

Interview Preparation: Common Questions

Quick Tips

It is important to be aware of some of the common questions you may be asked in a job interview. Preparation will help you feel more confident and perform better!

Many of the questions that employers ask at job interviews will be standard interview questions.

You don't need to memorize an answer, but by learning what employers are looking for when they ask common interview questions and then preparing answers for these, you will increase your chances of success.

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Interviews often begin with questions about you, your interest in the position and your career goals.

Question 1

Tell us about yourself.

The purpose of this question is for you to refresh the interviewer's knowledge of your relevant skills, accomplishments, strengths and background in relation to the job's key selection criteria.

It is an opportunity for you to use a professional marketing pitch that you have planned in advance. Include aspects of your personality and background that you want to promote – aspects that relate to the job and the company. Consider your:

- Education
- Experience
- Skills
- Interest in the job

Sample answer

I have completed a Bachelor of Business, majoring in Marketing from Swinburne University of Technology. I have particularly enjoyed the advertising aspect of the course which is reflected in my distinction results.

For the past three years, I have also been working in the customer service industry as a representative. My most

recent experience has involved handling incoming calls in the high tech industry. I enjoy the challenges that go with it, and the opportunity to connect with a range of people. I have formed some significant customer relationships resulting in a 30% increase in sales in a matter of months.

Through both my studies and experience, I have shown that my real strength is my attention to detail. I pride myself on my reputation for following through and meeting deadlines. I'm hoping to contribute to a company that values customer relations, where I can join a strong team and have a positive impact on customer retention and sales.

Question 2

Why are you interested in this position?

This type of question is usually asked early in the interview. Show what you can contribute to the organisation and don't make the answer all about what you can gain from the job. Employers will be listening for some of the following:

- Do you have a realistic understanding of this job and this organisation?
- Is the job/career you describe available in this organisation?
- What is your level of initiative and ambition?
- What can you bring to this job in terms of your skills and experience?

Sample answer

I can see from the job description that the role has a big focus on training and development, which was an area of my studies that I was most interested in and achieved great results. In my capstone project I was responsible



COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

for developing a customer service training program which included conducting a training needs analysis, writing training modules and assisting with delivery. I got some great feedback and think I could use the skills and experience from this to make a contribution in the role.

Question 3

What do you hope to be doing in five years' time?

Avoid vague or general answers such as "I would hope to grow with the responsibility I am offered and to develop my skills as far as I am able" or "I would expect to be in a management role by then".

Be specific, but flexible: recruiters want to see you have some career clarity and are keen to see you are committed to staying with the organisation.

You need to show that you are ambitious but your goals are realistic - saying you expect to be a senior manager after two years is unlikely to go down well! Use the employer's website or LinkedIn profiles to gain an idea of the career paths followed by past graduates.

Talk about responsibilities you would like to have and expected achievements. Talk about your career development and skills you'd like to acquire or you'd like to be using, and professional qualifications you'd like to get.

Sample answer:

I'd like to gradually take more responsibility and am keen to be involved in brand management for a major product. I am keen to gain some exposure to market research, digital media and developed a broad range of project management skills.

Question 4

We all have weaknesses. What are some of your major weaknesses?

Tip 1: Refer to a weakness as an area for improvement. You need to indicate that you are aware of your weakness and that you have strategies to strengthen this weakness. For example, "An area for improvement for me is time management skills. I am overcoming this by creating daily checklists in my calendar and met all university deadlines". This puts a positive spin on things!

Tip 2: Try to be light-hearted, or make a joke. However, this is the least recommended way of handling a question of this nature. Your weakness could then be eating too much chocolate, your backhand in tennis or lack of exercise. You may get away with this approach. Then again, you may be asked to take the question seriously. So you still need to be prepared to answer this question properly.

It is **not** recommended to:

- Confess to weaknesses that make you unemployable or are critical to the job! Don't talk about your poor communication or technical skills, your problems in getting on with other people, or the fact that you are always late. You do need to be honest without highlighting anything that may make you unemployable.
- Pretend to be perfect. You are expected to have some personal insight into your weaknesses. In fact, some employers may think you're a little arrogant or lack self-insight for not being able to see any faults in yourself.
- Give long rambling answers
- Volunteer more than one weakness!

Sample answer

I have a tendency to take on too much; I am working on delegating more tasks to the rest of the team.

Sample answer

I am always keen to create a paper-less office and continuously initiate on-line processes to replace hand-written documents. Sometimes this can annoy colleagues. I now discuss and consult with all concerned before offering to make changes.

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW:

It is essential that you have prepared your own questions to ask the interviewer, as that demonstrates interest in and understanding of the role. There are two types of questions you can ask: organisation-related or job-related. It is advisable that you prepare at least two questions for each of the above areas. Avoid asking about information that can easily be found on their website. Some examples include:

Job Related:

- How would a typical day be spent in the job?
- What will be the greatest challenge in the job?
- What induction/initial training is available?
- Reporting relationships, i.e. to whom will I be responsible?
- When will you be making your decision?

Organisation Related:

- Does the organisation encourage further study or opportunities for professional development? What provisions are made?
- How many employees are there in the department?
- What is the organisation's attitude towards.....?

Recruitment Process:

- What is the next step in the recruitment process?
- When do you expect the new person to start?

FURTHER INFORMATION

Careers & Employability has a range of other resources which may help you prepare for your interview. You can access an Interview Simulator through SwinEmploy+ [swi.nu/swinemploy].