

Interview – Sample Questions and Answers

(July 2020)

Tell me about yourself

This is usually one of the first questions asked at interview because it is a good ice-breaker. You should always have a finely tuned response prepared in advance. Structure your answer around the job specification (if a post has been advertised) or what you think you would be able to offer the position/company (if you are applying speculatively). Remember that the panel are not looking for the potted version of your entire career – there isn't time for this – but rather they will be hoping that you will focus **only** on the aspects of your career and life experience to date that are **most relevant** to this position and/or this organisation. Elaborate well but succinctly.

For example, you might tell the interviewers what work-related skills and accomplishments would be an asset to the company/post. Describe your education and work history (be brief). If there's time and, if relevant, you could mention one or two personal character traits and describe how the traits helped you accomplish a task at school or work e.g. "I would describe myself as a self-starter. At Acme Corporation, there was a problem with.... so I created a new inventory system (give details) that reduced expenses 30%". If you have a recent degree and not a lot of employment experience you might give a simpler example:

e.g. "I have enjoyed working with computers since I was nine years old and have always been adept at using them. Throughout school, friends and relatives were always asking me for help with their computer problems, so no one was surprised when I chose computing as a career"

Your answer might go on to explain how in college, you discovered you wanted to concentrate your studies on a specific field; how your internships or work experience influenced you or led you in a certain direction and how you have come to decide that you want to work for this particular company. You may also describe why you would be an asset to this company.

How would your best friend describe you?

Think "how would my best friend describe me **to a prospective employer**?" This is one method employers use to ask about your strengths and weaknesses although very often they will just ask you about these directly. Mention only your strengths unless asked specifically about weaknesses and elaborate where you can.

e.g. "My best friend would probably say that my three greatest strengths are my leadership capability, my communication skills and my organisational ability. I have shown these strengths through..."

e.g. "I have the ability to train and motivate people. At Acme Co., employee turnover was very high, so I" (give details of what you did to increase turnover, train and motivate employees, etc.)

Your weaknesses

It is best to give examples of weaknesses that you have had but that you have taken proactive measures to overcome. Try and avoid clichéd answers like 'I work too hard' or 'I find it difficult to delegate'. Also avoid giving examples of weaknesses that might be an integral part of the job. A good example of a response in relation to time management and organisational skills would be:

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What do you know about our company?

You should always research a company before the interview. Learn about their products, services, size, future plans, current events, competitors, etc. Much of this information should be on their website. Do an internet research of their latest press release. If you cannot find information about a particular company, call their offices and ask if they can send you information about the company in the form of a brochure, etc. You should also research the industry in which the company operates. Consider utilising online business databases such as FAME and Business Source Complete available via the TU Dublin library as they may provide valuable information in particular in relation to larger businesses. Consider conducting an informational interview with someone in the organisation – see the help sheet '[Information Interviews](#)'.

Why do you want this position?

Again, your answer should state a passion to work for the organisation because of the characteristics of it that most appeal to you. More responsibility and opportunity are good reasons to offer. Do not focus on remuneration (salary):

e.g. "Because it pays more" is not a good answer but stating "The position offers more responsibility, challenges and interesting opportunities"

e.g. "Time management used to be a bit of a problem for me – not that I was always late but rather that I often took on too many tasks to complete at once. I went on a time management course and learned to apply a simple prioritisation and scheduling plan to all my projects. Since doing that I find I always get things done on time."

Why should we hire you?

Answer this question thoroughly, focusing on how you will apply your personality traits, skills and experience to the job. A good answer focuses on how you can benefit the company. You can best do this by researching a company before the interview and be ready with examples of how your skills, talent, etc., might help to tackle some of the challenges faced by that particular company. Do you have a unique selling point that will make you stand out from the other candidates?

Why do you want to leave your present job?

You could state that you want a more challenging position, higher salary or more responsibility. Don't mention personal conflicts with your present boss or bad mouth your current employer or co-workers as this will harm your chances of being offered the job. Keep in mind that interviewers have a preference for people who are looking for more challenging positions or responsibility because it shows drive, ambition and motivation.

Why do you want to work for this company?

Don't answer this question with, "because you advertised for an X at monster.com". Your answer should state a passion to work for the organisation because of the characteristics of it that most appeal to you.

e.g. because it is on the cutting edge of technology" or "because you are the industry leader".

The research you do on the company to prepare for the interview should help you to prepare an answer to a

question like this. Give specific examples that prove you have carried out your research, e.g. *because you have a comprehensive training programme that includes x, y, z.*

Do you work better alone or as part of a team?

If the position you're applying for requires you to spend lots of time alone, then of course, you should state that you like to work alone and vice versa. Never sound too extreme one way or another. Don't say that you don't like working with people and would "die if you had to work with others" nor that you "will go crazy if you're left alone for five minutes"! A healthy balance between the two is always the best choice. If you have previous experience illustrating the fact that you can work alone or with other then offer it.

e.g. You might state that in previous jobs that you spent a significant amount of time alone while travelling, or that you have learned how to get along well with people in the workplace by working in numerous team projects.

What did your last supervisor criticise most about your performance?

A good way to answer this question is to offer an example that is not very important or not directly related to the position you're applying for. For example, telling the interviewer that you were constantly criticized for coming to work an hour late is not a good idea but revealing a minor criticism and telling the interviewer what steps you took to improve yourself is a good way to answer the question. In fact if you can state that you have already solved the problem and received a higher mark on a subsequent performance review, then say so.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Assume that you will be promoted two or three times in five years, so your answer should state that you see yourself working at whatever job is two or three levels above the job in which you are applying for. Avoid brash statements such as that you will be "running the company" or "sitting in your shoes" in five years! You might want to add that you understand your promotions will be earned through hard work and that you don't assume you will be promoted on the basis of the number of years you've spent with the company. You could also mention that you would like to be building on existing skills, develop new ones, hold a position of more responsibility, etc.

Why have you changed jobs so frequently?

Reasons for job hopping should always be based on your past employers failure to challenge you or failure to give you enough opportunity for advancement and not on the fact that your past employers were incompetent or unfair. Make sure you point out any jobs you did hold for a long time. Mention that your current goal is long-term employment and back that up with any proof you have to want job stability such as that you have just taken on a mortgage, etc. If the job you're applying for offers you the challenges and environment you were always looking for, then say so.

Are you willing to relocate?

If relocating wasn't an issue the interviewer wouldn't be asking the question. Therefore the only acceptable answer is "yes". If you answer in the negative you will not get the job. If you really don't want to relocate, then perhaps you shouldn't accept the job if it is subsequently offered to you. If you aren't sure, then ask

questions about relocation, such as when it is likely to occur, where you will relocate to and would it involve a promotion.

Are you willing to travel?

If travelling wasn't part of the job, the interviewer wouldn't be asking this question. Therefore, the only acceptable answer is "yes". If you are willing to travel, answer yes and give some illustrations of work travel you have done but if you do not want to travel, you should find out more about this aspect of the job before accepting the position, such as how much travel will be involved, where will you be travelling to and for how long.

Are you willing to work overtime?

If this wasn't an aspect of the job, the interviewer wouldn't be asking this question. Therefore, the only acceptable answer is "yes" if you want to be considered for the job. If your past jobs involved overtime therefore, this would be a good time to point this out to the interviewer.

Have you ever been fired or asked to resign?

When answering this question keep in mind that many people have been fired at least once in their lifetime and it is almost always due to a personality conflict with the boss or co-workers. Answer this question honestly but without attacking your former boss or colleagues and also without sounding defensive or bitter. If you have been fired more than once don't mention this unless asked specifically: "How many times have you been fired?" I have read self-help books, attended training courses about..... getting along with others.... improving my time management...etc. Also, point out any past jobs you held when you got along well with your boss and co-workers or received good performance reviews or a promotion.

How long have you been searching for a job? Why haven't you received a job offer? Why have you been unemployed for so long?

It is always better to answer this question with "I just started looking" but this is not always possible, particularly if your CV indicates you've been unemployed for the last six months. If you can't hide the fact that your job search has been taking a while, then state you're being selective about whom you will work for. Of course, stating this might prompt the interviewer to ask "What offers have you turned down?" which could land you in hot water if you haven't actually received any job offers. Don't make up answers, be honest in your responses. A poor economy and a crowded market are good reasons one might have trouble finding a job. Offer examples of how you have filled your time productively, job hunting timetable, training courses, volunteering.

What previously held job do you consider to be your favourite and why?

This question may be asked to determine if you enjoy the type of work the position you're applying for involves. Therefore the answer to this question should include mention of a job that requires the same or similar work that you will be required to perform in the new job. If you do not have a previous job where in you performed similar tasks, then offer an answer that suggests that you are well-suited to and enthusiastic about such a position.

Do you consider yourself to be organised? Do you manage your time well?

The interviewer wants to hear about your work skills concerning time and task management. A model answer might be:

e.g. "I manage my time very well, I routinely complete tasks ahead of schedule, for example..."

You could expand on this by offering the interviewer proof of your organisational skills by telling him about a major project that you organised and completed in time or mention the fact that you consistently received an outstanding grade on previous performance reviews regarding your time management. Don't reveal to the interviewer that you are habitually late or that you complete tasks at the very last minute.

Would you choose the same career if you could start over again?

How you answer this question depends on whether or not you are trying to win a job related to your career history or are trying to enter a new field. No matter how much you despise the career you originally chose, do not admit this fact to the interviewer because it conveys negativity. Mention what you learned from the previous career, e.g. experience, knowledge, transferable skills, time to reflect, etc. If, of course, you are trying to enter a new field, tell the interviewer that you would choose the field you're now trying to enter if you had it to do all over again.

Why have you stayed with the same employer for so long?

Just as moving from job to job too frequently may affect a potential employer's perception of you, so can staying with the same employer for too long – particularly if you've never been promoted during your tenure. Your answer should state something about the variety the position offered, the training you undertook, that it gave you the opportunity to work successfully with many people both inside and outside of the organisation, including different managers and co-workers, as well as interacting regularly with various types of organisations and customers.

Do you consider yourself to be a risk-taker?

How you answer this question depends on the type of company it is. If it is a start-up company or within a highly-competitive industry, then they may be looking for those more willing to take risks. If you believe the company is this type, then offer an example of a risk you've taken in business. If the company is a well-established industry leader, risk takers are not as highly valued. Of course, no company is looking for employees who are foolish in their risk taking behaviour, so a good rule of thumb is to place yourself somewhere in the middle, giving examples which show you are a calculated risk taker - neither too foolish nor overly cautious.

Would your present employer be surprised to know you're job hunting?

Never answer this question with negative information such as "My current boss wouldn't be surprised in the least to hear I'm leaving since he's been trying to shove me out the door for years!" Always tell the interviewer that you are happy with your current employer and job but are simply looking to stretch your wings and take on a job with more challenge, opportunities for advancement, higher salary, etc.

How well do you handle change?

The only acceptable answer is one stating you handle change very well. Don't just make this claim; offer an

example of how well you coped with a major change that took place in your work environment. A common shake-up occurs when your employer brings in new automation or changes its culture. In any event, tell the interviewer what you did to cope or adapt to a change that occurred with a previous employer and this should be a major change, not a minor.

What salary are you expecting?

You should do some research before the job interview so that you can suggest a realistic figure, commensurate with the level of skills, experience and qualifications that you have gained to date. If you are a recent graduate you can research the average salary. Contact recruitment agencies for their most recent statistics, you might also look at salary details in job advertisements in the press for similar posts and even 'Google' salary information on the web.

If you can find out exactly what people earn in the company for whom you are interviewing then do so. You do not have to state a salary that is at or below what you know the company is offering - if you believe you are worth more, stand firm. If you feel that they are reticent or taken aback by your response then you can qualify your answer. State that you are making the estimate on the basis of the skills and qualifications that you have and also, informed by statistics on average salaries for this field, but that you are very willing to negotiate where the right job is on offer. Don't forget that many organisations may appear to offer a low salary but the benefits package may be of equal or more value to you than a few more euros in your wallet. For example, salaries in the hospitality sector are held to be low by comparison with manufacturing for example but companies often provide uniforms, all meals on duty, preferential rates on stay in other hotels, gym membership, etc. so make sure that you are aware of the total package. In addition, initial salaries often rise after the probation period and in line with your performance on the job so you might ask how soon appraisals happen and what type of performance management system the company operates.

How do you resolve disputes with co-workers? How do you handle conflicts in the workplace?

Unless it's the truth, don't claim that you have never had a dispute with anyone! If you have no work-related examples to draw from then consider something from college or your personal life that you are happy to share. Describe the dispute in objective terms and state specifically why the dispute arose, what you did to handle it and what the outcome was. Make sure you mention that you listened to the other person's point of view. If the outcome was not as you wanted it to be, tell the panel what you learned from the experience.

Who was your favourite boss and why? Who was your least favourite boss and why?

These are two of the most difficult interview questions to answer unless you understand what the interviewer wants to hear and if you realise that you can answer both questions with basically the same answer. Employers are looking for employees, who are interested in contributing to the company, improving their job skills and making a contribution. So instead of insulting or demeaning your past bosses by telling the interviewer that he was e.g. "always hogging all the credit" or was "totally incompetent", state that you wished he had offered you more feedback about your job performance, provided you with more job training or challenged you more by providing you with more opportunities to show what you can do etc.. You can answer the question "who was your favourite boss and why?" using the same answer, phrased in another way.

e.g. "John O'Dwyer in Diageo was my favourite boss because he offered me lots of feedback about my job performance, taught me almost everything I know about marketing and gave me plenty of opportunities to prove myself by giving me very challenging projects to complete".

Never put down your past employers or blame them for anything in a demeaning or insulting way, as this will come across as petty.

What could you have done to improve your relationship with your least favourite boss?

Again refrain from stating negativities about your former boss. Put a positive spin on your answer by telling the interviewer that, if you had it to all over again (with reference to the example given above) that you would have requested more feedback regarding your performance and requested to be assigned more projects, etc.

What book are you currently reading (or what was the last book you read)?

It is ideal if you can give an example of one that is on a subject related to your career or the sector that you are applying for a job in, in general. For example, if you're a sales person, you might tell the reader you're currently in the middle of Dale Carnegie's "How to win friends and influence people". Or if that seems too much of a cliché, offer the title of a book on improving your time management, languages, leadership skills, etc. Do not lie and claim to be reading one or two acceptable books that you have never read as you may be asked to discuss them if the subject is brought up during an interview. The interviewer might ask you how the book is helping you (what you have learned from it), so have an answer ready. Some interviewers will try to determine if you read regularly by asking you for titles of 3, 4 or 5 books you've read this year so be prepared.

What is the last movie/play/concert that you saw/attended?

Replying that you "don't have time to go out as you are completely devoted to your job" may be seen as glib, even if the interviewer believes you! Interviewers are looking for well-rounded people who enjoy healthy activities, including relaxation and entertainment and will expect you to have a wide range of cultural interests. Have some examples ready to discuss that you are knowledgeable about – it doesn't have to be something very recent but it's preferable that it be from within the last year at least.

Are you considering offers from other employers?

It is recommended that you NOT disclose any other offers you have received or discuss the companies with whom you have interviewed. Therefore, a good answer to this question is to state that you have not had offers from other companies as you wanted to focus all your efforts onto being recruited by this firm first. If you have reason to believe that you will have a better chance of getting the job offer if you disclose other information, then do so.

When can you start?

It is customary for most employees to give between one week's and one month's notice to their current employer, depending on their tenure. Those in management positions are expected to give longer notice. You will not earn points if you express disrespect toward your current employer by telling the interviewer you plan to quit your present job without giving sufficient notice. He will assume you will show his company the

same amount of disrespect. It is also a good idea to tell the interviewer you plan to start learning about your new position/employer in your leave time (i.e. reading employee training manuals, etc.) Be enthusiastic. If you know that you have a holiday booked within a few weeks or months of potentially starting with the employer it is fairest to advise them of this up front as opposed to waiting until you are in the job. A good employer will accommodate the right candidate or ask you to change your holiday if they need you to and it will then be up to you to make the decision.

Why did you decide you attend X College? Are you happy with your choice?

Always state that you are happy with your choice, even if you aren't/weren't. It's not advisable to state "it was the only place that I was offered" and avoid making negative statements about the programme, the college, the staff, etc., either. Expand by describing what specifically you like/liked most about the institution and/or your course of study, skills you gained, etc.

What factors did you consider in choosing your major specialisation?

A good answer is to state you have always wanted to become X since Y time and selected your major specialism accordingly. If you're changing career fields or applying for a position unrelated to your major, tell the interviewer you were interested in that subject at the time but circumstances have taken you down a new path. Of course, you should put a positive spin on also stating that you have benefited tremendously by changing careers (learned new things, made you more hardworking, etc.)

FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORY ROLES

Have you ever fired anyone?

The interviewer is not usually looking for you to express either too much indifference or too much sympathy for those you have had to fire. Describe the incident specifically and in objective terms. If you have no example then describe the steps you would take if such an occasion arose, stating that such action would only be taken as a last resort when such a procedure had been totally exhausted.

How do you motivate your employees?

There is no simple way to motivate all people due to the vast number of personality types and situations in which people work. The best answer is one that tells the interviewer that each employee must be uniquely motivated. Have a bank of examples to demonstrate your motivational/leadership style.

What is your commitment to this job?

A typical response would be an answer avowing a deep commitment to the company and the job; however, a better answer would be to state that your commitment will grow as you get to know the company and people in it.

Aren't you overqualified for this job?

Note the employers often don't like to hire 'overqualified' people because they fear that they won't stay around long. Admit that you may be but emphasise the positive. Emphasise the skills that you have to bring to the job, what you hope to learn and how you hope to develop and re-iterate your enthusiasm for working in this particular organisation.

Are you opposed to doing a lot of routine work?

Try to assure the interviewer you will embrace all aspects of the job and that routine work is to be expected in every position that one holds.

e.g. "I know this position requires a lot of routine work but I don't expect to start at the top. I'm willing to start at the bottom and prove myself. I expect that my responsibilities will become more challenging as I demonstrate that I am capable of taking them on."

Do you have any questions?

This question is usually the last one an interviewer will ask as it is a logical way to end the interview. Never go to an interview without preparing questions to ask beforehand. Avoid asking about salary, vacation time, employee benefits, etc. until you have asked a number of other questions that demonstrate your interest in working for the company. Be careful not to ask questions that the answers to these are in their publicity material which you should have read as part of your preparation for the interview.

You could ask questions that show your interest in the role, questions regarding information you found when conducting research about the company or questions that occurred around topics that came up during the course of the interview.

It is also an opportunity to add something that you forgot to say previously in the interview, for example:
Earlier you asked me about my leadership experience, and I forgot to tell you that I was class representative last year. For this role, I was responsible for ...

Being asked if you have any questions is an indication that you still have a couple of minutes of interview time left. If you find that all your questions have been answered throughout the course of the interview then say so and use the time to re-iterate your unique selling points, your enthusiasm for the post and what you feel that you are the best candidate for the job.

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