

15 Most Common Interview Questions and Answers

Following the study from 2015 that reported on the job interviews in **ninety seven different corporations in the United States**, we composed a list of fifteen **most common interview questions**, trying to help the job seekers to prepare for their interviews.

We analyzed each question, and we looked at it from the **point of view of the interviewers and job seekers**.

Short hint explains **why the interviewers use every question, what they try to find out when asking it, and what you should focus on when answering**. Several sample answers follow the hint. The following fifteen questions have made the list:

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?
2. Why did you apply for this job?
3. Why did you leave your last job? / Why do you want to leave your present job?
4. Can you tell us something about your education?
5. Can you tell us something about your working experience?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. What are your strengths?
8. What are your weaknesses?
9. What are your goals?
10. What are your biggest achievements?
11. What characterize a good boss/colleague from your point of view?
12. What motivates you?
13. What are your salary expectations?
14. When are you able to start?
15. Do you have any questions?

Let's have a look at them, one by one!

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?

Hint: Often the very first question, it helps the HR managers to get a basic idea of your communication skills, motivation, and interests.

It is also an ice breaker, and a good answer should help you to feel more relaxed in an interview.

The interviewers do not ask about your education, experience, personal life, or anything else in particular—you can choose what you say to introduce yourself.

However, you should remember that **your choice reflects what matters to you the most**. In a job interview, it should be your education, working experience, and skills, simply **things that are relevant for the employer**.

You can mention one or two hobbies, or something from your personal life, just to show them that you are human, and have a life outside of work.

Considering that it is only the first question, **try to answer briefly**. Mention the most relevant things, speak with enthusiasm. If they want details, they will ask.

Sample answers

I am Mario, 25 years old, and I have just finished my Masters in Economy. I enjoy team work, and I am looking for my first job, ideally in a big company. I want to learn, and meet like-minded people in work. In my free time I like to run, read, and meet with friends. I try to have positive outlook of life, and take everything that comes my way as an opportunity to become a better person.

I am Michaela, and I have worked as a secretary before my maternity leave. Now, returning to work, I am looking for office manager position, or a similar job. I try my best to combine the role of a mother and the role of an employee, which is not always easy, but I enjoy the process. If I have some free time, I like to cook, read, and basically enjoy the time with my daughter.

My name is Ron, and I am a programmer. I love designing new games and I look for a job that will allow me to design them. I am creative, and I also like to draw. I have a family, my children attend college, and in my free time, which is typically only on weekends, I enjoy gardening and wandering in the nature. Though in my fifties, I still believe I have something to offer for my employer, and I constantly work on improving my programming skills.

2. Why did you apply for this job?

Hint: Motivation of job applicants is one of the deciding factors in every interview. The HR managers try to understand your motives. Do you apply for a job just to earn money, or just because you have studied the same field? **Do you apply because you need a job, or because you desire to have this one?**

Your goal is to convince them that you desire to have the job, and that you have a good reason for choosing the offer they advertise.

Pre-interview research should help you to find a good reason. Think company culture, their vision and goals, the value they bring to their customers and business partners. Try to look for something that goes beyond your personal role in the company, something you can compliment.

You should speak not only about your own preferences, but also **about their company**, and **how you can help them to achieve their priorities**. Show them that it makes sense to hire you.

Sample answers

I really like the job description and believe I can fit well here, and bring some value to your team of financial analysts. On the top of that, I have the right working experience for this role, and I would really enjoy working in an international environment.

Your store is just ten minute walk away from my apartment, and I shop here regularly. I like the way the employees approach customers, and I would be proud to be a member of this team. On the top of that, I like the vision of your company, the way this store is organized, and overall I have a good feeling about the place.

I am looking for my first job, and your offer stood out on the job board. Reading it, line after line, I felt that it was the perfect opportunity for me. On the top of that, few friends from college work here, and they have said only good things about the working environment.

3. Why did you leave your last job? (Why do you want to leave your present job?)

Hint: Changing a job, or even a career, is not anything extraordinary. Nevertheless, employers want to understand why you plan to make a change, or why you were forced to make one.

They try to understand **if they can count with you in a long term**, and **what kind of an employee you are**—if you look for good or bad in your job, and in your colleagues, if you demand a lot from the people or not.

Regardless of your past experience, **you should focus on the good things**. Even if they fired you, try to speak nicely about your former colleagues and bosses. Nobody wants to hire an employee who will complain about everything.

Focus on the future, not on the past. Tell them clearly and honestly why you want to change your job, and why you chose them. But you should not say that you want to change a job to earn more money, even if true. Say rather that you look for another challenge, different working environment, a chance to learn something new, etc.

Sample answers

I have had my job in a restaurant for four years. While I enjoyed the company of my colleagues, and believe that I helped the guests to feel welcome at the place, I felt like I needed a change. The duties were repetitive, and I felt I was not moving forward. That's why I left, and decided to apply for your offer, as I really see a potential for learning and growing professionally in this company.

They fired me, because I had a different opinion than the director of the company. Nothing wrong with that—we just had a different philosophy of leadership, and we imagined a different future for the business. Maybe he was right, maybe I was—only time will tell. But I wish them all the best and do not want to focus on the past. Now I am here, looking for a new challenge, and a chance to help your company prosper.

I am simply looking for something different. Though I have been with my present employer only for a few months, I understood it was a bad choice. I look for another place, simply for a better match. Considering your job description and things you do here, I believe this job will suit me better, and I can see the value I can bring to your team, which is something I can not see anymore with my current employer. That is why I plan to leave them.

4. Can you tell me something about your education?

Hint: A diploma or a degree has never made a good employee of anyone. Nonetheless, HR managers often inquire about the education of job applicants, trying to **understand their attitude to learning**, and to education in general.

You should focus on the things you learned—**the practical skills and abilities that will help you in your job**, not on the names of degrees and institutions.

And if you have no education, or are just trying to obtain some degree, try to turn this to your advantage, saying that you preferred **the school of life** to traditional education.

Sample answers

I have studied at ABC University. I acquired knowledge of statistics, project management and accounting. I was always seeking opportunities to put the lessons to practice, taking part in projects and competitions we had at school. I believe that my education and internship that followed prepared me perfectly for a job of a project manager.

I have attended the course for medical assistants with AMMA recently, since I always dreamed of having this job. I believe I learned how to take care of both administrative and clinical duties, and I really enjoyed my lessons. Apart from that I try to work on my computing skills, and I read a lot of books on psychology and communication, trying to further improve my knowledge in areas that are relevant for the field.

To be honest, I have always preferred the school of life to traditional education. I believe that one can learn the job only by doing it. I was always eager to listen to more experienced colleagues in work, trying to follow their example while mastering my working duties. And I also believe that once you can work with information, you can learn any subject of your choice without attending the University, or any other educational institution. Everything is in books or online.

5. Can you tell me something about your working experience?

Hint: Employers can read about your experience on your resume. Still, they want to hear what matters to you, and they want to see your attitude to your previous jobs.

You should pick two or three roles that are most relevant for your current job application, and then you should speak about your working duties, achievements, and lessons you learned while having them.

If you had just one job in the past, and it was completely irrelevant to the one you try to get, say that the experience helped you to gain basic working habits, and simply prepared you for an employment in general.

And if this is your first job application, I suggest you to speak about your volunteering experience, or basically about anything else that will show the employer that you know what it means to work for someone.

Sample answers

I have done a lot of things in my life. It helped me to gain a good understanding of business. From 2001 to 2004 I worked as a project manager for Siemens. We were working mostly on smaller energetic projects, water plants. I hope to use my knowledge and contacts from the industry in my new job. I learned to lead projects from scratch to success. From my other jobs I can mention my role of marketing manager in CDE, from 1998 to 2001, and my freelancing experience from 2005 to 2010. Would you like to hear more details about one of my roles?

I have worked only at Walmart so far. But I learned a lot there, how to approach the customers, how to work with other people. It is not such an easy job as it seems, since the workload is heavy most days. But I do not complain, just I hope to get a better job now, and learn something new again.

As you can see on my resume, this is my first job application. But I have done some volunteering for Red Cross before, and I worked a lot with my father when we were building the house. I believe I know what it means to have a job, and I am eager to finally start working somewhere, after many years of studying.

6. Why should we hire you?

Hint: If someone hires you for a job, they will pay you a monthly salary, and they will also pay money to the government each month.

Will you represent just a regular monthly expense, or will you become a great investment they made, an asset for their team?

HR managers try to find out the answer.

You should focus on something unique, **a value you can bring to their team**. Ideally it should be something that distinguishes you from other competing job applicants. If you can not find it, however, you will do well listing your skills and abilities relevant for the job.

I suggest you not to say that you are the best candidate for the job. First of all, you can not tell that (since you have not met the other job applicants in person), and secondly, you should **try to show some humility in your interview**. Saying that you are the best would not create a right picture in the eyes of the hiring committee....

Sample answers

I had the very same job with one of your competitors, and I can bring a new perspective to your team. We can talk about things they did better, and I believe my feedback and experience will help to improve your own results.

I have an ability to uncover needs and desires, and to sell people what they really need or want. This is my hobby, my passion. I study human psychology in my free time, to understand different types of personalities and how to approach them to maximize the chances of closing the deal. I can honestly say that in the last years I did my best to get ready for a job of a persona banker. And that's why you should hire me.

I am young, eager to learn, and motivated to work hard. I have the passion for numbers, and I would really enjoy having this job. Of course I haven't met the other applicants for the job, and they are likely also motivated and ready to work hard, but I believe I would be a good choice for this position.

7. What are your strengths?

Hint: Professional interviewers should be able to identify your strengths—that's what they get their salary for, after all. But the interviews are sometimes led by people who aren't

skilled in HR. Sometimes, they will actually have no idea about interviewing people (think owners of small business, as an example).

One way or another, **your answer should correspond with your interview presence**. If you struggled to formulate your thoughts in an interview, and said that you had great communication skills, while narrating your strengths, interviewers would not believe your answer (and they would start doubting your other interview answers).

You should pick relevant strengths. If possible, you should elaborate on your answer, saying how you demonstrated your strength in your professional career. And if you can not come up with anything better, speak about strengths that are relevant for every single job—such as responsibility, loyalty to the employer, or taking setbacks as lessons and opportunities to grow.

Sample answers

I love to talk to people, and I believe I do understand them well—what they need and desire. This helped me in my volunteering experience in a nursing home, and I hope to use this strength in my social work career.

Responsibility is my greatest strength. I consider my job the first priority, and it has never happened to me that I came late to work, or that I did not finalize my tasks in time.

I would say my experience is my greatest strength. I have been working in this field for years, and I have tackled many challenges. There is hardly anything that would surprise me in job. Therefore I can work quickly, independently, and know what to do to achieve the best results for my employer.

8. What are your weaknesses?

Hint: I will repeat myself. Professional interviewers should uncover your weaknesses, after talking to you for five minutes, or even for less.

But anyone can lead an interview with you, and good interviewers often use this question as well, trying to **see what you think of yourself**. Can you admit having a weakness? Are you humble?

Those who believe to have no weaknesses can hardly move forward in their life, **since they do not see areas for improvement**. You should not leave such an impression in your job interview.

Everyone has some weaknesses. But it is **your attitude** that matters for the interviewers. Admit your weaknesses, and tell them how you try to improve on them. That's the answer they seek in a great job candidate.

Obviously, you should pick a weakness **that won't ruin your chances of getting a job**. If you said your accounting skills were below par, they would hardly hire you for a position of a cost accountant. But if you said you struggled with management skills, they would not consider your weakness a show stopper. Accountants do not manage people, so they do not need to have great management skills.

Sample answers

I am not very patient. That's obviously bad. But I am working on it, trying to control myself, staying tolerant to my colleagues. It's not easy, but I have definitely made some improvements in the recent years.

Sometimes I struggle to focus on my duties. However, I practice every day, trying to eliminate useless thoughts, and my concentration has improved over the years. I still continue working on it though, trying to eliminate distractions in work.

I trust people too much. It is nice to live with this attitude to life, but it caused me some troubles in the past. Getting older, however, I am learning how to recognize the people I can trust from those who try to take advantage of my trust.

I struggle with computers. But I attend evening lessons, and I practice a lot at home, trying to improve on them, learning to work with the most common office software.

9. What are your goals?

Hint: Every responsible person has some goals. When recruiters ask you about your goals and dreams, first of all they want to **hear that you have some goals and dreams**.

Secondly, your goals should somehow relate to their business, or at least they should not interfere with them.

For example, if you dream about running your own business, or about traveling the world, you should not say that in your job interview. Companies do not want to hire people who will leave them after a year of employment, to pursue their traveling or entrepreneur dreams.

If you have no professional goals, speak about your personal life. You can say you hope to have a family one day, or, if you already have the family, you can say your goal is to live a long and balanced life with your loved ones, enjoying the present moment.

Sample answers

I would like to have a managerial role in five years time. However, I understand that I need to learn a lot before it can happen, and I believe that this position in your company is a perfect starting point for my career.

I do not dream much about the future. If I have a teaching job, and if I do it well and get a good feedback from my students, it will make me happy in life. That's likely my only goal—to be happy, and to do my best in both professional and personal life.

I plan to start a family in a few years time, and to become a good mother. When you look around, what's going on in the world right now, it is definitely not an easy goal to accomplish. But I hope to become a mother one day, and to have a good steady job, one I will enjoy doing.

10. What are your biggest achievements?

Hint: Employers try to find out if you have just “gone to the job”, or if you actually **tried to achieve something** with your work.

If possible, speak about your **achievements from the perspective of an employer** (helping them to find new customers, helping them to improve their reputation, building good atmosphere on the workplace, etc), not about from your own perspective (getting promoted, earning a degree or certification, etc).

If you have no other option, however, you can talk about personal promotion, employee of the month award, or other recognition of your good work.

If you apply for your first job, you can speak about achievements from personal life. For example, a chain smoker who managed to quit smoking recently shows their strong determination and will, narrating how they managed to quit smoking.

Sample answers

When I worked as a Sales Manager at ABC Inc., my sales volume grew by twenty percent or more each year. No other sales representative achieved similar results, and nobody helped their business as much as I did.

I have become a better person over the years. I learned to listen to the others, and to see the good things in people, which is something I had struggled to do early in my life. I consider this my biggest achievement, since it made my life better, and I hope people enjoy my company more now.

I have done only manual labor so far, and it is hard to speak about big achievements in work. But I tried to be nice to my colleagues in retail, and I believe that I helped to improve the overall atmosphere in the store, and the retailer benefited from that.

11. What characterizes a good boss (colleague) from your point of view?

Hint: You won't work alone. Employees interact with each other, and the interviewers try to find out if you can fit into the team on the workplace.

You should not mention something personal in your answer, for example saying that you prefer young collective, or that you work better under a boss who are older than you. Such an answer could easily backfire—if a boss was a young man, they would not hire you.

The best thing to do is mentioning something **neutral** and **emphasize that you can get along anyone**.

Sample answers

Ideal boss doesn't exist, and it doesn't even matter to me. I want to focus on my job, and my duties, and I try to avoid any conflicts with other employees. Everyone is different, and I respect the individuality of each person. But I do not try to think much about my colleagues, what they should do better, how they should act. I simply prefer to focus on my own duties, and on my good attitude to other people. That is the only thing I can control.

I can get along with everyone, and I do not have special preferences. The most important thing is to see that my colleagues try their best in work, day in day out. But whether they are old or young, whether they like dancing or watching football doesn't make any difference to me.

12. What motivates you in work?

Hint: Interviewers try to find out **whether you work only for money, or are driven by a passion that comes from within you**, that magical driving force that helps us to deliver our best in job.

Your motivation is actually tested during the entire interview, and you should demonstrate it **with the enthusiasm** for the job offer, for yourself, and for the world in general.

Answering this particular question, however, you should speak openly about your motivation, something that drives you.

It can be a desire to help people (great choice for a nurse, a social worker, a teacher), and it can be a **desire to support your own family, simply a goal to live well**.

One way or another, try to stay honest and show them that you have many reasons to work hard.

Sample answers

Meaningful purpose of this job motivates me. I would be proud to teach young children, as I believe I can become a good role model for them. And I do not want to be a bad role model, so you can be sure I'd try my best in each class.

I love to work with people. I am very social, and I enjoy talking to strangers. I believe that the nature of this job is motivating enough, at least for me it works that way.

I have a family, and I love them. I try my best to support them, and this job would help me greatly. While it is not the most fascinating job one can have, it is definitely fine for me. Even if it gets boring sometimes in work, I always try my best. It's not for my own sake...

13. What are your salary expectations?

Hint: If they start talking about salary, it is mostly a good sign. **It means that they consider hiring you** (unless they just blindly follow an interview template, and ask every job candidate exactly the same question).

Anyway, you should say that **salary is not a deciding factor for you**. But if they insist on hearing a number, you should say something to backup your expectations (average salary statistics, the sum of money you earned in your last job, etc.)

Sample answers

I like the job description, I like your bank, and I would be proud to have this job. But as far as my knowledge goes, average salary for a teller in your institution starts at \$29,000. I would accept that number for the start.

This is my first job application, and I am motivated to learn. I understand it is an entry level position, so the salary offer won't be great. At the same time, however, the possibilities of promotion are almost endless, so I would accept your standard salary offer for entry level jobs. I am sure that once I prove myself worthy of promotion or a raise, you won't hesitate offering it to me.

I've been earning \$70,000 in my present job, and I would prefer not earning less , considering it goes about the same position. However, I am open to negotiation and would love to hear your thoughts.

14. When are you able to start?

Hint: Most HR managers prefer to see their new hires on board as soon as possible. If you can start immediately, say it and stress that you are not waiting for any other interviews to finish, or phone calls to come...

And if you can not start immediately (bearing in mind notice period requirements, or other reasons), say clearly why you can not start, and try to turn this answer to your advantage. You can show right attitude to work, saying that it would be irresponsible to leave your current employer without helping your replacement to understand their job.

Sample Answers

I am eager to start as soon as possible. I have applied also for two other job offers, but this one is my first choice, so if you need me tomorrow, I can be here in the morning.

I could possibly start tomorrow, but I want to finish the project I currently work on with my employer. It would be unprofessional and irresponsible if I just left them. I will need two or three weeks at least to finish it, and then I can start here. But I am ready to sign the contract even today, and you can be sure that I won't change my mind about working here.

15. Do you have any questions?

Hint: You will get a chance to ask some questions in your interview. It is good to ask one or two questions at least, as it shows that you still want the job, after everything that has been said and done in your interview.

But you should not ask about something that was **already discussed in an interview**, or about something that was explained on their job description. Focus on their working

environment, next steps of recruitment process, company culture, their goals and plans, their product portfolio, etc.

Sample Answers

What are the next steps of recruitment process? Is there anything else I can do to improve my chances of getting this job?

I really like your product ABC. Can you tell me more about the plans you have with the product, and the innovations you plan in the future?

Do you set any goals for sales managers, such as monthly sales volume?

It is nice here, and people look happy in work. Do you organize any teambuilding events for your employees, or how do you keep such a good atmosphere on the workplace?

Final Word

To succeed in an interview is not easy. But if you read this eBook a couple of times, and practice your interview answers with a friend, you should **get rid of stress and feel more confident** in your interview.

Every interview is a chance to learn, to improve your presence, and of course—to finally get a job of your dreams. Try to analyze your past interviews, identify the mistakes you have made, and improve on them for the next time.

If you do so, and if you improve your interview answers, you will get a job you want to have, sooner, or later.

I wish you good luck!



Sincerely,

Matthew Chulaw,

Your Personal Interview Coach,

Founder of InterviewPenguin.com