

Interviewing



How to Make it Count

Answering Six Common Interview Questions

While you'll never be able to anticipate every question you might be asked in an interview, you can get a head start by developing strong, concise answers to commonly used questions. Most interviewers will ask similar questions like these to gain knowledge about a candidate's abilities and qualifications and compatibility with the job and the company.

1. Tell me about yourself:

This is often the opening question in an interview. It's also one of the most difficult if you're not prepared. Remember, the interviewer does not want to hear about your hometown or your scrapbooking hobby. This question calls for your one-minute commercial that summarizes your years of experience and skills and your personality in the context of the job for which you are interviewing. Get to the point and sell your professional self. Develop a few brief sentences that demonstrate you have what it takes to do the job -- experience, proven results and desire to contribute.

2. Why should we hire you?:

The key to answering any question about you versus your competition is using specifics. "Everybody is going to speak in generalities, so you need something that will make you stand out a bit," said Linda, a teacher in Springfield, Ohio. Give real examples that show them you are best-suited for the job. Linda says she would point out her achievements and accomplishments throughout her career that are relevant to the open position, as well as her experiences in dealing with different types of students and teaching situations. Pinpoint the qualities you have that are truly valuable to the company.

Be ready to handle the surprise call. Once on the phone, candidates tend to ramble. Be succinct and avoid the urge to over-amplify your answers. Remember the average individual listens for only 30-45 seconds at a time. Therefore, carefully prepare "sound bites" that will last not longer than a minute. While being brief, however, avoid yes or no answers, as they give little information. Make sure to include key points and answer questions directly.

Role-play the interview. During the course of a phone interview, candidates should try to match the interviewer's voice tone, pitch, and delivery speed. Enlist a friend or family member, support group member, or other coach to call you at an appointed time and run through the interview. This will work only if both of you agree to be "in character" during the entire mock interview. After the interview (at least 30 minutes) is completed, debrief to determine overall impressions and areas for improvement.

Be aware of mannerisms, such as repeated phrases (ending sentences with "and that," starting sentences with "like," "you know," or "I mean," etc.) or nervous laughs. These mannerisms can be distracting and can hamper professional delivery. The experience shows that individuals with these mannerism are often completely unaware of them.

Watch your mouth while talking on the phone. Keep your mouth about an inch from the mouthpiece to avoid sounding faint or muffled.

Selectively smile during the course of the interview. Yes, you are right. No one can see you, but this tip is one the experts swear by. Smiling will make your voice sound positive, confident, and upbeat.

Do not eat or chew gum while on the phone. The sound carries beautifully and will not leave a positive impression.

Keep up your end on the conversation. It is fine to let the interviewer do most of the talking, but be prepared with some questions of your own. Interviewers generally expect senior executives to be intelligent individuals with inquiring minds. Prepare several questions concerning responsibilities, the characteristics that will contribute to success in the position, etc. Write them down and keep them by the phone.

Take notes during the interview. These will be tremendously helpful in preparing for future interviews and will help you keep track of points to emphasize or follow-up on your questions and later meetings.

Go for the close. The whole point on the phone interview is to move you forward to the next stage of the search process. If the interviewer has not established next steps by the end of the conversation, it is your turn to take the initiative. Tell him or her how interested you are in the position, how much you could contribute, and ask when things might move forward.

Telephone Interviewing

Sometimes if a candidate lives a great distance from the offices of the company, then it may not be practical to attend preliminary interviews in person. In this case, and interview can be conducted on the telephone. Alternatively some companies use telephone interviews as a screening process to eliminate the weaker candidates early on. A telephone interview is not to be treated as an easier option. It should be conducted in an equally professional manner as a standard interview and the same rules apply. The only difference is that your body language no longer applies. Do not let the interviewer totally lead the conversation. If it is appropriate, push for a face to face meeting saying something like, "I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you in person so we can both better evaluate each other. I am free either Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning. Which would be better for you?"

Preparing for the Phone Interview

Preparation for a telephone interview is as important as preparation before any other form of interview or meeting. The impression you create in the opening moments, and the manner with which you present yourself will determine whether or not you will be successful.

Find out as much as you can about the company and the job description. If your telephone interview has been arranged by a third party, you should receive much of this information from them. But in any case, do your own researches—company websites are one of the best sources of information. Find out about the size and structure of the company, its products, and its markets.

Make a note of any questions you would like to ask. Ask about things if they are important to you, especially if your decision whether to proceed depends upon the answers (for example, relocation). Otherwise, ask broad questions such as "What training will be given?" and "What opportunities are there for advancement?" Have these questions written down.

Have a notepad and pen ready, along with your calendar.

Have your resume at hand. In all probability, the hiring manager will have a copy of it too, so you probably won't be asked to describe your background in detail.

During the Phone Interview

How to behave. Speak in a clear voice, answer the interviewer's questions precisely, try to elaborate without talking too much, exude controlled professionalism, and smile.

3. Why do you want to work here?

What do you know about our company?: Peter, a physician in Indianapolis, said that research is important in answering these questions. "I would use this opportunity to show off what I know about the company and, more importantly, how I would fit in." Susan, a vice president of benefits in Chicago, said that she would address issues and challenges in the company to demonstrate the depth of her knowledge. "I usually talk about revenue, numbers of employees, and also challenges in their type of business and how my experience relates to that," she said. "I would point out things I have done in similar companies that could address their problems."

4. What are your weaknesses?:

The secret to answering this question is using your weaknesses to your advantage. "I would turn my weaknesses into strengths," said Tara, an attorney. "For example, if my weaknesses include my lack of patience I would then state that because of this, I have learned to take special measures to ensure that I remain calm and attentive." Just make sure that you do give a real answer to this question. None of us is without faults, so don't pretend that you do not have weaknesses.

5. What did you dislike about your last job? Why did you leave your last job?:

You need to be cautious about these kinds of questions and make sure you do not end up sounding bitter. "I would never talk down about my former company, the boss, or my former co-workers," Tara said. You need to have a good understanding about the job

Other Common Interview Questions

for which you're applying to turn this question into a positive one. It may be best to say that you really enjoyed many aspects of your job, then focus on how this new job will give you the opportunity to contribute more in a particular area that is key to the position.

6. Where do you see yourself in five years?:

An interviewer does not want to hear that your five-year aspiration is to be sailing in the Caribbean or working in a different industry. You need to talk about goals you have that relate to the job. This will demonstrate that you understand the industry, the company and are motivated to succeed there. Susan, the director of public relations at a major car rental company, said she would keep her answer specific to her field, such as stating that she sees herself as a vice president of corporate communications. Preparation is the key to answering any question with poise and confidence. Always keep in mind -- whatever the question is -- that the interviewer is trying to uncover if you are a good fit and can make a positive contribution in the job.



- What are the responsibilities of your current or previous position?
- What do you know about our company/industry?
- What is your organizational/management style?
- Why did you decide to apply for this position?
- How would you describe your work style?
- What motivates you?
- Describe a time when you stepped into an informal leadership role without being directed or advised to take on the role.
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Tell us about a challenging project where you had a significant role, and walk us through the steps you followed. What was the outcome?
- How do you define success?
- What was the last book you read?
- What area of this job would you find most difficult?
- What leadership/supervisory roles have you held?
- What are your strengths?
- What has been your greatest crisis, how did you solve it?
- Describe a time when you've worked with a difficult coworker/colleague, and how did you handle the experience?
- What person has had the greatest influence on you, why?
- What do you like best or least about your job/school?
- How has college prepared you for this career?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What have you done that shows innovation?
- In what areas of the job would you expect to be most successful....least?
- Describe a situation with an irate customer and how you handled it?
- What aspect of this job do you consider most crucial?
- What are your long range career objectives and how do you plan to achieve them?
- How do you think a friend/former supervisor would describe you?
- How do you work under pressure?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- Tell me about other jobs you've had. In hindsight, how could you have improved your performance?
- What makes a good supervisor?
- What skills do you want to improve?
- What are your salary requirements?
- What frustrates you?