



INTERVIEWS

How do I answer common questions effectively?

Benjamin Franklin once said “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.” In an interview situation, if you want to demonstrate that you are the right fit for the role you need to prepare for commonly asked questions. To answer these questions effectively, it can be helpful to understand the reason why certain questions are used by interviewers. The rule of thumb is to prepare succinct and relevant responses that match your skills and attributes to the needs of the company and role. Remember to also prepare a suite of compelling examples to help convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job. Preparation, positivity and proof are your keys to interview success.

➤ **Tell me about yourself.**

This is a commonly asked question designed to break the ice. A strong, succinct answer will quickly gain the interviewer’s attention and separate you from other candidates who may be tempted to divulge their life story. Give a brief, concise description of who you are and your key qualifications, strengths and skills. Tailoring your answer to the role on offer and declaring the strongest benefit that you offer an employer will leave the interviewer compelled to know more.

➤ **Why do you want to work here?**

The interviewer is trying to gauge your enthusiasm for the role as well as your level of knowledge about the company. Give specific examples of things that attracted you to the company and elaborate on your strengths, achievements and skills and how they match the position description, making you the right fit.

➤ **Why do you want to leave your current employer?**

This should be straightforward. Always reflect positively on your current/past employer but state how you are looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience and a change of environment. Explain how your current role can no longer provide you with these things, but how you believe the role on offer presents an opportunity for growth that will make full use of your strengths and potential.



➤ **What are your strengths?**

Not only does the interviewer want to know what (you believe) you are particularly good at but also how this can be applied to the role. Before you answer this question, think carefully about what makes you stand out. Remember that for most roles, each candidate will have already satisfied the selection criteria set out in the advertisement. This means the interviewer already knows you have the minimum requirements to be there. To be successful at the interview stage you need to be thinking about what you believe are your **specific strengths** required for the role. Once you have done this, think about examples of how you have demonstrated them successfully in the past. The best examples are solution based – ie there has been a challenge that your strengths have allowed you to overcome. Strengths could include the ability to learn quickly; composure under pressure; ability to multi-task; team focus or your ability to work autonomously, but remember not to be vague!

➤ **What are your weaknesses?**

This question is notoriously difficult to answer, especially under pressure. It is important to be aware that the interviewer is trying to gauge your self-awareness, not make you feel negative about yourself. **We all have weaknesses** so it's best to have an answer prepared which will prevent you either saying you don't have any or taking too long to think of one (which pretty much says the same thing!) Avoid using the word 'weakness' and instead talk about an 'area for improvement/development' that is not vital for the job. Another way to address this question is to specify a 'challenge' that you are working to overcome. Demonstrating a willingness to develop yourself and face challenges can turn a potentially uncomfortable question into a positive answer.

➤ **What achievement to date are you most proud of?**

This question has several purposes and can be very telling about an individual. Not only will your answer illustrate whether you are a high-achiever but it will also let the interviewer know what your priorities are. The information is also useful to the interviewer as they can then ascertain how your accomplishments will be beneficial to them. The best way to answer this question is to select one or two recent accomplishments that are directly related to the job on offer. Identify the situations, the actions you took, skills you used and the positive outcomes; quantifying the benefits where possible. Show how you can bring what you learned to the new role and don't forget to state **why** you were more proud of this achievement than any other. This is an opportunity to give the interviewer a chance to see who you really are and what motivates you.

➤ **What is the most difficult situation you have faced at work?**

The interviewer is trying to find out your definition of 'difficult' and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving. Select a tough work situation that was not caused by you. Explain the way you approached the problem, including the actions you took and the solution you applied to overcome the problem. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes setbacks and frustrations in your stride, as part of the job.



➤ **What did you like/dislike about your last role?**

This is a multi-faceted question as the interviewer is trying to find out what motivates you, but also what motivates you and more importantly, how you cope in situations where there are responsibilities that you may find monotonous or boring. To navigate this question successfully you need to focus on what you particularly enjoyed in your last role and what you learned from it, drawing parallels to the new role. When addressing what you disliked, be conscious not to criticise your last employer. Choose an example that does not reflect on your skills (such as company size) or which reveals a positive trait (such as your dislike for prolonged decision making).

➤ **What are your goals for the future?**

A sense of purpose and ambition is an attractive feature in a candidate, so this question is designed to probe the extent of your career planning. Be aware not to put your commitment to the role at risk, but also avoid the blank stare that says 'I have no plans and want to be with your company forever'. Instead, you answer the question by breaking it up into short, medium and long term goals. You can describe how your short term goal (12-36 months) is to continue to grow, learn, add value and take on new responsibilities in your current role or similar. This then gives the interviewer an opportunity to ask you about medium and long term goals, meaning you are free to state any managerial and leadership aspirations.

➤ **How do you respond to working under pressure?**

This can be a misleading question, as there is only one answer the interviewer is looking for – “well”. What you are being told is that there will be elements of working to deadlines and under pressure in your role and they want to know if you have composure, problem solving skills and can stay focused in difficult conditions. When answering this question try to give an example of a time when you faced a stressful situation (not caused by you) and how you handled it with poise. Describe the context, how you approached the situation, the actions you took and the positive outcome. Demonstrate how you remained calm, in control and got the job done.

➤ **Tell me about a successful team project that you have been involved in. What was your role and what made it a success?**

The interviewer is trying to gauge your interpersonal skills and team contribution. Outline the project objectives, your responsibilities, the actions you took to assist the group and the successful results. Provide evidence of how you were a keen collaborator and how your contribution was critical. You also want to demonstrate that you value teamwork and understand its key attributes such as honest communication, a shared purpose and effective problem-solving.

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