## How To Ace The 50 Most Common Interview Questions - Forbes



If it has to do with leadership, jobs, or careers, I'm on it.

I recently laid out <u>the year's most oddball interview questions</u>. The <u>Glassdoor</u> list included queries from companies like Google, Bain & Co., and Amazon, which are notorious for their perplexing and unusual job interview questions.

In 2012, the search giant asked a candidate, "How many cows are in Canada?" while Bain challenged an interviewee to estimate the number of windows in New York. Amazon asked a candidate, "If <u>Jeff Bezos</u> walked into your office and offered you a million dollars to launch your best entrepreneurial idea, what would it be?"

The moral of the story was that job seekers need to anticipate less conventional interview questions, and that they should think of oddball queries as an opportunity to demonstrate their thought process, to communicate their values and character, and to show the prospective employer how they perform under pressure.

But as it turns out, *most* companies will ask more common interview questions like "What are your strengths?" and "What are your weaknesses?"—and it's important that you prepare well for those, too.

Glassdoor sifted through tens of thousands of interview reviews to find the 50 most common questions.

## The 50 Most Common Interview Questions: Recommended by Forbes

- 1. What are your strengths?
- 2. What are your weaknesses?
- 3. Why are you interested in working for [insert company name here]?
- 4. Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
- 5. Why do you want to leave your current company?
- 6. Why was there a gap in your employment between [insert date] and [insert date]?
- 7. What can you offer us that someone else can not?
- 8. What are three things your former manager would like you to improve on?
- 9. Are you willing to relocate?
- 10. Are you willing to travel?
- 11. Tell me about an accomplishment you are most proud of.
- 12. Tell me about a time you made a mistake.
- 13. What is your dream job?
- 14. How did you hear about this position?
- 15. What would you look to accomplish in the first 30 days/60 days/90 days on the job?
- 16. Discuss your resume.
- 17. Discuss your educational background.

- 18. Describe yourself.
- 19. Tell me how you handled a difficult situation.
- 20. Why should we hire you?
- 21. Why are you looking for a new job?
- 22. Would you work holidays/weekends?
- 23. How would you deal with an angry or irate customer?
- 24. What are your salary requirements?
- 25. Give a time when you went above and beyond the requirements for a project.
- 26. Who are our competitors?
- 27. What was your biggest failure?
- 28. What motivates you?
- 29. What's your availability?
- 30. Who's your mentor?
- 31. Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.
- 32. How do you handle pressure?
- 33. What is the name of our CEO?
- 34. What are your career goals?
- 35. What gets you up in the morning?
- 36. What would your direct reports say about you?
- 37. What were your bosses' strengths/weaknesses?
- 38. If I called your boss right now and asked him what is an area that you could improve on, what would he say?
- 39. Are you a leader or a follower?
- 40. What was the last book you've read for fun?
- 41. What are your co-worker pet peeves?
- 42. What are your hobbies?
- 43. What is your favorite website?
- 44. What makes you uncomfortable?
- 45. What are some of your leadership experiences?
- 46. How would you fire someone?
- 47. What do you like the most and least about working in this industry?
- 48. Would you work 40+ hours a week?
- 49. What questions haven't I asked you?
- 50. What questions do you have for me?

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How to prepare for common job interview questions:

**Do your homework.** "One of the biggest complaints of hiring managers is that many job interview candidates know very little about the company they're interviewing for," says <u>Andy Teach</u>, author of <u>From Graduation to Corporation: The Practical Guide to Climbing the Corporate Ladder One Rung at a Time</u>, and host of the YouTube channel <u>FromGradToCorp</u>. Google the company you're interviewing with and read some of the articles that pop up; study the company's website; know the company's mission, its products and services, its locations, and who their top executives are. Go to the Public Relations tab on their website and print out some of their latest press releases. "Study them so that you can talk in the interview about what's going on with the company now," he says.

**Prepare a list of likely questions.** Shweta Khare, a <u>career and job search expert</u> says getting a list of common questions for an interview is easier than ever before. "You can never underestimate the importance of preparation. It's the first step and the most important," she says.

**Identify what the organization wants and needs.** "While the focus of 'Why should we hire you?' (and other similar interview questions) is on 'you,' the interviewee, it's important to remember the answer isn't all about you," says Miriam Salpeter, job search coach, owner of <u>Keppie Careers</u> and author of <u>Social Networking for Career Success</u> and 100 Conversations for Career Success.

The most successful interview responses focus on the hiring manager's needs. "Framing replies that demonstrate you understand their problems, or 'pain points,' makes a big difference when competing with many other qualified candidates."

Prepare by identifying the skills employers are looking for. "Use their in-depth job descriptions, view videos the employers post about their organization, and visit their Facebook page and Twitter feeds," she suggests.

**Google yourself.** Find out what the company knows about you, Teach adds. "See what they see. If there's anything negative about you, have a response ready as to why it's negative but don't get too defensive. Respond and then move on."

Interview yourself for the position. Before every interview, ask yourself: "Why am I a good fit for this job?"

"I tell my clients to post the question, 'Why should we hire you?' on their bathroom mirror, refrigerator or anyplace they will see it during the day," Salpeter says. "I instruct them to answer, out loud, keeping different companies in mind each time. Rehearsing this way will help you hone in on what you have to offer."

Identify what is unique or special about you. How have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? What did you accomplish that no one else managed to do? Did you volunteer to tackle a problem and solve it? "Don't underestimate the value of looking at yourself, your skills and your accomplishments and outlining the key points you will want to share with a prospective employer."

**Practice and plan.** Role play answering typical interview questions with a friend, colleague, or coach, says <u>Anita Attridge</u>, a Five O'Clock Club career and executive coach. "Be prepared for the typical interview questions by thinking about what your response would be to them before the interview," she adds.

If you are a college student, set up an appointment with your career center and have them conduct a mock interview with you. "Even if you're a recent graduate, many college career centers will conduct mock interviews to help alumni," Tech says. "Request that your interview is filmed so that they can critique you and you can study the film. Don't worry if you're nervous or you screw up. You're much better off screwing up in a mock interview than in the real thing."

You don't necessarily want to memorize responses—but try to have a general strategy for answering common interview questions. "Today many organizations are using behavioral interview questions to better understand what you have done," Attridge says. "They usually begin with, 'Tell me about a time when..." She suggests briefly describing what the situation was; how you handled the situation; and what the result was.

To prepare for these, you'll want to think about workplace experience stories that describe your accomplishments or show how you dealt with a tough situation, Khare says. "If you don't have any stories that you can recall now, set aside a few hours to think and write down at least two or three stories. A simple question like, 'Tell me about a time you made a mistake,' can take you off-guard and it is not easy to recall unrehearsed. Having a repository of work experience stories written down before an interview will make it easier to recall."

**Reflect on previous interviews.** Keep a computer or paper record of your interviews, Teach says. "Keep a record of the time of your interviews, how long they are, your impressions of the hiring manager, and perhaps most importantly, what questions were asked of you, what answers you gave, and record any questions they asked you that you felt could have been answered differently. " Study these elements and your interview skills will improve, he says.

**Figure out how to articulate your goals**. Most of the commonly asked questions during an interview either dig into your previous experience or want to explore your future goals, Khare says. "Prepare and articulate your goals, and remain honest here. Inconsistent answers won't get you the respect and credibility that is a must to impress an interviewer."

**Be positive.** When preparing for an interview and anticipating likely questions, plan to answer all questions positively. "Even if you were in a bad situation, think about how you can talk about the situation positively," Attridge says. You always have a choice. It is much better to talk about a glass being half full then to talk about it

being half empty. It's all about your perspective, and in an interview being positive counts.

Never say anything negative about your prior employers or bosses, either–no matter how bad the situation may have been. "A negative answer actually is a reflection about your judgment and business acumen, and not about the employer or manager."

**Get comfortable.** "Preparation and practice aside, the most important tip I would like to suggest to job seekers is to feel comfortable with the interview process," Khare says. "You can read all the advice in the world about acing the interview, but none of the tactics will work out of you are not yourself during the process."

Feeling comfortable and relaxed positively influences your confidence. "And interviewers always appreciate a relaxed and confident candidate, as opposed to a heavy promoter and edgy one," she adds. Practice calming your nerves, and focus on how you can prove you'd be a valuable asset to the company.

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## How to answer 7 of the most common interview questions:

"Tell me about yourself." While this isn't exactly a question, answering this the wrong way could really hurt your chances of getting a job, Teach says. "I was once told by an HR executive that this can actually be a trick question. Hiring managers can't ask you certain questions legally but if you go off on a tangent when answering, you may tell them some things about you that are better left unsaid." The worst way to approach this request is to tell them your life story, which is something they're definitely not interested in. The best way to approach this is to only discuss what your interests are relating to the job and why your background makes you a great candidate.

"What are your strengths and weaknesses?" It's easy to talk about your strengths; you're detail oriented, hard working, a team player, etc.—but it's also easy to get tripped up when discussing your weaknesses, Teach says. Never talk about a real weakness unless it's something you've defeated. "Many hiring managers are hip to the overused responses, such as, 'Well, my biggest weakness is that I work too hard so I need try to take it easy once in a while.' The best answer is to discuss a weakness that you've turned around, such as, you used to come in late to work a lot but after your supervisor explained why it was necessary for you to come in on time, you were never late again."

"Where do you want to be five years from now?" "What employers are really asking is, 'Is this job even close to your presumed career path? Are you just applying to this job because you need something? Are your long-term career plans similar to what we see for this role? How realistic are your expectations for your career? Have you even thought about your career long-term? Are you going to quit after a year or two?" says Sara Sutton Fell, CEO and founder of FlexJobs.

Show them that you've done some self-assessment and career planning. Let them know that you hope to develop professionally and take on additional responsibilities at that particular company. "Don't say something ridiculous like, 'I don't know,' or "I want *your* job," she says.

Teach says no one can possibly know where they'll be in their career five years from now but hiring managers

want to get a sense of your commitment to the job, the company, and the industry. "In fact, I would even mention that it's hard for you to know what job title you may hold five years from now but ideally, you'd like to have moved up the ladder at this company based on your performance. You're hopeful to be in some management position and your goal is to help the company any way you can." If you give the impression that this job is just a stepping stone for you, it's unlikely the hiring manager will be interested in you.

"Please give me an example of a time when you had a problem with a supervisor/co-worker and how you approached the problem." "I think that the hardest thing about work isn't the work, it's the people at work," Teach says. Most employees have a problem with a supervisor or co-worker at some point in their career. How they handle that problem says a lot about their people skills. If you can explain to the interviewer that you were able to overcome a people problem at work, this will definitely help your chances of getting the job, he says.

"What are your salary requirements?" "What employers are really asking is, 'Do you have realistic expectations when it comes to salary? Are we on the same page or are you going to want way more than we can give? Are you flexible on this point or is your expectation set in stone?" Sutton Fell says.

Try to avoid answering this question in the first interview because you may shortchange yourself by doing so, Teach says. Tell the hiring manager that if you are seriously being considered, you could give them a salary range—but if possible, let them make the first offer. Study websites like Salary.com and Glassdoor.com to get an idea of what the position should pay. "Don't necessarily accept their first offer," he adds. "There may be room to negotiate."

When it *is* time to give a number, be sure to take your experience and education levels into consideration, Sutton Fell says. "Also, your geographic region, since salary varies by location." Speak in ranges when giving figures, and mention that you are flexible in this area and that you're open to benefits, as well. "Be brief and to the point, and be comfortable with the silence that may come after."

"Why are you leaving your current job?" Hiring managers want to know your motivation for wanting to leave your current job. Are you an opportunist just looking for more money or are you looking for a job that you hope will turn into a career? If you're leaving because you don't like your boss, don't talk negatively about your boss—just say you have different work philosophies, Teach says. If the work was boring to you, just mention that you're looking for a more challenging position. "Discuss the positives that came out of your most recent job and focus on why you think this new position is ideal for you and why you'll be a great fit for their company."

If you've already left your previous job (or you were fired), Sutton Fell suggests the following:

- If you got fired: Do not trash your last boss or company. Tell them that you were unfortunately let go, that you understand their reasoning and you've recognized areas that you need to improve in, and then tell them how you will be a better employee because of it.
- If you got laid off: Again, do not trash your last boss or company. Tell them that you were let go, and that you understand the circumstances behind their decision; that you are committed to your future and not dwelling on the past; and that you are ready to apply everything that you learned in your last role to a new company.

• If you quit: Do not go into details about your unhappiness or dissatisfaction. Instead, tell them that while you valued the experience and education that you received, you felt that the time had come to seek out a new opportunity, to expand your skills and knowledge, and to find a company with which you could grow.

"Why should I hire you?" A hiring manager may not ask you this question directly but every question you answer in the interview should contribute to helping them understand why you're the best person for the job. "Stay focused on why your background makes you an ideal candidate and tell them how you are going to contribute to that department and that company," Teach says. "Let the interviewer know that one of your goals is to make their job easier by taking on as much responsibility as possible and that you will be excited about this job starting on day one."

Salpeter suggests you print and highlight the job description, looking for the top three or four most important details. "Do they include terms such as, 'cross-functional team,' 'team work,' and 'team player' several times?" If so, your answer to, "Why should we hire you?" (asked directly or as an underlying question) should mention and focus on your abilities as they relate to teams.

In Pictures: How to Prepare for Common Interview Questions

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