

ANSWERING BASIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For most people, the most stressful part of the job search process is the interview. While you may never completely feel comfortable interviewing, preparing for your interview will go a long way in helping you *sound* more comfortable. It is impossible to anticipate every question an employer might ask. However, you can practice answering questions that an employer is *likely* to ask. This will help you develop confidence in your ability to respond to an interviewer.

General Guidelines for Responding to Questions

- Listen to the question carefully.
- Answer appropriately and concisely.
- Do not offer extra, unrelated information.
- Always be honest, but try to emphasize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.
- Try to stress “Top 14” employability skills that all employers want (listed below).
- Explain how the job-specific skills you have gained in one industry or occupation will transfer to the job for which you are applying.

Top 14 Employability Skills

- *Communication*
- *Accepting Responsibility*
- *Professionalism*
- *Positive Attitude and Motivation*
- *Teamwork and Collaboration*
- *Follow-through*
- *Showing Commitment*
- *Planning and Organization*
- *Flexibility*
- *Time Management*
- *Leadership*
- *Ability to Work Under Pressure*
- *Creativity / Problem Solving*
- *Decision Making*



The 10 examples below will give you some ideas on how to prepare to answer the most common basic interview questions. Write out your own responses to each question and practice saying the answers out loud to prepare for an interview.

1. Tell me about yourself.

Use “Tell Me About Yourself” to effectively provide just enough information in a short two minute conversational narrative to succinctly sell your benefit and value to a prospective employer. This question has the most potential for setting the tone of the interview. Draft an answer to “Tell Me About Yourself” by filling in the blanks with information about you.

- My strengths are _____, _____ and _____.
- Currently (or most recently) I am/was a _____ (job title) _____ with _____ (company name) _____ where I _____ (job responsibilities) _____. (Continue in reverse chronological order for 10 years/2 positions)
- My proudest accomplishments include _____, _____ and _____.
- My education, training, or on-the-job experience include _____.
- This job appeals to me because _____.
- I believe I am a good fit for this position because _____.

A: I am a proven manager who is a strong team player, a great team builder and problem solver. As you can tell by my resume, my most recent position was store manager at Big Mart where I was responsible for all operation, human resource, and customer service functions. Before that, I was a merchandising manager with the Jones Company where I ensured merchandise was ordered, processed and presented according to company standards. Some of my proudest accomplishments include being chosen as Big Mart’s Manager of the Year in 2009, reducing employee turnover 25% by developing procedures for on-boarding new employees, and winning a corporate holiday sales contest based on achieving the highest percent increase over planned sales. I attended Life University while working full time at Jones Company and received a bachelor’s degree in Business Management. When I saw your position advertised, it excited me because it fits perfectly with my background, and I know I would be able to make an immediate contribution to the team.

2. Why do you want to work here? What do you know about our company?

The response for either question must show that you have done your homework and know a little bit about the organization. The interviewer wants to know that you've selected them for a reason and aren't just applying because there is an opening.

A: I've read about the tremendous expansion plans XYZ currently has and believe my experience, energy and enthusiasm make me the ideal candidate for this position. I'm excited about working for an employer with such an outstanding reputation, and I believe the job opportunity is a perfect fit for my skills.

3. What is your greatest accomplishment?

You should respond with a recent accomplishment that's related to the job you are interviewing for.

A: I'm very proud of my successes in developing work teams and helping them achieve outstanding results. Last year, our marketing team launched a total of 12 new products on time and under budget. We were the only team in the company to consistently meet our goals.

4. What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?

Answer with three strengths. They can be job or employability skills.

A: My strengths include using Microsoft Office programs, my accounts receivable experience, and management skills. I'm very proficient with Microsoft Word and Excel and have always been the go-to person for accounts receivable questions. My management skills are strong, and I have successfully led teams to consistently reach company goals on time and within budget.

Be prepared with two weakness examples, but only share one with the interviewer unless asked for another (which frequently happens). Identify a true weakness that is skill based (not a personal weakness) and isn't vital to the job. Finish your answer with what you are doing to improve that weakness.

A: I did not need to use computer skills in my last position and need to be more proficient, so I have been taking computer classes and practicing at home to improve my skills.

5. Why should I hire you versus someone else?

Compare the job description with your abilities before the interview so you know what the company is most interested in. Give concrete examples of why your skills and accomplishments make you the best candidate for the job.

A: You should hire me because I'm committed to the values and success of this company. I truly believe in "green" products and will be a great salesperson for you. In addition, my previous sales experience and industry contacts would allow me to make an immediate contribution to the company.

6. What are your long-term career plans? Where do you see yourself in five years?

Connect your answer to the job you are applying for. Begin by stating the interest you have in the job you are interviewing for and then talk about a career path that starts with that job

A: My immediate goals are to enhance my administrative skills, become an important part of the organization and continue my education. Once I gain additional experience and graduate from college, I see myself being promoted from an administrative assistant position to management. I am excited about this job opportunity and XYZ Company. I would like to grown and advance within the organization and am completely open to using my skills and talents however they are needed.

7. What would your last boss say about you?

Pull out your old performance appraisals and boss's quotes. This is a great way to brag about yourself through someone else's words.

A: At my last review, my boss gave me extremely high marks in customer service and meeting objectives. She said she can always rely on me to complete my projects on time and under budget and work well with all the teams in the organization. She appreciated my sense of humor and the way I could turn a chaotic situation into one that became calm and productive.

8. What are your salary requirements?

This is a question designed to exclude candidates from consideration. Whenever possible, try to get the interviewer to tell you what the position is going to pay. If you have to answer, your answer should reflect that you are more interested in the job itself and are open to negotiation. If pressed, you must answer with a salary range in order to be as close as possible to what the job will pay.

A: I am more interested in the duties of the job and working environment, so my salary requirements are negotiable. In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?

A: Based on my research, the going rate for this position is between \$40,000 and \$50,000, and I am comfortable with that range.

9. Why did you leave (are you leaving) your last job?

Always answer positively and truthfully. Regardless of why you left, never speak badly about your previous employer or manager. Answer honestly even if you left because you were fired (an interviewer always finds out). Don't worry that it means you are out of the running. If you can show what you've learned from the situation, it could become a positive. Keep your response short and focus on the job you are applying for.

A: Unfortunately, the company I worked for moved their operations. While I enjoyed my last position, I didn't have much opportunity to collaborate with other departments, so I'm excited about working on cross-functional teams here.

10. Do you have any questions?

Always ask questions at the end of the interview, even if all your questions were previously answered. Asking your own questions demonstrates a true interest in the company, the position, and the interviewer. It conveys that you are a selective job seeker looking for the right fit – **all very appealing to an employer**. The questions you ask will be determined by who you are interviewing with. A recruiter could be asked general company questions, but you would ask the hiring manager more specific questions about the job itself. **Never ask about salary or benefits**.

For guidance and practice, participate in Interview Practice Sessions held weekly at each of the WorkOne Indy offices.

Questions for Your Interviewer

- I saw on your website ..., (ask a related question to what you saw)
- What are the company's long- and short-term goals?
- Where do you see this company five years from now?
- What does the department hope to achieve in the next two to three years?
- What role would I play in meeting these goals?
- What would be the initial top three objectives that you would like me to achieve?
- What could I do to exceed your expectations in this position?
- What would be the biggest challenges that I would face in this job?
- What do you value most about your employment with this company? How long have you been with the company?
- Based on our conversation today, do you have any concerns about my ability to do the job?
- What are the next steps?