

# 1001 Common Interview Questions

Review these typical interview questions and think about how you would answer them in your own words. Relate your answers to the skills, experience and key words the employer has outlined in the job posting. Highlight accomplishments with numbers, percentages and statistics as well as with awards and commendations. Illustrate your answers with personal, work-related experiences as much as possible. Don't simply describe your duties and responsibilities. Practice your answers in front of a mirror or with a friend. Or, better yet, schedule a mock interview at the job center. During the interview, speak with a smile and with enthusiasm and pause 5-10 seconds before answering each interview question. Be brief and to the point. Keep your answers to no more than 2 minutes. Only once should you ask to have a question repeated.

**1. Tell me about yourself.**

The most often asked question in interviews. You need to have a short statement prepared in your mind. Be careful that it does not sound rehearsed. Limit it to work-related items unless instructed otherwise. Talk about your experience, qualifications and accomplishments at previous jobs and how these relate (highlighting points from the employer's job description) to the job for which you're applying – not your childhood, family, hobbies, favorite sports or the big red rock in your backyard.

**2. If I met your former boss, what would he or she have to say about you?**

Keep it positive and work related. Describe a specific accomplishment that brought praise from your boss. Here are some words you may wish to include in your answer: loyalty, energy, positive attitude, team player, patience, hard work, creativity, problem solver.

**3. If I met a former co-worker, what would he or she have to say about you?**

Again, offer a specific, positive example of how you may have assisted that co-worker in a critical situation. Mentioning your being a team player is important here. "While working overtime on a recent weekend, Jill Clark, a co-worker at Smith Company, said I was the hardest worker she had ever known."

**4. Give an example of your work as a team player.**

You are, of course, a team player. Be sure to have examples ready. Specifics that show how you often perform for the good of the team rather than for yourself are good evidence of your team attitude. Don't be arrogant; just say it in a matter-of-fact tone. This is a key point.

**5. Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?**

What not to say: "I want to see myself in management, a supervisor." Rather, say, "This is the job I've been looking for. I'm looking for a home."

**6. How do you prioritize?**

Say something simple like, "I'm a list maker."

**7. Describe your most difficult supervisor.**

Never trash a former supervisor. Rather, say something like, "She was very demanding, but my employment there was a great learning experience." Describe what you learned. A variation of

this question is: Did you ever have a disagreement with a boss? "Sure we disagreed. But we worked well together. For example..." Another variation is: Give an example of when you worked well with a difficult personality or describe a difficult personality.

**8. Describe your greatest strength.**

Don't say something like, "I'm a good learner." Vague answers don't go over very well. The interviewer wants to know what strengths you have that specifically relate to or match the job you're being considered for. A critical component of your presentation will be convincing your prospective employer that you possess the core assets to excel in the job. Again, match your answer with the employer's job posting. It will be essential for you to back up your assertions with concrete examples of how you tapped those strengths in previous situations. Your story should follow these steps: describe a situation or challenge, the action you took and the results. The action you took should incorporate the strength which you are trying to demonstrate. Following, are a few ideas.

- My ability to prioritize
- My problem-solving skills
- My ability to work under pressure
- My ability to focus on projects
- My professional expertise
- My leadership skills
- My positive attitude
- My love of helping and serving people

**9. Describe a weakness.**

You always need to be prepared to share a weakness so you can demonstrate that you are committed to professional growth and have self-insight. Make sure any weakness does not create serious doubt about your willingness or ability to carry out the central functions of the job.

Avoid something negative like, "I sometimes have a temper problem." Or, "I work too much. I just work, work, work." Or, "I have an aversion to kryptonite but it doesn't normally affect my work." Or, worse yet: "I don't have any." Handle it by minimizing your weakness and emphasizing your strengths. Concentrate on professional traits: "I am always working on improving my communication skills to be a more effective presenter." Or, "I'm improving my ability to keep the big picture in mind rather than focusing too much on the details." Or, "Being organized wasn't my strongest point, but I have implemented a time-management system that really helped my organizational skills." A related question is: What was your greatest failure and what did you learn from it?

Several variations of questions 8 and 9 are: How will your strengths impact this company?  
How will your weaknesses impact this company?

**10. Describe a time when you provided excellent customer service.**

Listen to the question! Come up with a specific example; don't generalize about what you would do.

Several variations of this question are: Define excellent customer service. Describe a time when you provided poor customer service.

**11. Describe a problem you encountered in the workplace and how you resolved it.**

Give a specific example that will highlight your skill as a problem solver, communicator, or leader; how you turned a problem into an opportunity. Concentrate, however, on your problem solving technique and not so much on the problem you resolved.

**12. What do you know about this organization?**

Before you go to the interview, visit the company's web site or talk with a current employee. Get information on the company's size, its key products or services, the markets where it competes and its overall reputation. Find out where they have been and where they are going.

**13. Why do you want to work for this organization?**

This may take some thought and certainly should be based on the research you have done on the organization. Sincerity is extremely important here and will easily be sensed. Relate it to your long-term career goals. Describe how your specific accomplishments will benefit the organization, not what you hope to get out of working for the company.

**14. What kind of salary do you need?**

A loaded question. A nasty little game that you will probably lose if you answer first. So, do not answer it with a figure. Instead, say something like, "That's a tough question. Can you tell me the range for the position?" Or, "What would you usually offer someone with my qualifications?" In most cases, the interviewer, taken off guard, will tell you. In not, say that it can depend on the details of the job. Or, say that you are open to negotiation. You may have learned about salary ranges during your researching of the company.

**15. How many children do you have and do you have reliable daycare?**

Oops! This is an inappropriate/illegal question. What if you're asked this question or something like, "Do you have plans for additional children? Are you married? Have you missed work because of daycare problems? Or, are you a single parent?" If you're asked a question like this, never avoid the question or say that that's an inappropriate question. Instead, simply answer the question.

**16. 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 minutes to compare the job description with your abilities, as well as mentioning what you have accomplished in your other positions. Point out how your assets meet the organization's needs and goals. Be positive and reiterate your interest in the company and the position.

**17. Are you willing to work overtime? Nights? Weekends?**

This is up to you. Be totally honest.

**18. How did you prepare for this interview?**

These are some areas you should have involved yourself in:

- Web site
- Informational interview
- Discussions with employees

- Conclude with saying something like, "In fact, all of my life's decisions, directions, and jobs have brought me to this moment; to this interview."

**19. If offered the position, when could you start?**

Be careful with this question. If you're not currently working, you could start immediately. If you're currently employed, you would want to give 2 weeks' notice. If you're currently employed and say something like you could begin the next business day, your potential employer may see you as someone who too quickly would jump ship. If you do it with your current employer, your new employer may fear that you could do it to him or her as well. Such an answer may cost you a job offer.

**20. If offered this position, when would you expect to begin being productive?**

"Right away!"

**21. Why did you leave your last job?**

Stay positive regardless of the circumstances. Never refer to a major problem with management and never speak ill of supervisors, co-workers, or the organization.

- **If you were fired:** Be honest, but quick about explaining it. Explain what you learned from the experience and how it makes you an even stronger employee today. Never lie about your termination.
- **If you were laid off:** Don't apologize or act defeated. If a company goes bankrupt or had massive layoff, simply explain, "Because of the economy, the company decided to eliminate six departments, including mine."
- **If you quit:** Again, be honest and stay positive. State that your work wasn't challenging enough, that you are seeking higher levels of responsibility or simply that you are ready to make the next step on your career ladder and that the job for which you are now interviewing is the ideal next step.

**22. What experience do you have in this field? Or, What qualifications do you have?**

Speak about specifics that relate to the position you are applying for. If you do not have specific experience, get as close as you can. Consider transferrable skills. Here's a strategy: using your fingers, name the first skill, then explain your qualifications. Repeat for each additional skill. Your answer must draw from the skills and qualifications noted in the employer's job description. Use the same key words the employer used.

**23. Define success. Do you consider yourself successful?**

You should always answer yes and briefly explain why. A good explanation is that you have set goals and you have met some and are on track to achieve the others.

**24. What have you done to improve your knowledge in the last year?**

Try to include improvement activities that relate to the job. A wide variety of activities can be mentioned as positive self-improvement. I have some good ones ready to mention.

**25. Are you applying for other jobs?**

Be honest but do not spend a lot of time in this area. Keep the focus on this job and what you can do for the organization. Anything else is a distraction.

- 26. Do you know anyone who works for us?**  
Be aware of the policy on relatives working for the organization. This can affect your answer even though they asked about friends, not relatives. Be careful to mention a friend only if they are well thought of.
- 27. Have you ever had to fire anyone? How did you feel about that?**  
This is serious. Do not make light of it or make it in any way seem like you enjoy firing people. At the same time, you will do it when it is the right thing to do. When it comes to the organization versus the individual who has created a harmful situation, you will protect the organization. Remember, firing is not the same as a layoff or reduction in work force.
- 28. What is your philosophy toward work?**  
The interviewer is not looking for a long or flowery dissertation here. Do you have strong feelings that the job gets done? Yes! That's the type of answer that works best here. Short and positive, showing a benefit to the organization.
- 29. If you had enough money to retire right now, would you?'**  
Answer yes if you would. But since you need to work, this is the type of work you prefer. Do not say yes if you do not mean it.
- 30. Have you ever been asked to leave a position?**  
If you have not, say no. If you have, be honest, brief and avoid saying negative things about the people or organization involved.
- 31. Explain how you would be an asset to this organization.**  
You should be anxious for this question. It gives you a chance to highlight your best points as they relate to the position being discussed. Give a little advance thought to this relationship.
- 32. Tell me about a suggestion you have made in the workplace.**  
Have a good one ready. Be sure and use a suggestion that was accepted and was then considered successful. One related to the type of work applied for is an extra plus.
- 33. What would you do if one supervisor told you to do something now and another supervisor told you to do it later?**  
The manager wants to see how you would handle conflict. How would you handle it?
- 34. What irritates you about co-workers?**  
This is a trap question. A short statement that you get along with folks is great. Stay positive.
- 35. How would you handle it if you noticed a co-worker was not doing his or her fair share of the job or was doing it wrong?**  
This question is to determine how you follow office policies and procedures, how you follow the chain of command and if you are diplomatic.

**36. Tell me about a dream job.**

Stay away from a specific job. You cannot win. If you say the job you are contending for is it, you strain credibility. If you say another job is it, you plant suspicion that you will be dissatisfied with this position if hired. The best is to stay generic and say something like, "A job where I love the work, like the people, can contribute, and can't wait to get to work."

**37. Why do you think you would do well at this job?**

Link your answer with what the employer is looking for in a job candidate and with the company's goals. Give an example illustrating a specific skill, experience or accomplishment using the employer's key words that highlights your feeling of optimism about the job.

**38. What are you looking for in a job?**

See answer #23.

**39. What kind of person would you refuse to work with?**

Do not be trivial. It would take disloyalty to the organization, violence or lawbreaking to get you to object. Minor objections will label you as a whiner.

**40. What is more important to you: the money or the work?**

Money is always important, but the work is the most important. There is no better answer.

**41. What has disappointed you about a job?**

Don't get trivial or negative. Safe areas are few but can include:

- Not enough of a challenge
- I was laid off in a reduction
- Company did not win a contract which would have given me more responsibility

**42. Tell me about your ability to work under pressure.**

You may say that you thrive under certain types of pressure. Give an example that relates to the type of position applied for. The interviewer wants to see if you turn a negative into a positive situation.

**43. What motivates you to do your best on the job?**

This is a personal trait that only you can answer, but good examples are:

- A challenge
- Achievement
- Recognition

**44. Are you willing to work overtime? Nights? Weekends?**

This is up to you. Be totally honest.

**45. How would you know you were successful on this job?**

Several ways are good measures:

- I set high standards for myself and meet them
- My outcomes are a success
- My boss tells me that I am successful

**46. Would you be willing to relocate if required?**

You should be clear on this with your family prior to the interview if you think there is a chance it may come up. Do not say yes just to get the job if the real answer is no. This can create a lot of problems later on in your career. Be honest at this point and save yourself future grief.

**47. You've had several different jobs over the last few years. Why?**

The employer may suspect you're a job hopper. Try to be positive about why this has happened by indicating that past jobs didn't meet your goals and explain why. Stress what you've gained as a result and why you feel this job would be different. This could be a difficult sell but you must convince the employer that you are here to stay put. If the job changes were a result of poor health, point out that you are recovered and bring a doctor's statement if appropriate.

**48. Have you ever been convicted of a crime?**

It's not illegal to ask this question if it has a bearing on the job you are seeking. A bank, for example, wouldn't want a convicted embezzler working in the vault. If you have a conviction, admit it. Explain briefly what happened. Admit that you made a mistake. Tell what you've learned; what you've done to make amends. Ask for a chance.

**49. Are you willing to put the interests of the organization ahead of your own?**

This is a straight loyalty and dedication question. Do not worry about the deep ethical and philosophical implications. Just say yes and briefly explain why.

**50. Who are your heroes and why?**

Think about it. Your hero's credits should mesh with what the employer is looking for.

**51. Describe your management style.**

Try to avoid labels. Some of the more common labels, like "progressive", "salesman" or "consensus", can have several meanings or descriptions depending on which management expert you listen to. The situational style is safe because it says you will manage according to the situation, instead of "one size fits all."

**52. What have you learned from mistakes on the job?**

Here you have to come up with something or you strain your credibility. Make it a small, well-intentioned mistake with a positive lesson learned. "An example would be ... working too far ahead of colleagues on a project and thus throwing coordination off."

**53. If you were hiring a person for this job, what would you look for?**

Be careful to mention traits that are needed and that you have.

**54. In your lifetime, what has been your greatest accomplishment? What did you learn from it?**

A personal touch work well here, such as your marriage, childrearing or helping someone in need.

**55. What qualities do you look for in a boss?**

Be generic and positive. Safe qualities are: knowledgeable, a sense of humor, fair, loyal to subordinates, and a holder of high standards. All bosses think they have these traits.

**56. Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a dispute between others.**

Pick a specific incident. Concentrate on your problem-solving technique and not the dispute you settled.

**57. What position do you prefer on a team working on a project?**

Be honest. If you are comfortable in different roles, point that out.

**58. Describe your work ethic.**

Emphasize benefits to the organization. Things like, determination to get the job done and work hard but enjoy my work are good.

**59. What has been your biggest professional disappointment?**

Be sure you refer to something that was beyond your control. Show acceptance and no negative feelings.

**60. Tell me about the most fun you have had on the job.**

Talk about having fun by accomplishing something for the organization.

**61. What creates good morale? Why is it important? Who is responsible for it?**

What would you say?

**62. Do you have any questions for me?**

Always have 2 or 3 questions prepared. Questions involving areas where you will be an asset to the organization are good. Begin by saying something like this: "I have several questions but first I'd like to say something: Thank you for the opportunity of this interview, you've asked some very important questions. I'm very interested in this job. If hired, I will do my very best to exceed your expectations. Now, I'd like to ask my questions". Don't ask more than 3 questions unless prompted. Have them written in advance on your pad of paper.

Here are some examples:

- **What is the first challenge the person you hire must attend to?**

You must be on the same page as your new manager, as well as be clear on what the initial expectations are and that you can deliver. What you don't want is to allow yourself to be misled about the job's requirements and end up overwhelmed after the first week on the job. Related to this is the question: What training should I anticipate and when would I be fully functional?

- **What can you tell me about the individual to whom I would report?**

Why you need to ask: It doesn't matter how wonderful the company might be; your time will be spent working for a specific manager. You need to find out who this person is and what kind of manager he or she is. Related to this question: How will I be supervised?

- **Would you like greater clarification to any of the answers I have given during the interview?**

An answer you gave may have raised another question in the mind of the interviewer. This gives the interviewer the opportunity to probe a little deeper and you the opportunity to add more depth to an answer.

Several more examples:

- **What is a typical day?**
- **How would I get feedback on my performance?**
- **What is the dress code?**

**DO NOT** ask about salary, vacation days, benefits or anything else that would make it look like you're more interested in the compensation package than the company. You should already have a good idea about salary and benefits from the job description, information interview or web site.

## Boiling All Of These Questions Down To The 10 Most Common Interview Questions

Take some time and write down your answers

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
2. **What are your key skills/qualifications?**
3. **What are your strengths?**
4. **Describe a weakness?**
5. **How are your experiences relevant to this job?**

6. Give an example of a problem you've faced and how you solved it?
7. If you had the choice, would you rather work alone or as part of a group? Why?
8. What do you know about this company?
9. Why should I hire you? Or, why do you want to work here?
10. Do you have any questions?

## QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

Your interview is almost over. The interviewer then asks you the final question, "Do you have any questions for me?" You must have several questions (at least 2, no more than 3) ready because you never want to reply, "No I don't have any questions." Such an answer will likely give the employer the impression that you're really not that interested in the job.

Here are several questions from which you can choose. Have two or three written in advance on a piece of paper in your folder.

Hint: Before you begin asking your questions, say something like, "I do have several questions but before I begin, I want to thank you once again for this interview and say that if hired, I am confident I will exceed your expectations. Now, my first question is..." (Memorize this statement and deliver it with feeling). This is a polite way of stating that you want the job without saying something inappropriate like, "Shall I begin work on Monday, the 19<sup>th</sup>?"

1. What happened to the person who previously did this job? Or, if this is a new position, how has this job been performed in the past?
2. What is the first challenge the person you hire must attend to?
3. Knowing the mission statement for your company is ..., what is THE most important thing I need to know to continue to provide this kind of excellent service to our customers?
4. What are the typical day-to-day responsibilities that I'll have in this job?

5. What are your major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?
6. How will I be supervised?
7. How long a period of training will I be involved in before I'm fully functioning?
8. Would you like greater clarification to any of the answers I have given during the interview?
9. What is the most important thing I can learn so I can provide excellent productivity to your company?
10. Why do you like working here, and what keeps you here?
11. What are the top 5 problems you have that I could take off your plate immediately to make your job easier?
12. What goals or objectives need to be achieved in the next 6 months and in the next year?
13. How does the reporting structure work here? What are acceptable channels of communication?
14. Will I be working as part of a team or independently?
15. What is our next step?

*Ask questions that will make the interviewing personnel think about their answers. This leaves them with a very strong and positive last impression of YOU!*