Types of Interview Questions

Common (Standard) Interview Questions and Answers

Q. Tell me about yourself.

A. This is the most common interview question and can sometimes be the hardest. Since it is a broad and general question the worst thing you can do is give a broad and general answer.

To make the most of this question you should use it as a “springboard” to topics that you want to discuss. This question allows you to decide what parts of your career experiences you want to share with your prospective employer.

Q. What are your major strengths?

A. When you answer this question you should answer it in terms of “what are the top two or three skills I bring to this job?” Thus, your strengths that you are willing to discuss will usually change from interview to interview depending on the job and the organization you are meeting with.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

A. Many people view this question as a way for an employer to find out your shortcomings as an employee. This is not the case. The real reason why this question is asked during the interview process is to determine your level of awareness of your shortcomings.

When answering this question it is important for you to avoid weaknesses that may hinder your job performance or will disclose personal issues. You should choose a weakness before an interview. You should also be able to tell the interviewer steps that you took to overcome the weakness.

Q. What prompted your decision to apply for this position?

A. When an interviewer asks this question they are trying to seek out a number of things. The interviewer may be trying to find out what motivates you, the level to which you desire the job, how much you know about the job, etc.

If this is a position that you really desire this is a very easy question to answer. Your goal in answering this question should be to link your interest and enthusiasm to the skills and knowledge that are most relevant to the position.
**Q. Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?**

A. Though you may not know where you see yourself 5 minutes from now it is important for you to be able to answer this question without hesitation. When an employer asks you this question they are trying to get a better grasp on your level of dependability, focus, and commitment.

Your answer to this question should be to focus on initially completing the challenge at hand. After that you can change focus a bit and discuss your long term career goals. Your answer to this question should not include personal or family goals.

**Q. What have you gained from your work/school experiences?**

A. When answering this question you should not simply focus on or read directly from your resume. Rather, pick one or two work experiences or situations you were involved in and be able to discuss in detail: you duties, your activities, successes, lessons learned.

**Q. What difficulties have you faced on the job?**

A. In this question it is important to discuss only difficulties that you have faced where the final outcome has been successful. When utilizing examples you should try to take a negative situation and have it end with a positive solution.

**Structured Interviews**

A structured interview is a type of interview that is utilized by many larger organizations. This interview is especially popular when there is more than one of the same position available within the organization. In a structured interview every applicant for the position is asked the same questions as every other applicant applying for the position. A structured interview may contain standard interview questions, behavioral interview questions, or a combination of the two.

**Behavioral Interview Questions**

The Behavioral Interview is rapidly becoming the most popular way to interview in the Unites States. In this method of interviewing the interviewer asks few or no “standard interview questions.” In this style of interviewing the interviewer will ask you to reflect upon you previous work and school experiences, and take him/her through a detailed account as to how a particular situation was handled.

The key to the successful behavioral interview lies in your ability to recount detailed work situations that are directly related to the work at hand.
In preparation for a behavioral interview you should conduct a STAR analysis:

S = Name a SITUATION facing you or
T= a TASK you had to complete
A= describe what ACTION you took
R= tell the RESULTS of your actions

You should conduct a STAR Analysis for each of the skills required to perform the position that you are applying for.

Samples of a Behavioral Interview Questions with Answers and explanations

Q. Consider the following situation and describe in detail how you would respond. Your alarm clock doesn’t go off, you wake up, and you are going to be two hours late for work. How would you handle that situation?

A. Once I woke up I would immediately call work, apologize, and let them know what happened and inform them that I was going to be late. I would then call a co-worker and ask them to cover for me until I arrived. Once I arrived I would apologize again and ask if I can stay late or come in early to make up the lost time. Finally, I would buy a new alarm clock to ensure that this did not happen again.

E. In this scenario the applicant would have wowed over the interviewer. The applicant was considering a negative situation. However the applicant turned a negative into a positive. They described a pro-active plan to ensure that losses in productivity did not occur, offered to make up lost time, and made efforts to ensure that the alarm clock would work the next day.

Q. Tell me about a time you had to meet a deadline. Describe the deadline. Describe the steps you took in order to achieve the deadline. Were you successful? Why or why not?

A. A professor assigned a 15 page paper one week before the end of the semester. Being faced with the challenge of meeting this deadline I decided that it would be best to first develop a topic to the paper, then I outlined the paper using my notes and the assigned textbook. I then proceeded to do all of my research for the paper. I then typed the paper, proofread it, and submitted it one day before it was due.

E. This is a good answer to this question. The candidate answered the question in detail and utilized an example where the candidate showed he/she was able to meet deadlines.
Illegal Interview Questions

Though most employers do not intentionally ask illegal questions intentionally, it is important to not only know what these questions are but how to handle answering them should they arise.

The following are sample illegal interview questions:

- Are you a US citizen?
- Where were you/your parents born?
- What is your native language?
- How old are you?
- What’s your birth date?
- What’s your marital status?
- Who do you live with?
- Do you plan on starting a family?
- How many kids do you have?
- How tall are you?
- How much do you weigh?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- How’s your families health?
- Have you ever been arrested?

Handling these questions can be difficult. Legally, you are not obligated to answer any of the questions listed above. However, if you feel comfortable answering an illegal interview question, should it arise, you should not hesitate to answer the question. If you do feel uncomfortable answering such a question simply tell the interviewer that you do not feel comfortable answering that question.