurate**, including sharing your true strengths, not those you think the interviewer wants to hear; **relevant**, choose your strengths most targeted to this particular position; and **specific**, for example, instead of saying you have “people skills,” say “persuasive communication” or “relationship building skills or experience.” Follow up with an example of how you've demonstrated these traits in a professional setting.

7. What do you consider to be your weaknesses?

- What your interviewer is really trying to do with this question—beyond identifying any major red flags—is to gauge your self-awareness and honesty. “I can't meet a deadline to save my life” is not an option—but neither is “Nothing! I'm perfect!” Strike a balance by thinking of something you struggle with but you are working to improve. For example, maybe you have never been strong at public speaking, but you have recently volunteered to run meetings to help you be more comfortable when addressing a crowd.

8. What is your greatest professional achievement?

- Nothing says “hire me” better than a track record of achieving amazing results in past jobs, so don't be shy when answering this interview question! A great way to answer is by using the **S-T-A-R** method: Set up the **Situation** and the **Task** you were required to complete to provide the interviewer with background context (e.g., “In my last job as a junior analyst, it was my role to manage the invoicing process”), but spend the bulk of your time describing what you actually did - the **Action** and what you achieved - the **Result**. For example, “In one month, I streamlined the inventory process, which saved my group 10 man-hours each month and reduced errors on invoices by 25%.”

Want to stand out? Consider: “**RATS**” - Lead with something that gets attention like **Results**! Follow with your **Action**, **Task**, and **Situation**.

9. Tell me about a challenge or conflict you've faced at work, and how you dealt with it.

- In asking this interview question, the interviewer wants to get a sense of how you will respond to conflict. Anyone can seem pleasant in a job interview, but what will happen if you're hired and you and a new co-worker don't see eye to eye? Again, you can use the S-T-A-R method, being sure to focus on

how you handled the situation professionally and productively, and ideally closing with how you came to a resolution.

10. Where do you see yourself in five years?

- If asked this question, be honest and specific about your future goals, but consider this: A hiring manager wants to know a) if you've set realistic expectations for your career, b) if you have ambition (a.k.a., this interview isn't the first time you're considering the question), and c) if the position aligns with your goals and growth. Your best bet is to think realistically about where this position could take you and answer along those lines. If the position isn't necessarily a one-way ticket to your aspirations it's okay to say that you're not quite sure what the future holds, but that you see this experience playing an important role in helping you make that decision.

11. What's your dream job?

- The interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is in line with your ultimate career goals. While “an NBA star” might get you a few laughs, a better bet is to talk about your career goals and ambitions—and why this job will get you closer to them.

12. What are you looking for in a new position?

- **Hint:** Ideally the same things that this position has to offer! Be specific. Know the position you are applying for and how it fits in with your aspirations.

13. What type of work environment do you prefer?

- **Hint:** Ideally one that's similar to the environment of the company you're applying to! Be specific. Know the culture and the company you are applying for and how you would fit in.

14. What's your management style?

- The best managers are strong but flexible, and that's exactly what you want to show off in your answer. Think: “While every situation and every team member requires a different strategy, I tend to approach my employee relationships as a coach...” Make sure to share a few of your best managerial moments, like when you grew your team from five to 15 or coached an underperforming employee to become the company's top salesperson.

15. Describe an experience when you showed leadership?

- Depending on what's more important for the role, you'll want to choose an example that showcases your project management skills. For example, can you include information about spearheading a project from beginning to end, juggling multiple moving parts, or one that shows your ability to confidently and effectively rally a team? The best examples include enough detail to be memorable yet can show your overall leadership experience and potential.

16. Describe a situation when you disagreed with a decision that was made at work?

- Everyone disagrees with the boss from time to time, but in asking this interview question, hiring managers want to know that you can do so in a productive and professional manner. “You don’t want to tell the story about the time when you disagreed but your boss was being a jerk and you just gave in to keep the peace. You also don’t want to tell an experience where you realized you were wrong,” says Peggy McKee of Career Confidential. Focus on an example where made a positive difference on the outcome of the situation.

17. How would your supervisor and co-workers describe you?

- First of all, be honest. Remember, if you get this job, the hiring manager will be calling your former supervisors and co-workers! Try to pull out strengths and traits you haven't discussed in other aspects of the interview, such as your strong work ethic or your willingness to pitch in on other projects when needed.

18. Why was there a gap in your employment?

- If you were unemployed for a period of time, be direct and to the point about what you’ve been up to. Hopefully, it includes impressive volunteer and other mind-enriching activities, including blogging or taking classes. Steer the conversation toward how you will do the job and contribute to the organization: “I decided to take a break, but today I’m ready to contribute to this organization in the following ways.....”

19. Can you explain why you changed career paths?

- Don't be thrown off by this question—just take a deep breath and explain to the hiring manager why you've made the career decisions you have. More importantly, give a few examples of how your past experience is **transferrable** to the new role. This doesn't have to be a direct connection; in fact, it's often more impressive when a candidate can make seemingly irrelevant experience seem very relevant to the role.

20. How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?

- Choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situations in a productive, positive manner. A great approach is to talk through your go-to stress-reduction tactics. Are you a list maker? Do you know how to take a break? Ask for help? Take 10 deep breaths before you return to a task or answer a concern? Share an example of a stressful situation you navigated with ease and highlight your skills.

21. What would your first 30, 60, or 90 days look like in this role?

- Start by explaining what you would need to do to get ramped up. What information would you need? What parts of the company would you need to familiarize yourself with? What other employees would you want to sit down with? Next, choose a couple of areas where you think you can make meaningful contributions right away for example, “I think a great starter project would be diving into your email marketing campaigns and setting up a tracking system for them.” Sure, if you get the job, you (or your new employer) might decide there’s a better starting place, but having an answer prepared will show the interviewer where you can add immediate impact—and that you’re excited to get started.

22. What are your salary requirements?

- The #1 rule of answering this question is to **do your research!** Know what you should be paid by using sites like Payscale and Glassdoor. You’ll likely come up with a range, and we recommend stating the highest number in that range **that applies**, based on your experience, education, and skills. Make sure the hiring manager knows that you're flexible. You're communicating you know your skills are valuable, but that you want the job and are willing to negotiate.

23. What do you like to do outside of work?

- Interviewers ask personal questions in an interview to “see if candidates will fit in with the culture [and] give them the opportunity to open up and display their personality,” says longtime hiring manager Mitch Fortner. If someone asks about your hobbies outside of work, it is okay to share your hobbies and interest. However, remember to keep it professional. For example, saying you like to hang out with friends on weekends is fine. Mentioned that Monday is usually a rough day for you because you are always hungover is NOT.

24. If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?

- Seemingly random personality-test type questions like these come up in interviews generally because hiring managers want to see how you can think on your feet. There's no wrong answer here, but you'll immediately gain bonus points if your answer helps you share your strengths or personality, or if you make a connection with the hiring manager. **Pro tip:** Come up with a stalling tactic to buy yourself some thinking time, such as saying, “Now, that is a great question. I think I would have to say...”

25. How many tennis balls can you fit into a limousine?

- 1,000? 10,000? 100,000? Seriously? You might get asked brainteaser questions like these, especially in quantitative jobs. Remember, the interviewer doesn’t necessarily want an exact number—he wants to make sure that you understand what’s being asked of you, and that you can set into motion a systematic and logical way to respond. So, just take a deep breath, and start thinking through the math. (Yes, it’s OK to ask for a pen and paper!)

26. Are you planning on having children?

- Questions about your family status, gender (“How would you handle managing a team of all men?”), nationality (“Where were you born?”), religion, or age, are illegal—but they still may get asked. Not always with ill intent—the interviewer might just be trying to make conversation—but you should definitely tie any questions about your personal life (or anything else you think might be inappropriate) back to the job at hand. For this question, think: “You know, I’m not quite there yet. But I am very interested in the career paths at your company. Can you tell me more about that?”

27. What do you think we could do better or differently?

- This is a common question especially at startup companies. Hiring managers want to know you not only have some background on the company, but that you're able to think critically about it and come to the table with new ideas. So, come with new ideas! What new features would you love to see? How could the company increase conversions? How could customer service be improved? You don’t need to have the company’s four-year strategy figured out, but do share your thoughts, and more importantly, show how your interests and expertise would lend themselves to the job.

28. Do you have any questions for us?

- You probably already know that an interview isn't just a chance for a hiring manager to grill you—it's your opportunity to sniff out whether a job is the right fit for you. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team? Some questions you might ask could include: “What is the favorite part of your job?” “How would you describe a typical day for someone in this role?” “Can you describe your management style?”