

Sample Interview Questions and Answers

1. **Can you tell me a little about yourself?** This question seems simple, so many people fail to prepare for it, but it's crucial. Here's the deal: Don't give your complete employment (or personal) history. Instead give a pitch—one that's concise and compelling and that shows exactly why you're the right fit for the job. Start off with the 2-3 specific accomplishments or experiences that you most want the interviewer to know about, then wrap up talking about how that prior experience has positioned you for this specific role.
2. **What do you know about the company?** Any candidate can read and regurgitate the company's "About" page. So, when interviewers ask this, they aren't necessarily trying to gauge whether you understand the mission—they want to know whether you care about it. Start with one line that shows you understand the company's goals, using a couple key words and phrases from the website, but then go on to make it personal. Say, "I'm personally drawn to this mission because..." or "I really believe in this approach because..." and share a personal example or two.
3. **Why do you want this job?** Companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so you should have a great answer about why you want the position. (And if you don't? You probably should apply elsewhere.) First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you (e.g., "I love customer support because I love the constant human interaction and the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem"), then share why you love the company (e.g., "I've always been passionate about education, and I think you guys are doing great things, so I want to be a part of it").
4. **Why should we hire you?** This question seems forward (not to mention intimidating!), but if you're asked it, you're in luck: There's no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you can not only do the work, you can deliver great results; that you'll really fit in with the team and culture; and that you'd be a better hire than any of the other candidates.
5. **What are your greatest professional strengths?** When answering this question, interview coach Pamela Skillings recommends being accurate (share your true strengths, not those you think the interviewer wants to hear); relevant (choose your strengths that are most targeted to this particular position); and specific (for example, instead of "people skills," choose "persuasive communication" or "relationship building"). Then, follow up with an example of how you've demonstrated these traits in a professional setting.
6. **What do you consider to be your weaknesses?** What your interviewer is really trying to do with this question—beyond identifying any major red flags—is to gauge your self-awareness and honesty. So, "I can't meet a deadline to save my life" is not an option—but neither is "Nothing! I'm perfect!" Strike a balance by thinking of something that you struggle with but that you're working to improve. For example, maybe you've never been strong at public speaking, but you've recently volunteered to run meetings to help you be more comfortable when addressing a crowd.
7. **What's your dream job?** The interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is really in line with your ultimate career goals. While "an NBA star" might get you a few laughs, a better bet is to talk about your goals and ambitions—and why this job will get you closer to them.
8. **Tell me about a challenge or conflict you've faced at work, and how you dealt with it.** In asking this question, "your interviewer wants to get a sense of how you will respond to conflict. Anyone can seem nice and pleasant in a job interview, but what will happen if you're hired and Gladys in Compliance starts getting in your face?" says Skillings. Again, you'll want to use the S-T-A-R method, being sure to focus on how you handled the situation professionally and productively, and ideally closing with a happy ending, like how you came to a resolution or compromise.
9. **How would your boss and co-workers describe you?** First of all, be honest (remember, if you get this job, the hiring manager will be calling your former bosses and co-workers!). Then, try to pull out strengths and traits you

haven't discussed in other aspects of the interview, such as your strong work ethic or your willingness to pitch in on other projects when needed.

10. **What's a time you exercised leadership?** Depending on what's more important for the the role, you'll want to choose an example that showcases your project management skills (spearheading a project from end to end, juggling multiple moving parts) or one that shows your ability to confidently and effectively rally a team. And remember: "The best stories include enough detail to be believable and memorable," says Skillings. "Show how you were a leader in this situation and how it represents your overall leadership experience and potential."
11. **How do you deal with pressure or stressful situations?** "Choose an answer that shows that you can meet a stressful situation head-on in a productive, positive manner and let nothing stop you from accomplishing your goals," says McKee. A great approach is to talk through your go-to stress-reduction tactics (making the world's greatest to-do list, stopping to take 10 deep breaths), and then share an example of a stressful situation you navigated with ease.
12. **Where do you see yourself in five years?** If asked this question, be honest and specific about your future goals, but consider this: A hiring manager wants to know a) if you've set realistic expectations for your career, b) if you have ambition (a.k.a., this interview isn't the first time you're considering the question), and c) if the position aligns with your goals and growth. Your best bet is to think realistically about where this position could take you and answer along those lines. And if the position isn't necessarily a one-way ticket to your aspirations? It's OK to say that you're not quite sure what the future holds, but that you see this experience playing an important role in helping you make that decision.
13. **What are your salary requirements?** The #1 rule of answering this question is doing your research on what you should be paid by using sites like Payscale and Glassdoor. You'll likely come up with a range, and we recommend stating the highest number in that range that applies, based on your experience, education, and skills. Then, make sure the hiring manager knows that you're flexible. You're communicating that you know your skills are valuable, but that you want the job and are willing to negotiate.
14. **If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?** Seemingly random personality-test type questions like these come up in interviews generally because hiring managers want to see how you can think on your feet. There's no wrong answer here, but you'll immediately gain bonus points if your answer helps you share your strengths or personality or connect with the hiring manager. Pro tip: Come up with a stalling tactic to buy yourself some thinking time, such as saying, "Now, that is a great question. I think I would have to say..."
15. **How many tennis balls can you fit into a limousine?** 1,000? 10,000? 100,000? Seriously? Well, seriously, you might get asked brainteaser questions like these, especially in quantitative jobs. But remember that the interviewer doesn't necessarily want an exact number—he wants to make sure that you understand what's being asked of you, and that you can set into motion a systematic and logical way to respond. So, just take a deep breath, and start thinking through the math. (Yes, it's OK to ask for a pen and paper!)
16. **What's a time you disagreed with a decision that was made at work?** Everyone disagrees with the boss from time to time, but in asking this question, hiring managers want to know that you can do so in a productive, professional way. "You don't want to tell the story about the time when you disagreed but your boss was being a jerk and you just gave in to keep the peace. And you don't want to tell the one where you realized you were wrong," says Peggy McKee of Career Confidential. "Tell the one where your actions made a positive difference on the outcome of the situation, whether it was a work-related outcome or a more effective and productive working relationship."
17. **What would your first 30, 60, or 90 days look like in this role?** Start by explaining what you'd need to do to get ramped up. What information would you need? What parts of the company would you need to familiarize yourself with? What other employees would you want to sit down with? Next, choose a couple of areas where you think you can make meaningful contributions right away. (e.g., "I think a great starter project would be diving into your email marketing campaigns and setting up a tracking system for them.") Sure, if you get the job, you (or your new employer) might decide there's a better starting place, but having an answer prepared will show the interviewer where you can add immediate impact—and that you're excited to get started.

18. **What do you think we could do better or differently?** This is a common one at startups (and one of our personal favorites here at The Muse). Hiring managers want to know that you not only have some background on the company, but that you're able to think critically about it and come to the table with new ideas. So, come with new ideas! What new features would you love to see? How could the company increase conversions? How could customer service be improved? You don't need to have the company's four-year strategy figured out, but do share your thoughts, and more importantly, show how your interests and expertise would lend themselves to the job.
19. **Are you planning on having children?** Questions about your family status, gender ("How would you handle managing a team of all men?"), nationality ("Where were you born?"), religion, or age, are illegal—but they still get asked (and frequently). Of course, not always with ill intent—the interviewer might just be trying to make conversation—but you should definitely tie any questions about your personal life (or anything else you think might be inappropriate) back to the job at hand. For this question, think: "You know, I'm not quite there yet. But I am very interested in the career paths at your company. Can you tell me more about that?"
20. **Do you have any questions for us?** You probably already know that an interview isn't just a chance for a hiring manager to grill you—it's your opportunity to sniff out whether a job is the right fit for you. What do you want to know about the position? The company? The department? The team? You'll cover a lot of this in the actual interview, so have a few less-common questions ready to go. We especially like questions targeted to the interviewer ("What's your favorite part about working here?") or the company's growth ("What can you tell me about your new products or plans for growth?")