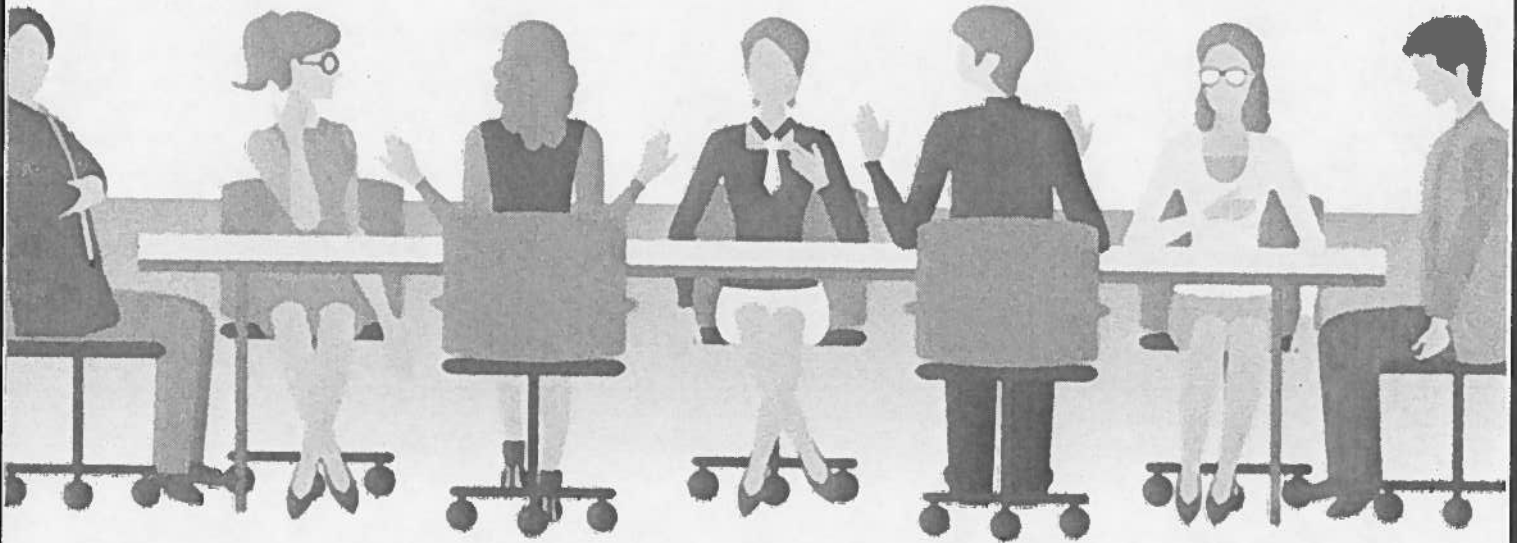




INTERVIEW READY



CLASS HANDOUTS



EMPLOYMENT READINESS PROGRAM

The interview questions

The interview is the most important element in the job search process. When an employer invites you to an interview, he or she generally already thinks you may be qualified to do the job. Now you both need to exchange enough information to allow you both to determine whether you and the organization are a good "fit" for each other. Therefore, think of an interview as a highly focused professional conversation. Use the limited amount of time you have to learn about the employer's needs and discuss the ways you can contribute to meeting them. In many cases you will interview at least twice before being hired for a position, once in a briefer screening interview and at least once again in a visit in which you speak with many of the people you will be working with.

HOW TO PREPARE

Preparation is vital. While you cannot anticipate every question, you can prepare yourself to make the most of whatever you are asked. It is critical to know as much as you can both about the organization/position and industry but also do lots of self-analysis so that you can best articulate your skills and experiences.

HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

General Tips

- **Provide a great first and last impression** – firm handshake, good posture, smile. Maintain eye contact as you speak, have good posture, and avoid "um," "like," and "uhh", etc.
- **Listen to the questions.** While the interviewer controls the flow of the interview, you can control the content. If the employer is looking for specific facts, provide them. If a question is general, refocus it to your advantage.
- **Be honest.** Let an employer get to know you. Avoid dissembling or comparing yourself to others. You want to be sure that you and the employer know what you are getting if you are hired.
- **Be positive.** Never say anything negative about past experiences, employers, or courses and professors. Employers, like anyone, tend to generalize: if you didn't like "x", you are a negative person and won't like me either. Figure out what was positive about an experience and talk about that.
- **Be enthusiastic and demonstrate interest.** If you are genuinely interested in the job, let the interviewer know that. This can be achieved by doing research on the organization prior to the interview. It can also come across by asking questions during the interview about the job, the organization and its services and products. When asking questions, be sure that the answers will give you information that you don't already have (or should have) and that the questions are genuinely of interest to you.
- **Silence is OK** – taking a moment to consider your answer is certainly appropriate. It can be a sign of thoughtfulness and intelligence, in addition to giving you time to collect your thoughts.
- **Convey professionalism, maturity, and poise in all interactions with the organization.** In a sense, the interview process extends well beyond your actual interview to include all interactions with the organization, employer presentations, night-before events, and correspondence.
- **Use examples to stress your points.** For example, if asked, "What three words best describe you?" list three traits and give examples that show how you have demonstrated each.
- Do not ask about salary or benefits. Wait until you have an offer to negotiate. There are many places to research salary trends in the meantime (www.bls.gov, Career Services surveys, etc.).

When you are at a loss for words

What if an interviewer poses a question that catches you so completely off guard that you cannot come up with an answer at all? Ideally, you can use some of the following suggestions to buy time and come up with a response:

- Stall for time – ask to have the question repeated, repeat it yourself
- Ask for a few moments to think over the question
- Ask for clarification
- Try to redirect your thought process and find an answer
- Read [this blog](#) for more ideas

And if all else fails ... In a gracious and polite way, say something like "May we return to this question later on? I seem to be at a loss at the moment." (Then think of something to say as the interview proceeds!)

... and if the interviewer returns to the question and you still don't have an answer ...

"This is a question that has really stumped me for some reason. May I have your card so that I can follow up later on today with an email?" (This is a last resort, of course, but if you go this route – make sure you follow up as promised!)

ADVICE FROM RECRUITERS

Employers tell us that when interviews go wrong, they go wrong (typically) for these reasons:

- **The student didn't really know why s/he applied for the position and how it fits into her/his career path.** Think through this beforehand and be able to articulate it.
- **The student is confused about what the organization does.** Be sure to take the time to learn what they do and be able to discuss it.
- **The student is not enthusiastic.** It's OK to smile and be excited! You set the tone for the interview, so demonstrate your enthusiasm!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INTERVIEWER(S)

Almost always, your interview will end by your interviewer asking if you have any questions for them and these questions are also being evaluated. Be responsive to what has gone on in the interview. If you have listened well, you should be able to come up with thoughtful questions which impress the interviewer. You may want to prepare a few questions in advance, but an insightful comment based on your conversation can make an even stronger statement.

- *What areas need the immediate attention of the person you hire?*
- *What are the major responsibilities of this position?*
- *How long have you been with the company?*
- *What attracted you to this company?*
- *What qualities and skills are most valued at this firm?*
- *What characteristics must one have to thrive at this organization?*
- *What are the company's growth projections?*
- *Whom do you identify as your major competitors?*
- *What are your plans for new products or services?*
- *How would you describe a typical patient/client/customer in this organization/facility?*
- *How would you define your management philosophy?*
- *What are you looking for in the person who will fill this job?*
- *Describe a typical day.*
- *Describe the ideal candidate for this position.*
- *What kind of training would I receive?*
- *What activities could I engage in now that might help me on the job if I'm hired?*
- *How centralized is the organizational structure?*
- *What do you like most about your job and the company?*
- *Whom could I speak with who has the position now or who has been promoted from the position recently?*
- *What are the avenues for advancement?*
- *What is the turnover rate?*
- *Who would be my supervisor and what is that person's supervisory style?*
- *What do you see as the key issues/challenges facing the person in this job?*
- *How has this organization/facility been affected by all the changes in the xxxx industry?*
- *What is the time line for filling this position? (Will there be additional interviews? When can I expect to hear back?)*

ALWAYS ASKED/STANDARD

All interviewers are ultimately trying to see if a candidate is the right fit for their organization or program. This means that in any interview you have you will always be asked both about your interest in the position/organization as well as what skills/experiences you bring that will be an asset to you in the role. These questions include:

- *Why are you interested in this position/opportunity/program?*
- *Why are you interested in this organization?*
- *What skills and experience make you a good fit for this role?*

Candidates who have prepared responses for these questions will start the interview off on a positive note. Here are some other questions that are very commonly asked:

- *Tell me about yourself.*
- *When did you know you wanted to be an xyz?*
- *Describe yourself in 3 adjectives.*
- *How would your friends describe you?*
- *What makes you tick or what motivates you?*
- *Why should I hire you?*
- *Why did you decide to go to Penn?*
- *Why did you choose your major?*
- *How did you learn about our organization?*
- *What do you know about our organization?*
- *Where do you see yourself in five years?*
- *What was the worst thing that happened to you on a summer job?*
- *What contributions could you make to our organization?*
- *What do you expect from a job with us?*
- *What is your greatest asset?*
- *If you were an interviewer, what do you think the three most important criteria would be for hiring someone for this position?*
- *On what grounds would you dismiss someone?*
- *Do you like working with people? Is this an important factor?*
- *How would you handle an irate client if the complaint were against the organization's policy?*
- *Describe a situation when you had to learn a large amount of material quickly. How did you do it?*
- *Why are you interested in this field of work?*
- *Do you have any questions?*
- *What was your best subject in school?*
- *Why do you want to work for us?*
- *Why did you take a leave of absence?*
- *Would you consider relocating?*
- *Could you travel three days a week?*
- *How do you relieve stress?*
- *Do you plan to go to graduate school?*
- *If we hired you, what is the top position you see yourself holding?*
- *Is there anything which could potentially interfere with your performance?*
- *Tell me about your experience on a part-time job.*
- *Of what accomplishment are you most proud?*
- *What was the best part of your college experience?*
- *What do you think is the most important/difficult ethical dilemma facing our industry today?*
- *How do you get people to do things they don't like to do?*
- *Are you more interested in program development or implementation?*
- *If you could be one person in the world, who would it be?*
- *What do you like to do for fun?*

BEHAVIORAL

More and more interviewers are asking behavioral questions, in which the employer asks you to recount a specific example of a past experience which s/he can use as a predictor for your future behavior. "Tell me about a time you

demonstrated initiative. Give me an example of your leadership ability. Describe your most recent group effort and how you contributed to the team." In answering these questions, be certain to describe a SPECIFIC example (don't describe your leadership style in general, but rather recount a specific time you were in a leadership role). After setting the context, describe your role, contribution to, or influence on that situation. Finally, always provide a statement describing the outcome of your efforts (e.g., the grade you received, the percentage increase in sales volume due to your efforts, etc.) so they can evaluate your effectiveness.

A common way to approach answering behavioral questions is to use the STAR method:

1. S = Situation: Describe what you were facing
2. T = Target: Describe what you wanted to achieve
3. A = Action: Describe what you did
4. R = Results: Describe what happened, how things turned out, what you learned, and perhaps what you'd do differently if presented the same circumstances

CASE

Case questions focus on business issues and problems. Most commonly used in consulting interviews, they test your analytical skills and business acumen. A case can be very broad (e.g., "What makes ABC Company so successful?) or extremely specific (e.g., a discussion of detailed financial statements) in nature. There are several extremely useful guides to interviews available in the Career Services library. You can also access Career Services' online **Vault** and **WetFeet** career guides from the [Career Services library webpage](#). (Click on the online subscriptions link.)

ILLEGAL

An employer cannot discriminate against you because of your race, sex, religion, ethnic origin, disability or, in some states or cities, your sexual orientation. As such, employers should not ask any interview questions in regards to these topics.

Illegal interview questions include but are not limited to:

- *Are you married? or, How is your spouse going to handle your schedule in this position?*
- *Are you planning on having children? How will you handle child care?*
- *How old are you? Who was the first president you voted for?*
- *Are you a U.S. Citizen? (However, employers can ask "Are you legally authorized to work in the U.S.?)*
- *As a woman, how would you handle working in a male dominated environment?*
- *What religious holidays do you observe?*

Some employers may end up asking questions that they don't realize are illegal as a conversation starter or as a way to get at certain environmental or schedule-related issues in the job. In these cases, usually the intent is innocent as the interviewee, your choice is to refuse to answer or dodge the question, or answer the question behind the question. You can find some more information on these approaches [here](#).

Resources:

- [Forbes Article "5 Illegal Questions and How to Dodge Them"](#)
 - [Yale Career Services List of Illegal & Legal Questions](#)
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GROUP/TEAM

In some instances, an interview might involve a group or team component. This could mean one of two things—either you will be interviewed by a group of people at once, or that you are simultaneously interviewing with other candidates for the same position.

In former case, this will mean that you will need to be sure to try to answer to the group. Start your response for a question by looking at the person who asked you the question but be sure to also make eye contact with the other interviewers during your answer before returning to the person who asked the question at the conclusion of your answer.

For the latter, usually you are given a scenario to work through as a team. When this happens, the interviews are evaluate how well you work as a team player so it will be important to show your listening skills as well as your ability to take initiative.

CHALLENGING

Some employers will ask questions that are deliberately challenge. This is done to see how you think on your feet, how you handle stress, and, in some cases, how creative you are. Here are some examples:

- *I see you received a very low grade in XXXX. Why?*
- *What was your worst subject in school?*
- *Let's pretend that the first 25 minutes of the interview have passed. What were you planning to tell me in the last 5 minutes?*
- *Why do you, an xyz major, want to go into business?*
- *With your educational background in xyz, why didn't you apply for law school?*
- *You don't seem to have done as well academically in college as you did in high school. Why?*
- *How do you feel about working with numbers? What is 12% of 69? How did you figure that out?*
- *Where do you think employment with this company will take you five years from now?*
- *You strike me as graduate school material. Why are you applying for jobs?*
- *What do you think of our organizational structure?*
- *How do you feel you work without direct supervision? Are you prepared right now to work without supervision?*
- *Would you prefer to work independently or as part of a team? Why?*
- *How much traveling would be ideal in a job?*
- *What is your greatest liability?*
- *What is one of your weaknesses? Now, I know you had one prepared, so give me another one?*
- *What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?*
- *What have you learned from your mistakes?*
- *Of what activity are you least proud?*
- *What was the worst part of your college experience?*
- *Why should we hire you rather than one of the 200 other applicants?*
- *How much do you expect to earn?*
- *What question do you wish we had asked?*
- *Highlight the one thing on your resume that separates you from everyone else on Penn's campus.*
- *What don't you do well?*
- *Tell me about a time when you failed at something.*
- *Tell me about a time when you made a mistake and what you learned from it.*
- *Describe a group work situation where you and your partner were having trouble getting along with each other. How did you resolve the problem?*
- *Describe a situation when you were faced with a deadline that you couldn't meet. How did you handle it?*
- *You are very qualified. Why would you want to work at a small company like ours, when you could work at a larger company?*
- *How would someone who dislikes you describe you?*
- *Tell me everything you know about ___xyz___ in three minutes (or tell me everything you know about our organization in three minutes?)*
- *Why didn't you get a permanent offer from your last summer employer?*
- *Who else are you interviewing with? What do you think of those organizations?*
- *What characteristics/traits do you most dislike in a person?*
- *If you could be a fruit, what type of fruit would you be?*

- *You work in a library, and a book has been mis-shelved. How do you find it?*
- *What is the one question you don't want us to ask you?*
- *What is the biggest risk you ever took?*
- *If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?*
- *Give me an example of how you are a risk taker.*
- *What is your grade point average?*
- *Why are tennis balls fuzzy?*
- *What is the lowest salary you would consider?*
- *Tell me something that is not on your resume.*
- *How much do you think you will be earning in ten years?*
- *Give me an example of a time your ethics were tested and how you responded and reacted.*
- *Could you make a commitment now?*

101 Most Common Interview Questions

Top Ten Questions (With Pass or Fail Answers)

If you're preparing to do a job interview, there's a good chance you're planning to ask the questions below.

If you're preparing to go on a job interview, the red flags and answers listed will give you a good idea of how to avoid making serious mistakes with these common questions, and how to answer them in ways that will make a recruiter or hiring manager smile.

So here they are, the top 10 interview questions.

1. What are your strengths?

Red flags: Candidate is unprepared for question or only gives generic answers.

This is the most common job interview question - everybody should be expecting it. If they don't seem prepared, or give a fairly stock answer, it's probably a bad sign.

Good answer: The consensus is to go for quality, not quantity here. Candidates should give a short list of strengths, and back each one up with examples that illustrate the strength. Also, they should explain how these strengths will be useful in the job you're applying for, and use this question to say something interesting about themselves.

2. What are your weaknesses?

Red flags: This is the peanut butter to the previous question's jelly. Again, everyone should expect it, so it's a bad sign if someone seems totally unprepared, or gives a stock answer like, "I'm a perfectionist." Also, of course, any candidate crazy enough to blurt out some horrible personality trait should go in the red flagged pile.

Good answer: Candidates should talk about a real weakness they've been working on improving. For instance, they're not good at public speaking, but they've been taking a course to help them improve. Or maybe they feel that they're easily distracted when working online, but have installed software that helps them stay on task. Answers like these show a desire for improvement, self-awareness and discipline.

3. Why do you want to work here?

Red flags: They don't have a good reason, or provide a generic answer, "I think it represents a great opportunity."

Good answer: One that shows they've done research on the company, and are truly excited about specific things they can do at the job. This not only shows enthusiasm for the work and basic preparation skills, gives you clues about the cultural fit.

4. Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

Red flags: A generic or uninspired answer. Also, answers that show that this career/company is just a temporary stop for them.

Good answer: One that shows the candidate has thought about this question, has plans, and that those plans align with the job and a career path that is possible in the company. You want to see that this candidate is a good long term investment.

5. Why do you want to leave your current company?

Red flags: Complaining about or blaming their former job, boss or colleagues. Also, having no good reason.

Good answer: One that focuses on the positives about why the job they're applying for offers them better learning or career opportunities, chances for advancement, aligns more closely to their long term goals, or is a better fit for them.

6. What can you offer us that someone else can not?

Red flags: Going negative - if the candidate starts trash talking other candidates, it's a sure sign of a bad attitude. Also, if they can't provide a solid answer, it may show that they lack thorough knowledge of the skills the job requires, and an understanding of where they fit in.

Good answer: The candidate can name specific skills, abilities or understandings they have that apply directly to the job that other candidates are unlikely to have, or are in short supply.

7. What do you know about our company?

Red flags: They don't know much about the company. If a candidate is serious and enthusiastic, they should have done some basic research.

Good answer: An answer that shows they've really done their homework and know what the company does, any important current events that involve the company, and the work culture.

8. What is your desired salary?

Red flags: Candidates who are unable to answer the question, or give an answer that is far above market. Shows that they have not done research on the market rate, or have unreasonable expectations.

Good answer: A number or range that falls within the market rate and matches their level of mastery of skills required to do the job.

9. Tell me about yourself.

Red flags: Candidates who ramble on about themselves without regard for information that will actually help the interviewer make a decision, or candidates who actually provide information showing they are unfit for the job.

Good answer: An answer that gives the interviewer a glimpse of the candidate's personality, without veering away from providing information that relates to the job. Answers should be positive, and not generic.

10. Why do you want this job?

Red flags: No solid answer, answers that don't align with what the job actually offers, or uninspired answers that show your position is just another of the many jobs they're applying for.

Good answer: The candidate has clear reasons for wanting the job that show enthusiasm for the work and the position, and knowledge about the company and job.

Gauging Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence, or EQ, has come into vogue as a good trait to hire for.

EQ is the ability to use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, to recognize other people's emotions and your own, and to discriminate between different feelings and label them appropriately.

EQ is considered essential to help teams function well. Here are some of the top questions for help you get an idea of how candidates perceive their emotions and those of others.

- If you started a company today, what would its top values be?
- Who inspires you? Why?
- How could you create more balance in your life?
- What makes you angry?
- How do you have fun?
- How good are you at asking for help?
- How did you deal with a bad day?
- What's something you're really proud of? Why?
- Tell me about a time when your mood altered your performance (positively or negatively).
- Has there ever been a time when you felt you needed to change your behavior at work? How did you do it?
- Did you create friendships that lasted while working at a previous job?

Questions to verify experience or credentials

Sometimes people want a job a little too bad - and they may fudge their credentials and experience a bit.

If you've run into this problem, are worried about it, or have credentials and experience that are absolutely essential, you may need to ask a few verification questions.

If you are a candidate, you should review your resume and make sure you know all the key points, and that nothing has been misconstrued.

- What grades did you get in college?

- What were your responsibilities when you worked in job x?
- How many people were on your team at your last job?
- What will your previous manager/supervisor say when I ask where you needed to improve?
- What was your beginning and ending salary at job x?
- What were your beginning and ending titles at job x?
- Are you eligible for rehire at job x?
- What tools are necessary for performing job x?
- Describe to me how you would perform [x typical job task].
- What was the focus of your thesis?
- When did you leave company x?

Behavioral Interview Questions

Behavioral interviews were popularized by industrial psychologists in the 1970s, and have been used at big companies like AT&T. The idea behind them is that past responses to situations are the best predictor of how candidates will respond in the future.

- Tell me about a time you faced a conflict while working as part of a team.
- Talk about a goal you set for yourself. What did you do to make sure you met the goal?
- Give an example of a time when you had to work with someone with a very different personality from yours.
- Talk about an instance where you wish you'd handled a situation differently with a team member.
- What's the most difficult problem you have had to solve?
- Give an example of how you handled a situation where you needed information from a colleague who wasn't responsive.
- Talk about a time when you had problems building a relationship with a key team member. What did you do?
- Tell me about an instance when it was important to make a great impression on a client. What did you do?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to work with a difficult client.
- Tell me about a situation where you disappointed a client, and how you tried to fix it.
- Talk about a time when you had to strategize to meet all your obligations.
- Talk about a time when you failed at something. How did you react?
- Talk about a time you took on a leadership role.
- Tell me about a long-term project you oversaw. How did you keep it focused and on schedule?
- Talk about a time when you were under a lot of stress. What caused it, and how did you manage?
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others?
- Tell me about a time when you were overwhelmed by the amount of work on your agenda. How did you handle it?

Situational Interview Questions

Situational interviews are similar to behavioral interview questions - but they are focused on the future, and ask hypothetical questions, whereas behavioral interview questions look at the past.

The advantage is that employers can put all candidates in the same hypothetical situations, and compare their answers.

- What would you do if you made a strong recommendation in a meeting, but your colleagues decided against it?
- How would you handle it if your team resisted a new idea or policy you introduced?
- How would you handle it if the priorities for a project you were working on were suddenly changed?
- What would you do if the work of an employee you managed didn't meet expectations?
- What would you do if an important task was not up to standard, but the deadline to complete it had passed?
- What steps would you take to make an important decision on the job?
- How would you handle a colleague you were unable to form a positive relationship with?
- What would you do if you disagreed with the way a manager wanted you to handle a problem?
- What would you do if you were assigned to work with a difficult client?
- What would you do if you worked hard on a solution to a problem, and your solution was criticized by your team?
- How would you handle working closely with a colleague who was very different from you?
- You're working on a key project that you can't complete, because you're waiting on work from a colleague. What do you do?
- You realize that an early mistake in a project is going to put you behind deadline. What do you do?

Questions to Test Communication Skills

For most jobs, communication skills are important. It's hard to work as a team if people aren't communicating well.

At some jobs, like customer service or sales, communication skills are an absolute essential.

These questions are meant to help gauge a candidate's ability to communicate.

- How do you prefer to build rapport with others?
- How would you go about simplifying a complex issue in order to explain it to a client or colleague?
- How would you go about persuading someone to see things your way at work?
- How would you go about explaining a complex idea/problem to a client who was already frustrated?
- What would you do if you there was a breakdown in communication at work?
- Talk about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it did well.

- How would you explain a complicated technical problem to a colleague with less technical understanding?
- Do you prefer written or verbal communication?
- Describe a time when you had to be careful talking about sensitive information. How did you do it?
- What would you do if you misunderstood an important communication on the job?
- Talk about a time when you made a point that you knew your colleagues would be resistant to.
- Is it more important to be a good listener or a good communicator?
- Tell me about a time you had to relay bad news to a client or colleague.
- Rate your communication skills on a scale of 1 to 10. Give examples of experiences that demonstrate the rating is accurate.
- How have you handled working under someone you felt was not good at communicating?

Stress interview Questions

Some jobs require employees to work under stress, and some interviewers just like to see how applicants handle stressful questions.

There are many questions designed for putting the interviewee into an awkward situation, or throwing them off, to see how they do under stress. Here are some samples.

- How do you feel this interview is going?
- How would you handle undeserved criticism from a superior?
- How many other jobs are you applying for?
- What would you do if you saw a colleague stealing supplies or equipment?
- What did you do when you had a boss you didn't get along with?
- What would you do if a colleague took credit for your idea, and got a promotion?
- Was the stress of your previous job too much for you?
- What would you do if a colleague admitted to lying on their resume to get the job?
- What would you do if a customer verbally insulted you in front of co-workers?
- What would you change about the design of a baseball hat?
- Why were you fired from your previous job?
- How successful do you think you've been so far?

Brainteaser Questions

Brainteaser questions have become popular for interviews in recent years, as word has gotten out that top tech companies such as Apple, Google, Microsoft and IBM have used this type of question at one time or another.

Companies like Google aren't using these questions so much anymore, but many companies, are, and it may be good to prepare for them. The key to these isn't so much getting the exact answer, as it is showing how you would come up with an answer.

Here's a sample of the best and most difficult.

- How many street lights are there in New York City?
- How many gas stations are there in the United States?
- How many golf balls can fit in a school bus?
- How much should you charge to wash all the windows in Seattle?
- Why are manhole covers round?
- How many times a day does a clock's hands overlap?
- How would you test a calculator?
- Describe the internet to someone who just woke up from a 30-year coma.
- How much does the Starbucks in Times Square bring in, in annual revenue?
- You are shrunk to the height of a nickel and thrown into a blender. Your mass is reduced so that your density is the same as usual. The blades start moving in 60 seconds. What do you do?
- How many golf balls are there in Florida?
- How would you weigh a plane without scales?
- Why is there fuzz on a tennis ball?
- If you could get rid of any one of the United States, which one would you get rid of and why?

The Best Questions to Ask in the Interview

An interview is meant to be a two-way street. The hiring manager is interviewing you to determine whether you're the best fit for the job. At the same time, you should be asking questions to determine whether you would be happy in the position or with the company. But once nerves take over, it's easy to forget your role. After all, you're meeting on the employer's schedule in an unfamiliar office. After listening to the interviewer's monologue about the company and role, you're asked a barrage of questions about your background and future plans "all the while praying that you're delivering the "right" answers. By the time the employer asks if you have any questions, it's easy to be so drained and nervous you can only stammer out, "Nope." Not asking questions, however, is passing up a chance to stand out from the competition. "This is a great opportunity to set you apart in a positive way from other people being considered for the job," says Eddie Payne, division manager of professional staffing for recruiting firm FGP International. "Employers say they are interested in candidates who ask quality questions and make intelligent conversation based on what they know about the organization." Before the interview, prepare a list of questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the company and interest in the position. Some good topics to cover include:

- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- What do you consider to be your companies most important assets?
- What can you tell me about your new product or plans for growth?
- How do you rate your competition?

The position's history Asking about why the position is vacant can provide insight into the company and the potential for advancement. good questions include:

- What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the last person who held this job?
- What types of skills do you NOT already have onboard that you're looking to fill with a new hire?

The department Asking about your department's workers and role in the company can help you understand more about the company's culture and hierarchy. Stanford suggests asking:

- What is the overall structure of the company and how does your department fit the structure?
- What are the career paths in this department?
- What have been the department's successes in the last couple of years?
- How do you view your group/division/department?

The job's responsibilities To avoid any confusion later on, it pays to gain a solid understanding of the position.

- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this job?
- What are the skills and attributes you value most for someone being hired for this position?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to within the company?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in this position? The typical client or customer I would be dealing with?

The expectations To determine how and when you will be evaluated

- What are the most immediate challenges of the position that need to be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- How will I be evaluated at XYZ company, and how often?

The next steps At the end of the interview, don't forget to ask:

- What are the next steps in the interview process?



Top 10 Interview Tips from an Etiquette Professional

By Nancy R. Mitchell, *The Etiquette Advocate*

Interview — one of the most dreaded words in the English language for job seekers young and old. Do your hands begin to tremble or do you break out in a cold sweat when you hear the word? You're not alone. Could there be a more difficult situation than walking into a room with one or more strangers, sitting in what feels like a criminal interrogation spotlight, knowing your every word and gesture are being evaluated, while attempting to appear to be composed, confident and professional?

As you head out the door for that next important interview, don't forget to pack one of the most powerful business tools available: ETIQUETTE. Your etiquette and people skills can make the difference between an adequate performance and one that will launch you to level 2 of the hiring process.

Your attitude and behavior toward others are as important as your resume, experience, training and technical abilities. Too many job candidates spend more time worrying about the margins on their resume than their manners, and they fail to realize that employers are selecting individuals who have not only job-related experience, but who they believe will be a good fit in their business family. They are looking for the human qualities that make the difference in business relationships: courtesy, respect, trust and reliability. Manners and respect are the underlying foundation of good relationships, and good relationships translate to business success.

How do your manners measure up? Here's how to outclass your competition by avoiding some of the mistakes that have derailed job hunters from reaching their goal.

1. NO DO-OVERS IN FIRST IMPRESSIONS

You have 5 seconds to make a first impression in most situations. In a job interview you're given a bit more time to shine--approximately 30 seconds. Since there's no rewind button to undo a false start, don't blow this opportunity to cement the image you want to leave in the minds of each and every member of an interview team.

You are on stage from the moment you walk into the building where the interview will take place. Smile. Be enthusiastic. You may be riding on the elevator with the head of your interview team. Turn off your cell phone or Blackberry before you enter the building. When you arrive at the office where the interview will take place (and never more than 10 minutes early), politely introduce yourself to the receptionist, and sit at attention in the waiting area--no cell phone, BlackBerry, magazines. Stand and shake hands with the person who comes to escort you into the interview.

Enter the interview room with enthusiasm and energy, both of which can help to mask your nervousness. Smile, make eye contact, and try to maintain an open posture (line your shoulders up with the shoulders of the person you are meeting) as you shake hands with each individual in the room. If possible, walk around the side of the table or desk to shake hands; try not to have a barrier between you and the person you are meeting. Introduce yourself using your first and last name as you shake hands (at least to the first person, if there are several people on the interview

team), and, say your first and last name as you shake hands.

2. AVOID WARDROBE MALFUNCTIONS

Always dress up and dress conservatively for a job interview. Even if you are applying for a job behind a steam table in a fast-food restaurant or in the relaxed environment of an IT company, this is a strategy that works. Remember how your parents told you to dress up to go to church or to visit Grandma? Their reasoning was that we show respect for an organization or an individual by dressing up. Your polish indicates that you think the interview and potential employer matter and that you respect them and the situation.

3. DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF A SMILE

I was invited recently to conduct mock interviews in the business school at a leading university in Washington, D.C. One of my subjects participated in a 30-minute session without smiling once. I had reviewed his resume the day before and knew that he had begun a career in banking in his European homeland, so I was prepared to be impressed when I talked with him. But his frown became my focus, as I tried to analyze him. Was he mean, mad, nervous, psychotic, disappointed that his interviewer was a woman? This guessing game distracted me from his answers and from his credentials. In my evaluation at the end of the exercise, I discussed this with him and learned that in his culture, a business professional is trained to have a serious demeanor in order to be taken seriously. I quickly explained that this is not the case in the North American business environment. A smile shows not only confidence, but a pleasant nature. It invites others to get to know you. Remember that not only is an employer filling an opening in a workforce, but is filling an opening in a business family.

4. BODY LANGUAGE SPEAKS VOLUMES

Employers interpret your attitude and interest in the job vacancy and in their company through your body language, just as they do from your smile and your words. Sit up straight and plant your feet firmly on the floor during an interview. You may think that a relaxed pose will show your confidence, but it shows, instead, a lack of respect or interest. Don't sit with both hands in your lap beneath the table--you will look like a nervous child. Rest an arm on the arm of your chair or on the table.

Make eye contact and maintain an open posture. This means aligning your shoulders with the shoulders of the person to whom you are speaking, whenever possible. Do the best you can in a situation where a number of people are interviewing you. Do not fidget in your chair, cross your legs, or wring your hands, and try not to use too many hand gestures. Hold a pencil or a pen if that helps to control your nervousness.

5. MASTERING THE ART OF MEET AND GREET

How you greet people reveals a great deal about you--your confidence, your attitude, your polish. Learn to give a good handshake. Begin with your hand parallel to the floor with your thumb pointing to the ceiling, and go all the way into your partner's hand until the space between thumbs and index fingers touch. Wrap your thumb and fingers all the way around your partner's hand and squeeze assertively--not painfully--and shake 3-4 times. Always stand for a handshake in business, and in a North American business environment the space between partners is approx 2 feet (more when meeting Asians, less when meeting Latin Americans or people from the Middle East.) Never have your left hand in a trouser pocket when shaking hands, and don't feel obligated to return a double handshake (left hand placed over the two hands shaking) or a pat on the upper right arm. Make no comment about a handshake that does not come off perfectly.

Maintain an open posture when shaking hands, smile, make eye contact, and say your first and last name. When meeting someone for the first time, always try to say their name as you shake hands and use an honorific (Mr. Ms., Mrs., Dr., Gen.) and their last name. These rules apply to

both men and women in a North American business environment. When meeting people from other countries, you need to research cultural differences in order not to offend others or embarrass yourself. In some cultures for example, a hug, kiss or air kiss may accompany that first handshake--you don't want to be taken off guard.

6. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

People love to hear the sound of their name, so use names when you meet interviewers and when you say goodbye. It is not necessary to sprinkle their names throughout the interview: "That's an interesting question, Mr. Davis" will seem artificial and cloying if said more than once. Because you may be nervous when entering an interview room, you may not hear and remember all of the names of the people you are meeting for the first time. Instead, when you are contacted by the interview scheduler, ask for the names and titles of the individuals who will be interviewing you, and write them down in the notebook or portfolio that you will carry to the interview. Memorize this list. Then, when you enter the interview room, you can use an individual's name when you shake hands: "Good morning, Mr. Peterson. It's a pleasure to meet you." And always, always use an honorific (Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr., Gen.) and last name when meeting someone for the first time in business. When introducing yourself, either in person or on the telephone, use your first and last name.

7. TABLE TALK

After you shake hands with all of your interviewers, stand behind a chair until you are invited to sit down, or politely ask where the interviewer would like you to sit. When you take your seat at an interview table, do not place personal items on the table--no cell phones, Blackberrys, handbags, briefcases, water bottles or coffee cups. All of these things should be placed under your chair or on a chair beside you. You may place a portfolio or notepad and pen in front of you. If a beverage is offered, decline politely. Remember to sit up straight with both feet planted on the floor. (See Body Language.)

8. FOR WHOM THE BELL TONES

If, for some unfathomable reason, your cell phone or Blackberry rings during an interview, some serious damage control will be required. Do not look at the display window and do not answer it to explain that you cannot talk at that moment. Reach down (because your cell phone is in your bag under your chair) and hit the "off" button immediately. Look at the interviewers and say sincerely: "I'm so sorry. I was so caught up in preparing for my interview that I forgot to turn it off." PS. If it does happen, you will have to be the absolute top candidate for the position in order for the faux pas not to knock you out of the running.

9. EXIT STRATEGY

When the interview is over, reiterate your interest in the position (if sincere), and thank the group for spending time with you. You may ask about the time frame for filling the job and notifying candidates. Make eye contact, shake hands with everyone in the room and try to use the name of each individual as you shake hands. If possible, stop in the outer office to thank the individual who greeted you when you arrived or who escorted you into the interview room. This is not a strategy, just good manners. Keep a smile on your face and your cell phone turned off until you leave the building.

10. POST GAME PLAY

Write and mail (snail mail) a thank you note to each person on the interview panel within 24-48 hours of the interview. You will have collected names and titles when the HR or company representative called to set up the interview, or you may ask the receptionist for this information as you leave. You may contact the HR department or the interviewer for a status update on the

hiring process once the prescribed period of time has passed. You may send interviewers a quick email thank-you message if you believe that your note will take a long time to reach them, but a hand-written note shows your good manners.

Don't underestimate the power of people skills in an interview. When interviewers like you, they begin to "pull" for you to do well, often without knowing they are doing so. Some interviewers will explain questions more fully, help you along when you are searching for a word or an example to answer a question, and they become more relaxed in how they pose questions and rate your answers. All of these things can help you to succeed in your interview. This emphasis on etiquette and people skills is not intended to diminish the importance of a strong resume and solid work experience, but to underline how people skills can give one candidate an edge over another.

After the Interview : Thank You Letters

There is no question - you must send a thank you email after an interview.

- 57% of candidates don't send thank you notes after an interview - even though hiring managers expect it.
- 86% of hiring managers said the lack of a thank you note after an interview sends the message that the candidate lacks follow through, and
- 56% said that it shows the candidate isn't serious about the position.

Here's an example of what a post-interview thank you email should look like:

Subject: *Thank you for the opportunity, Lorelai*

Dear Lorelai,

I wanted to thank you for taking the time to meet with me on Wednesday. I am very excited about the opportunity to work at the Dragonfly Inn!

I was thinking about what Michel said regarding customer feedback on your social media channels. In my last role as Guest Relations Manager, I found that personally responding to comments on social media resulted in an overall increase in repeat customers. I hope that helps.

I also wanted to say that you were right about the coffee at Luke's. I stopped by on my way home. Delicious!

Please feel free to contact me if you find you need any more information. I look forward to our call next week as discussed. Thank you once again, Lorelai.

Best regards,

Ted Zero

Who and when - the logistics of sending a post-interview thank you email

Send the thank you within **24 hours** after your interview to everyone that was in the room with you, not just the one person who gave you an email address. The exception to the rule would be the panel interview, especially if many of the participants joined via phone or Skype. In this situation, it's okay to send one thank you email after an interview addressed to everyone.

It's okay to send one email to the person whose address you have with a postscript at the bottom requesting that they forward the email to the other people who were present. Alternatively, you can request the email address of the other people in the postscript so that you can send them personalized emails as well.

If you don't have any email addresses, contact the person who organized your interview - the recruiter or HR specialist. Ask for the hiring manager's email address. Don't pre-write a thank you note before your interview so you can leave it at reception on your way out the door - it's impersonal and defeats the whole point of a thank you letter.

What if you want to send a handwritten thank you letter after your interview? In that case, you should send a post-interview thank you email within 24 hours, alerting a hiring manager to the fact that you've dropped a handwritten note in the mail.

Most hiring managers (87%) agree that it is appropriate to receive a thank you email after an interview instead of a handwritten letter. It's up to you to decide whether or not a hiring manager would appreciate an email or a letter more.

Tone, Style, Length - How to write a thank you letter after an interview

The key to writing an effective thank you email after an interview is to make it personal and address topics brought up in the interview. There are millions of sample thank you emails on the Internet. If you ask Google for templates, it will deliver. It's extremely tempting to fill in a template. Filling in the blanks gets that email out faster and makes you feel confident that you sent something correct. Resist that temptation.

The whole point of sending a thank you email after an interview is:

- To reiterate your interest in the position.
- To keep your sparkling self at the forefront of a recruiter's mind.
- To reinforce your uniqueness as a candidate.
- And yes, to express gratitude.

Write a short and sweet note. Implement a three paragraph rule. Don't give a play-by-play recap of your interview, and go into detail about how awesome you are.

- In the first paragraph, express your gratitude for the opportunity.
- Use the second paragraph to comment on the value you'd bring to the company by mentioning a project or solution that you discussed.
- In the third paragraph, you can touch on something that you felt was left out during the interview. Or you can refer to a personal topic that you and the hiring manager bonded over, such as the wedding planning mentioned in the example.

Aim for around 200 words. As far as tone is concerned, the degree of formality you use should reflect how formal the recruiter was at your interview. Again, it is up to you to decide how formal to be. There are no hard and fast rules.

You can attach a formal letter, properly formatted, as a PDF file. Then write a shorter thank you email after an interview if you want to make sure that you've covered all of your bases.

What goes in the subject line?

A typical inbox reveals about 60 characters of an email's subject line. That number gets reduced to 25-30 characters on mobile devices. It's the same as when you want to email a resume to a hiring manager.

"Thank you" (with a space) is already nine characters, giving you 51 left to use.

Here are five variations less than 60 characters:

- *Thank you, [hiring manager's name]*
- *Thank you for the interview, [hiring manager's first name]*
- *Thank you for the opportunity, [hiring manager's first name]*
- *Writing to say thank you for the interview*
- *I wanted to thank you for the chance to interview with you*

So what would a thank you email after an interview look like in the end?

Subject: *Just wanted to say thank you for the interview, Melanie*

Dear Melanie,

I wanted to thank you for taking the time to meet with me on Friday. I am very excited about the opportunity to work for Aunt Pittypat's Kittycat Emporium!

I was thinking about the problem you're having with selling premium cat toys. I remembered that when I began to organize open house days for customers at my last job, premium toy sales went up by 10%. All we did was allow customers to bring their cats in to try out new toys. I hope that helps!

I also wanted to say good luck with your petunias. I just tried the technique with the banana peels that you suggested to get rid of aphids, and I am looking forward to the results. I will have to let you know how it goes.

Please feel free to contact me if you find you need any more information. I look forward to our call in two weeks as we discussed. Thank you once again, Melanie.

Best regards,

Rene Picard

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- ✓ **Pro Tip:** Note the informal tone of the email. Rene decided to write Melanie using a friendly tone because she felt that the interview had gone the same way.

6. No One Does It, but Adding Personal Touches Impresses Hiring Managers

If you would like to add a few personal touches to your thank you email after an interview, here are some ideas:

- Add a link to your website, blog, or portfolio - even if they were already on your resume. That will remind the hiring manager that you've got a blog and give them easy access to it. Example: *Please feel free to contact me if you need any more information, or visit my website at www.johnsmith.com*
- Use Nice Stationery - If you do decide to drop a handwritten note in the mail, go with professional, personalized stationery instead of a greeting card. If you're going to go with a personal touch, go all the way.
- Attach a Formal Letter as a PDF - If you decide not to send a handwritten note by mail, you can still write a formal letter and attach it to your email as a PDF as discussed above. It shows that you've gone the extra mile.

Key Takeaway

The three commandments of sending a thank you email after an interview are as follows:

1. You must always send **one**.
2. You must always send **one to everyone**.
3. You must always send **one within 24 hours**.

The rest is up to you. Just remember to add personal touches and to gauge the level of formality based on the atmosphere of your interview. No hiring manager in the world wouldn't love to receive an authentic, personal thank you note after an interview. It gives you a golden opportunity to stay in the good graces and the memory of a hiring manager long after that last handshake.