

Most Common Interview Questions

While you can't anticipate every question asked in an interview, there are certain questions that come up time and time again and should be prepared for. I have outlined below the most popular questions, have highlighted what the employer is *really* asking and given some guidelines to help you prepare a strong, punchy response.

Tell me about your self

This question is often used as an ice-breaker and as a way of putting you at your ease at the beginning of the interview. You should keep the focus on your professional life, highlighting the skills and experience you have that most closely match this position. Keep your answer high level (you have plenty of time to give details later in the interview) and do not exceed two minutes. If used correctly, this is your opportunity to give your opening sales pitch and to influence the future direction of the interview.

Why did you apply to this position?

Employers are aware that in an economic downturn many people simply want a job, *any* job. From an employer's perspective, if a job applicant accepts a role for the wrong reasons, there is a strong chance that they will leave within a short timeframe. Consequently, you need to reassure the employer that your interest was aroused by *this specific* role - show how your experience is relevant and express your passion for both the job and the company.

What do you know about this company?

An employer wants to see proof that you are genuinely interested in working for their company and have taken the time to research what they do, where they are positioned in the market place and are aware of recent activities they have been involved in. Much of this information is available on line. Look at the corporate website, old newspaper articles and if appropriate go the company office to get their company accounts. The more senior the position, the more information you should seek. By gathering this information, you can use it to position yourself as a commercially aware individual with a strategic and pro-active approach.

What are your strengths?

As part of the recruitment process, the employer will have already identified the essential qualities required in a prospective employee and if you can demonstrate that your strengths compliment the job, you will immediately stand out from the crowd. The key competencies and skills will be outlined in the job specification and should guide you as to which strengths to focus on. Highlight three to four key strengths and have an example to back each one up.

What are your weaknesses?

A dreaded but surprisingly popular question. Many people feel uncomfortable admitting a weakness in interview but fear not, even employers don't expect perfection! In this question, an interviewer is really looking to see that you can learn from your mistakes and that you are continually looking to improve.

Where do you want to be in five years time?

The employer is looking for reassurance that your short to medium term plans are to remain in the company. Recruitment is an expensive exercise and an employer will be looking to get a strong “return on investment.” Indicate that you want to quickly get up to speed in your position, broaden your responsibilities and develop within the company.

Do you have any questions you would like to ask us?

At the end of a recruitment process, I always ask employers on what basis they have chosen their preferred candidate. Quite often if there is very little to differentiate the final shortlisted candidates, an employer will base their decision on the quality of questions asked. Questions can help differentiate you from the other job applicants. Possible questions to ask include “what do I need to do in order to exceed expectations in the first six months?” or “what changes would you like to see made over the next year by the person who takes this position?”

Conclusion

Practicing your responses to these questions will build your confidence before the interview and help you give a vibrant, polished performance. In next month’s article we will look at some of these questions in more detail and give guidelines on how to best structure your response.

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of *Interview Techniques*, a leading provider of interview coaching services. She has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with *Recruit Ireland* and the *Sunday Business Post*.

Go to: www.interviewtechniques.ie
Email: info@interviewtechniques.ie
Call: 01 676 8874