

How to Approach Some Common Interview Questions

Listed below are some questions that are often asked of candidates and suggestions for ways to answer them. Remember, these are only a few of the questions that may be asked. A more complete list of frequently asked questions can be found on pages 13-14.

Tell me about yourself: Do not be tricked by this question into sharing your life story. Interviewers usually do not want to discuss personal issues when they ask this question. They want to know an overview of your background (where you're from, where you went to school, major area of study and career interests or goals). Think of this as your elevator speech to introduce yourself, share a bit about to give them a few for where you came from and what you like and then relate it to why you meeting with them today. If you're still unsure of where to start, you can always ask, "What area of my background would be most relevant to you?" and take it from there.

What is your greatest weakness?: This question is a challenge to many interviewees. If you don't have any to report, you may appear to lack introspection or seem arrogant. At the same time, you want to continue to put forth a positive image. The best approach is to design your answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive. For example, "Some people may say that I get too bogged down in the details, but others would say that my work is thorough and accurate." Another good approach is to mention a weakness that you once had or are currently working to overcome. Explain how you overcame your weakness as well as how you continue to improve.

What is your greatest strength?: Think of the qualities that the employer is looking for. Share concrete, specific examples that demonstrate those qualities and highlight your strengths. It is not enough to say, "I have good communication skills." Back up that statement with an example.

Why did you choose to attend Cornell College?: Be sure to describe the practical reasons you had for choosing Cornell. The employer is looking for an example of your decision-making skills.

Where do you want to be in 5 years?: Keep in mind that this employer will not be calling you in 5 years to see if you followed through. Rather, they want to hear that you are thinking about your future and how you intend to progress. Relate your future plans as they apply to that career or organization.

What do you know about our organization?: This is one place where your research will pay off. Explain what you have learned through company literature, their website and your personal contacts.

Why do you want to work here?: This is another question where your research will help. Explain the positive aspects of the organization - products, services, mission or other factors - and why those make this organization one where you would like to work.

What qualifications do you have that will make you successful?: Go back to those key strengths and qualities that you have already focused on. Draw on academic as well as workplace experiences. Think of leadership roles you have held, student organizations you have assisted, and related part-time or summer jobs.

Why should I hire you?: This is your open invitation to really sell yourself. Highlight areas from your background that relate to the organization's needs. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, matching it with your skills. Mention any strong points that you haven't had the opportunity to address.

Do you have any questions for us?: At this point you probably want the interview to just be over. But employers like to be asked questions - it shows your interest in what they do and in their organization. Asking questions gives you an opportunity to gather useful information and clear up any confusing issues. Be prepared by having a list of questions in your portfolio. If your mind goes blank you can tell the employer that you do have some questions jotted down - select two to four questions from your list.

FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Tell me about yourself.
- What college did you attend and why?
- What are your long-range (short-range) goals and objectives?
- When /why did you establish these goals? How are you preparing yourself to achieve your goals?
- What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- What do you consider your greatest strength?
- What do you consider your greatest weakness?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
- How has your college education prepared you for this position?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What led you to choose your major field of study?
- Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic capabilities?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- How do you work under pressure?
- In what part-time jobs (summer) have you been most interested? Why?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- What criteria will you use to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
- Are you willing to travel?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
- Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our organization is located?
- What is the biggest challenge you were ever faced with and how did you handle it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What is your leadership style? Give me an example of your leadership skills.
- Could you give me an example of where you took extraordinary efforts to achieve a deadline?
- What attracted you to this organization?
- Give me an example your creativity.
- Describe a recent project in which you were in charge.
- What kinds of work situations irritate you?
- Give me specific examples of things you have done in previous jobs or in your education which demonstrate that you would perform effectively and enjoy this position.
- What does confidentiality mean to you?
- Give me an example of a time that you worked in a group and faced a conflict with that group. How did you deal with the conflict?
- What sets you apart from other candidates?