

Suggested Responses to the Most Common Interview Questions

Proper interview preparation can be the difference between getting your dream job and coming up short. One important aspect of interview preparation is practicing your responses to the most common interview questions interviewers ask. This exercise will help you formulate focused responses, allowing you to communicate your strengths and qualifications clearly and effectively.

1. Tell me about yourself. What is your background? What has been your work experience?

It is best to stick with a brief outline of your work history and not your personal life.

2. How would you describe yourself?

Prepare 5 - 10 adjectives that would describe you. Focus on characteristics that would be valuable in the workplace.

3. What are your short and long term goals? Where do you see yourself in five years?

Be sure that the goals you express are in line with what the job can offer. Saying that you want to be a manager when you are talking to the manager of a small company is unwise.

4. What would be the ideal job for you? Describe the kind of position you are seeking.

Be sure that your answer is compatible with the requirements of this job. If you are not sure what the company wants, then answer broadly, "I am open to similar work to what I have done, but I would also be delighted to take on new challenges."

5. What do you think you do best? What are your strengths? At what are you most successful?

Pick points that you think are needed the most for this specific position.

6. What are your weaknesses? Give me an example of one of your biggest mistakes on a job.

Try to pick weaknesses that are not important to doing well in this job or a weakness that you have worked on and successfully improved.

7. What did you like the least about your last job? What duties have you disliked in the past? What kind of things would you try to avoid in your next job?

Be careful about overly negative responses that make you look inflexible. Pick little things like, "I wasn't wild about the filing, but all jobs have some less exciting duties."

8. What was your favorite job and why? Which position was the most rewarding and why?

Stick with job content over personalities, environments, location, or benefits.

9. Who was your favorite boss and why? What qualities would an ideal boss have?

Some applicants make the mistake of describing their boss's personality (nice, flexible, etc.). This is a great opportunity to shine. "I loved the way my last boss gave me so much responsibility and trusted my ability to make decisions on my own. He appreciated the improvements I made in our systems and some of the marketing cost savings I was able to implement."

10. What was your least favorite boss like? Who was your worst boss and why?

This is a snake pit question. Don't elaborate too much! Negative remarks can be interpreted as disrespect for authority and as inability to let the rough and rude actions of a difficult boss roll off your back. Be diplomatic. "All bosses can have their difficult ways. My boss at _____ was the most demanding and difficult to please. I feel that I performed well for him even though ..some of the staff had trouble relating to him."

11. Would you rather work by yourself or with others?

Answer both positively. "I am a team player yet I am productive working on my own."

12. What three accomplishments are you the most proud of? What are your job successes?

This is a key question. Think of ways you have contributed to the company's success in quantifiable ways. For example, you saved your employer money, made procedures more efficient, increased sales. You can mention academic successes if they are relevant and recent.

13. Do you work well under pressure? Can you juggle several tasks and lots of deadlines?

Give examples of projects or people that have been demanding and how you did well. Set up the problem you faced, how you addressed the problem, and the results achieved.

14. How could you contribute to your company? What attributes do you have that we could use?

Avoid trite remarks like, "I am a hard worker. I learn quickly." It may be better to say things such as "If you asked my previous boss what he appreciated about me I think he would tell you that I take initiative, that I have enthusiasm for my work, and I am not afraid of working hard or putting in overtime. I not only do my work accurately and quickly, but I also take the interest in understanding the reasons behind the task at hand."

If you can identify specific areas where you can contribute to the company, mention them here. It can show diligent research on your part, but be careful not to be too critical of the company.

15. What problems have you experienced on the job (or in school)? How did you deal with it?

This is another way of asking about your weaknesses, personality conflicts, negative attitudes about a job, ability to roll with the punches and deal with frustrations-be careful.

16. What types of promotions or job changes have you experienced in the past?

This is a great opportunity to shine. Even if specific promotions have not occurred, you may have been given greater responsibility - talk about it.

17. Tell me about a typical day on your last job. What were the responsibilities in the job?

Do not ramble. Be concise and explicit. Mention 5-6 reasonable highlights of the job.

18. Do you have plans to continue your education? What are your educational goals?

Be careful if your goals are not compatible with the future of this job, as you could be knocked out of the running. A company may also need overtime and evening courses may interfere. Continuing your education is usually respected. Give safe remarks such as, "I like to take courses that will help me contribute more to my job and company, if time permits."

19. What courses in school did you like the best? The least?

Try to select courses that might relate to the job. "English was one of my favorite classes because I am good at composition and writing. Higher-level accounting classes were challenging, but I worked to become one of the top students in the class. Foreign languages were my least favorite."

20. Is salary more important to you than satisfaction with the type of work you do?

This can be a feel-out question if your salary is negotiable and if you are committed to your career. "Salary is important, but is secondary to my satisfaction with work content."

21. What do you like to do in your free time? What are your hobbies and interests?

Have something intelligent and productive to say. Self-improvement remarks win points. "I like to attend computer workshops, motivational seminars, and business courses that might apply to my work. I also like to play tennis and go to sporting events."

22. Do you need to be kept busy in a job? Can you get bored easily if a job isn't challenging?

This can be a trap. If the job has peaks and valleys and you say you need to be kept busy, you may be dropped from consideration. If you get bored easily you may be considered lacking in industriousness. "I prefer to stay busy, but if there are slow times, I like to help out others meet priorities that are key to the business. I am too productive to get bored."

23. What do you think past employers would say about you? Who are your references?

Be prepared with specific examples from various employers. You should also have business references with phone numbers.

24. What kind of work atmosphere are you most comfortable in?

Do you fit in with this group? Are they formal, relaxed, straight business, jokers and kidders, aggressive personalities, laid back, a bit stuffy, have a dress code, style queens, private offices, bull pen environment- all are related. "I think I can fit in with most any environment. I tend to reflect the personality style of my boss and adapt to any situation."

25. Why would you want this job? Why would you like to work for this company?

Avoid focusing on benefits, financial stability of the company, location or pay. Talk instead about your interest in the industry and administration of the success of the company. Discuss how the content of the job would be satisfying and challenging. Say you have liked the people you have met and you believe you would fit in well. Describe how your knowledge, skills, and training could contribute to the company.