



## Acing an Interview: Tips and Sample Questions

### Introduction

An interview is a critical part of landing a job, but it can be incredibly stressful! Fortunately, preparing for an interview can help you make a great first impression. Below are a few tips to help prepare you for interviews as well as some commonly asked questions with advice on how to answer them.

### Tips

- Practice!
  - Review the questions below, and come up with answers for each question.
  - Ask a mentor or friend to run through mock interviews with you. The more you practice the more comfortable you will feel.
- Educate Yourself and Be Prepared
  - Read about the school or company to see what they are looking for in an applicant, and come up with some questions to ask during the interview.
  - Remember the name of your interviewer to personalize your thank you note.
  - Have your working papers and references before the interview.
  - You do not have to share your current salary. If asked what kind of salary you are looking for, respond by saying, “what is the typical salary range for someone with my qualifications in this position?”
- Make a Good Impression
  - Wear something professional - a good rule of thumb is to dress one level above what you would expect to wear on the job.
  - Practice good hygiene: shower and wear deodorant.
  - Bring a copy of your resume, cover letter, and portfolio if you have one.
  - Arrive early.
  - Make eye contact with your interviewer and remember to smile!
  - Be aware of your body language.
  - Shake your interviewer's hand at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Write a Thank You
  - Following up with a thank you card is a great way to leave a good impression. Sending it immediately after the interview demonstrates how interested you are in the position.



## 10 Common Interview Questions

### *Tell me about yourself.*

- This is often the first question interviewers ask to help them decide if you are a good fit. Give them a brief overview of who you are and focus on a few of your main interests. This may prompt further questions about the activities you mention, so be prepared to answer any of those and be honest in the answers you give.
- Remember, they have your resume and any other documents that you provided, so don't repeat what they've already read. Expand on the information most relevant to the job. You can add details that wouldn't necessarily appear on your resume, such as activities you do outside of school or work. Wrap up your response with a long term goal or career pathway interest.
- Example: "I am a junior at Brilliant Pathways High School. I moved here four years ago from New York City which was quite a culture shock. I would consider myself very outgoing though, and I quickly became involved in a variety of activities. For example, I joined the soccer team right away and have been a part of the student council for two years. I also am a part of the Art Club at my school. Outside of school, I spend a lot of time babysitting my two brothers and my neighbors, which has helped me realize that I want to have a career working with children in the future."

### *Why do you want this job?*

- This question lets the interviewer know if you will take the position seriously or not. Avoid telling the interviewer that you need the job so you can afford a new car or the big vacation you have been planning. Instead, tell them how this job can help you reach your long term goals and how the values of the company align with your own.
- Do some research before going into the interview. Learn about the reputation of the company, their mission and values, and skills you can learn from them. You can find a lot of this information on the company website, but also look at other sources such as recent press.
- It is important that you are not too general in your response to this question, as your answer should not be the same for every position. By doing research beforehand and going into the interview with specific points that prove you put



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effort into preparing for the interview, you demonstrate that you will take this job seriously and perform well.

- Example: “As I mentioned before, my goal is to become a surgeon so I can save lives. I am passionate about helping people, and I really hope to start on my path in the medical field now to help me develop the skills necessary to reach my goals. I am hoping to stay in this area and work at this hospital, and I think this position would be a great way to get my foot in the door here.”

## *What are your strengths?*

- This can be a difficult question at first, but with some reflection and preparation it can be a great way to let your interviewer know what will help you succeed. Strengths can either be skills or personality traits.
- Rather than listing every positive skill and trait that you have, choose a few that you believe are the strongest and provide some examples and context to back them up. Be honest and only talk about things you know are your strong points, without coming off as too arrogant or too humble. If you get stuck while preparing for this interview, reach out to family, friends, teachers, and other people in your network and ask them what they believe are your biggest strengths.
- Example: “I would say my greatest strength would be my leadership capabilities. I have always thought of myself as someone who works well on a team and gets along with others, and I often take on a leadership role when in a group setting. I was voted captain of my football team because I am always trying to help my teammates. As a leader and a team player, I really enjoy encouraging others and the feeling that I can help them reach their goals.”

## *What are your weaknesses?*

- What you choose to talk about depends on the position. If you know the position will require you to work in Excel, but you have never used the program before, that should be something you let them know. If the job does not require a skill you don't have, you can talk about a personality trait.
- Instead of listing all of your weaknesses, choose a few most relevant to the job and provide examples and context. Include strategies you are using to work on improving in that area.
- Sometimes interviewers will ask about strengths and weaknesses at the same time. In this case, start by talking about your weaknesses so you can end on a more positive note!



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- Example: “I would say my biggest weakness is my lack of confidence when it comes to public speaking. Even in school I have been hesitant to raise my hand to answer questions for fear of being wrong in front of my classmates. This is something that I have made a conscious effort to work on though, which is why I make a point to raise my hand to answer at least one question every day now. I also joined the drama club, which I think will help me improve my confidence even more.”

## *Why should we hire you?*

- This is a good time to really let the interviewer know what would make you a good candidate for the position. It is okay to brag a little bit here about your past experiences, skills, awards, accomplishments, and anything else that would give you an advantage in the position.
- Before your interview, reflect on what makes you stand out from other candidates. Make a list of any accomplishments that relate to the position and skills that would help you succeed.
- You do not have to list every accomplishment or skill you have. Rather, choose key points that will best set you apart from other candidates.
- Example: “I believe I would make an excellent addition to your team. Not only am I extremely passionate about working with animals, but my previous experience working with the same computer program you use would mean that I would require less training than many of the other applicants. I have also volunteered with this organization for the past three years, which has given me a lot of the knowledge and skills that will be needed for this job.”

## *Describe your dream job.*

- This question is usually asked so the interviewer can figure out what you truly enjoy and are passionate about. Chances are, the job you are applying for is not exactly that, but highlighting how it can help you get there can help show the interviewer that you are motivated to do well in the position.
- Unless you are super set with what your dream job is and it lines up well with the job you are applying for, it is typically advised to give more of a general description of your dream job rather than the job title. Either way, some great points to cover in your answer are skills you would like to use and some of your values.
- Try to figure out some of the similarities between your dream job and the one you are applying for, and talk about those. Letting the interviewer know that you are passionate about advancing and learning the skills you will use in the job to



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ultimately reach your career goals will show them that you are motivated to do the job well.

- Example: “My dream job is to lead a team whose main goal is to develop technologies to help companies be more environmentally friendly. I believe that to have the greatest impact on saving the planet, corporations will have to make the largest changes, and I want to help them do that. I was excited when I found this position because of the chance to move up within the company to develop my leadership skills, as well as your eco-friendly values and policies.”

*How would you describe your ability to work on a team?*

- If the job you are applying for involves working on a team, chances are the interviewer will ask you some questions about teamwork. It may be this question, or asking for examples of times you have worked on a team (either good or bad) so be sure to prepare by thinking of times you needed the essential skill of teamwork.
- With questions like this, you want to highlight your strengths related to the question while remaining honest. If you feel like you do not have much experience working on teams, but you know what qualities you possess that would make you a good team member, focus on those. Providing examples and questions can go a long way when answering questions like these.
- Example: “I have always loved being part of a team. I have played many team sports throughout my life, and have always found that I am my most productive when I am able to talk to others about my ideas and work towards a common goal, which I can attribute to being such an extrovert. In many cases, I have found myself becoming an unofficial team leader, as I like to ensure all of the goals are being met and I enjoy the responsibility.”

*Tell me about a time when you had to persevere or use mental agility to overcome a challenge.*

- Perseverance and mental agility are both really important skills that interviewers want to be sure their employees have. In any job, there will always be challenges that arise and the interviewer wants to be sure that whoever they hire will be willing and able to come up with quick and effective solutions, and be resilient enough to keep going.
- It is best to have a few instances in mind when going into the interview so you are not caught off guard with this question. Choose to talk about a time that is recent where you can easily describe how you used these essential skills to



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overcome the challenge with a positive result. You can talk about a challenge in a previous job, in school, or in your personal life if it is appropriate.

- While it is important to provide some context, keep in mind that the interviewer is most interested in how you handled it and what you took away from it. Keep the context to a sentence or two, talk about what actions you took to resolve the situation, and then tell the interviewer about the result.
- Example: “I have always been an avid runner, and a few years ago some of my teammates and I decided to sign up to run a half marathon. The week before the event, after we had been training for months, I fell and hurt my knee. I ended up needing surgery and could not run for a long time after. I was devastated that I could reach my goal of finishing the race, and had a hard time when I could not use running as my outlet like I had been doing for years. When I finally was able to run distances again, I decided to persevere to continue working towards my goal, and I actually just ran in the half marathon last week!”

## *What do you like to do for fun?*

- The interviewer may ask this question to gauge how well you will fit in with other employees, see if you have anything in common, and hear about what you enjoy doing outside of work.
- There are many things you can talk about when answering this question, but be honest and keep it work appropriate. If you have any hobbies or specific interests, that is a great place to start! Be prepared to talk about whatever you bring up further in case the interviewer asks more questions. For example, if you say you like reading but struggle to give them an answer about what your favorite book is, you may appear untrustworthy.
- Do not say you do not have any hobbies or that you do not do anything for fun. At the very least talk about things that interest you, but be sure to remain truthful. You can talk about skills that you would like to learn or even something you have done in the past. It is good to talk about a variety of topics rather than go into too much detail about one so they can get more of an idea who you really are.
- Example: “My absolute favorite thing to do is spend time outside, and I have picked up hiking recently which I really enjoy. Staying active is important for me. I also really love to bake and eat the treats I make! I spend a lot of time in the kitchen trying out new recipes and watching cooking shows. I also volunteer at the local soup kitchen once a week.”

## *Do you have any questions for me?*



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- Even if you do not feel like there are any questions you need answered, it can show interviews that you are really interested in the position. Preparing a few questions to ask before you go into the interview is a good way to show that you are taking the interview seriously.
- Make sure the questions you ask are not something you have already covered or something that you could have answered with a quick google search before the interview. You want to be prepared and show the interviewer that you have done your research. Reflecting back on the interview can show that you were engaged throughout the interview. Try to come up with open ended questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”
- You can ask questions about the hiring process, the position you are applying for, the company or employees, and about yourself.
- Examples:
  - What is the company culture like?
  - What are the key characteristics you think a person needs to be a great cultural fit at your company?
  - Can you share more about the day-to-day responsibilities of this position?
  - Are there any opportunities for advancement in the company?
  - What sort of training is involved with this position?
  - Are there opportunities for further professional development?
  - What are your short and long term goals for this company?
  - How long have you been at the company and what makes you stay?
  - What do you like most about working for this company?
  - How would my performance be measured?
  - Do you have any concerns about my qualifications for this position?