

TOP 10 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

QUICK TIPS TIP SHEET

This sheet covers the top 10 interview questions interviewers ask job candidates. By using this quick reference sheet you can be better prepared for your next interview. The answers that we provide for these questions are just examples, they are sample answers. You can use this guide to develop your own answers to the questions.

Using these question tips along with our specialized resume services can greatly improve your chances of landing your dream job. If you want to succeed in your job search, then you need to give yourself the best possible chance with a professionally written resume and well prepared interview answers.

Question #1: “Tell me about yourself”

This is not an opportunity to tell your life story or to recount your entire resume. In just a couple of sentences, describe your top strengths and motivations and the experiences that underscore these characteristics. Then connect these characteristics to your specific objectives and to what you can do for the hiring organization. Your answer should be around 60 seconds.

Here's the response of a recent college grad who landed a job at ESPN:

“I love sports, in the game, in the stands, watching sports center in the morning, or debating the Knick's roster with my friends at a bar at night. And as the captain for my soccer team, I enjoyed how my words could impact the outcome of a game or a season. I have also learned how to influence others with my writing - having had 2 professors use my work as their class examples. So, I want to apply my communication skills and my love for influencing others to energize fans of professional sports. More specifically, I hope to write provocative articles that cause fans to think about sports instead of anything else. From what I know so far, your firm looks like a great opportunity to pursue this path, and I hope to learn more today.”

Question #2: “Walk me through your resume”

Don't get caught up telling every detail. Articulate your top selling points, and cite the past experiences that support these points. Your response to this question is pretty similar to “Tell me about yourself,” though it can run closer to 2 minutes (speaking at a normal speed). The difference between the two responses is that for this answer, you will reference specific experiences as they are described in your resume rather than describing these past experiences in another manner.

Question #3: “What makes you better than other candidates?”

Your answer needs to explain how your skills and experiences will enable the company to succeed. Your answer should basically say, “I bring a unique combination of strengths, experiences, and knowledge that will address the challenges your organization is facing better than anyone else.” In addition, your response should itemize both a few of your defining characteristics and a few of the challenges which the organization is facing.

Question #4: “Where do you see yourself in 5 years?”

This question is an opportunity to demonstrate you are motivated and ambitious. Your answer should show that the work you would do for this company is something you will be excited about 5 years from now. Employers also want to make sure their new hires don't start with one foot out the door. So unless the position is explicitly temporary, you want to suggest that you will stay with the company for this period.

For example, you might say something like:

“In 5 years, I hope to continue doing the work I enjoy everyday, but from a position of greater responsibility. On a daily basis, I am motivated by work that allows me to put the pieces together to look at the big picture and to analyze complex problems. I also value having autonomy and flexibility in my approach to delivering results and having work that is financially rewarding for me and my company. From what I have learned about your company and this opportunity, I believe this organization is a strong fit for me, both now and 5 years from now.”

Question #5:

“Why are you leaving / did you leave your current job?”

Do not fall on your sword with this question by being negative. Do not speak poorly of your old boss or of your co-workers or even of the work itself. If you were fired, tie the context of your separation into being part of a group of people who left.

If it's a voluntary departure, you might say something like:

“I very much enjoyed the people I worked with, and generally the work that I performed. But I am hungry to take on more responsibility and to take be in a position that leverages my abilities more fully. I am excited about this position, because I know that working for your organization I will have the opportunity too...”

Or, if it's an involuntary departure,* you might say something like:

“I very much enjoyed the people I worked with, and generally the work that I performed. Unfortunately, I was part of a group of people who were let go due to the recent economic downturn. But I believe that this may ultimately be to my advantage due to the opportunity I see with your company. I know that working for your organization I will have the opportunity to...”

* My Interview Success Formula training program shows you how to address questions about being fired in your previous job.

Question #6:

“What is your biggest weakness?”

By asking this question, the interviewer may just be hoping that you will describe a massive flaw that can cause them to exclude you from hiring. You are welcome to try an answer like, “flourless chocolate cake. Every time it's on the menu, I have to order it.” This answer may help you build rapport with the interviewer, but there is still the fair chance that they will want a more serious answer.

For this answer, you will want to use what I call “The Sandwich Technique.” Pull out a trait that can be considered a strength of yours, then identify how this strength can also be consider a weakness. Then conclude with how you've learned to adapt to this weakness.

For instance,

- Strength: “Well, I am a strong writer and found that other people really respond well when I write.”
- Weakness: “But, I've discovered in the past that for people who are auditory learners, I tend to use writing too much.”

- Adaptation for this weakness: “So I’ve learned that whenever I work with a new co-worker or client to ask them about their preferred balance of communication medium, and I do my best to communicate with each person as he or she prefers.”

After you take our online assessment, you will receive two custom-built responses for this question as part of your Interview Cribsheet™ report.

Question #7: “What do you do during your free time?”

This is an informal question designed to get to know you better and to show that you’re not a totally dull person. The key is to give an answer with specific details and to describe experiences in a way that show you are proactive. Be ready to include two to three different types of activities. If you are lucky the interviewer will be excited by one of your responses and ask follow up questions.

Everyone can create a good answer for this question. Even if you are a busy parent who just has time to get home, play with your children, cook dinner, and watch a bit of TV before bed, you could answer:

“Well I have two children. Kaylie is 5 and Alex is 7. I really enjoy getting to know them better and taking them for bike rides in the park.”

“I’ve also been honing the art of kid-friendly healthy cooking, learning tricks like blending cauliflower into mash potatoes, or adding carrot juice into orange juice.”

“Finally, I have to admit that I’ve become a bit of a fanatic for the TV show ‘Dancing with Stars’ (smile). When I can, I do my best to fit in an episode.”

Question #8: “Why don’t you give me your understanding of the position, and explain how your experience lines up?”

Don’t answer this question until you feel as though you really understand the job. If there are specific aspects that you aren’t sure about, begin with, “Before I can answer that question, I was hoping that you could clarify what X entails. What would my responsibilities be in this regard?”

Once you feel you understand the job, describe it to the interviewer briefly, then ask “Did I leave out anything important?” If you did leave something out, thank the

interviewer for pointing out the omission.

With this context set, you want to mention a couple of your key strengths, the context in which you have used these strengths, and how these strengths can help you succeed.

As an example (with many specifics omitted):

“So correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding of the work is that I will be asked to... In short, I will combine rigorous quantitative analysis and qualitative feedback to help devise new web marketing strategies. My quantitative analysis skills are pretty deep running from experiences in... While I’ve learned about interpreting qualitative customer feedback through... and I’ve helped devise a number of marketing strategies as... Looking at these past experiences, I can help your company (group) be successful by...”

Question #9: “Why this job, at this company?”

Your response to this question should include three things, the people, the mission (or the product), and the work. You would likely get a passing mark if you said: “When I look at this organization, from what I have learned of the people who work here, culturally, I see this company as a strong fit. Furthermore, I have always been strongly connected to the products this company produces. Finally, from what I understand of this job, it aligns with what I enjoy doing on a daily basis and with where I want to my career to be headed.”

But you would definitely do better by mentioning specific cultural attributes, by focusing on one or two key products and why that product connects to you, and by explaining what specifically about the work, you would find energizing.

Question #10: “Do you have any questions for us?”

You should always have a couple of questions. This is an opportunity to show how excited you are about the work. Good question include, “so what big projects are coming up for this group?” or “What has been the best experience you have had working for this company.” Never ever ask about salary, benefits or vacation. Our website has a more complete list of questions. This includes questions to ask early in the interview to give you an edge, and to ask late in the interview to leave a positive and memorable impression.