

# 25

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

AND HOW TO  
ANSWER THEM  
BRILLIANTLY



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Everything you need to get your dream job

## Introduction

So you have found your dream job; all that stands between you and the perfect life is the job interview. It is normal to be a little nervous before you go to meet your new employers, nerves are good as they keep your performance sharp, but you do need to be able to keep them under control.

The best way to control interview nerves is to prepare in advance, know every inch of your CV, review your work history so that you can use it to refer to when answering questions, and finally use this book to prepare for the interview by reading through our list of the 50 most common interview questions and suggested answers.

Get a close friend or family member to ask you the questions so that you can practice answering them out loud – remember to refer back to any relevant experience you have when giving your answers and make sure they are relevant to the job you are applying for.

Practice a few times in the week before your interview so that you feel confident that you can answer the questions without stumbling. Remember not to speak too fast or gabble, speak steadily and give the interviewer time to ask extension questions if they want.

We have broken this book up into different sections, each covering a theme which interviewers often choose to focus on. They may not ask all of the questions in exactly the same way as we set them out here, but you can be certain that they will ask something very similar from each of these themes.

- Chapter 1: Questions about you
- Chapter 2: Questions about your professional qualifications and work history
- Chapter 3: Questions about the new job
- Chapter 4: Questions about salary and your plans for the future

Practicing beforehand means that you will ace the answers in the interview. We have also given some sample answers for you to adapt to your own situation.

Good luck!

## Chapter 1: Questions about you

### ***Question 1: Tell me about yourself...***

This open-ended question is a favourite of interviewers because it tells them a lot about you as a person. It will teach them quite a bit about how you approach life and work.

The interviewer will not want you to spend the whole interview on this question so think about a concise structure that demonstrates you and your personality in a few minutes. Your answer has to be snappy and pique the interviewer's interest in you. Take the time to think about how you can distil the essence of your CV in a few sentences. Highlight your experience for the job and the benefits it will bring to the interviewer.

Example Answer:

*"I am an experienced, dedicated and inspirational teacher of history. During my 5 years in my current position, I have increased the number of children studying history at X School by 45% and brought the average grade at GCSE from a B to an A – we now achieve 85% A\*-A grades compared with 65% when I arrived."*

### ***Question 2: What are your greatest weaknesses?***

This is the flip side of the coin to the previous question. You will need to spend a similar amount of time thinking about how to answer the potential question you will get about your greatest weaknesses. Do not feel that you need to use this question to beat yourself up and be negative – this is actually an opportunity to paint yourself in a good light. There are a few possible approaches to answering this question.

One tactic is to give a professional weakness that has absolutely no bearing on the position you are interviewing for, if you do this make sure that you show that you have worked on this weakness to improve your performance. Your answers should always show that you have addressed any weakness.

Example Answer:

*“I used to find it very difficult to speak in public, I love one to one communication and my clients always praise me for my communication skills, but I always had a feeling of dread if I had to speak to large groups. I took some courses to give me confidence in this area – I don’t like doing it, and it’s not part of my job but I know I could do it if I have to.”*

The best way to answer the question, however, is to turn a negative into a positive.

Example Answer:

*“I am a compulsive volunteer – I love my work and I always want to do more; I find it very hard to say no to more projects – I have found that every time I have moved on from a position I have added at least 10-15% to my job description. In my first job I took too much on too fast so now I have learned that, if I have an urgent deadline and new work comes in, always to check which project needs to be prioritised.”*

If the tone of the interview allows it, you can end the answer with a bit of a joke.

Example Answer:

*“Sadly, I would say that my greatest weakness is baking – even the dog refuses to eat my Victoria sponge.”*

### **Question 3: Do you work well with other people?**

The only acceptable answer is, of course, yes. Use this question as an opportunity to talk about your work and leadership style. You will have an idea, from the job description, of the working environment that you are moving to so make sure that your answer highlights skills and competencies that they are looking for. Use examples to show the interviewer that you can not only talk about how you work with other people but how you have put that into practice.

Example Answer:

*“I believe in working as a team, which means supporting others in their work. In my current role I have been mentoring two trainees, we meet for lunch once a week to talk about what they have been doing and how they can improve. They also come to me for specific guidance on projects they are doing. Of course it is not just trainees, I am always happy to be a professional sounding board for other people in the team and I often approach others in the same way.”*

### **Question 4: What motivates you?**

This is not a trick question – the interviewer will genuinely want to know the answer but it can be hard to think of an answer on the spot so it is worth spending some time thinking about how you would like to answer this.

Example Answer:

*“I am a very results and success orientated individual – I want to do and be the very best at my job. It really motivates me to see the results of my hard work. Last year we had a difficult period when one of our big clients went into administration. We pulled together as a team to increase sales to existing clients and find new ones – I got a real kick out of seeing our numbers grow when we thought they would not.”*

### **Question 5: What is the most outrageous thing you have got away with at work?**

The only correct answer to this is that you never play high jinks or fool around at work. Then give an example of something you have got away with in your personal life – keep it light and friendly.

Example Answer:

*“I don’t like to fool around with work – it is a place for serious business not fun and if I make a mistake I work hard to put it right. When I was a kid, I injected some water into a banana with a syringe from a safe travel pack because I wanted to see what would happen. It exploded all over my mum when she tried to eat it. She just thought it was ‘one of those things’.”*

Under no circumstances joke about anything illegal. If you do have prior convictions on your record, you should be honest and upfront about them, say you have learned your lesson and regret what happened.

### **Question 6: What are you most often criticised for?**

An interviewer asking this question will want to work out how sensitive you are and whether you handle criticism well. Many interviewees will answer ‘Being a perfectionist’. This answer is very glib and runs the risk of sounding both arrogant and rehearsed so try to think of a different way

to answer the question without giving the impression that your work is hopeless. You could use an example from the past or an example from your personal life. However you choose to answer you should show how you have addressed the criticism.

Example Answer:

*“When I just started out, I hated having to do the billing every month – well to be honest who doesn’t, it is time consuming and I used to put it off. A senior colleague came and explained that if we did not bill, our clients would not pay and that would cause cash flow problems, the billing paid our salaries. After that I looked at it differently, it is still a tedious job but one that is very necessary – I now give it just as much attention as my client work or persona development.”*

### **Question 7: What do you do in your spare time?**

Be honest in your response to this – you don’t want to say you are a keen sailor if you get seasick at the drop of a hat. You might end up being asked to crew the company yacht in a competition. Equally don’t bring up anything illegal – a company will not hire you if you say your enduring passion is for dog fighting or badger baiting. Think about what hobbies you have that paint you in a positive light and potentially bring transferable skills to the office.

Example Answer:

*“I lived in Germany for a year and became quite fluent. I like to keep up the language so I go to the German Film club at the local university once a month and go bowling with my German friend once a week when we speak only in German.’ Or ‘I have a real thing about cryptic crosswords, I do them on the train into work in the morning, I find they relax me and set me up for the day, they are also really good for promoting lateral thinking.”*

### **Question 8: How many hours do you work, on average, every week?**

This is another tricky question and for the same reasons. Don’t be drawn into giving a specific answer.

Example Answer:

*“It varies from week to week – I work as many hours as I need to get the job done.”*

## Chapter 2: Questions about your professional qualifications and work history

### **Question 9: What is your work philosophy?**

Have a look at the company's values statement on their website. This should give you an idea of what is important to them so you can try to tailor your answer to fit as closely as possible.

Example Answer:

*"Integrity and respect are at the core of who I am and what I do. I work closely with a lot of very dedicated and inspirational people. I try to learn as much as I can from them."*

### **Question 10: Do your current employers know you are here? If not, where do they think you are?**

Don't say your employers know where you are if they do not (your boss may be friends with someone at the company) but remember it is not a good idea to let your interviewer know if you have been economical with the truth to your current boss – you will be seen as untrustworthy. If your employers do know you are interviewing great, if not best to take a holiday day.

### **Question 11: Have you ever had any problems with a boss?**

This is another question with which you need to take a lot of care – don't be negative or, if you are talking about a genuine problem try to turn it into a positive.

Example Answer:

*"I have never really had any particularly bad problems with a boss. A few years ago, I worked for someone who liked to start on time while I prefer to come in early to have time to concentrate on difficult tasks before the office gets busy. It took us a bit of time to synchronise our days so that we could get mutual work done at a time that was convenient for us both, but we sorted it out, by the end we had a very good working relationship."*

### **Question 12: How do you work with people who do not like you?**

This is another question that allows an interviewer to establish whether or not you are the type of person who will fit in to their corporate culture and environment. You should be honest but upbeat and positive.

Example Answer:

*“I get on well with most people. Of course there are always going to be possibilities for character clashes in any environment, I have never experienced this at work but I have in my personal life and I have just been polite but not engaged with the person in any great detail. If I did have to work with someone who did not like me I would leave personal feelings behind and work with them in the same way that I would anyone else. I would hope that anyone professional would do the same thing.”*

### **Question 13: Why is there a gap in your CV?**

If there are gaps in your CV prospective employers will want you to explain why. It is important that you are honest about facts that could be checked – you should never lie in job interviews (or ever) in any event.

Example Answer:

*“My former employers had to restructure and my position was one of the ones selected for redundancy. After I left the office, I decided to take three months to go to Southeast Asia and see the sights – something I had always wanted to do but never had time for. When I got back, I did a short computer course to update my skills and am now ready to start work again. I think the time away has given me the chance to do some amazing things but also to process my feelings about my redundancy and allow me to approach work with a fresh mind.”*

### **Question 14: How do you deal with friction between colleagues?**

This question will usually be directed at people who are interviewing for management positions – the interviewer will want to know that you are capable of dealing with problems. Tell them how you would handle it using examples from your previous experience.



Example Answer:

*“Last year there were two people on my team who did not work well together – I noticed that there was some friction between them and had a quiet one on one talk with each of them – this confirmed that they each felt that the other was not pulling their weight and were resentful of others picking up the slack. After I talked with them individually, I decided to bring them into a meeting together to mediate between them. This got them talking and helped them understand how the other person worked. I explained that I had no problems with either of their performances and that I was fully aware of the work that they were each doing. They will never be good friends, but they work together without friction now and can be polite to each other at work.”*

### **Question 15: What is your biggest professional failure?**

In the ideal world you will be able to say that you have never experience professional failure but take care with this – some interviewers use this question to establish whether someone has the necessary resilience for the role they want to fill. If you don't have any professional experiences of failure, take an example from your private life and show how you overcame it. Pick something relatively small and minor – a failure to complete a run meant you trained harder and completed it the next time not your 5-year battle with infertility. It is better to use a relatively minor professional failure if you can.

Example Answer:

*“When I just started in my first job, I was part of a team working really hard on a tender for a big contract. Our company did not get the tender – I was really upset but my boss explained that you have to be able to accept that you win some you lose some; the important thing is to get feedback on why you lost out. In that instance it turns out that we were slightly undercut on price – our product was better but marginally more expensive. We made sure to really highlight the value for money our superior product offered over the long term in future pitches. It was a valuable lesson for me.”*

### **Question 16: What decisions do you find difficult to make?**

This is not a question with a right or wrong answer – it is another opportunity to use your previous experience to impress your interviewer and show them that you have the right

experience and capabilities for the job. Take some time in the week before to think about how you will answer this question and the examples you will use to back up this answer. Make sure that you show that, while some decisions are difficult, you are capable of making them and that you will be decisive even when it is hard.

Example Answer:

*“During my time at Y Corp we had to restructure our team and let some people go. It is never nice going into work and speaking with people knowing that you are evaluating their performance and making a decision about their future while they know nothing. We made the decision based on how well people were performing. When I called people into my office to tell them they would have to leave I felt bad. I made sure that I gave them the very best possible reference and offered to support and mentor them through the interview and hiring process.”*

## Chapter 3: Questions about the new job

### ***Question 17: How long do you think it would take you to settle into a new company?***

This is a question that you are particularly likely to get if you have been with your current employer for a long time. Even if you have been with the same company, you will probably have made changes in your professional life so reference those in your answer.

Example Answer:

*“It is true that I have been with X Co. for a long time. I started out in the Manchester office and worked there for a few years before moving to the Birmingham office to take up a promotion. The culture of the two locations was completely different – we had a different structure to the day and worked with a different type of client. I made the effort to get to know everyone from the boss to the newest secretary and find out how the office worked. Some things worked better and more efficiently in Birmingham, and it was good to learn a new way of doing things. As it happened our billing procedure in Manchester was more efficient so at my first review I brought this up with my team leader. We decided to implement the new system on my team and then through the office as a whole. I would aim to do the same here – find out how things work, get to know people and introduce change if and when appropriate.”*

### ***Question 18: What do you think you will find the least challenging about this job?***

You have two options you can pick something relatively small and simple and keep your answer short or you can answer it in much the same way as you would ‘your greatest strength’ type question. However, be careful as this can be a bit of a trick question. Don’t fall into the trap of complaining about routine work or be blasé about an aspect of the job that will, in fact, be a challenge or your interviewer will think you are not serious about the potential job.

Example Answer:

*“Every firm has their own billing method and strategy. Billing is important for cash flow so I would like to get a handle on how this is managed here as quickly as possible. Once I know how it is done here the task should be relatively simple, if time-consuming, to complete at month end.”*

### **Question 19: How are we better than your current employer?**

This question is a trap designed to see whether you will be willing to criticise your current employer. Don't fall into it; be positive about both your current employer and the hiring firm.

Example Answer:

*“My current company is an excellent place to work, and I have truly enjoyed my time there. We have been concentrating on building our growth in home markets and this is slightly different to your emphasis on European growth. I have heard some very good things about your new X product, all the reviews say that it is likely to be a market leader.”*

### **Question 20: Why should we not hire you?**

This question is very similar to ‘your greatest weakness?’. You have to be quite careful when answering this question and it is worth spending some preparation time devoted to it. Think about the corporate culture of the company you are interviewing at and the type of qualities they are looking for in the job description. You can highlight these and say that they should not hire you if they do not want these specific qualities.

Example Answer:

*“I flourish in an environment where I get to interact with people – I have strong relationships with colleagues, superiors and clients. If you are not looking for someone with a personality driven style of work you should not hire me.’ Or ‘I am a perfectionist; I make the time in my schedule to check my work meticulously in order to make sure that it is 100% correct and I expect my team to do the same. If attention to detail is not something that is seen as important, I would probably not be a good fit for the job.”*

### **Question 21: What would you do if you found out the company was doing something illegal?**

Employers who ask this question are mostly not asking because they want you to engage in or condone illegal activity, nor do they want an overzealous whistle-blower. They want to see whether you are willing to take a tough ethical call and do the right thing. Most companies and professional associations will have a process to handle any suspicion of illegality and you should be prepared to invoke this.

Example Answer:

*“I am sure that no one at X Corp engages in illegal activity. However, I know that it is important that we are all aware of what to do if something or someone goes wrong. If I had concerns about potentially illegal activity or behaviour, I would bring this to the attention of either my immediate supervisor or the relevant director depending on who would be the most appropriate person in the circumstances. I would then assist them in whatever way they required to investigate the concern. If they did not take any action and concerns remained, I would escalate further. If I still had concerns, I would need to consider informing the appropriate people outside of the company, but I cannot imagine a situation where this would become necessary as I am sure my concerns would be properly dealt with.”*

### **Question 22: What questions do you have for us?**

An interview is a two-way street, and you are checking out the company every bit as much as they are checking you. Do not go overboard on your questions but prepare a list in advance so that you can ask targeted, relevant questions that will help you make up your mind whether to accept the job if it is offered. Do not, at this stage, make any enquiries about the salary or benefits of the position.

Example Answers:

“What are the three main priorities for this job – what will you expect me to deliver in the first few months?”

“Who will I be reporting to, will there be a chance to meet during this interview process?”

“Why has this position become open – where is the previous incumbent moving on to?”

“What is the office culture like? Is this a good and exciting place to work?”

## Chapter 4: Questions about salary and your plans for the future

### ***Question 23: What are you looking for in this job?***

Look at the job specification and tailor your answer to the opportunities offered by this job.

Example Answer:

*“I enjoy my current job a great deal, but I feel that I am getting to the stage where I need new challenges and opportunities. You are looking to bring new products to new markets, and I feel that my track record in opening up the widget market in South America is a great foundation on which to build on and expand my experience with the opportunities you are offering.”*

### ***Question 24: Are you interviewing anywhere else?***

You should be careful answering this question – you don’t want to appear desperate to leave your current employer at all costs, nor do you want to appear unmarketable. If you were specifically requested to apply for the position you can say you enjoy your current work but were asked to apply and wanted to explore the opportunity. The best answers are fairly short and not too detailed.

Example Answer:

*“I am very interested in the use of music as therapy, and I have been speaking to a few companies that are investigating this concept. I am particularly interested in your company because....”*

### ***Question 25: What are your expectations with regards to remuneration?***

This is a difficult question to answer – pitch too low and you are talking yourself out of some much-deserved income. Pitch too high and you might talk yourself out of a job. Make sure that you do your research before going to the interview – what is the industry average for this type of role? Is there a decent benefits package? Are stock options common?

Think about what the minimum figure you would be willing to move for would be and add about 10-20%, this gives you some room for negotiation.

Alternatively, if the interviewer is receptive you can turn the question around.

Example Answer:

*"I am sure that we can come to an agreement on salary terms – what are your usual salary parameters for this level of job?"*



## Conclusion

Now you have read through this book you will have a good idea of the types of questions interviewers will ask you and how to go about answering them. You will have noticed a few common themes that run through almost all of our suggested answers:

### *Honesty*

Everyone exaggerates their experience a little bit and it is absolutely fine to talk yourself up; most companies will not want to hire diffident personnel, but don't tell lies. The worst-case scenario is that the interviewers run a thorough check and find out about the lies or, they hire you on the strength of something you claimed and then fire you without a reference when they realise that you told a lie.

### *Preparation*

There is no substitute for good preparation. This book can help you ace your interview but only if you do your homework. If you are reading this half an hour before you go in it is too late. Spend the week before you go to interview running through the job specification and questions you are likely to be asked. This will allow you to target your answers appropriately.

### *Research*

Good research goes hand in hand and is a key part of good preparation. Learn as much as you can about the company interviewing you and the people you will be speaking to. This will allow you to shine in the interview and make you stand out from the competition. Depending on the role you are interviewing for you may want to print out copies of their financial statements, mission statement, report to shareholders or other relevant documents so that you can refer to them when giving example answers or when asking your own questions.

When you arrive at the interview remember the following and you will be fine:

### ***Poise***

Make sure that you are well groomed for the interview. As a rule of thumb dress one level smarter than the industry standard. If you are interviewing at an accountants a suit is appropriate, if at a modern tech company where dress down is common a blazer and tie for men or a smart dress for women is probably more appropriate than jeans. Polish your shoes and make sure your hair and fingernails are clean and freshen your breath before you go in.

### ***Politeness***

Arrive no less than 5 and no more than 10 minutes early to the interview and be polite to everyone from security guard and receptionist up. Have spare copies of your CV, published articles, portfolio etc. to hand over to the interviewer if necessary. When the interview is finished shake hands firmly and thank the interviewer for their time.

### ***Calm***

Keep your voice low and pleasantly modulated, don't gabble or shriek, remember to breathe.

You will be fine – good luck with your interview!

## Feedback

If you have any feedback on this ebook we would love to hear from you.

- How can it be improved?
- Are there any errors that you have spotted?
- What else would you like to see included?
- Are there other job and career related topics you would like covering in another ebook?

Please direct any comments, good or bad, to: [contact@jobsearchbible.com](mailto:contact@jobsearchbible.com)