



Common Interview Questions & Answers

Tell me a little about yourself.

The interview question, "Tell us about yourself," is one of the most commonly asked questions during job interviews. Crafting a compelling and concise response is crucial for making a strong first impression. To effectively answer this question, it's important to understand its purpose. Interviewers are seeking insights into your background, skills, and suitability for the role. This is your opportunity to highlight relevant experiences, achievements, and qualities that align with the job requirements. Additionally, creating a well-structured response will help you deliver a confident and coherent answer.

Framework for Answering the Question:

Begin with a brief personal introduction: Brand yourself! If you are not currently employed, you have the creative liberty to create your own title. Choose something that aligns with the title of the role you are interviewing for. For example, if your last title was "Talent Acquisition Professional" but the role you are applying for is called "Senior Recruiter", refer to yourself as a recruiter to align with the role.

Summarize your professional experience: Provide a concise overview of your professional background, focusing on relevant roles, achievements, and skills. Highlight how your past experiences have prepared you for the position you are interviewing for. Emphasize accomplishments and responsibilities that demonstrate your abilities and value.

Mention educational qualifications and certifications: If applicable, mention your educational qualifications, degrees, and any relevant certifications that showcase your knowledge and expertise in the field. This helps establish your credibility and expertise.

Share personal attributes (optional): Briefly discuss personal qualities or attributes that align with the company culture or job requirements. Highlight soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, or adaptability, and provide examples of how you have demonstrated these traits in the past. However, keep in mind that personal attributes should be relevant and support your professional narrative.

Practice and Refinement:

Once you have planned your response, it's crucial to practice delivering it with confidence and fluency. Here are some tips to help you refine your answer:

Be concise: Aim to keep your response within two to three minutes. Practice trimming unnecessary details while retaining the essential information. Focus on the most relevant aspects of your experience.

Maintain relevance: Tailor your response to the specific job and company you are interviewing for. Highlight experiences and skills that directly align with the role's requirements. This demonstrates your understanding of the position and your ability to contribute to the organization.

Use anecdotes: Support your claims with specific examples or achievements from your past experiences. This adds credibility and helps interviewers visualize your abilities. Storytelling can be a powerful tool in making your response memorable.

Seek feedback: Practice your response with a coach, friend, or family member and ask for their feedback. Consider recording yourself to assess your tone, body language, and overall delivery. Incorporate their suggestions to improve your response.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, answering the "Tell us about yourself" question effectively requires careful planning, practice, and adaptability. By understanding the purpose, structuring your response, highlighting relevant experiences and skills, and demonstrating enthusiasm, you can impress interviewers and set a positive tone for the rest of the interview. Remember to personalize your answer for each job opportunity and showcase your unique value proposition. With preparation and practice, you will be well-equipped to confidently tackle this question and make a lasting impression during your job interviews. Good luck!

Example:

"I'm an experienced communications specialist with extensive knowledge of public information tools and techniques. I've developed comprehensive communication plans for major public events, written dozens of articles accepted by worldwide publications, and created specialized educational programs for adults and students. I am always eager to learn new methods and procedures and have implemented continuous improvement techniques in my past positions that saved money and increased productivity. I like working with people and enjoy group projects but am also a self-starter who doesn't mind working on my own. My goals are to complete my master's degree and broaden my experiences with community relations."

Why do you want this job?

This question focuses specifically on the job role or position you are applying for. Interviewers want to gauge your interest in the responsibilities, tasks, and challenges associated with the job. It allows them to assess your motivation and enthusiasm for the specific role.

When answering this question, you should highlight:

How your skills, experience, and qualifications make you an excellent fit for the job. How the job aligns with your career goals and aspirations.

What aspects of the role excite you and how it will allow you to utilize and develop your skills.

How the job's responsibilities and challenges appeal to you and how you thrive in such an environment.

Example:

"I've been very careful about the companies I have applied to. When I saw the ad for this position, I knew I had found what I was looking for. What I can bring to this job is my seven years of experience, and knowledge of the industry, plus my ability to communicate and build customer relationships. That, along with my flexibility and organizational skills, makes me a perfect match for this position. I see some challenges ahead of me here, and that's what I thrive on. I have what you need, and you have what I want."

If you are applying for a position in a company for which you already work, explain how you'll be able to apply and expand on the knowledge and experience you've gained from your current position, and will be able to increase your contributions and value to the company through your new responsibilities.

What do you know about this organization?

This question is one reason to do some research on the organization before the interview. Find out where they have been and where they are going. What are the current issues and who are the major players? Consider reviewing the company's LinkedIn page for an overview of pertinent information.

Why do you want to work for this organization?

This question focuses on your interest in the organization as a whole. Interviewers want to understand your knowledge of the company, its culture, mission, values, and how you see yourself contributing to its success. It demonstrates your level of research and understanding of the company's unique offerings. When answering this question, you should highlight:

- Your knowledge of the company's mission, values, and culture.
- How the company's goals and values resonate with your own personal and professional aspirations.
- Specific aspects of the company that attract you, such as its reputation, industry leadership, innovation, impact on society, or work environment.
- How your skills and experience align with the company's needs and how you can contribute to its growth and success.

This may take some thought and certainly should be based on the research you have done on the organization. Sincerity is extremely important here and will easily be sensed. Relate it to your long-term career goals.

Why are you no longer at your last place of employment?

Be honest, brief and avoid saying negative things about the people or organization involved. Be prepared to answer this question for every change on your resume.

Layoffs or Company Restructuring:

If your departure was due to layoffs or company restructuring, explain the situation briefly and professionally. Highlight that the decision was not based on individual performance, but rather a strategic decision made by the company. Mention any positive experiences or achievements during your time at the company to maintain a positive tone.

Sample Script:

"As you may or may not know, company XYZ has recently gone through a major restructuring and as a result my position was eliminated. However, I learned a lot while I was there and am excited to learn more about this opportunity."

Without Cause Termination (where you did not receive a 'reason')

Use a concise and straightforward approach without dwelling on negative emotions or blame. State that the layoff was "without cause".

Sample Script:

"I was let go from my previous position without being provided with a specific reason. While it was an unexpected turn of events, I've used the experience as an opportunity for reflection and personal growth. I firmly believe in focusing on the positive aspects and moving forward."

This is a great chance to highlight your best skills. *Don't pick just one*, focus on your top 5 - 10. Try to incorporate both hard and soft skills.

Some soft skill examples: leadership skills, team-building skills, and organizational skills.

Hard skill examples: Excel, project management, managing budgets.

Determine which strengths would fit best with the position for which you are applying.

What is your greatest weakness?

Be careful with this one. Most interview guides will tell you to answer it with a positive trait disguised as a weakness. For example, "I tend to expect others to work as hard as I do." or "I'm a bit of a perfectionist." Interviewers have heard these "canned" answers repeatedly.

Try to be more authentic. Identify an area you have needed to improve on, and what actions you have and continue to take.

IMPORTANT: Be sure the weakness you talk about is NOT a key element of the position!

Please describe a time you experienced conflict in the workplace.

Nobody likes to talk about conflict at work. You'd probably prefer to pretend that you are an absolute delight to work with and that nobody has ever had an unkind word to say about you. Behavioral questions about conflict force you to talk about a less-than-delightful situation. It can be difficult to come up with a good example on the fly — and even more difficult to describe it concisely in a way that presents you in a favorable light. Therefore, it is important to prepare an example in advance using the P.A.R. format.

P= Problem A = Action R = Result

Problem: Briefly describe the context for the conflict that arose. Provide just enough background information for context.

Action: Talk about the key actions that you took. In the case of a conflict story, the focus should be on how you resolved the disagreement in a professional and productive way.

Result: Every good interview story includes a happy ending. End your response with a description of the positive outcome(s) of your action.

Tips:

- Choose an example that shows you taking an active approach to resolving an important conflict.
- Be specific. Don't give a general answer like, "I deal with conflicts all the time and have learned to stay calm, and that communication is key." It's boring and it doesn't answer the question.
- Don't choose a minor disagreement ("He didn't want Italian for lunch.") or a conflict that was resolved by someone else or just went away without direct action. The idea here is to show off your interpersonal skills and problem-solving ability.
- Avoid examples that could make you look bad. For example, don't share a time when your mistake or miscommunication CAUSED a conflict.
- **PRACTICE!** Take the time to practice telling your story. This is especially important when telling a story about a conflict.

How long would you expect to work for us if hired/Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Specifics here are *not* good. Something like this should work: In 5-10 years I see myself in a role where I can continue to provide value and could learn and grow.

Tip: Focus on competency growth rather than title growth.

Describe your management style.

Try to avoid labels. Some of the more common labels, like progressive, salesman or consensus, can have several meanings or descriptions depending on which management expert you listen to. The situational style is safe, because it says you will manage according to the situation, instead of one size fits all.

Have you ever had to discipline a problem employee?

If so, how did you handle it? This is a likely question if the position for which you are applying requires supervisory duties. Explain how you used problem-solving skills, listening skills and coaching skills to help the employee. If those techniques turned the employee around, be sure to say so. If those techniques failed, tell how you followed the company's policies and what the result was.

What would your first 30, 60, or 90 days look like in this role?

Begin by explaining what you would need to do to get ramped up. What information would you need? What parts of the company would you need to familiarize yourself with? What other employees would you want to sit down with? Next, choose a couple of areas where you think you can make meaningful contributions right away. (e.g., "I think a great starter project would be diving into your email marketing campaigns and setting up a tracking system for them.") Sure, if you get the job, you (or your new employer) might decide there is a better starting place, but having an answer prepared will show the interviewer where you can add immediate impact—and that you're excited to get started.

If you were hiring a person for this job, what would you look for?

Be careful to mention traits that are needed and that you have.

Describe your work ethic.

Emphasize benefits to the organization. Things like determination to get the job done and working hard but enjoying your work are good.

What is your greatest professional achievement?

Nothing says "hire me" better than a track record of achieving amazing results in past jobs, so do not be shy when answering this interview question! A great way to do so is by using the S-T-A-R method: Set up the situation and the task that you were required to complete to provide the interviewer with background context (e.g., "In my last job as a junior analyst, it was my responsibility to manage the invoicing process."), but spend the bulk of your time describing what you actually did (the action) and what you achieved (the result). For example, "In one month, I streamlined the process, which saved my group 10 man-hours each month and reduced errors on invoices by 25%."

Why should we hire you?

Point out how your assets meet what the organization needs. Do not mention any other candidates to make a comparison.

This interview question seems forward (not to mention intimidating!), but if you're asked it, you are in luck: There is no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the hiring manager. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you cannot only do the work, you can deliver great results; that you will really fit in with the team and culture; and that you would be a better hire than any of the other candidates.

A great way to answer this question is to say, "You should hire me for these 3 reasons, ____ & ____ & ____". Focus your response on how your qualifications match what they have requested.

Do you have any questions for me?

Always have some questions prepared. Questions prepared in which you will be an asset to the organization are good.

Sample Interview questions to ask HR:

1. What is the culture of the company?
2. What are the 3 main factors you will be using to determine the right person for this job?
3. Why is this position open? Is this a new position? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
4. Is there anything that stands out to you that makes you think I might not be the right fit for this job?
5. Who would not be a good fit at this company?

Interview questions to ask a potential Supervisor:

1. Fast forward one year, you're looking back on this hire. What did they do to exceed every expectation?
2. What is the most unexpected thing you've learned while working here?
3. What are the expectations of this role in the first 30/60/90 days?
4. What is your management style?
5. How do I help you in your job?
6. How do I set myself up to succeed?
7. Who would be my colleagues?
8. Why does this role matter to the growth of the company?

Interview questions to ask a potential Peer:

1. Why do you like working here?
2. What does your typical day look like?
3. What type of challenges have you encountered and worked through?
4. What projects are you working on right now?