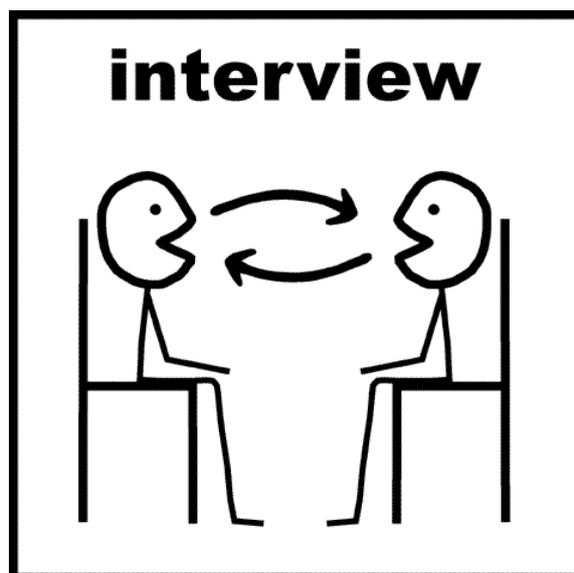


Trade Union Education Centre

City of Glasgow College

Common Interview Questions



Common Interview Questions

Most interviews feature a set of frequently used **common interview questions** that help interviewers to find out as much as possible, in as little time as possible, about the candidate.

You must be able to give comprehensive, well researched and well thought-out answers. There is no excuse for poor preparation. Almost all job interviews are highly standardized and vary little from company to company, so you can work out what type of interview questions will be coming up, and consequently perform to a consistently high standard.

Employers conducting many interviews will often have a list of around 20 to 30 common interview questions and ask each candidate a random selection of about 10. These questions will almost always refer to and ask you to discuss your: **strengths and weaknesses, aspirations / drive / motivations, hobbies and skills, education / academic ability, analytical / problem-solving ability, salary / travel expectations, work experience and competencies** (most notably teamwork, leadership and communication). It is very likely you will also be asked about the job/ industry/ employer you have applied for.

Job / Industry / Employer

Even before making a job application, an ideal candidate knows exactly what a company does, what they will be doing in the job, and why they want to do it. It is important to spend time finding out about these things before you begin your job search, but even more important to undertake this research before an interview.

Job seekers will almost always be asked the following interview questions:

- **Why do you want to be a ?**
- **What do you think you will be doing in this role?**
- **What draws you to this industry?**
- **Why do you want to work for us?**
- **What do you know about us - or - What do we do?**

Make sure you have spoken to a member of HR at the firm you have applied to before your interview, and found out exactly what the job entails. If you can, talk to people you know who already do similar jobs, and find out what a typical day's work involves for them. Think about your skill-set and why you would be good at doing this job. Think of examples and experiences from your life which demonstrate your skills, and you can use to impress your interviewer and help promote yourself at interview.

When an interviewer asks you to tell them what you know about their company, you must be able to show extended knowledge. Every candidate has access to the internet and will have read their website. Just using this basic level of information as your resource is not good enough if you want to set yourself apart from the competition.

Make sure you research the firm in relation to their future plans and recent developments. Think about how they are placed in the industry they work in. Find out who their competitors are and what relationships they have with them. Read relevant trade/industry press to learn about current industry issues you can discuss at interview. The more information you have at your disposal, the better placed you are to answer difficult interview questions.

You are also likely to be asked questions such as:

- **Who are our competitors?**
- **What do you think of our competitors?**
- **Where else have you applied to?**
- **Where else have you interviewed at?**

Make sure you have researched the industry. If you are making applications to several companies in the same field, any research you do now can also be used for interviews in the future. Be prepared to give critical analysis of a firm's competitors. Do not criticise them for no reason, and if you like them then do say so, but always remember to mention that you prefer the company you are interviewing with most of all!

Key Competencies: Leadership, Teamwork, Communication

Competency questions do not just come up in competency interviews. You may be asked this type of question in any interview, most commonly in relation to leadership, teamwork and communication skills.

Employers are keen to find evidence of leadership skills in job candidates, particularly for managerial positions such as management-focused graduate schemes. It is also important for employees to possess teamwork and communication skills to work in teams and discuss problems and solutions with other people.

Examples of common interview questions you may be asked are:

- **Are you a leader?** (leadership)
- **Describe a situation in which you have lead a team** (leadership/teamwork)
- **Describe a situation where you worked as part of a team** (teamwork)
- **Describe a situation in which you influenced or motivated people** (leadership)
- **Describe a situation in which you dealt with confrontation, for example a difficult customer** (communication)

To answer these interview questions you must give a pertinent example from your life to prove to your interviewer that you possess these important key competencies.

You need to make sure that you have looked through your CV for examples of where you have demonstrated these skills before the interview.

You may be asked several competency questions at interview. Try to use a different example to answer each one.

Analytical / Problem-Solving Ability

Interviewers ask this type of question to find out about a candidate's logical and analytical approach to problems, and to work. You may also be given a work-based problem scenario and asked what you would do, requiring you to visualise a problem and a way of solving it.

- **How do you go about solving problems?**

Your interviewer wants to see that you understand how to go about solving problems, even if you are not always able to solve them yourself. Show that you are a careful planner, who uses research and other people's advice to tackle issues that you face.

If asked how you would go about solving a problem, think about how you would conduct any necessary research, who you would talk to, how you would allocate your time, the resources you would need and anything else you think necessary.

Aspirations / Drive / Motivations

Employers want to hire competitive people because they tend to accomplish more work, and their work is of a higher standard. You should certainly tell your interviewer that you are competitive, and use lots of high quality examples from your life and university experience to prove this.

- **Would you describe yourself as competitive?**

Try to demonstrate that being competitive is natural to you. If you have been involved in sports teams this is a very good opportunity to talk about them. They are a great way to describe team and individual competition. Make sure you talk about your competitive successes also, and how other people see you/value you as a team member.

- **What motivates you?**
- **What gets you out of bed in the morning?**
- **What has been your greatest achievement?**

You could say that you enjoy challenges and love the feeling of satisfaction you get from producing great work even though it may have been difficult and there may have been intense pressure. It would also be good to mention that you enjoy working as part of a productive team and contributing to successful projects.

You could also relate what motivates you to the specific requirements and duties of the job you are applying for. Think about what key skills are required by the job you are applying for and try to demonstrate that your motivations are the same.

If you can, try to show that you are self-motivating. Give examples of times when you have motivated yourself to achieve success, for example: completing university

coursework, setting up your own business, or organising a sports team. You do not want to appear as someone who always needs someone else to tell you what to do to get you motivated. Show that you are prepared to push yourself for success.

- **What do you expect to be doing in five years' time?**
- **Describe your ideal job?**

To answer this interview question, try to think frankly about where you want to be in five years. Be realistic about where your career could go. Show that you are motivated by success and promotion. Many people say that they would like to be managing a team and having more input into work processes and company policy. It is a good idea to suggest that you can see yourself at the company you are interviewing at in five years, rather than a competitor firm.

Strengths and Weaknesses

When your interviewer asks you these common interview questions, you should prepare to start selling yourself.

- **What are your strengths?**
- **How would you describe yourself?**

Before any interview you should make a list of your "Unique Selling Points" - the key skills and competencies that make you a great candidate for this job. These could be: strong academic results, work experience or internships, evidence of leadership or teamwork, foreign languages, creative skills or anything else you think is relevant for this role.

Make sure you back up these points with relevant examples of where you have demonstrated these skills and competencies.

- **What is your biggest weakness?**
- **What are your weaknesses?**
- **How would your worst enemy describe you?**

There are two good ways to answer this type of question. You can either try to disguise a strength as a weakness and use this as your example, or you can be honest.

To describe a strength as a weakness, you need to say something like:

- At times I fail to see the bigger picture, because I'm so focused on my own work.
- Once I get started I like to get the job done. I often stay at work too late, because I simply can't leave until I've finished what I've set out to achieve.
- Before I start a new project I tend to ask a lot of questions. I like to be sure of the work about to be done, and how I can excel at it, before I get involved with a new project.

If you give this type of response make sure you give specific examples to back yourself up. However, using this trick to answer this question is something of a

cliche. Interviewers hear these responses all the time, and your answers will not impress them.

Another strategy is of course, to be honest. However, there are reasonable limits on how honest you need to be. For example, you should never reveal something terrible about yourself at interview, such as a chronic tendency to arrive late, or that you dislike other people.

Instead, choose a small weakness that you're working to improve and describe the action you are taking to remedy it. By acknowledging that you are not perfect you are showing humility, which is in itself a strong quality to possess. For example, you could say something like:

- Before I got to university/college, I was quite shy in social situations. However, I quickly realised that it was important to be more confident and consequently joined several sports teams and groups to force myself to meet people and be more outgoing. In my second year I joined a drama society and my friends say that ever since then, I've never stopped talking!

Everyone has weaknesses and your interviewer will understand this. They will certainly have their own. Be prepared to be truthful, albeit measured in your responses to these questions.

The best way to prepare is by reading as many **interview questions and answers** as possible.

University/College

Be positive when discussing your time at university or college. Talk about what you learnt on your course (using specific examples of interesting things) and what you learnt about yourself (again, using specific examples from extracurricular activities). Common interview questions include:

- **Why did you choose your university and what factors influenced your choice?**
- **Did you enjoy university?**
- **Why did you choose your degree subject?**
- **Why do you think graduates in .. [your degree subject] .. would be good at .. [job role you have applied for] .. ?**

Before your interview, think about the skills you learnt on your course which are applicable to the job you are applying for. If the job you want is a departure from the course you took (e.g. Accounting and a degree in English), be prepared to explain what attracted you to this industry, and how you plan to transfer your skills to another field. Talk about this in a very positive way; for example, you bring an unconventional perspective to the table which will allow you to think on a different level to your peers.

Extracurricular Activities / Skills / Hobbies

Talking about your interests and hobbies is helpful for interviewers to gain a deeper understanding of who you are and what you like to do outside work.

- **What are your hobbies?**
- **Were you involved in any teams or societies at university?**
- **Tell me about yourself**

Talk enthusiastically about your hobbies, and talk in detail about specific skills (such as a foreign language) that will set you apart from other candidates and make you a more attractive hire to your interviewer.

- **What are your computing skills like?**

Let your interviewer know exactly what IT skills you have, and if possible give examples of times when you have used different software packages.

Conscientiousness / Trustworthiness / Time

It should be obvious how to answer questions concerned with your conscientiousness, time-keeping or trustworthiness. If asked questions relating to these issues, you must make it clear to your interviewer that you are a reliable person who is consistently early for work, prepared to stay late when required and someone who they can trust.

- **Give me an example of a time when you hit a deadline**
- **Give me an example of a time when you failed to hit a deadline**
- **What was your biggest setback?**
- **How do you deal with adversity?**
- **What do you do when you are late for work?**

Use examples of times when you have been given responsibility in the past, if you need to prove to your interviewer that they can trust you in an employment situation.

Travel / Relocation

Be certain about the travel requirements of the job, before your interview. There is no point interviewing for a job that you won't be able to accept because it is based 300 miles away and you don't want to relocate.

- **Do you enjoy travelling?**
- **How would you feel about frequent travel?**
- **How would you feel about re-locating?**

If you are prepared to relocate or travel frequently (for example, spending time on secondment with company clients), discuss times in the past when you have done this successfully (e.g. moving to university) or show your enthusiasm, saying that you are looking forward to experiencing life in various new locations and that you have nothing tying you to any particular place right now.

Salary

Salary is not always discussed at interview, but when it does come up, it is extremely important you know how to handle it.

- **What sort of salary are you looking for?**

To give you an example. a graduate can expect a salary of somewhere between £22,000 - £25,000 outside London, and £24,000 - £30,000 inside London. Some industries do pay more than this - starting salaries at investment banks will be closer to £45,000, and the average for law firms is around £38,000. Some supermarkets also pay very well: Aldi pays graduates for its area manager training programme an initial salary of over £40,000 plus a company car.

Before your interview you should already know roughly how much the job you have applied for will pay you. If this figure is around £25,000, you should say that you are looking for a salary of around £24,000 - £26,000. Your expectations should match the salary on offer. If your salary expectations are too low, or too high, you will be seen as either devaluing or over-valuing yourself, and you will **not** get the job. Saying you are interested in a very high salary also suggests to interviewers that you are too motivated by money, and may leave if a better paying job comes along in the future.

The **only** time you should ever tell your interviewer that you want to earn a lot of money is during an interview for a sales job, or a job in recruitment. This is because salaries for these roles are based on commission; the harder employees work, the more money they can earn. Employers want employees who want to earn a lot of money because this means they are more motivated to work harder.

Candidates should **never** ask their interviewer questions about salary during a graduate interview. Doing so gives the impression that you are interested in a job purely for financial reasons and reveals that you have not researched the job and company in fine detail - if you had, you would have found out the salary on offer already!