



# The Definitive Guide to Interview Questions

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## MASTERING THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Heading into an interview can be nerve-racking. You've done your research, dressed the part, and know what you can offer to the position. All that's left are the interview questions.

Interviews are a two-way street. The interviewer will ask you questions to determine if you are the right cultural fit, if your experience level is appropriate, or to see how you respond to specific situations. It is also your chance to learn about the company and the people you would be working with.

This is your definitive guide to interview questions: from how to respond to common questions to what to ask at the end of the interview. *\*Adapted from themuse.com*



### Inside This Guide

- ☐ Questions You Should be Prepared to Answer
- ☐ 50+ Questions You Can Ask





Questions You  
Should be Prepared  
to Answer

### Can you tell me a little about yourself?

This question seems so simple that many people fail to prepare for it, but it's crucial. Don't give your complete employment (or personal) history. Instead give a pitch - one that's concise, 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 wrap up talking about how that prior experience has positioned you for this specific role. You should spend 3 minutes - tops - answering this question.

This is a perfect opportunity to stand out and show your passion for and connection to the company. For example, if you found out about the job through a friend or professional contact, name drop that person and share why you were so excited about it. If you discovered the company through an event or article, share that. Even if you found the listing through a random job board, share what, specifically, caught your eye about the role.

### How did you hear about the position?

### What do you know about the company?

Don't just regurgitate the company's "About" page. When interviewers ask this, they aren't necessarily trying to gauge whether you understand the company, they want to know whether you care about it. Start with one line that shows you understand the company's goals, using a couple key words and phrases from the website, but then go on to make it personal. Say, "I'm personally drawn to this mission because..." or "I really believe in this approach because..." and share a personal example or two.

Companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so have a great answer about why you want the position. First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you (e.g., “I love customer support because I love the constant human interaction and the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem”), then share why you love the company (e.g., “I’ve always been passionate about education, and I think you are doing great things, so I want to be a part of it.”)

**Why do you want this job?**

**Why should we hire you?**

This interview question seems forward but if you’re asked, you’re in luck: there’s no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you can do the work and deliver great results; that you’ll fit in with the team and culture; and that you’d be a better hire than any of the other candidates.

When answering this question be accurate (share your true strengths, not those you think the interviewer wants to hear); relevant (choose your strengths that are most targeted to this particular position); and specific (e.g., instead of “people skills,” choose “persuasive communication” or “relationship building”). Then, follow up with an example of how you’ve demonstrated these traits in a professional setting.

**What are your greatest professional strengths?**



### 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 that you struggle with but that you're working to improve. For example, maybe you've never been strong at public speaking, but you've recently volunteered to run meetings to help you be more comfortable when addressing a crowd.

Nothing says "hire me" better than a track record of achieving amazing results in past jobs. Setup the situation and the task that you were required to complete to provide the interviewer with 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 did and what you achieved. For example, "In one month, I streamlined the process, which saved my group 10 man-hours each month and reduced errors on invoices by 25%."

### What is your greatest professional achievement?

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

Your interviewer wants to get a sense of how you will respond to conflict. Use the STAR method by identifying the **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction, and **R**esult. Be sure to focus on how you handled the situation professionally and productively, and ideally close with a happy ending, like how you came to a resolution or compromise.

Be honest and specific about your future goals. A hiring manager wants to know if you've set realistic expectations for your career, if you have ambition, and if the position aligns with your goals. 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 OK 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.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?**

**What's your dream job?**

Along similar lines, the interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is really 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 goals and ambitions - and why this job will get you closer to them.

"Often the best approach is to mention that you are exploring a number of other similar options in the company's industry," says job search expert Alison Doyle. "It can be helpful to mention that a common characteristic of all the jobs you are applying to is the opportunity to apply some critical abilities and skills that you possess. For example, you might say 'I am applying for several positions with IT consulting firms where I can analyze client needs and translate them to development teams in order to find solutions to technology problems.'"

**What other companies are you interviewing with?**

## Why are you leaving your current job?

You can be sure you'll be asked this question. Keep things positive - you have nothing to gain by being negative about your past employers. Instead, frame things in a way that shows that you're eager to take on new opportunities and that the role you're interviewing for is a better fit for you than your current or last position. For example, "I'd really love to be part of product development from beginning to end, and I know I'd have that opportunity here." And if you were let go? Keep it simple: "Unfortunately, I was let go," is a totally OK answer.

If you get the admittedly much tougher follow-up question as to why you were let go (and the truth isn't exactly pretty), your best bet is to be honest (the job-seeking world is small, after all). But it doesn't have to be a deal-breaker. Share how you've grown and how you approach your job and life now as a result. If you can position the learning experience as an advantage for this next job, even better.

## Why were you fired?

## What type of work environment do you prefer?

Hint: ideally one that's similar to the environment of the company you're applying to. Do your research. Be specific.



The best managers are strong but flexible, and that's exactly what you want to show off in your answer. (Think something like, "while every situation and every team member requires a bit of a different strategy, I tend to approach my employee relationships as a coach..."). Then, share a couple 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.

**What's your management style?**

**Tell me about a time when you exercised leadership.**

Depending on what's more important for the role, you'll want to choose an example that showcases your project management skills (spearheading a project from end-to-end, juggling multiple moving parts) or one that shows your ability to confidently and effectively rally a team. Show how you were a leader in this situation and how it represents your overall leadership experience and potential.

Everyone disagrees with their boss from time to time. Hiring managers want to know that you can do so in a productive, professional way. "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," says Peggy McKee of Career Confidential. "Tell the one where your actions made a positive difference on the outcome of the situation, whether it was a work-related outcome or a more effective and productive working relationship."

**What's a time you disagreed with a decision that was made at work?**

### How would your boss and co-workers describe you?

First of all, be honest (remember, if you get this job, the hiring manager will be calling your former bosses and co-workers). Then, 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.

If you were unemployed for a period of time, be direct and to the point about what you've been up to (and hopefully, that's a litany of impressive volunteer and other mind-enriching activities, like blogging or taking classes). Then, steer the conversation toward how you will do the job and contribute to the organization: "I decided to take a break at the time, but today I'm ready to contribute to this organization in the following ways."

### Why was there a gap in your employment?

### 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 transferable 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.

“Choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situation head-on in a productive, positive manner and let nothing stop you from accomplishing your goals,” says McKee. A great approach is to talk through your go-to stress-reduction tactics (making the world’s greatest to-do list, stopping to take 10 deep breaths), and then share an example of a stressful situation you navigated with ease.

**How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?**

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

Explain what you’d 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 meet? Then choose a couple areas where you can make meaningful contributions right away (e.g., “I think a great starter project would be diving into your email marketing campaigns and setting up a tracking system.”). Having an answer prepared shows the interviewer where you can make an immediate impact - and that you’re excited to get started.

The #1 rule of answering this question is doing your research on 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. Then, make sure the hiring manager knows that you’re flexible. You’re communicating that you know your skills are valuable, but that you want the job and are willing to negotiate.

**What are your salary requirements?**



### 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, too,” says longtime hiring manager Mitch Fortner. “In other words, if someone asks about your hobbies outside of work, it’s totally OK to open up and share what really makes you tick.”

Hiring managers want to know that 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.

### What do you think we could do better or differently?

### Do you have any questions for us?

An interview isn’t just a chance for a hiring manager to learn about you - it’s your opportunity to determine whether a job is the right fit for you. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team? You’ll cover a lot of this in the actual interview, so have a few less-common questions ready to go. We especially like questions targeted to the interviewer (“What’s your favorite part about working here?”) or the company’s growth (“What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?”).

# 50+ Questions You Can Ask



## Generally Speaking...

1. What does a typical day look like?
2. What are the most immediate projects that need to be addressed?
3. Can you show me examples of projects I'd be working on?
4. What are the skills and experiences you're looking for in an ideal candidate?
5. What attributes does someone need to have in order to be successful in this position?
6. What types of skills is the team missing that you're looking to fill with a new hire?
7. What are the biggest challenges someone in this position would face?
8. What sort of budget would I be working with?
9. Is this a new role that has been created?
10. Do you expect the main responsibilities for this position to change in the next six months to a year?

## Training & Professional Development

*Think of each new job not just as a job, but as the next step on your path to career success. Will this position help you get there?*

11. How will I be trained?
12. What training programs are available to your employees?
13. Are there opportunities for advancement or professional development?
14. Would I be able to represent the company at industry conferences?
15. Where is the last person who held this job moving on to?
16. Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to?



## Your Performance

*Make sure you're setting yourself up for success by learning upfront the goals of the position and how your work will be evaluated.*

17. What are the most important things you'd like to see someone accomplish in the first 30, 60, and 90 days on the job?
18. What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
19. What is the performance review process like here? How often would I be formally reviewed?
20. What metrics or goals will my performance be evaluated against?

## About the Interviewer

*Asking questions of the interviewer shows that you're interested in him or her as a person - and that's a great way to build rapport.*

21. How long have you been with the company?
22. Has your role changed since you've been here?
23. What did you do before this?
24. Why did you come to this company?
25. What's your favorite part about working here?



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## About the Company

*Because you're not just working for one boss or one department, you're working for the company as a whole*

26. I've read about the company's founding, but can you tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_?
27. Where do you see this company in the next few years?
28. What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?
29. What are the current goals that the company is focused on, and how does this team work to support hitting those goals?
30. What gets you most excited about the company's future?

## About the Team

*The people you work with day in and day out can really make or break your work life. Ask some questions to uncover whether it's the right team for you.*

31. Can you tell me about the team I'll be working with?
32. Who will I work with most closely?
33. Who will I report to directly?
34. Can you tell me about my direct reports? What are their strengths and the team's biggest challenges?
35. Do you expect to hire more people in this department in the next six months?
36. Which other departments work most closely with this one?
37. What are the common career paths in this department?

## About the Culture

*Is the office buttoned-up conservative or a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of place? Learn the subtle, but oh-so-important, aspects of the culture.*

- 38. What is the company and team culture like?
- 39. How would you describe the work environment here - is the work typically collaborative or more independent?
- 40. Can you tell me about the last team event you did together?
- 41. Is there a formal mission statement or company values?
- 42. What's your favorite office tradition?
- 43. What do you and the team usually do for lunch?
- 44. Does anyone on the team hang out outside the office?
- 45. Do you ever do joint events with other companies or departments?
- 46. What's different about working here than anywhere else you've worked?
- 47. How has the company changed since you joined?

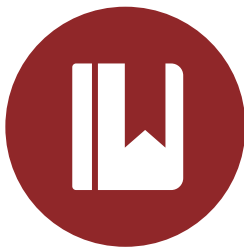
## About the Next Steps

*Before you leave, make sure the interviewer has all the information he or she needs and that you're clear on the next steps by asking these questions.*

- 48. Is there anything that concerns you about my background being a fit for this role?
- 49. What are the next steps in the process?
- 50. Is there anything else I can provide you with that would be helpful?
- 51. Can I answer any final questions for you?



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