

## Interview Questions Practice:

This document is meant to help you think through a variety of questions that may come up during an interview or the interview process. Take some time to review these and think through (or write out) how you would answer these questions so that you are prepared when you face these or similar questions.

Please note, there is no guide that can include every question an employer may throw at you, in part because every employer is different and while some have a specific list of questions that they ask each individual person, some employers will go off-the-cuff each time. The key is to spend time and think through your personal why, how, and what, and the below is a good start to that:

### “Traditional” Questions:

*Tell me about yourself*

- Start with the present – what is going on right now? Are you a recent graduate? Then that is your starting point. Are you looking to transition to a new field? Start there. Did you just move to the area? That’s a great starting point, honestly.
- This is not an opportunity to opine on the state of your life. Do not start “I was born on a dark and stormy night.” Do not give the rundown of everything you’ve done in your career.
- Focus on the Why and the What. Are you looking for a job in human resources because you have an interest in working with people and helping them in their own careers? There’s your why and what.

*What are your strengths?*

- There are a few ways to handle this question, and a few ways it may be posed, but try starting with the below. Try filling in some of these right now to get you thinking.
  - I think of myself as \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - My friends think of me as \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Of my friends, I am the one who \_\_\_\_\_.
  - My previous bosses say I \_\_\_\_\_.

Why are those good ways to answer the question? They show that you not only know yourself, you know yourself in others’ eyes, which can give the interviewer an idea of how their office might end up seeing you as well.

*What are your weaknesses?*

- This is a classic stumper for many people, but it doesn’t need to be. There actually is a way to answer this question correctly, and despite what people may think, it is not to give a strength masquerading as a weakness or a weakness masquerading as a strength. You care too much or work too hard isn’t the right answer here and does not come across genuinely. Be honest about a weakness, then explain what you are doing to fix your weakness. For example, “I am not bilingual, and I know your office works with many international clients, however, I am currently working to overcome this by studying French/Spanish/Etc. using Rosetta Stone / private tutoring / a class.” To answer this question correctly does involve some pre-work to figure some things out about yourself, though. Take the time now to be comfortable with it before it hits you in an interview.

*How did you accomplish \_\_\_(specific thing)\_\_\_ on your resume?*

- Some very tough interviewers will go through your resume in advance and highlight things that they may not believe you accomplished or think you may have “fluffed” and ask these questions to double-check that you have the experience that you say you have. Make sure you are familiar with your resume and the things you mention on it. Bring a copy of your resume with you in a folder or portfolio if you’d like to have a copy to reference in this type of situation.

*What experience do you have with \_\_\_(specific thing/technology)\_\_\_?*

- Hopefully this will be an easy question and you can answer it quickly by referencing direct experience with whatever thing. However, sometimes, the thing the employer wants to know if you have experience with is something new to you or specific to their field and you don’t have experience with it. In those instances, be honest, and follow it up with how you are either working to learn the thing or are a fast learner and happy to provide references to attest to that fact.

*What qualifications do you have that indicate you will be successful in this field?*

- Be very specific, considering both the position and the field. Your understanding of the field is as important as your qualifications.

*What new skills/capabilities have you developed over the past year?*

- This is not an opportunity to discuss hobbies, though if you went bungee jumping to improve your risk-taking capacity, it may be appropriate to describe it. It is an opportunity to describe a developing strength that would be of interest to the employer, or to show how you are working toward personal or educational development goals.

*What is your greatest work and non-work related accomplishments during the past few years?*

- Whatever the answer, it should include a short explanation of why you consider it to be “greatest.”

*Describe three things that are most important to you in a job.*

- Think about why you work. Do you require or enjoy purpose, autonomy, feedback, organization, or affiliation with talented coworkers, or camaraderie with a large group? Are you looking for collaboration and creative problem solving? This is a chance to explain how you will fit into the organization; there are big clues about organizational culture on organization websites.

*What motivates you?*

- This refers to your motivation to work. Even if you are working just for money, that’s not the correct way to tackle this answer, though. They are looking for things like the fact that you are a self-starter or enjoy completing tasks or helping people.

*How would a co-worker, friend, or boss describe you?*

- You might ask a former co-worker or boss, or a friend for the answer, in preparation for the interview.

*How would you describe your own work style?*

- A work style can be described many ways: organized, deliberative, focused, creative, productive, collaborative, etc. You can probably expect a follow up question: “Tell me what you mean by that description” or “Can you give us an example of that?”

*What do you see yourself doing in 1, 3, 5, and 10 years from now?*

- Do not tell the interviewer you see yourself in his or her job or that you see this job as a stepping stone. It is good to voice your intention to stay with the employer, and imagine the ways you might be contributing by then. A simple “I see myself living here in this city in a position that helps people” is fine, too – you don’t have to know all of your future goals beyond wanting to be where you are, and if you are moving to a new area, that type of answer helps show that you are really set on being in that new location.

*What is success, to you?*

- This is something you must answer truthfully, and you should be able to answer this one pretty quickly. Is it completing tasks efficiently, providing excellent customer service, knowing you’ve made a difference, moving up in an organization? What’s your version of success?

*What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?*

- Begin with specifics, and include the way in which they relate. Service, attention to detail, collaboration, initiative, and other categories of competencies are things you can consider in advance of the interview as part of your preparation. This is one you need to work to prepare especially closely if you are changing fields or changing employer type (nonprofit to corporate or vice versa, for example). If your job involves doing things that people outside of the field don’t understand, this is a question you will need to spend time working with and deconstructing probably before you even tackle a cover letter, in fact. And, to be honest, this is the biggest one that I see people have trouble with when preparing – if you are in a field that has very specific tasks and you are concerned that it doesn’t translate, you will need to spend some time or chat with someone to work through this.

*Why should we hire you?*

- It is a good question, and you should have a good answer ready, and it shouldn’t be “because I am more experienced than your other candidates,” or anything that disparages the other candidates, because you truly have no idea who they are. This should instead be about you, and not them. If you are stumped, think about these questions: What is special about you? What do you bring to the table? What do you add to their team? Make sure you have this figured out.

*Why do you want to work here?*

- This is importantly not about you; you should not discuss how close the office is to your home, nor how the work enhances your own portfolio, or how you expect the job to teach you things or give you opportunities to grow. This is about the way you fit the employer’s needs, and careful phrasing will illustrate a win-win.

*What salary do you expect?*

- This is an unlikely question for an in-person interview anymore – this tends to be handled in a pre-interview screening (in the application or on the phone) to make sure you fit within the expected range, or it is handled all the way at the very end. In an interview, you have

some latitude to state that you will consider any offer and that you very much want the job. But you may have to state a number, and it should be carefully thought out and considered in advance of the moment when you are asked. Above all, the question should not surprise or fluster you. Do note, though, that many employers have specific ranges that they cannot venture outside of, even if you come in with the perfect experience and a previously higher salary, and often they have to take institutional equity into consideration when making an offer to a new employee.

*Do you have any questions for me?*

- It is never a good idea to throw a hardball in an interview of any kind. If the interview is a later stage interview, you might ask for clarification of something you have been told. It is always acceptable to ask the interviewer questions about his or her own tenure, career at the firm, agency, or organization. Have a few prepared and ready to go, and feel free to bring in some questions that you've written down (this helps show how prepared you are, also).

### **Behavior-Based (STAR) Interviews**

Behavior-based interviewing is an interviewing pattern that some employers are using in their hiring process. The premise is that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation. When they use this method, employers identify the competencies that are necessary for the job and then ask questions about the candidates past experiences in which those competencies were utilized. In this form of interviewing, what you do not describe is as important as what you describe.

Most Behavior-based Interview questions begin with the phrase, "Tell me about a time when . . ." and then go on to establish the competency you may have used in the past.

Common themes in these questions involve:

- Critical thinking
- Collaboration
- Service orientation
- Time management
- Conflict resolution
- Anger management
- Detail orientation
- Decision-making
- Judgment

For example: "Tell me about a time when you had more work than available time, and important deadlines looming for each project. What did you do to resolve the situation?"

As you can see, it isn't even clear whether the interviewer is seeking information about your time management skills or your conflict resolution competencies. You have a little latitude for interpretation. If you ask for more information, most interviewers will simply repeat the question. You have to have an answer.

Your response to these questions should be specific and detailed. The most important start to your response is to tell the interviewer about a particular situation that relates to the question, not a general one. **Briefly** describe the situation, describe the actions you took, and then the positive result or outcome. This method of answering questions is often referred to as the **S-T-A-R** method. Your interviewer may even direct you to answer according to the S-T-A-R method.

Situation/Task	Action	Result/Outcome
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The key to an effective behavior-based interview is preparation. Your interview prep should include identifying examples where you have demonstrated successful behaviors associated with the job you want. It may be best to use specific examples of past internships, clinics, classes, activities, team involvements, community service, work experience, and/or personal achievements. You can discuss work, friends, volunteer experiences, or the like. Be sure to choose experiences that had a positive outcome/result.

You should keep your story brief & pretty efficient; this is not a chance to bring up irrelevant details or change the subject.

Here are a few examples where the STAR method can be applied.

- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with difficult pressure or deadlines.
- Describe a time when you had to respond to criticism you felt was not warranted.
- Describe a time when you had to deal with an uncomfortable level of conflict among peers.
- Describe a difficult problem that you tried to solve. How did you identify the problem? How did you go about trying to solve it?
- Describe a time when you tried to persuade another person to do something that he/she was not very willing to do.
- Describe a time when you decided on your own that something needed to be done, and you took on the task to get it done.
- When have you felt overwhelmed? Tell me about it.
- Give an example of a situation in which you didn't back down in the face of adversity.
- Tell me about a time when you "bent" the rules. When is it ok to do so?

In order to get to a point when you feel comfortable with these types of questions take some time to think of and develop 3-4 pivotal moments in your life or career and write them out. These are the stories of your life, things that happened to you, and situations you remember in detail. These will be personal to you, so I can't tell you what they are. Take the time to write them out, including what you learned, what you did, and how, and save that document just for your own future reference/review. You don't want to memorize verbatim the wording of the story, but you do want to have it written down so it has permanency and concreteness. That will help you extract the story and lessons from your memory when in an interview situation.

### **Other Question Types / Interview Styles**

Other than the traditional “tell us about yourself” or “tell us about a time” questions, you do occasionally see interviewers use assessments and problem-solving questions or case studies. While these are still rare, there is always something new popping up in interviews. If you are interviewing for a very large employer, like Google, or something specific like a large consulting company, check the internet for information about how they do interviews and how to be successful in those interviews. The information is out there, and some of those employers have very specific expectations – give yourself the best opportunity for success by doing that research.

