Potential Interview Questions

Listed below are some questions commonly asked by employers during interviews along with some hints about how to best answer each question. Outline or write out your responses in your own words for each question, then practice them before you interview.

**General/Introductory questions:**

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
   [Hints: ONLY talk about education, work or work related interests. DO NOT talk about your personal life, health or non-work-related interests/hobbies.] Explain why you choose the career you did. What your currently doing (school, work, volunteer experience) as it relates to your situation. What your future plans are.

2. **Tell me about your recent work history.**
   [Hints: Talk mainly about jobs or job duties that relate to the job for which you are applying. If you have no related work experience, talk briefly about what you have done, then explain your reason(s) for your career change (e.g. volunteer experience, results of an interest inventory, new training/education/certification, etc.). DO NOT volunteer information about negative job experiences.]

3. **Why are you applying for this job?**
   [Hints: Talk about why this particular job would be a good one for you AND why you would be good for this job. Use your knowledge about the company and the position in answering this question. DO NOT say “I need the money”]
4. **What do you know about our company?**
   [Hints: Be sure to do your homework ahead of time. First state what you know, then ask a question or two about the company if you have any. **DO NOT** guess or make an answer—it is worse to be wrong than say “Nothing.”]

5. **What would you references say about you?**
   [Hints: Know and have confidence in your references: ONLY discuss work – related responses and make sure your references will do the same. **DO NOT** say “I told them to tell you...” Or “I don't know.”]

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**Skill - related questions:**

6. **What are your strengths?**
   [Hints: State two or three of your strongest work – related assets (e.g. conscientious, hard – working, good communication skills, easy to get along with, etc.) and briefly explain. This is your opportunity to brag, not time to be humble. **DO NOT** say “I don’t know”]

7. **What are your weaknesses?**
   [Hints: State one or two work – related assets that you have worked on and briefly explain. Always state how you came up with a solution for your weakness. **DO NOT** talk about personal issues and **DO NOT** say “I don’t have any- we’re all human!”]
8. What skills and/or experiences do you have that relate to this position?
[Hints: Summarize any education, training and/or experience you have in the field. Relate your answer specifically to the duties in the job description and/or your knowledge of the company. DO NOT say “None” or “I don’t know”]

9. What are your biggest accomplishments?
[Hints: Keep your answers job related. This is similar to strengths because it’s your chance to brag, but different because you should focus on things you have done rather than who you are. Discuss your contributions to various projects and/or team efforts, goals you have accomplished and what you have learned from these experiences. Balance your answer by assuring the interviewer that your biggest accomplishments are yet to come. DO NOT exaggerate or lie about your answers.]

10. How has your attendance/punctuality been in past jobs?
[Hints: If this has not been a problem for you, brag! If this has been a problem for you, be honest but matter-of-fact about it, then explain how you have overcome that problem and why it will be different in this job. In either case, describe your understanding of the importance of attendance and punctuality. DO NOT volunteer details about your attendance being poor (e.g. “My health problems kept me from getting to work a lot.”)]

11. What do you consider good customer service?
[Hints: Relate your answer to the business this company does and describe what you would do in your position to ensure that customers would return and recommend that business to others. If possible, give and example of when you provided good customer service.]
Work Environment – related questions:

12. What frustrates or upsets you? How do you handle that?  
   [Hints: Name one thing that either will not effect or will enhance your work performance (e.g. “When people won’t do their share of the work.”) and briefly explain. Tell them how you handle it whether it is asked or not. DO NOT name anything that may be a natural part of the job (e.g. “A fast – paced work environment”) or say “Nothing.”]

13. What causes stress for you? How do you handle that?  
   [Hints: Name one thing that either will not affect or will enhance your work performance (e.g. “When customers are being treated unfairly.”) and briefly explain. Tell them how you handle it whether it is asked or not. DO NOT name anything that may be a natural part of the job (e.g. “When there’s too much to be done”) or say “Nothing.”]

14. How do you handle conflict with a coworker or supervisor?  
   [Hints: Focus on your conflict resolution skills. If you can provide an example of when you successfully worked it out, do so. If this has been a problem for you in the past, briefly describe what you have done/are doing to improve these skills. DO NOT describe an undesirable response (e.g. “I just walk away.”), especially if you can’t follow up with a positive replacement response.]

15. Do you prefer to work around/with other people or by yourself?  
   [Hints: Appear to be as flexible as possible. Try to gear your answer toward the job for which you are applying. DO NOT talk about what you don’t like.
16. How do you handle feedback/criticism from a supervisor?

[Hints: Focus your answer on how you would use feedback to improve your performance and avoid discussing your emotional reaction to criticism. The only emotion you may want to mention is your appreciation of your supervisor’s interest in your performance/ progress. DO NOT suggest or imply that feedback/criticism would not affect you – employers want an employee who cares about what their supervisor thinks of their work.]

17. What is your preferred supervisory style?

[Hints: Give two to three examples of general qualities you appreciate in a supervisor (e.g. accessible, organized, enthusiastic, etc.), but be sure to only list qualities that match what you already know about that particular work environment. Emphasize your adaptability to various supervisory styles. DO NOT talk about what you don’t like (e.g. “I hate it when my boss is always breathing down my neck.”)]

18. Can you work under pressure?

[Hints: This is NOT a yes or no question. It IS an opportunity for you to sell your skills and values. If you thrive on pressure, say so. If you don’t like pressure, explain the positive ways you deal with it. In either case, talk about what you do to avoid creating unnecessary pressure in you work environment (e.g. time management, goal setting, team work, etc.). DO NOT indicate any inability to handle pressure. Take time in the interview to learn about the job, then, when you are offered the job, you can turn it down if it will be too high pressure.]
Job-related questions:

19. Why did you leave your last job? / Why do you what to change jobs?
[Hints: State your honest assessment of the situation in objective terms, and if you must refer to you own difficulties, emphasize how they were specific to that situation or how you have overcome them, then discuss how it was a learning experience for you. DO NOT blame former coworkers, supervisors, etc. – take responsibility for your own past difficulties.]

20. Have you been fired?
[Hint: Say “no” if you can (being laid off, asked to resign, and having temporary status ended are not being fired). If you have been fired, be honest, briefly outline the reasons for the termination, acknowledging your own responsibility in the situation, and assure the interviewer that you learned from it and do not foresee any similar difficulties in future employment. It would be wise to contact any such former employer to see what kind of a reference they will give you and ask if they would say you were fired or simply resigned. If they would call it a resignation, your answer to this question can be “no”. DO NOT blame your former employer for your termination; this would only call into question your willingness to accept responsibility for your actions.]

21. Why do you want to work here?
[Hints: Use your knowledge about the company to answer this question by outlining the company’s attributes as you see them and follow with how those attributes would help you produce your best work. Conveying a sense of pride in your work/profession is important. DO NOT make general statements about how you need a job/the money – let them know why you want this job.]
22. What qualities make someone a good worker?

[Hints: Try to tie your answer for this one into what you have listed as your strengths. Also, know what qualities are important for this position. Be sure to follow your response with a brief explanation or example. DO NOT say “I don’t know.”]

23. What are your plans for the future?/Where do you see yourself in five years?

[Hints: This question is usually asked to get an idea of how long a commitment you would give to the company. Discuss a career or educational goal only if it relates to the field in which you are applying, or if you are interviewing for a typically high-turnover job. DO NOT say or imply that you are “gunning” for your interviewer’s job, or her/his supervisor’s, for that matter.]

24. What is the best job or job duty you have had? Why?

[Hints: Before naming one job or duty, let the interviewer know that you have enjoyed the majority of the job duties you have had. Be sure you select one that directly relates to the one for which you are applying. Tell them why it was the best, whether it is asked or not. DO NOT select something that requires you to stretch to connect it to the job for which you are applying.]

25. What job or job duty have you liked the least? Why?

[Hints: Avoid answering this question if possible by emphasizing how positive your job experiences have been. Express your understanding of the importance of sharing the responsibility for completing unpleasant tasks as well as you knowledge that all jobs include some duties that are less interesting than others. Describe how you ensure those tasks are completed regardless of your feelings about them. If pushed to select something, carefully choose a job or duty that has the least connection the job for which you are applying (jobs prior to a career change are generally safe). DO NOT “bad-mouth” other employers in any way – this is a warning flag that you could be a problem employee.]
26. Do you prefer repetitive tasks/jobs with routine or jobs with a variety of tasks/without a set routine?
   [Hints: Tailor your answer to the demands of the job. When in doubt, respond with flexibility.  DO NOT talk about what you don’t like.]

27. What times/hours are you available to work?
   [Hints: Be as flexible as possible; this is not a time for negotiation (that comes after the job offer, if necessary). Know ahead of time what the business’s hours are as well as whether employees work beyond those hours. Realize that even if you start with undesirable hours, you may move toward a more desirable schedule once employed (which is not an option if you’re not employed).  DO NOT focus on or give reasons for unavailable times (e.g. “I can’t work Tuesdays because that’s when I have all my doctor’s appointments.”)]

28. Do you have reliable transportation?
   [Hints: Answer “yes” to this question and leave it at that. If you are offered the job, you should only take it if it is compatible with your mode of transportation. If you have questions regarding your need for transportation for this job (e.g. does this job require traveling), ask those questions at the end of the interview or when you are offered the job.  DO NOT make it the interviewer’s concern to provide a solution to your transportation dilemma.]
Questions to Ask in an Interview

Below are listed some questions to which you may want answers before leaving the interview, or at least before accepting a job offer. Write your questions down (in your own words) on a notepad prior to the interview, leaving space between each question to write down responses (best to write them after the interview unless memory is an area of difficulty to you), then take the notepad to the interview with you.

• Why is this job open? (i.e. who had it last, and what happened to him/her; how many people have held this position in the last couple of years; what happened to them subsequently)

• Why did the interviewer join the company? How long has he/she been there? What is it about the company that keeps him/her there?

• To whom would you report? Will you get the opportunity to meet that person (today, at the second interview, before starting the job)?

• Where is this job located? What (if any) are the travel requirements?

• What type of training is required/offered, and how long is it?

• What would you first assignment be?

• What are the realistic chances for growth in the job? Where are the greatest opportunities for growth within the company?

• What are the skills and attributes most needed to get ahead in the company?

• Who are the company’s major competitors? How does the interview feel the company stacks up against them?

• What has been the growth pattern of the company over the last five years? Is it profitable? Is the company privately or publicly held?

• If there is a written job description, may you see it?

• How regularly do performance evaluations occur? What model do they follow?

• What is the company dress code?