

Common Job Interview Questions and Answers

1. Tell me about yourself.

You'll encounter some version of this question in almost every behavioral interview. This question is an opportunity for the interviewer to get to know you, your background, and what led you to apply for the position.

Your interviewer has probably already read your resume. When answering this question, don't feel the need to include every professional experience you've ever had. Instead, think about the most important experiences you'd like to highlight and how the role you're interviewing for fits in.

"This question allows you to tell the interviewer things they can't read on your resume," says Laura Mills, head of early career insights at Forage. "For instance, you might share a lifelong passion that is interesting, and you can parlay it into an opportunity to introduce a characteristic, experience, or skill that shows motivation, perseverance, or a success factor."

"Craft a compelling narrative, but only share the pivotal chapters of your professional journey that led you to this moment," says Shahrukh Zahir, the founder of Right Fit Advisors.

You can frame your answer by talking about your professional past, present, and future to tell a cohesive story of your career experience.

Mills shared an example with me of a candidate who answered this question by talking about his experience playing hockey in college:

"I once had a candidate that shared how he was passionate about hockey, but when he got to college, found the club hockey team was suspended due to disciplinary issues. He took the initiative to work with the administration and gain permission to reconstitute the team. He integrated this into his answer to this question by saying, 'I am passionate about hockey and am grateful to have been able to grow my leadership, motivation, and commitment through both high school and college hockey. Hockey has taught me discipline and teamwork and these skills have transferred to all other aspects of my work and personal life.'"

2. Why did you apply for the job?

"Mention what specifically attracted you to the job, such as the company's mission, culture, or the responsibilities of the position," says Margaret Buj, principal recruiter at Mixmax.

"Beyond surface appeal, this is where you showcase your alignment with the company's ethos, mission, or the challenges they are trying to solve," Zahir says.

Think about why you want this specific job, aside from the obvious benefit of a paycheck. If the responsibilities for the role are exciting to you, pick a few to call out and explain why you'd enjoy doing them. If you're feeling stagnant in your current role and think this role will be more challenging, say so and explain why.

Buj provided this example answer:

"I applied for this job because I've been following [Company Name] for quite some time, and I'm genuinely impressed by the innovative solutions and groundbreaking work you provide within the [industry]. Your company's reputation for pushing the boundaries in [industry-specific innovation or area] has consistently caught my attention.

I am particularly drawn to [Company Name] because of your unwavering commitment to [specific aspect that aligns with your values]. In my career, I've always been passionate about [that specific aspect] because it's not just about the work; it's about making a meaningful impact. Your company's dedication to this aligns perfectly with my own values and interests.

What excites me most about this opportunity is the chance to contribute to [Company Name]'s mission. I believe that my background in [relevant skills or experience] will enable me to make a significant contribution to the continued success and growth of your team. I'm eager to be part of a company that is not only a leader in the industry but also a place where I can learn, grow, and help drive innovation in [industry]."

3. What are your greatest strengths?

"I'd want to hear where they are most comfortable and what they really enjoy doing," says Amy Spurling, founder and CEO at Compt. "I want to hear what makes them happy to wake up and jump into things in the morning."

"Highlight strengths that are relevant to the job and back them up with specific examples from your previous experiences," says Buj.

She provided this example answer:

"One of my greatest strengths is my ability to analyze data and derive actionable insights. In my previous role at [Previous Company], I led a project that involved analyzing market trends, and my recommendations resulted in a 15% increase in sales within six months."

4. What are your weaknesses?

"Employers are trying to determine how you handle difficulty and challenges with this question. It is important to choose a real weakness to share," says Mills.

Mills suggests framing your answer to this question in the following way: name a weakness you have, explain the steps you have developed to mitigate it, and provide examples of how taking those steps has helped you improve in this area.

5. Why do you think you're qualified for the position?

"When responding to this question, there's always going to be a temptation to try and win the interview by demonstrating that you are the most competent candidate that is being interviewed," says Jeremy Grunfeld, director of student success at Forage.

"It's important for students to realize they can take the pressure off themselves. You do not need to be the most technically competent candidate to be the successful candidate," he continues.

When recruiting for early-career roles, employers seek to reduce costs by hiring candidates who are likely to stay at the company for a longer time period, Grunfeld adds. Employers recognize that technical skills can be taught on the job. Even if you're not the most

technically skilled candidate, if you can convey your authentic interest in the role, the company may be inclined to hire you.

When answering this question, Grunfeld advises: "Demonstrate that you are the most passionate person about the position and that you've taken the time to learn about the skills required to succeed in that role."

"I want to hear that they have done some research on the role and company and where they think they would be able to have an impact," Spurling says.

"Point out how your skills, experience, and qualifications align with the job requirements. Be specific," says Buj.

Grunfeld provided this example answer:

"Say your prior experience was at a bank, and now you're applying to Walmart. You might say that while you were building a particular product at the bank, you got to see firsthand how you as a software engineer can build a product that has an impact on millions of people's lives. You now want to take that to Walmart, where you're not just impacting millions of people's lives but you're impacting their ability to feed their families. Demonstrate a connection between the prior experiences you've had and how you are passionate about the organization and the role."

Buj provided this example answer:

"I believe I am well-qualified for this position because of my extensive and highly relevant experience. Over the course of [number of years] years, I've accumulated a deep expertise in working with [specific technology or skill] — a fundamental requirement for success in this role.

In my previous positions, I've consistently demonstrated my proficiency in [specific technology or skill]. For example, I successfully [mention a significant achievement or project related to the technology or skill], where I [describe the tasks or challenges you encountered and overcame]. This experience has not only solidified my technical capabilities but has also equipped me with the ability to navigate and innovate in this domain effectively.

Furthermore, my role at [Previous Company] involved a range of responsibilities that are strikingly similar to what is expected in this position. For instance, I was responsible for [describe similar tasks or responsibilities], where I consistently met or exceeded performance expectations. This experience has given me valuable insights into the intricacies of the role and has prepared me to excel in the challenges and opportunities it presents.

I'm confident that my combination of hands-on experience, technical expertise, and my ability to adapt to similar responsibilities make me a strong fit for this position. I look forward to bringing this skill set to [Company Name] and contributing to its continued growth and success."

6. What are your salary expectations?

Your response should show you've researched the market rate for the role, according to Spurling.

"If they can ask, 'What is your compensation philosophy and how have you determined the salary range for this role?' I will know they align with how we view compensation and pay equity within our organization," Spurling says.

7. What motivates you?

"A confident interviewee realizes that the interviewer just wants to get to know them for who they are," Grunfeld says. "The usual response from an interviewee in this scenario is to try and answer by saying what they think the interviewer wants to hear. The best interviewees will be the ones who answer this question with authenticity."

He gave this example answer:

"If competition is what motivates you, you might tell the story of how you once gave a rousing speech to motivate your team to win a state championship basketball game.

This may not seem relevant to the role you're applying to, but it allows the interviewer to move to more informal questioning because they're interested in the story. You will then be able to follow up with more true and authentic stories."

8. What are your reasons for leaving a job?

"The general and sound advice is to articulate your motivations for leaving your current job, emphasizing the positive aspects for considering a move," says Karl Cremin, the co-founder and director of Talentspot Recruitment.

"To really differentiate yourself from others, I suggest your answer should not only highlight your desire for growth and new challenges, but also call out why the role you're applying for aligns with your career aspirations," he says.

"It's an opportunity for you to speak to the skills that you've developed in your current job and how those skills set you up for success in this new role that you are applying to, and to demonstrate that your values and your interests are better aligned with the company that you are now applying to," Grunfeld says.

"Even if you're leaving a job due to challenges or issues, focus on your desire for professional growth and the opportunity the new job provides," says Buj.

"It's important to focus on the opportunities and growth you seek in your next position rather than dwelling on the negatives of your current or previous job," she adds.

Buj provided this example answer:

"I've had a great experience at my current job, and I've learned a lot. However, I feel that I've reached a point where I'm seeking new challenges and opportunities to further develop my skills. I believe this new position aligns perfectly with my career goals, and I'm excited about the chance to contribute my expertise in a different context."

9. What are your career goals?

"I always recommend being as open and honest as possible about your career goals!" says Herrera, a talent and DEI consultant.

"After all, you're making a huge decision by choosing a company you want to work for," she continues. "If you're looking to grow your technical skills, say so! If you're looking for a company where you can grow professionally and develop your leadership and managerial

skills, say so as well! The last thing you want is to be trapped in a team or company that doesn't support you, your growth, or your development."

10. Where do you see yourself in five years?

"None of us know what's going to happen in one week, one year, let alone five years. So you don't need to give a precise answer that says exactly where you're going to be in what role and in what company," Grunfeld says.

"What you want to demonstrate here is that you are interested in continuing to develop, grow, and learn and that you want to see the skills that you develop compound on one another."

"Discuss how your career goals and aspirations are in line with the potential career progression at the company. Show ambition and dedication," says Buj.

Grunfeld provided this example answer:

"An example could be that in five years I hope to be capable of managing an entire division. The first step would be to secure this internship I'm interviewing for and convert it into a full-time job where I can learn how to do this job exceptionally well. I'll then be able to teach others how to do this job, based on what I've learned. Then, I'll use that experience to be able to secure a position where I'm able to manage a group of people."

Buj provided the following example answers:

"In five years, I see myself as a key contributor to the company's success. I want to take on more responsibilities, potentially leading a team, and actively contributing to the development of new strategies or projects. I am committed to continuous learning and professional growth, and I believe that [Company Name] offers the right environment to achieve these goals."

"In five years, I envision myself in a leadership role within the company. I am passionate about [specific area or department], and I aspire to become a subject matter expert in this field. I see myself not only managing projects but also mentoring and leading a team, helping to guide them toward success and fostering a collaborative and innovative work environment. Additionally, I hope to have contributed significantly to the company's growth

and success in terms of [mention specific goals or objectives relevant to the company]. I'm committed to continuous learning and development, and I believe that as I grow in my career, I can add even more value to the organization while furthering my professional growth."

11. What type of work environment do you thrive in?

Before the interview, research the work environment at the company, says Herrera.

"With that in mind, you can craft an answer that's both honest and true to your needs and relatable to the company's requirements," she says.

"For example, if you learn that the company in question thrives in teamwork, and that's also true for you, you can mention that during the conversation. You can do so by following the STAR method or by sharing specific examples about how collaborations make you, and the rest of the team, a more productive, dedicated, or creative employee."

If, on the other hand, you find during your research that the company's approach to work doesn't align with your expectations, you may want to reconsider whether this company is somewhere you want to work.

"If you have not had the opportunity to work in various professional settings yet, you can leverage life transitions," Cremin says.

You could discuss how you adapted to new learning environments during your school career or how you adapted to a summer job, he suggests.

12. Tell me about an accomplishment you're proud of.

Your answer to this question doesn't need to be an accomplishment that was life-changing, says Herrera. Smaller-scale accomplishments can work just as well as answers to this question.

"For example, maybe you created a process that helped streamline a tedious system; or acted as a mediator when two of your colleagues weren't seeing eye-to-eye and were jeopardizing a project, or you came up with a solution that no one else was thinking about," she says.

13. Tell me about a time you disagreed with your boss or a colleague.

"I want to hear how they handled the disagreement, how they approached their boss about the difference in opinion, and whether they were able to change the boss's mind," Spurling says.

"Ideally, the area they disagreed on would be some work-related (i.e. not ethical) issue, and they thought about the boss's perspective, and if they still disagreed they showed new data to the boss."

Mills says, "This question is looking for you to show a few things about yourself: that you can listen to your colleagues and hear their perspectives; that you are willing to compromise if that is the best solution for the situation; that if compromise will hurt the outcome, you can politely and professionally advocate and make a case for your perspective; and that you can remain friendly with colleagues after a disagreement."

14. Tell me about a time you had to overcome a challenge and what you learned from it.

"You don't need an extraordinary or fairy-tale story," Cremin says. "What matters is how you interpret and overcome the challenges that life throws at you."

"Share examples of how you've applied the lessons learned from these challenges to different aspects of your life," he says. "Emphasize the importance of continuous learning, regardless of how big or small challenges you face, and how it has shaped your personal and professional growth."

15. How do you give and respond to constructive criticism?

Spurling shares that with this question, she wants to understand how the candidate processes feedback when it is given to them.

"Do they respond immediately to explain themselves, do they take it in and let it sit for a while, etc.? I want to hear how they mentally process information," she says.

"Then I want to hear what they do with the feedback—and this is likely different depending on if they agree with it as being fair feedback or not. Both are valuable."

16. How do you keep your skills up to date?

"This question helps the interviewer understand how self-motivated you are when it comes to self-directed learning, and it also demonstrates areas of your skillset which you either value or have felt you need to upskill on," Cremin says.

"It's about showcasing your readiness to take charge of your own growth, especially in a professional world that may not always provide direct guidance on what to learn next. You're looking to showcase your inner drive when answering this question."

17. Tell me about one of your side projects.

"Here you can shine a light on your passion for your interests and your ability to either be part of or take the lead of a project," Cremin says. "When you answer, don't just talk about the project – share the skills you put into action, what you learned from the experience, and the project's outcome."

Even if your side project flopped, you can still use it to answer this question.

"A project that didn't quite go as planned can be just as enlightening," Cremin says. "You can show how you analyzed what didn't work and used that knowledge to improve for the future."

Not everyone does side projects outside of work. If you don't, that's okay. Be honest in your answer and pay attention to how the interviewer responds – their reaction could give you clues about the company culture around work-life balance.

18. Have you ever used our product/service?

"Honesty is the best policy when answering this question," Mills says.

"If you have used the product/service, say so and note the positive aspects of that interaction. If there were negative interactions, hold that feedback for after you take the job."

If you haven't used the product/service, you should be forthcoming but have a good and professional reason for that lack of first-hand experience."

19. What goes into your decision-making process at work?

Everyone's decision-making process is different, says Herrera. When answering this question, be honest about the process that works for you.

"If you need to gather all the details before making a decision, make sure you mention that," Herrera says. "If you make decisions better when you have the opportunity to collaborate and bounce ideas off of a colleague or a manager, say so as well. At the end of the day, you also want to make sure that you'll be supported and elevated in the workplace and that you'll have the opportunity to learn, grow, and collaborate with others."

20. What questions do you have for me?

Here's a list of questions you can ask your interviewer:

1. Why is the position open?
2. Why did the last person who held the job leave?
3. Thinking about people who've done this work before, how do the people who are good in the role differ from those who are great in it?
4. What will success in the position look like? How will you measure my performance?
5. What are some of the biggest challenges I would face?
6. What are some of the biggest challenges the company is facing right now?
7. What do you like and dislike about working for the company?
8. What would you expect me to accomplish in the first 90 days? Six months?
9. How does this role support the company's overall mission?
10. Can you describe the company's culture?
11. I know X, Y, and Z are your competitors, but which one do you think is your top competitor and why?
12. What is a typical day like?
13. How has your role changed during your time here?
14. How long do people typically stay in this role?
15. Why did you decide to work here?
16. What kind of professional development does the company offer?