

Interview Questions and Answers

Tell me about yourself. Often, this opening statement stuns the interviewee. Employers use this question not only for the actual information that you will give, but as a way to figure out your style and attitude. This interview query can best be handled by summarizing or expanding on your resume. Use action words that describe your results and skills that are related to what the job requires. Plan a answer that is no longer than two minutes for this question. If you are still in doubt, consider asking the interviewer which area of your background you should discuss. For example: “Would you rather know about my management background or my sales experience?” Answering such a question can encourage participation from the recruiter, and help you keep your response on target.

What are your greatest strengths? This is a great opportunity to “sell” yourself. However, don’t go overboard; you don’t want to seem arrogant. You should cite specific strengths that you know the employer wants. Interviewers like to hear about personal qualities—loyalty, willingness to work hard, politeness, and promptness, explained in concrete terms. Avoid generalizations such as “I like people.” Take a few moments to collect your thoughts and identify the accomplishments demonstrating your top one or two strengths. For example, “My supervisor asked me to take over a project at the last minute which involved coordinating meetings for 20 staff members in several departments. The project was completed on time, and I was complimented by my boss for an outstanding performance.”

What are your greatest weaknesses? Do not be scared by this question. The interviewer wants reassurance that hiring you is a good idea, not a mistake. A flip answer, a joke or a statement that you have no weaknesses may show that you have no real insight into yourself. But this is not the time to confess all your bad points. Present your weaknesses as professional strengths. For example, if you are interviewing for a customer relations position that requires good people skills, say, “My greatest weakness is that I need to be around people; I don’t function well being alone for long periods of time.”

What did you like most about your previous position? An employer tries to figure out what type of worker you will be by how you answer this question. Be specific; use statements such as, “I enjoyed reorganizing the department’s filing system. My new system resulted in fewer lost papers and greater speed in finding necessary paperwork.”

Why did you leave your previous employer? This question can be hard to answer if you left because of problems; however, never badmouth an employer! Be positive and professional. Even if you were fired, it is wiser to be upfront about the issue. You might say, “My past employer felt that I was not aggressive enough. I have looked at my interests and strengths again and I now realize that I am much more suited to customer service than sales. However, I learned many things from my boss and I can use those skills in a position here.”

Always be honest. Information about your last job and why you left can be, and often is, easily checked. Any differences in your answers and your references will make person interviewing you question everything you said or put on your resume.

If we were to pick up the telephone and call your present company, what would your employer say? Make it clear whether your employer does or does not know you are looking for a different job. Then decide if your employer would give you a good recommendation, and how it would compare with what you have told the interviewer. If you see yourself accurately, you will know what qualities your current employer will mention. Suggest that the interviewer call your references, but be sure everyone you have listed as a reference has given permission.

Where do you hope to be in five years? Take the time to learn the company structure, and then select one or two positions you might achieve in five years. Some companies estimate that hiring and training a new employee costs as much as \$10,000. A thoughtful answer will assure the interviewer that, if hired, you plan to stick around and give them their money’s worth.

Since employers like goal-oriented workers, saying that you have no idea what you want in five years may make it seem like you have no ambition. Do not say, “I want to be president of this company.” Instead, you may want to answer in terms of position, responsibility or financial security. This is not the time for fine details but a chance to give the interviewer a look into your personality and goals. A statement might include, “I hope to be a coordinator or director of a department with this company.”

What do you think your employer's obligations are to you? An employer should be available for support or guidance, not to get the job done. The balance between being able to take directions and being able to work independently is a key to candidate success.

Interviewers seek employees who want to work in a positive, enthusiastic company atmosphere with the opportunity to advance. These candidates have the motivation and determination to stay with the company and succeed.

With your background, don't you feel that you would be overqualified for this job? Thousands of unemployed teachers, for example, have encountered that question when they applied for positions in the business world. The interviewer is worried about spending time and money training you, only to have you leave for a better position.

A straightforward answer might be, "I can't promise how long I would stay with your company. I believe that I have some special talents to share with you, and, in return, I hope to grow and strengthen my knowledge and experience. I can promise my dedication and my eagerness to learn."

What have you done that demonstrates initiative and willingness to work? Go back to your resume. Mention situations from your work or personal life that demonstrate your skills and attitudes.

Why do you want to work here? This question allows you to show your knowledge about the company. It also gives you a chance to ask your own questions. Demonstrate how your research convinced you that you wanted to work for this particular company.

What are your salary expectations? The interviewer is determining if the company can afford you, not trying to put you on the spot. Research the average salary for the position you seek, then show your willingness to talk about salary within that range rather than a specific figure. If the interviewer asks this question at the beginning try to stall by saying you would like to discuss the job itself first; it is better to discuss salary late in the interview, if you have a choice.

If you are asked what salary you were making before, be honest—this is another easily-verified answer. However, if the amount you were making was low, you might also mention any benefits you received.

Are you applying for any other jobs? This is not a trick question! In today's tight job market, no one expects you to apply to only one company. If you are applying for only one job, the interviewer may figure that you are either an innocent job hunter in the business world, or not very serious about your job search. Answer by saying that your talents are useful in several types of jobs and that you are looking at ways to use your skills.

Would you care for a cigarette or a drink? If your interview takes place over lunch, it is better to refuse an alcoholic drink or a smoke. You are more likely to offend your interviewer by saying yes than no.

How do you spend your spare time? Workaholics are not always the best employees, so this question is asked in the hopes of hiring well-rounded individuals. In a sales position, for example, a relationship with customers is established by sharing small talk on common interests or hobbies. That is very difficult if the salesperson's only interest is work.

Your answer shows more about you at a deeper level. For example, if you like to play cards, the interviewer might surmise that you enjoy other analytical activities. Highlight pastimes that would be good for the job you seek. If you are interested in reporting, perhaps an interest in crossword puzzles would be a plus since it indicates using clues to solve word problems. On the other hand, if you watch sports on television you might seem to be just a bystander rather than an active team member. If you indicate that you spend all your free time with you family, one interviewer might find you a stable member of society, but another might worry that business travel is out of the question. Give this question some serious thought.