

Twenty questions (and answers) that you need to deal with at interview.

The key to interview success is effective preparation, not just what you need to know before the interview, but how to handle questions when you get there. Here we set out twenty tough interview questions, with some suggested answer guides, to help you out perform the competition.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The questions below, in one form or another, will come up at your next interview. Why leave it to chance? Prepare a good response to each and boost your interview performance.

1. Tell me about yourself?

Have a brief chronological history prepared. Keep it to about two minutes. Highlight your virtues and make it interesting and relevant to the job.

2. What do you know about the organisation?

Make sure you have prepared properly for the interview and can discuss products, services, problems, people, and history. Avoid the website trap, there are plenty of places to get information.

3. What do you look for in a job?

If you have a career plan, this will take care of this question. Context your answer in terms of your realistic future job needs.

4. How long would you take to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

Use this question as an opportunity to state your past accomplishments and to demonstrate how your skills relate to their specific requirements.

Draw on examples of past work that demonstrate you have been able to solve problems or create value for your employers. Every interviewer wants you to show that you can deliver results and will go beyond the basic requirements of the job.

5. Why are you leaving your present position?

Mention more responsibilities, new skills, change of environment, interest in working in the company, career progression, and new challenges.

6. What features of your most recent position did you like the most? The least?

Pick three answers, don't dwell on the negative.

7. What were your most recent significant contributions while in your most recent position?

Give your answers in terms of measurable results and not broad descriptions. Pick three only.

8. Can you work under pressure and to deadlines?

Questions like these are best answered with a specific example from recent working history. It helps if you can relate these to the new organisation too. When someone asks you a question looking for an example of your past experience, use "I" and not "We" statements. The latter suggests you were on the periphery, rather than at the centre of the task or achievement.

9. If you had your choice of company or job, what would you do?

Again, if you have a career plan mapped out, this question will answer itself. It is best to respond to this in terms of the type of company or job that you seek. You might for example wish to work with a company strong on recognition or that prioritises the development of its employees.

10. What are your salary expectations?

Be realistic about your worth and the current job market. Do not price yourself out of consideration.

11. Why do you want to work for us?

You really need to prepare well for this question. It seems simple, but is loaded with opportunity to impress or distress your interviewer.

12. What are your goals?

Relate these to the job you are applying for.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

13. What are your strong points?

Present at least three. Relate them to the company and the position. Back up your choices with examples from your recent working past, as any good interviewer will drill down on your answers.

14. What are your weak points?

Highlight areas in which you genuinely feel a need for personal development. Show how you have been able to learn from past mistakes or feedback from previous managers.

15. What are your long term objectives?

The interviewer's concern in the current employment market, is that you want the position they are seeking to hire into and that you are not just buying time until you find something better.

16. What do you know about the role you have applied for?

The best answer to this question, is to be able to describe the problem that the company currently has by not having someone in the role. It is an answer model that applies for absolutely every position. If they are missing a line manager, who is covering the role? What is not being done as a consequence? What is the impact on the customer? In this way you present yourself as not just a candidate, but as a solution to the problem.

17. Would you work flexible hours?

It is important to your overall well being that you do not commit to something that you will find stressful to deliver on in the longer term. Every employer wants to hire people who will be flexible to the demands of business. Qualify the flexibility needed and the likely frequency. Leave a clear message that you want to do what the company needs, but still meet any out of work commitments that you might have.

18. What motivates you?

If the role is weighted towards performance based pay, then mentioning motivators such as money is not necessarily a bad thing. But linking reward to customer satisfaction is a better route, being motivated by getting repeat business or providing a good service, will have a stronger resonance with an employer. If you understand the job you are applying for well enough, then context your answer in terms of the benefit you can bring to the organisation.

19. Why should we hire you?

This can feel an awkward question to answer, particularly if you are not naturally inclined to self promotion. However, it should be seen as an opportunity for you to summarise the key points of your candidature. It gives you a brief, and it must be brief, opportunity to repeat the relevancy of your application in terms of your skills, experience and accomplishments. It also allows you to demonstrate an alignment between your career goals and the hiring organisation. Don't be afraid to take and make notes during an interview, they can be very helpful for these last two questions.

20. Do you have any questions?

If you are in anyway interested in the position for which you are interviewing, the answer must be "Yes". Any response to the contrary, is a clear message to the interviewer that you are either not interested or that you lack initiative. For more information on questions you can or should ask, see our guide "What to Ask".

