

# Sample Interview Questions

Questions an interviewer may ask you, and suggestions for responses!



**THE OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES**

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# Sample Interview Questions

## Tell me about yourself.

This is an open-ended question often asked to “break the ice.”

- Keep your responses brief (less than two to three minutes), and focus on highlights of your educational and work experiences
- It is suggested that you start with your most recent accomplishment, such as getting your college degree, perhaps why you chose your major, and discuss some of the courses you completed that pertain to the requirements of the job, as well as any relevant team projects on which you have worked in your classes.
- Discuss related work experiences and involvement in student organizations (if applicable). Make sure you mention the specific knowledge and skills you’ve acquired in these experiences, and how they will contribute to your being successful in the position (this could be developed into a “closing statement” to summarize what you’ve just discussed.
- *Limit disclosing personal information as this is not pertinent to your ability to perform on the job* (e.g. DO NOT mention your age, marital status, children, health, etc.).

## Which college course or courses have you enjoyed the most, and why? The least? Why?

- For the courses you like the most, discuss those that allowed you to develop knowledge/skills the employer is seeking for the position, if possible. Or, choose courses that allowed you to grow intellectually and/or interpersonally - such as a course that allowed you to develop the ability to view things from different perspectives, or the opportunity to work as part of a team on a special project.
- For the courses you liked the least, you may state that there were no courses you disliked; that you enjoyed all of your courses because you learned something in each. Or, you may choose a course that **does not** relate to the position - such as Algebra if you are interviewing for a social work position. Although you should be able to explain **why** you disliked it - even if just to say that Algebra is a subject in which you have little interest - still try to end on a positive note; for example, by stating that although you didn’t particularly *like* Algebra, the course allowed you to improve your critical thinking skills. Another response could be that, although you did not have an interest in the course, you chose to view it as a challenge, and that you applied yourself, determined to persevere and succeed in the course. And you did!

## What have you learned in your course work that will contribute to your being successful in this job?

- As a recent college graduate, employers won’t expect you to have professional experience in your field. However, you will be expected to be able to discuss what you have learned in your program of study. Refresh yourself on course titles and what you learned in those courses that pertains to the type of job you are interviewing for. Select some upper level courses - not intro courses - and be able to describe what you learned, including any team projects you worked on, and how that knowledge base will allow you to be effective in the job.

## Name three of your greatest strengths.

Remember to answer this question based on how it is asked.

- If the interviewer asks for three strengths, name them - for example: “Communication skills, organizational skills, and problem-solving skills.”
- The interviewer may ask another form of this question: “Name three words your co-workers would use to describe you.” In this case, your response should consist of **three words**: “Organized, detailed, and determined.” for example.
- Also be able to **provide examples** of how you’ve successfully applied these strengths to resolve a problem situation (see “Behavioral Interviewing”).

## What is your greatest weakness?

- Design your response so that your weakness is really a “positive” in disguise. For example, you may refer to your tendency to approach a task or project with the attitude, “If you want it done right, do it yourself,” but then you find that you are not managing your time effectively, nor delegating appropriately so that your subordinates are learnign responsibility on the job. Then, describe a situation in which you did NOT take this approach, and the positive results that occurred from you “new” approach.
- Or, you can address this question from a personal or professional growth perspective. For example, you may tell the interviewer that “public speaking” is an area in which you do not have a lot of experience, but that each time you have had the opportunity to do a class presentaion, you have worked to improve your public speaking skills. Be able to describe specific techniques you’ve used to improve in this area, and discuss successful outcomes. In a sense, you are not directly responding by naming a “weakness;” but you are alluding to an area that you recognized you needed to improve upon.
- However, NEVER choose a characteristic, skills, etc., that is required for the job; for example, do not use the “public speaking” example is interviewing for a marketing, sales, public relations, etc., position. Or, do not use the “If you want it done right, do it yourself” example above, if applying for a management position, as managers must manage their time effectively, and delegate work tasks appropriately.

### **Tell me what you have learned from your involvement in extracurricular activities.**

- Focus on the knowledge and skills required for the job in responding to this question, and tailor your response accordingly.
- Also, if you served on campus activities or community service committees as part of membership in a student organization, discuss these experiences and what they taught you (team work, leadership skills, communication skills, ability to plan and organize activities, etc.)
- Be able to describe real-life examples: “I learned to work effectively as part of a team, for example...” and then provide specifics as to what you accomplished, and how!

### **In what ways do you uniquely contribute to a team effort?**

- Research the definition of team work so you can begin to answer this question by describing the elements required for a successful team effort. For example, stating that you believe all team members have something to contribute could be part of your “philosophy of successful teamwork.” If you have taken the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), there is online information on the teamwork abilities. Answer along the lines of the following options, and if possible, give a specific example to support your statements:
- I’m a very organized person, and I usually assume the role of the person keeping the team on track. I write down everyone’s name and the tasks they are assigned for the project. I make sure everyone knows what their tasks are. I also develop a timeline of everyone’s tasks and even a breakdown of the steps for each member’s assigned tasks, and due dates for those. I also try not to come across as a drill sergeant, however! I let everyone know organization is my strength and that I’ll be happy to take on the role of timeline coordinator for the project.

Or

- I tend to be the team member who tries to make everyone feel they are a part of something worthwhile, and that they each have something to contribute. I love hearing everyone’s thoughts and enjoy encouraging them to think out and voice their ideas. I like making all of the team members comfortable so no one feels intimidated. For those that are somewhat shy, I encourage them to speak up, or I’ll tactfully ask them if they would like to be in charge of a certain task.

### **Would you rather work alone or in a group?**

- I am comfortable working as a member of a team and working independently as well. I had the opportunity to work as part of a team on projects in many of my classes. Team work requires listening to others’ ideas, as well as being confident in putting forth your own. Brainstorming everyone’s ideas will likely be a part of the teamwork process, as well as compromise.
- I learned a lot about those aspects of teamwork in my classes. However, even when you’re working on a team project, you’re still responsible for your specific assignments. I also valued being able to take away from the team interaction ideas and suggestions that I could think more about independently in order to improve on and complete my tasks for the project.

### **Which of your work experiences has been most rewarding? Why? Least rewarding? Why?**

- Again, relate positive work experiences to the requirements of the job for which you are interviewing. In other words, focus on the knowledge/skills you acquired in a past job and describe how such knowledge and skills will allow you to be effective in this position.
- As for “least rewarding” experiences, **NEVER say anything negative about a former employer, professor, etc.** You may indicate (as with the “favorite courses” question above) that you have learned something from each job you’ve held, OR, if a job did not offer opportunity for you to learn or grow professionally, you may relate this information to the interviewer; however, still attempt to find something positive about the job, and communicate this to the employer!
- Regarding your definition of “success,” let your response reflect your values - that is, what basic attitudes and beliefs you possess regarding life, career, yourself, and others.

### **I see you don’t have work experience in this industry/field, so why are you interested in working for this type of organization?**

- To answer this question, you need to have researched not only the specific organization or company, and the office or department which houses the available position, but also the industry or field, and its trends, issues and challenges. For example, let’s say you are interviewing for a position as an Admissions Counselor at a university. In addition to researching specifics about the university, such as enrollment numbers, student demographics, programs of study offered, types of degrees offered (bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral?), history of the institution, achievements, etc., you should also research the Admissions Office web site and be able to discuss the types of services offered, possibly the web site itself and positives you noted about ease of use, and accessibility to content.
- Additionally, look at other university Admission Office web sites and see if they offer different services, or some services you think would be a good idea to offer. Research trends and issues related to marketing initiatives of universities pertaining to enrolling students, and other enrollment challenges. Such information can easily be found online through search engines, and possibly through professional association online publications for that field.
- Showing that you have done your homework on the job, the organization, the industry trends and issues, will set you apart from the competition, as many applicants won’t put forth the energy and effort to do so. It will also show that you have looked closely at this type of work and type of organization, so you can be confident your interests, abilities, and personality would be a good fit.

## **Describe your leadership style.**

This statement may be offered primarily for management or administrative positions; however, it is suggested that you think about situations in which you have exercised leadership abilities, exactly what steps you took to serve as a leader, and the positive results that came from those efforts - for example, leading a class team project, a student organization activity or event, training new employees at work, motivating others in volunteer experiences, etc. Think in terms of guiding/motivating people, AND managing tasks - both are crucial elements of leadership. Also, even though the position for which you are interviewing may not require you to supervise others, you should still view your role and the scope of your duties as requiring leadership skills - i.e., *you should think of yourself as a leader or your are of responsibility, even if you do now have anyone "working under you."*

## **Describe an accomplishment, and how you achieved it. What does "success" mean to you?**

- Choose to describe an accomplishment that demonstrates the setting of a goal, and commitment to and perseverance in achieving that goal. Provide a specific example from college, work, or extracurricular activities.
- Describe the process you went through to achieve that goal, and what you learned "along the way."
- OR, choose to describe an obstacle that you overcame, perhaps a challenge for you in one of the aforementioned areas of your life, and how you addressed and met that challenge successfully.
- Also, your accomplishment does not have to be something that "changed the world"! Anything that illustrates positive qualities about you and results from your efforts is enough!

## **Do you work well under pressure?**

Answer in the positive: "Yes, I work very well under pressure. In fact, pressure can generate a certain energy that can be the driving force for getting things done. It can also be the source of creativity in solving problems." Remember, too, that this question can also be used to learn more about your ability to manage your time effectively, to multitask, to organize and prioritize your responsibilities. You may want to mention that you always try to effectively plan, organize, and accomplish your task in a timely manner so that if something unexpected occurs that requires an impending deadline and reprioritization of tasks, you will not have a lot of unfinished business that would prevent you from meeting the deadline.

## **Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate.**

Mention sharing core values such as mutual respect for each other's qualifications, experience, and opinions. But, don't forget to mention communication. State something along the lines of how you understand you are a new professional, so you will welcome feedback on your performance from your supervisor. You understand that constructive criticism is to help you learn to do your job well, and to grow as a professional. You may also mention that you like a supervisor that is approachable, for when you have questions, and who is receptive to any ideas you may have. However, you understand that their time is valuable and you want to demonstrate that you are able to take their suggestions and work independently to implement them.

Also, while it's acceptable to provide an example of a good relationship with a current or former supervisor, and to be able to explain why it's good, DO NOT compare "good supervisors" you've had to "bad supervisors"! And, NEVER say anything negative about a supervisor, co-worker, department/office, or company.

## **Why do you have a gap in employment from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_?**

College students can always explain a gap in employment as a deliberate move to spend more time focusing on their studies.

## **Where do you see yourself five years from now? What are your career goals?**

Be careful with your response to this question. DO NOT describe career goals which will take you away from the current job opportunity. In other words, do not state that you plan to pursue an advanced degree if you know (or don't know) whether this is what the company/organization with which you are interviewing is expecting, or if they can provide adequate reward for such an accomplishment. Instead, use this question as an opportunity to emphasize your strong desire for a career path with THIS company.

## **What do you know about our company/organization? Why do you want to work here?**

This frequently asked question begs you to DO YOUR HOMEWORK in researching the company/organization THOROUGHLY before interviewing. The type of information you should gather in your research is outlined in the "How Do I Research Companies?" document on the Career Services web site, under the Ace the Interview drop-down menu's Interview Preparation section.

## **What do you have to offer to this position/company that would set you apart from other applicants?**

- This question presents a great opportunity for you to highlight, in a summary statement, what you have to offer. You should base your response on the research you have done on the position and the company. Of course you cannot know the qualifications of the other candidates.
- You should also prepare for this question by carefully listening to the interviewer describe the position, the company, and what they are looking for in the person they ultimately hire.

## Appropriate questions for you to ask during the interview.

You should refrain from asking questions until the interviewer asks you for questions (this opportunity usually takes place at the conclusion of the interview). An exception to this “rule” may occur if you do not understand, or need clarification of, a question you are asked during the interview, in which case you may ask the interviewer to explain. Following are some appropriate questions for you to ask - and DO ASK QUESTIONS - this shows interest and initiative!

- What qualifications do you think are necessary to be successful in this job?
- What majors do you usually hire?
- Could you describe the training period/program?
- How would I be supervised? How would my performance be evaluated?
- What are the opportunities for advancement?
- What is the organization’s policy regarding continuing education/training?
- Does the company encourage participation in professional organizations?
- When can I expect to hear from you regarding your hiring decision?

## Inappropriate questions for you to ask during the interview.

- DO NOT initiate discussion of salary, vacation, or benefits during the first interview.
- However, be prepared to voice a range you’re looking for if they ask - **SIGI 3**, **O\*Net**, and **OOH** provide salary information on 100’s of careers.
- DO NOT push for an early decision by mentioning the other opportunities you have awaiting you.
- DO NOT ask for feedback on your interview performance.

## Behavioral Interviewing

- Expect to encounter this interview technique commonly utilized by employers. “Behavioral” questions are designed to probe applicants’ past behavior in work situations, on the premise that the best predictor of future performance is past performance. Think in terms of three or four challenging or problem situations, how you assessed the situation (perspectives you considered), actions you took to resolve or improve it, and the positive results that came from your efforts. Be specific when presenting this information to the employer.

Three types of behavioral questions:

- **Skill-specific:** “Give me an example of how you successfully applied your counseling skills.”
- **General-situation:** “Describe a challenging client and how you successfully worked with them.”
- **Hypothetical:** “How would you react if you encountered a client resistant to change?”

To help you understand and respond to behavioral interview questions, make a list of your “three greatest strengths” and provide an example of how you successfully applied each strength in an academic, internship, work, or extracurricular setting.



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