

Top 10 Interview Questions & *How To Ace Them*



1 Tell me about *yourself*.



Approach:

Tempting as it might to rattle off your accomplishments right from the get go, resist the urge to do so. Build rapport with the interviewer by starting with something personal.

One strategy is to start off with some aspects of your life that does not directly relate to your work. Think about certain hobbies which you are passionate about like quilting, astronomy, chess, choral singing, golf, skiing, tennis, or antiquing. (needless to say, keep it PG – avoid religion, politics, adult talk and anything that your interviewer may find inappropriate or uncomfortable discussing).

Make the most out of the question:

Use this question to highlight personality and traits that would give you an edge over the competition.

Interests that highlight self discipline, perseverance and commitment are valued – a regular fitness regime or your triathlete hobby which helps to represent your healthy, energetic side are worth mentioning.

Volunteering helps to highlight selflessness / willingness to put others above one's self and empathy.

Pursuits like being an avid reader or solving sudoku puzzles / brain teasers will help to showcase your intellectual leaning.

Warning: Do not lie about your interests. The worst situation you can find yourself in is having an interviewer that is just as avid about triathlons "as you are".

Ending your answer:

Always end with a link to your professional life to keep the conversation smooth flowing. Consider using phrases like "In addition to those interests and passions, my professional life is a huge part of who I am, so I'd like to talk a bit about some of the strengths which I would bring to this job."

2 Why should we *hire you?*



Approach:

This question is used by interviewers to evaluate whether you know enough about the job you are applying for, and to see how well of a fit you are to that job scope.

Be ready for this question, it is usually the second question that comes up in most interviews. To prepare, do your homework and look at the job listing. Make a list of the job requirements, including personality traits (if any), skills, and qualifications.

Match these with a list of the qualities you have that fit these requirements. For each quality, think of a specific example that you used that trait to achieve something at work.

For example, if you list that you are a “problem solver”, think of a time in which your ability to problem solve helped move a project forward / cut costs for your company.

Bonus: Throw in some awards / accomplishments to substantiate your claims!

How it sounds in the interview:

1. I have top-notch administrative skills and I believe I'd be an asset for the office. My skill set seems to be a perfect match for what you're looking for. In addition, I enjoy working with people, and would welcome the opportunity to be a part of your team.
2. You have explained that you are looking for a sales executive who is able to effectively manage over a dozen employees. In my fifteen years of experience as a sales manager, I have developed strong motivational and team-building skills. I was twice awarded manager-of-the-year for my innovative strategies for motivating employees to meet and surpass quarterly deadlines. If hired, I will bring my leadership abilities and strategies for achieving profit gains to this position.

3 Why do you want *this job?*



Approach:

This question usually throws off many interviewees. Focus too much on yourself and you come off as too self-centered. Focus too much on helping the company and you come off as fake and brown nosing. Strike a good balance between what you have and how it happens to help the company you are applying for.

- **Emphasize why you are a good fit** - Be specific about what makes you an ideal candidate for the role. Note what are the skill / personality requirements needed in the job and match them to what you excel in. When answering, highlight a few of your abilities that qualify you for the job.

- **Emphasize what you can contribute** - your answer should also emphasize what you can contribute and what you bring to the table. Mention any skills or work experience that makes you a unique, strong candidate for the job. Wherever possible, substantiate with numbers and past examples. Can you save your new company X% just like your previous company? Great. Know how to streamline processes and optimize work flows? Bring that up!
- **Don't talk about yourself** – Never ever mention perks like salary, hours, or commute as reasons you want the job. Not even as secondary reasons. You don't want to be perceived as a “convenient applicant” that will switch jobs at the next “more convenient” offer.

How it sounds in the interview:

- This job requires specific skill sets in sales and marketing, two of my greatest skill sets. When working for company XYZ, I increased sales by 25% in the midst of what many considered a recession. I believe that by bringing my X years of sales and marketing experience to this company, I can help ABC company grow.
- I have worked as a graphic designer for the past six years. Not only am I experienced working in the digital industry, I also greatly enjoy it. Working in an agency that values creative talent and skills would allow me to continue to put my skills to good use. I believe that working in a job scope fitting of my passion and personality would rub off positively with my co-workers.
- I have admired your company’s successful strategies and mission for years. Your mission to create lifelong relationships between your company and the communities you serve have brought you success everywhere you have opened an office. There are values I greatly admire.

4 What is your *greatest strength*?



Approach:

The biggest mistakes that candidates make with this question is either to under-sell or oversell. The best way to avoid both extremes is to prepare 3-5 strengths right off the bat ready to answer when this question comes your way.

Note the key job requirements necessary for your new position. Based on the requirements, brainstorm around what are some strengths that would achieve this outcome. Does it involve project management spanning 3-6 months at a time? Highlight your attention to detail and your ability to manage various tasks concurrently. Does it require servicing of clientele on a daily basis? Mention how you hit off with people naturally at events and parties.

The closer a match you are, the more likely you'll be to get a job offer.

Remember – keep it simple. One strength, substantiated with one example, followed by how it can benefit your prospective employer.

Examples:

- I have an affinity with people, even those I barely know. People find it easy to speak with me at parties and events when they first meet me. I remember once where I met a gentleman at our college alumni event, our conversation started off randomly but he ended up giving my previous company a huge contract! I hope I would have the opportunity to bring this to your company as well.
- I am a skilled designer with over ten years of experience. My ad banners and creative campaigns have helped won my previous company various awards over the years. For example, you may have heard of XYZ campaign. I was involved in that campaign from conception to delivery. I believe that these skills would fit in nicely with the creative strength of your agency.
- I pride myself on my negotiation skills and my ability to resolve what could be difficult situations. With five years of experience as a customer liaison officer, I have learned to effectively understand and resolve customer issues.

5 What is your *greatest weakness?*



Approach:

Don't be fooled, this is not a time to be humble! Remember to have one answer ready for this question so it doesn't catch you off guard.

Although this question seems difficult, it is actually amazingly simple to answer. Here are some ways to catch this curve ball.

a) Discuss Non-Essential Skills

One way is to answer the question with a non answer. Reply with a skill that you lack that the job does not require anyway.

For example, if you are applying for a designer job, you might share you are not necessarily good with numbers. You can even lighten the mood by saying you can count pixels but that is the extent of your math skills.

b) Mention Skills You Have Improved

They mentioned that it has to be a weakness but did not say it still has to be one. Mention a skill that you previous lacked but took the initiative, dillgence and effort to improve.

You can sketch for employers your initial level of functioning, discuss the steps you have taken to improve this area, and then reference your current, improved level of skill.

Remember, tie this strategy back to a) and do not mention anything that you improved upon that is related to the job for which you are interviewing.

c) Turn a Negative Into a Positive

Mention a skill that is irritatingly positive that the interviewer will not write it off as a negative. For example, if you are applying to become an auditor, mention your over-conscientiousness to check and double check every entry when you work in a project.

Examples:

- When working on a project, I prefer to give myself a little bit more buffer and complete it ahead of schedule. (do not use in a company that values work life balance)
- I used to wait until the last minute to set up my upcoming meetings and appointments, but over the years I realized that scheduling in advance makes much more sense.
- Sometimes, I spend more time than necessary on a task, just to double check my work for errors. Although I've never missed a deadline, it is still a conscientious effort I take to know when to move on to the next task, and to be confident when assigning others work.

6 Why did you quit / resign from you previous job?



Approach:

This is where you need to exercise caution – you are treading on thin ice. Maybe you want a higher salary, thought the company was in chaos, despised a new manager, or were laid off – whatever the reason, these should not be raised.

Be honest, but also strategic in your response - avoid any answer that reflects poorly on you. Here are some tips on how to handle this question:

Cite personal reasons – interviewers know what is off limits, and family is one of them. Having a spouse relocated due to their career change, or having to stay home to take care of kids are all perfectly valid reasons to quit your previous job.

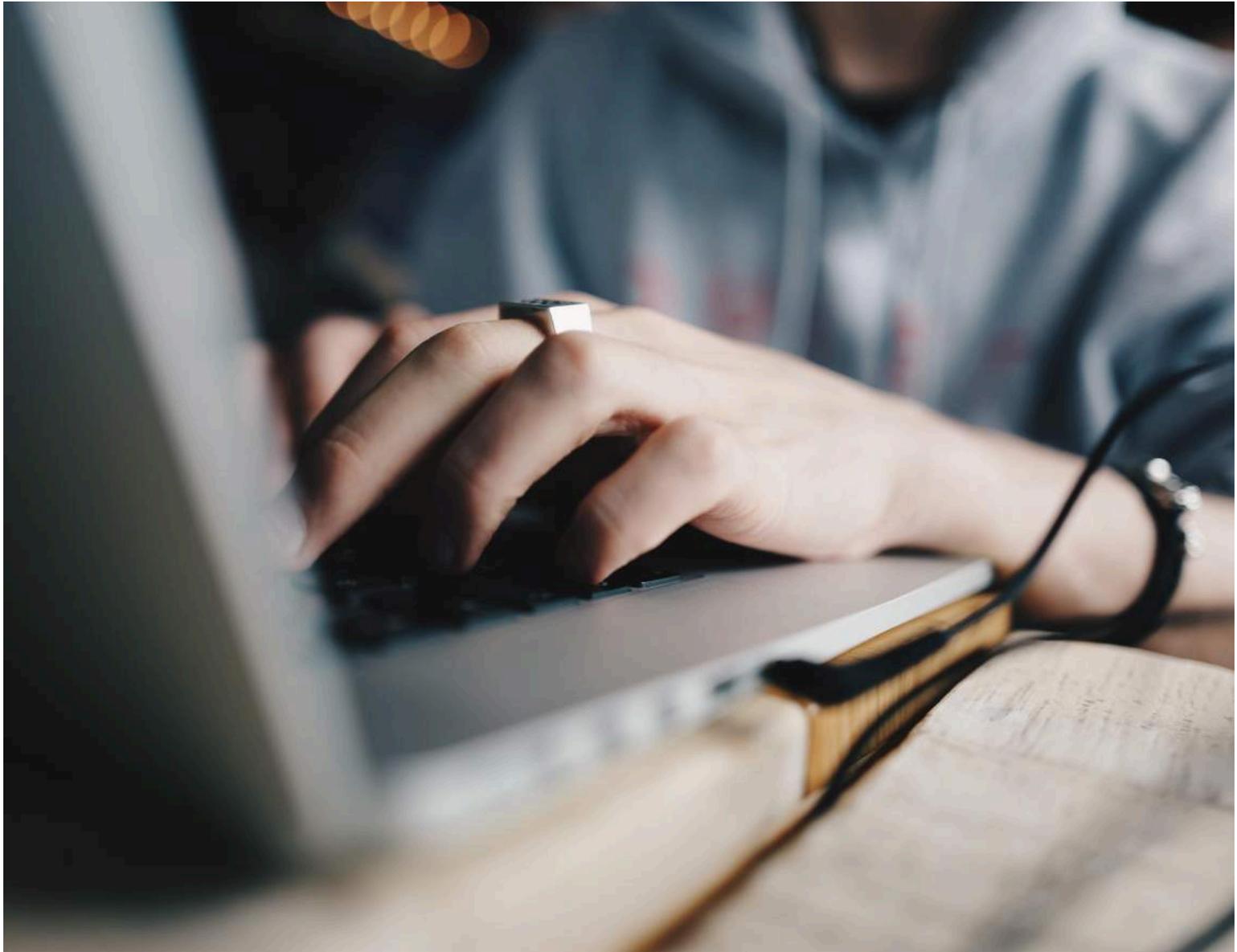
Cite growth opportunities – mention that you felt you have learnt enough (hints at your skill sets) and want to develop your skills further in a related but different industry.

Not just me reasons – the previous company decided to close their country branch, or there was a restructuring where X other employees along with myself were laid off.

Examples:

- I don't have room to grow with my current employer and I'm ready to move on to a new challenge.
- I'm looking for a new challenge and to and I couldn't properly apply for jobs part time while working.
- I was laid-off from my last position when my job was eliminated due to HQ relocating our country office to another country.
- I am interested in taking up a new challenge and find opportunities to use my skills and experience in a different capacity than I have in the past.

7 Do you take work home with you?



Approach:

There is no cookie cutter answer to this question – it really depends on your new employer.

If your company values work life balance, the correct answer is clearly no.

If the company requires employees to put in lots of overtime, you may want to stress your willingness to bring projects home to ensure work gets completed on schedule no matter what.

If you aren't sure, the safest answer is to emphasize ability to handle multiples projects while also volunteering that, when necessary, you will take work home with you.

Example:

- When I need to, bringing work home with me is not an issue. I value being a team player and having my colleagues counting on me to finish my task on time, and if that requires extra hours in the office or at home, I am more than willing to do it.
- I am extremely organized and skilled at budgeting my time. I keep a personal calendar / journal in which I schedule my work appropriately based on timelines to ensure all my work is done without the need to bring my work home. However, in the event that timelines change or issues come up (which always happens), rest assured I am always willing to take work home with me for urgent tasks.

8 What was your *greatest accomplishment / failure?*



Approach:

This is one of interviewers' favorite questions, second only to "what is your greatest weakness".

In short, don't brag about what you have done. Rather, take the time to explain your most important accomplishments at work. Always give credit to others to downplay your individual achievement, but make the link clear between what you did to help the team accomplish that goal.

Make a Connection

The best way to respond is to give an example of something you accomplished that is directly related to the job that you are interviewing for. See “What is your greatest strength”.

Share Examples

When you're asked about your accomplishments, give a specific example of what you did in your last position. This should help to illustrate various strengths you previously highlighted in the interview.

How to Answer Questions About Failure

If you didn't fail at anything, do not be afraid to say so.

However, it can be off putting to some interviewers. The best strategy therefore is to pick a small failure and turn it into a positive.

For example, if you were working on a project that was behind deadline, explain to the interviewer how you adjusted the schedule, got in other resources and helped to mitigate the consequences.

Explain and Share Your Solution

Explain what caused the failure (pick a failure that was not caused by you but was managed by you), and discuss what you did to ensure it wouldn't happen again in the future. If you can share an example that turned out well in the end, use that. This way, the interviewer will see the learning journey you undertook in the process.

Do not make excuses for what went wrong. Also, don't blame your colleagues for not pulling their weight. The ideal “failure” is one that resulted due to circumstance (inventory not coming in on time, computer system crash, colleague having to drop out of the project due to family issues etc).

This will show that you have worked under rapidly changing circumstances and were still able to come out on top. It also highlights your proactiveness and flexibility in managing situations, even when things aren't going as planned.

9 What are your goals for the future?



Approach:

Employers want to be sure that you won't be eyeing another job within the next 2-3 years. New hires are expensive to bring on board and train. You don't want interviewers feeling you are not worth the company's investment.

The most successful candidates are the ones whose long term plans align closely with those of the organization. If you know they groom talent from within, highlight that you hope to take on a middle management role within the next five years. (throw in some emphasis on loyalty to an organization that is loyal to their employees etc)

This question also helps the interviewer understand if you are able to plan and think forward. It shows strategic thinking and long term planning.

Tip: Don't discuss your personal goals outside of work, such as marriage or having a family. More often than not, this complicates things and makes the employer more weary about hiring you.

Examples:

- I see myself as a top performing employee in a well-established organization, like this one. I plan on enhancing my skills and continuing my involvement in (related) professional associations.
- Once I gain additional experience, I would like to move on from a technical position to management.

10 How much do you *expect to be paid?*



Approach:

Before you start talking pay (and salary negotiations) with a prospective employer, you need to find out how much the job (and you) are worth. You will need to take the time to do your research. That way you will be prepared to get what you're worth and to get a job offer that's realistic and reasonable.

What Are Salary Negotiations?

Salary negotiations involve discussing a job offer with a prospective employee to negotiate a salary and benefits package that meets your needs.

Before you start salary negotiations it's important to know how much the job is worth, to try to determine how much flexibility there may be on the part of the employer, and how you can best negotiate a salary for the job you have been offered.

Salary Negotiation Tips

Once you know what you *should* be earning, how do you go about getting it? Start by being very patient. When interviewing for a new position, do your best not to bring up compensation until the employer makes you an offer.

If you're asked what your salary requirements are, say that they are open based upon the position and the overall compensation package. Or tell the employer you'd like to know more about the responsibilities and the challenges of the job prior to discussing salary.

Another option is to give the employer a range upon the salary research you've done up front.

Once you've received the offer you don't need to accept (or reject) it right away. A simple "I need to think it over" can get you an increase in the original offer.

And if you're ambivalent about the position a "no" can bring you a better offer too. I turned down a position I knew I didn't want, regardless of salary, and received three follow-up phone calls upping the compensation package.

Be careful though, if you do definitely need that job, there's a risk that the employer may accept your declining the position and move on to the next candidate.