

Practice Interviewing Questions

Work on how you would respond to interview questions with a friend, or rehearse them by yourself. It's not enough to know what they're going to ask you—have your answers ready beforehand. You are also interviewing them, so think about questions you will be asking the interviewer. Your answers should relate to the position for which you are applying and refer if at all possible to your positive attributes. Never respond negatively.

Insight on the Hiring Firm

Andrew Scharf, Founder, Managing Director at [Whitefield Consulting Worldwide](#) shares the following interviewing intelligence:

Interview questions often reveal as much about the interviewer and the organization that he/she represents. There are so many types of questions that can be asked.

If the role is a leadership position as indicated in your question then, the interviewer should be able to bring out how this individual identifies the tenants of leadership and style or styles used to manage and handle a team given the conditions of the job description.

- Does the organization want someone to exercise an affiliative, democratic, consensual, or authoritative leadership style? The questions chosen should reveal this with a sense of purpose. The most astute questions give the person who is being interviewed room to maneuver.
- There are some types of questions, which are designed to trap people. These questions are not necessarily productive depending on the results the interviewer wants to bring out.
- Questions designed to weigh leadership, judgement, decision making skills and ones focus on team building are clearly fundamental to identifying the best candidate.

The following sampling gives an idea of the types of questions that we use at WCW. We have found that these questions are also used by major corporate recruiters and the top MBA programs who are selecting candidates from a large cohort:

1) **Tell me about yourself?** A classic question, yes, but still an excellent opening gambit. What is revealing is how the candidate will begin. Is the stress on personal background, education, growing up in a certain environment or is the stress on the person's job function with a list of core responsibilities and bulleted list of accomplishments.

What I find revealing is how much detail is included in the answer. Does the answer attempt to be vague or does the candidate give concrete details, dates, and the type of description that draws out the interviewer's curiosity making them want to know more. The more intriguing the response the deeper the questioning can go. There is of course, no 'correct' answer. Skillful handling of the question demonstrates the way a person conceptualizes his or her professional and personal identity, notions of self-worth, confidence, sense of purpose, and yes, political judgement and decision making skills.

2) Describe the most challenging obstacle you had to surmount? What were the resources used in meeting the objective? This question can give the candidate the occasion, first to choose a project or scenario where leadership judgment is crucial to conflict or project resolution. Secondly, it can highlight the steps an individual takes to building a team and the group synergy, which is needed. Most people, try to put themselves in the driver's seat. Group projects clearly must have direction and defined objectives. It is revealing to see how much credit the 'leader' gives to his/her players during the project. Is this someone who recognizes and rewards talented players? Can they inspire others? Only confident professionals seem to answer this question effectively. Not out of arrogance, but from a position where they are unafraid of other talented individuals, empower them, and even promote their effectiveness to the benefit of the group as a whole.

3) Tell me about a country you have visited, which has made a significant impact on your life with the result that a cherished perspective has been altered? Because most of us today work in a multicultural, multiethnic environment, the question reveals the intellectual curiosity of the individual, how they handle challenges, adapt to new environments, and are willing to learn from others who hold different values and beliefs about work than they do.

The following answers were provided by Glenco Online, Career City (www.glencoe.com). Practice your answers to these.

Q: "Why do you want to work at this company?"

This is where you get to show that you have researched the company and you are more than just an average applicant. Relate something you learned about the company and explain why this attracted you to them. If the company has a commitment to the community, you might say you appreciate their commitment and that is what draws you to them. Or you understand that they are in a competitive battle with another major company and you relish the challenge of helping them carve out a bigger market share. If you heard about the job from a friend or family member, you could mention that person. But don't forget to include something that shows that they should want to hire you. "My friend has worked here for years and says it's a great company to work for with great people to work with. I think I could really contribute to your team."

Q: What did you like/dislike about your last job?

This is a tricky one, because you don't want to come off as overly critical, petty, or a problem employee. If you say you hated dealing with the general public, you can be

assured you won't be hired in retail sales or customer service. If you say you hated your boss, the interviewer will worry about you hating *them* someday. Keep your answer positive. If you mention something you disliked about the company, pair it with something you liked. Let's say that you worked as a receptionist, and your boss was condescending to you and never gave you anything interesting to do. You could say, "I enjoyed greeting the public, and I liked knowing that I could make a difference by giving people a great first impression of the company, but I felt that there wasn't room for me to contribute my organizational and teamwork skills. I'm ready for a position that offers more responsibility and more challenge."

Q: "What is your biggest accomplishment?"

Be specific. Tell about one thing that you did really well. Preferably, talk about something that was recognized and rewarded by your boss. You could say something like, "I created a system to organize my boss's projects and deadlines, which often overlapped. He was so impressed, he told other managers in the group, and I ended up training the other secretaries to create similar systems for their bosses." If you are applying for a position that involves being part of a team, recount something you did as a member of a team, and talk about the teamwork and cooperation that was required.

Q: "What is your greatest strength?"

Even if your greatest strength isn't business-related, find a way to relate it to work. Your greatest strength may be your ability to memorize lyrics to pop songs, but if you're applying for a job as a sales trainee, they won't really care. They will care that you have a great memory and are good at keeping information organized. If you're a great basketball player, talk about how well you deal with pressure and work as part of a team.

Q: "What is your greatest weakness?"

The interviewer who asks this question is looking to see how honest you are with yourself, and how well you deal with your own shortcomings. Don't pretend you don't have weaknesses, and don't avoid answering the question. This is your chance to show that you are honest and take responsibility for your actions. A good way to answer this question is to mention your weakness, then tell what you have done to overcome that weakness. If you have been disorganized in the past, you could say, "I used to be very disorganized, always forgetting assignments and birthdays. But I managed to work out a computerized system of to-do lists and reminders that keeps me on top of everything."

Q: "Do you prefer to work with others or on your own?"

This is a question you should have asked yourself before you applied for the job. The interviewer wants to make sure that you are appropriate for the job for which you are applying. If you're going to be part of a team, you should enjoy working with others. On the other hand, if you're going to be doing data entry, it might be a good idea if you enjoy working on your own. Remember, however, that companies don't want to hire workers who need constant handholding. A good answer might be, "I enjoy being part of a team and cooperating with others, but I also enjoy working on my own. At my last job, our team would meet to discuss our goals, then each work on our part of the project

individually. There was a lot of communication and cooperation among the group, but I was responsible for completing part of the project on my own."

Q: "What are your career goals?" or "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

The interviewer is wondering how dedicated you will be to the job and the company. If they are going to train you, they want to know that you aren't going to take the next job that comes along. On the other hand, most companies don't want to hire people who have no ambition at all. Even if you have no idea where you want to be in five years, don't say, "I don't know." Be positive. Say something like, "I hope to be in a position that continues to challenge me, and that allows me to use my skills and abilities to help the company reach its goals." Ideally, the job you're applying for is a step on your career ladder, so you can talk about the career ladder you've envisioned for yourself. Employers like to hear that you are interested in staying and growing with their company.

Q: "Tell me about a time that you had a lot of work to do in a short time. How did you manage the situation?"

Here, the interviewer is looking for specific strategies that you use to manage pressure situations. Talk about prioritizing your work, cooperating with others, making to-do lists, breaking large projects into small batches, and taking care of your health so you could maintain your concentration.

Q: "Have you ever had to work closely with a person you didn't get along with? How did you handle the situation?"

The interviewer wants to hear that you were able to put aside your differences and get the work done. They also want to hear that you are flexible, and can be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. If you don't have a work-related example, talk about a school project, or about being part of a club and learning to get along with the various people in the club.

Q: (If you are currently unemployed) Why did you leave your last job?

Review the suggestions on the My Writing Resources Website for how best to answer and tailor your response to meet your particular situation. Be direct and focus your interview answer on the future, especially if your leaving wasn't under the best of circumstances.

Six Important Questions You Should Consider Asking the Interviewer

Consider writing these down on a small slip of paper and take the list with you into your interview:

1. What happened to the person who previously did this job? (If a new position: How were the duties and tasks done in the past?)

Why ask: You need to know any problems or past history associated with this position. For instance, was your predecessor fired, did he/she resign, or was he/she promoted? It could be a clue to whether or not this is a temporary position. The answer could tell you about management's expectations and how the company is gearing to grow.

2. Why did you choose to work here? What keeps you here?

Why ask: Although you may like this company, you're an outsider. You need to find out what an insider has to say about working there. Who better to ask than your interviewer? This also forces the interviewer to step out of their official corporate role and answer personally as an employee and potential coworker.

3. What is the first problem or action item the person you hire must attend to?

Why ask: If it didn't come up during the interview, this question is a critical way to find out what is expected of you. You need to 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 and over your head after the first week on the job.

4. What can you tell me about the individual to whom I would report?

Why 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/she is -- earlier rather than later, before personality clashes develop. If you're an independent type used to working through solutions on your own, for instance, you'll chafe when you find you're being supervised by a micromanager. On the other hand, you need to know that you can go to this manager if you have questions or need to understand the process to get things done? Is he/she good with people? Well organized? Respected by others? well suited for the position? A good leader?

5. How is the company doing financially this year?

Why ask: You need to know about the future of the company you plan to spend several years of your life working for. It doesn't have to be this exact question. For example, you might want to ask about the company's future plans for new products and services or any planned market expansion. How does this company fare against its competitors? You may also want to ask if the company has recently had to lay off staff and why? Does the

company plan to outsource jobs overseas? This line of questions also shows that you've done your homework and are serious about this company.

6. What's our next step?

Why ask: This is your closing and the most important question to ask at the end of the interview. You need to know what happens after this point. Many books advise asking for the job now, but most people may feel too intimidated to bluntly do so. And with more candidates already scheduled for interviews, the company is not likely to make you an offer yet. You may also need to do some additional research on the company, making it too early to ask for the job.

A good compromise: Take the lead and offer to follow-up. You'll also be able to gauge the company's enthusiasm with the answer. Ask for a business card and ask for your interviewer's direct phone number and the best time to call.

As a job seeker, the key to a good interview is to find out as much about your potential employer as possible. Asking these six questions will not only make you appear more committed as a candidate, but will also give you better insight into both the challenges and opportunities that may lie ahead for you.