

Answering Interview Questions

Being invited to attend a job interview can sometimes be a nerve-racking experience. Our advice is to prepare some of your answers in advance to make the best impression and to maximise your chances of success.

General Tips

- + Remember to keep your answers concise and to the point. If you are too chatty, your interviewer may miss the important point you are trying to portray.
- + If you are asked a question that you find difficult to answer, stay calm, do not get defensive and take a moment to think about your answer before you speak. Don't feel you have to fill all the silence.
- + Pausing and talking at a slower pace gives the interviewer time to make notes during your interview.

To help you prepare your answers we have listed some of the more common questions asked in an interview along with some hints and tips for answering them. Remember that these should only be used as guidance. Always try and personalise your response.

Standard Questions

Question 1: Tell me about yourself

You should keep this answer to work-related facts, rather than your personal life. Your interviewer does not need to know about your family or hobbies. If you do want to mention things you do in your spare time, make sure that it relates to achievement that will reflect well for example any volunteering, sporting achievements etc...

For this question it is good to talk about your qualifications, previous career history, and your skills, that could be specifically applied to the job you are interviewing for.

Question 2: Describe your achievements

When an interviewer asks about your achievements it is best to use a more recent example, again making sure that it is work-related. Try and use specific, quantifiable details on how you benefited your company, any problems you solved, improvements you made. This is your chance to show case your skills in action.

Question 3: Can you tell me about a difficult situation you have had to face and how you overcame it?

An interviewer is testing what your definition of difficult is along with your problem-solving skills. Make sure that the example you use is an issue that was not caused by you and can be explained easily. Nothing too complicated. Make sure that the solution shows you in a positive light and demonstrates your thought pattern in coming to the solution.

Question 4: Tell me what you like and dislike about your current role?

When answering your likes, try to match your answers to the skills that are required for the job. Keep your answer positive but try not to overdo it.

Be careful when answering your dislikes though. Try not to be too critical of the role as it can draw attention to your weaknesses. Instead, you could keep your answer more general by looking at the positives of the company you are looking to join, compared to the weaknesses of the company you are looking to leave. This will help you to come up with an answer e.g. "I don't feel that working for a small company is right for me anymore, as it does not leave much room for progression or training. I want to be able to work for a company with more structure and resources to help me progress in my career."

Question 5: What are your strengths and weaknesses?

This is a standard question that is asked in most interviews, so make sure you plan your answer in advance.

Plan 3 or 4 points and where appropriate give examples. You need to be able to back up what you are claiming e.g. I have an ability to learn quickly, for example in my current role I learnt to use their specific software within the first week of being with the company, carrying out tasks unassisted by the second week.

When talking about your weaknesses you again need to be careful. It is not a good idea to say you can't think of any weaknesses. One idea is to use a negative that could be turned into a positive, for example, "I have a tendency to want to carry out a task perfectly, which in the past has held me back by spending too much time organising or proofing. I have learned to manage this by booking a slot at the beginning of the week to plan, and then creating deadlines to make sure that the task gets completed. I focus on the objectives given prioritising what part of the task needs to be right and which bits don't need as much focus. My approach is now much more balanced meaning I can be more productive."

Question 6: Why are you looking to leave your current role?

Try not to be negative in your reasons for leaving. It is normally not appropriate to mention salary as a reason or not getting on with a work colleague. Here are some reasons that you could use:

- + You are looking for a new challenge
- + You are looking for more responsibility
- + You are looking to further your career
- + You are looking for a change in environment

Question 7: Why did you apply for this role?

For any role you should first fully research the role and company prior to the interview, if you haven't already done so during the application stage.

Does the company have a section on their website about company culture; do they have articles on their news section and social media to show what they care about; what areas are they looking to focus on and develop?

You can use this information to craft an answer that shows how the job and the company culture fits with what you are looking for in your next role. They normally want to see your long term motivation, so if the roles involved a training programme or a progression structure, mention these things. If you want to work in a bigger team or for an established company you can learn from, mention that.

Competency Questions

A competency based question is used to try and get you to demonstrate your ability to do a job through a previous work scenario, showing off your best skills and behaviours.

Why do companies use these types of question?

An interviewer will use these more in-depth questions to better assess your ability to do the job. Many of the standard questions above test your suitability for the business and if you will fit in with their culture. A competency based question is looking for specific achievements and scenarios, so they can see clearly which candidate is most likely to be able to fulfil the role.

What to expect

Normally you will be asked to describe a recent situation that demonstrates your past experience, or shows your ability to carry out a specific task. When answering these questions you should:

- + Pause to think about the question and how you are going to answer it. If you don't understand the question, ask them to explain or repeat it
- + Try to give an example from the past 6 months
- + Describe the background briefly to your answer to put it into context
- + What were the key stages in the solution?
- + Describe your own specific contribution, rather than "we"
- + Describe the results – how were they achieved, the impact of your contribution, anything learned

Please note: Your Recruitment Consultant at First Recruitment Group is here to help you through the process. If you have questions prior to interview please ask so that you feel completely comfortable. Make sure you know the time and location of the interview, making a note of the person who will be interviewing you. It is also a good idea to arrive 15 minutes prior to allow time for parking etc... The last thing you want to do is appear flustered with your first impression.

Relax, smile and believe you are the right person for the job. Confidence goes a long way.