Interview Pack

Guidelines on preparing for your interview, including sample questions.

Careers Service, UCC
Preparation's what you need

Good preparation is essential, not only because you will come across better in interviews, but also because it's the best remedy by far for nerves.

Remind yourself

The first step to great preparation is to remind yourself what you are offering this potential employer. It may be a while since you filled in their application form so dig it out and look at the statements you made about yourself. Re-acquaint yourself with the fine details of your degree study. It's easy to forget most of what you studied and employers will be interested in hearing you talk intelligently about your course in some depth.

Research the company

Find out more about organisations. Have a look on the employer's website, and dig out any annual reports or company newsletters that might exist. If you can turn up something interesting from these sources or just by reading the newspapers, you will have an important advantage over other candidates.

Skills

Employers are also interested in the personal skills you can bring to the organisation so draw up a list of the ten or twelve skills and abilities you feel reasonably happy talking about. If you don't write it down you could easily forget it in the heat of the moment. For each skill, think of as many bits of evidence as you can that could persuade another person that you have what you claim you have.

What the employer wants

Most organisations these days are upfront with their selection criteria. Online or in their recruitment brochure, there will usually be a section called something like: 'What we expect from you'. If you have met them before at a careers fair or presentation, you would have been told what these essential attributes are. It does pay to find out what they place special emphasis on. If there is no brochure or online presence for the firm, check out similar firms or give them a call and ask for a job description.

Potential

All being well, the criteria that the employer is selecting against should be pretty similar to the list of skills you are offering. Don't be too dismayed if some of the things they seem to want are things you are uncertain about. After all, they're looking for potential. Just be confident demonstrating that you have recognised the importance of a particular criterion, you will impress the interviewer much more than just mumbling apologetically.

The main reason why it's absolutely critical that you know what an employer is looking for is because the interview will be based on these criteria. When you leave the room at the end of the interview, the interviewer completes an assessment sheet that lists each criterion with space to record how far you have demonstrated that you possess them.

Anticipating questions

Just to be clear, most questions are pretty predictable. It's not a pub quiz, so it's unlikely that you will be asked the capital of the Upper Volta or the tallest building in the world. There are only three areas that you will be asked about: your life, the job that you are applying for and the organisation that you hope will employ you...
Your life

You should be an expert on this first topic, even though it's sometimes difficult to remember what you did or thought last year. Look at your life as a series of key events and anticipate questions about each of them. Employers are most interested in your personal contribution, motivation and lessons learnt.

The job

They will always ask about the job you are applying for. If it's a marketing job, find out what marketing means in this particular organisation. Find out how your job will fit in to the bigger picture. Find out why your job is important to business. Look at competitor companies - do they market goods or services in a different way? Look too at career progression within the organisation. Where do you hope to be in five years' time?

The organisation

This deceptively simple and oh-so-predictable area of questioning can be a minefield. There are only two rules: never state the obvious and never slag off the competition. If you find yourself being interviewed by a member of the Ford Motor Company who asks, quite reasonably, why you are interested in Ford, don't say it's because Ford is a multinational car company with a fine reputation for training. First, they know that and second, they have probably heard that answer before.

Anticipate the question, think of the obvious answer and then avoid it. Now is your chance to impress the interviewer. Mention presentations, brochures, a chat you had with a recent recruit, something you read in the paper... Anything which shows you've put a bit of thought into it.

Three is the magic number

There are three questions that form the heart of every interview and you would be well advised to think about how to answer them.

1. Why should we employ you?
2. What interests you in this job?
3. Why are you applying to us?

Resist the temptation of learning answers parrot-fashion. Unless you have exceptional acting talent, you will come across poorly.

Practice!

However confident you are, it's never a waste of time to find another person to ask you questions and to hear yourself answer them. The careers service offers interview technique practice but, failing that, get a friend to do it. It won't be as rigorous as the real thing, but it will give you an opportunity to talk about yourself. Practising in a non-threatening environment will give you extra confidence when the big day dawns.

Attitude

Be positive

In interviews, however much you feel like moaning, you really ought to resist the temptation. No one likes sharing a room with a wet blanket. This doesn't mean you should talk about your life as a series of wonderful experiences where nothing ever goes wrong. But it is important that you highlight the positive benefits of failure and that, throughout the interview, you operate with your optimistic side showing.

Be enthusiastic

Enthusiasm has an infectious quality (as long as you don't go over the top) and it's one of the most natural ways to get someone to like you. If you find that nerves are making you rather buttoned-up at interview, try making a conscious effort to use the vocabulary of enthusiasm. Pepperering your answers with phrases like 'I
really enjoy this’ or ‘It was wonderful’ or ‘I had a great time’ can have the effect of dragging the enthusiasm quotient of the interview up to a healthy level. You may feel a bit self-conscious at first, but sometimes the words we choose to speak can affect the message we are giving.

**Be natural**

Your best chance at interview is to be yourself - it is, after all, the role you have spent all your life rehearsing. This doesn’t mean that you should give no thought to how you come across. We all behave differently in different situations - you need only compare what happens at Auntie Maud's tea party and a night on the town to realise that, entirely naturally, we adapt our behaviour to suit the circumstances. An interview is just another social setting. Be yourself, but imagine the time in your life when you have been happiest…

**Be honest**

If you start lying about what you've done, where you've been and the class of degree you're going to get, you will probably be found out. However, interviews are not confessionals so you would be ill-advised to tell the whole truth and nothing but. If asked about your weaknesses you don't have to mention that you can't get up in the morning. What you say should be the positive side of truthful. Try and keep the interviewer's mind focused on the most positive bits of your life

**Finding the right answers**

Here is a guide to those tough interview questions and how to answer them.

- **Would you say you were a follower or a leader?**
  Describe aspects of both - how you are capable of following directions and realise the importance of listening well and being part of a team effort, but you can also demonstrate leadership skills.

- **What do you consider your strengths/weaknesses?**
  Highlight several strengths you believe are relevant to the company and the job, but only one weakness. This weakness should not be closely related to the position for which you are being interviewed or it could be a technical skill that you can easily learn.

- **How well do you work under pressure?**
  Emphasise that you work as well under pressure as you do at any other time but that you prioritise tasks so that your workload is manageable.

- **How would you rate yourself from 1-10?**
  This question has a high discomfort factor and is better answered indirectly. Do not give a definite number. If you rate yourself as only a 7 they will question your ability and your confidence, if you say a 10 they will think you are arrogant with no room for growth or the right attitude to learn. Instead imply that you will strive to reach a 10.

- **Have you ever had a bad experience with an employer?**
  This is to test whether you can be discreet and tactful. Never talk negatively about a former employer even if you hated the sight of each other. Try to explain methods you use to deal with difficult people and emphasise the importance of flexibility, perseverance and good communication.

- **Are you applying to other jobs?**
  You need to show that you are sufficiently interested in that particular industry or field of work and that you have not just been applying for any job with ‘graduate’ in its description, so only mention jobs that are closely related to the one you’re at an interview for. You should also demonstrate a particular interest in and commitment to that company.
Different types of interview

The standard chronological interview

This is how all interviews used to be. A steady ramble through your life from school days (*When did you decide to study sociology at university?*) via the present day (*How is your project going?*) to the misty future (*And how do you see yourself progressing in our company?*). Based largely on your application form or CV, these interviews concentrate on getting you to explain, and expand upon, what you have written. Some interviews are still like this, but the trend is definitely towards something a bit more scientific.

The structured, criteria-based interview

Structured interviews are an attempt by employers to ensure interviews are as objective as possible. In structured interviews, all candidates are asked more or less the same questions. The logic behind the move towards structured interviews is simple: *Past performance is the best guide to future success*. The organisation thinks up the selection criteria and then, in an interview, examines whether or not you have evidence that you possess them to some degree or other. This kind of interview can be taxing, but at least if you have already worked out their selection criteria so you shouldn't be caught unawares.

Because the main purpose of the interview is to explore your life against six or so set criteria, it follows that the questions are more detailed and the questioning more persistent. It may be helpful to imagine the whole process as a series of levels, each one slightly deeper than the last:

- **Level one** The question Would you describe yourself as an organiser?
- **Level two** The evidence Be prepared to talk about several examples that illustrate each criterion, from different parts of your life.
- **Level three** The personal contribution Look at the significant events in your life and your personal contribution to each (your role, your feelings, what you learnt).
- **Level four** The general Be prepared to discuss criteria more generally. They may even relate criteria to current affairs, especially the business world (eg, what makes a good organiser, why is this important to businesses?)
- **Level five** The challenge Don't be shocked to have your ideas challenged. Despite what you may feel, they are not getting at you. Keep calm, look them in the eye and stick up for yourself.
- **Level six** Back to the start How else could you convince me that you're a good organiser?

Interviewers will generally visit each of these levels during the course of a structured interview, though not necessarily in this order.
The panel interview

Occasionally you will push open the door to discover two or more people waiting to interview you. As long as you remain calm, panel interviews are often easier and sometimes fairer than the normal one-to-one. If a solitary interviewer doesn't take a shine to you, you're sunk, but in a panel, the same person could be overruled by others.

The rules of engagement are similar to one-to-one interviews, but there are some specific points to make.

- If you don't know who to look at during the interview, the safest thing is to give most of the answer back to the person who asked the question, with a few brief glances to the others.
- Don't be thrown if one of the panel starts scribbling notes or looks bored. The bigger the panel, the greater the likelihood that some of its members are not experienced interviewers.
- You will sometimes be asked the same question twice. This isn't a cunning ruse to test the honesty of your earlier answer, it's a mistake. Someone wasn't paying attention. Just get on with answering the question (again).
- Sometimes it's helpful to know who's who on the panel. There may be a mixture of personnel specialists, technical and line managers. Knowing who they are, and therefore their special interests, can determine how you answer their individual questions.

Technical interviews

If you are applying for a technical or highly specialised position, the chances are you will get a first interview that contains a high proportion of technical questions. It's not unusual for interviewers to reach under the table, bring out a device and ask you to explain how it works. They could show you a wiring diagram or a line of computer code and expect instant analysis. Even if they don't resort to visual aids, they will quiz you in depth about your course. There are a few things to look out for.

- Most final year students forget what they studied in previous years. Make a big effort to remember. It's really embarrassing, after having listed your course details on your application form, to waffle unconvincingly on about a second year project you barely remember.
- If you have any project work, vacation experience or whatever that is particularly relevant, produce a short digest of the information and take it with you to the interview. You can use it to illustrate your answers or you can leave it with the interviewer when you finish.
- Even though it may be a technical interview, they will still be looking at other, more personal, skills. There aren't many jobs that require only technical skills.
JOB DESCRIPTION
Job Content, Day to Day Activities
/ Personality traits required for this Job

Q. Personality
   Work experience / job skills
   Academic progression – why?
   Company / Job on offer - why?
   Salary / Conditions

MATCH

RESEARCH COMPANY

Products / Services / New Ventures / Client Group
And
HR / Careers Service Website

Profile of existing staff members
Selection and recruitment procedure
Training & Development / Career Progression

COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWS

Tell the Story - Beginning, Middle and End
Demonstrate Progression through
Demonstrate by Live / Concrete Examples

Highlight skills match between you and job specification
Use language of your Degree

Use STAR FORMAT

SITUATION
   TASK
   ACTION (skills)
   RESULT

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

About Yourself
   Relationships with Employers / Team Colleagues
   Positive Outcomes
Behavioural/Competency-based Interviews

Behavioural interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. The interviewer will want specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours. Prior to interview each position is assessed for the skills/competencies and characteristics that relate to job success. Interview questions are then developed to probe into these areas. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate candidates.

The word competency is widely used in business and personnel psychology and refers to the behaviours that are necessary to achieve the objectives of an organisation. A competency is also something you can measure and lists of competencies form a common language for describing how people perform in different situations. Every job can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that they can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and of course, selection.

• Individual competencies - your personal attributes: Flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity
• Managerial competencies - taking charge of other people: Leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control
• Analytical competencies - the elements of decision making: Innovation, analytical skills, numerical problem solving, problem solving, practical learning, detail consciousness
• Interpersonal competencies - dealing with other people: Communication, impact, persuasiveness, personal awareness, teamwork, openness
• Motivational competencies - the things that drive you: Resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus

_Taken from How to Master Psychometric Tests by M Parkinson_

To prepare for this type of interview, first review the job description carefully and identify the skills and traits likely to be assessed. Next, identify the situations and experiences that you will refer to in the interview to demonstrate these skills and traits. Competency focussed, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will win you the interview. The STAR model will provide a structure to your answers:

Situation - describe a situation or problem that you have encountered
Task - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem
Action - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome
Results - highlight outcomes achieved

Take a look at this extract from the interview guidelines of a major Wellington-based employer.

**Competency: Customer Focus:**
Definition: Individuals who display this competency understand and believe in the importance of customer focus. They listen to and understand the needs of external and internal customers. They meet and exceed customer needs to ensure satisfaction.

**Behavioural Indicators:**
Demonstrates the importance of customer service by giving customer needs top priority. Deals effectively with customers by displaying a professional, courteous and empathetic approach.

**Interview Question:**
Can you give us an example of when you have dealt with an upset or angry customer in the past? What was the situation? Why had it happened? What did you do? How was the situation resolved?

Describe the Situation and the Task briefly. Most of your answers should focus on Action and Results; applying the who (you), what, when, where, why and how model used in journalism will keep you focussed and make your description more interesting.
Questions about ...

Influencing or Persuading Others

You may have strong verbal skills but can you influence another person to change their thinking or take some action - perhaps a colleague follows your advice or a client decides to buy a service or product. At management level have you the skills to persuade and involve rather than coerce and punish? Are you ethical in your dealings with people?

- Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly.
- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with.
- See this pen I'm holding…sell it to me.
- Tell me about a person or event that has been influential in your personal development.

Interpersonal and Team Skills

Employers need people who are socially competent. The desire to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical. Many workplaces function on the basis of project teams. These teams are task oriented and short lived. Those who are highly collaborative and co-operative are most likely to thrive in this type of environment.

- What experience have you had working on a team?
- What skills and personal qualities have you contributed to the teams you have been part of?
- Tell me about a time when you used tact and diplomacy.
- Tell me about the last time you had a disagreement with someone.
- Tell me about the most difficult person you have worked with.
- What have you disliked in your past jobs?
- What kinds of people do you enjoy working with?
- What kinds of people frustrate you?
- What qualities do you admire most in others?

Communication Skills

Daniel Goleman writing on Emotional Intelligence suggests that the key to successful communications is being able to listen to all types of communication in an open way. Are you an active listener, do you really listen and do you hear what is actually said. Are you able to read the non-verbal messages that others communicate? Do you communicate in an engaging and convincing way?

- Tell me about a time when you were successful in getting crucial information from another person.
- Tell me about a time when someone misunderstood what you were attempting to communicate to them.
- Tell me about a current event you have been following in the press.
- What do you think are the three most important things about communication?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with people from a culture unlike your own. What did you do to overcome any perceived barriers to communication?

Personal Adaptability, Energy and Resilience

How quickly and how positively will you adapt to changes in work practices, work roles and work environments and the general flux of the modern workplace? How do you manage or avoid stress?

- Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was criticised.
- Tell me about a time when you felt under pressure.
- Tell me about a time when you felt frustrated by your work.
• How would you respond if a project you had been working on was re-assigned to someone else or shelved?
• What do you do for enjoyment in your leisure time?
• What makes you laugh?
• Describe something creative that you've done.
• What has been your most satisfying/disappointing experience?

Self-management, Self-motivation and Self-knowledge

Do you always strive to achieve a standard of excellence, use initiative at the appropriate time, and show persistence in pursuing goals? Accurate self-assessment skills will allow you to be objective and critical in evaluating your strengths and weaknesses. How will your personality and temperament effect the existing team or work group?

• Tell me about a time when you acted over and above the expectations of your role.
• What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
• Tell me something about yourself.
• How would you describe yourself?
• How do you think a close friend who knows you well would describe you?
• How do you think an enemy would describe you?
• How would you describe your management style?
• What are the two most significant accomplishments in your career so far?
• What are your three major accomplishments?
• What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?
• What's your greatest weakness?
• Why do you want to work for us?
• What does "success" mean to you?
• What does "failure" mean to you?
• In the past year, what have you been dissatisfied about in your performance?
• What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
• What do you expect to be earning in 5 years?
• Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
• Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
• What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
• How has your university experience prepared you for a career in this field?
• How do your skills relate to our needs?
• What are you passionate about?
• What are your interests outside work?
• Tell me about a major problem you have encountered and how you dealt with it?
• What have you learned from your mistakes?
• How do you cope with routine work?

Administrative Skills

Generally checking that you have effective work habits, and the knowledge of workplace routines and some experience of common office administration systems.

• Tell me how you organise your work and schedule your time.
• Tell me about computer software packages you are familiar with and your experience in using them.
• Tell me about your experience of managing a budget.
Problem Solving and Decision Making

What's your problem-solving style? Do you manage your activities to minimise or avoid them? How do you behave in a crisis?

- Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made.
- What significant problems have you faced in the last year?
- How do you work under pressure?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the circumstances and what did you do?
- What impact do you think ... will have on our business?
- How would you motivate an employee who was performing poorly?
- Tell me about a situation where you achieved a satisfactory outcome to a problem that others thought couldn't be solved. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you had conflicting priorities and what you did to resolve them.
- What kind of problems do you handle best?

Conflict Management and Ethics

How do you behave in a crisis? What does it take to shake your poise or self-confidence? What approach do you take to problem solving?

- Tell me about a significant crisis you have faced.
- Tell me about a difficult customer or a customer complaint that you have dealt with.
- How do you resolve conflict in the groups or teams that you have membership of?
- How would you resolve a dispute?
- Have you ever anticipated a difficult situation before it arose? Describe the situation, the action you took and the outcome.
- What would you do if your colleagues were complaining to you about the organisation?
- Tell me about a time when you bent the rules. When is it okay to do so?

Personal and Career Objectives

Employers are likely to invest money in your training and development and will want to ensure that your objectives don't conflict with theirs.

- What are your short and long-term goals?
- When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What are the most important things you are seeking in a career?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What salary are you looking for?
- What person do you admire most and why?
- Why do you want this position?
Knowledge of the Organisation and Role

What are your motives in applying to this organisation: Were they well thought out? Do you know enough about this work area and this organisation to be clear about how your skills fit into it?

- Why did you apply for this position?
- How would you measure your success or failure in this job?
- What skills and personal qualities are essential for success in this role?
- How do you plan to keep up with developments in your field?
- What would you like to know about this organisation?
- What do you believe you can contribute to this organisation?
- What do you know about our industry?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Why are you interested in working for our organization?
- Why should I hire you?
- In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Which three of the competencies required for this position would you prioritise?
- Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
- Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What do you know of the area and community in which our company is located?
- Can you work well to deadlines and under pressure?
- If you were offered this role, what would you expect to achieve in the first year?
- What hours would you like to work?
- How do you believe the performance of the NZ dollar impacts on our organisation?
- Tell me about a time when you have been managed in a good or bad way.
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her.
- What problems do you feel you will have fitting into the job?
- Do you know the location of our head office?
- What interests you about our product/services? How would you improve them?

Work Experience

Do you take responsibility for your own learning and career development? Do you have an understanding of the type of environments in which you are most effective?

- Tell me about the best job you've ever had.
- What did you enjoy most or least about your last job?
- What relevant work experiences have you had?
- What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?
- What kind of office equipment/technical equipment have you used?
- Have you ever been the leader of a team? What did you like and dislike about the role?

Academic Experience

An opportunity to find out about you as a person and encourage you to discuss two subjects that you are the authority on, YOU and your studies. If continuing study for professional qualifications or certification is expected then the employer may check that you have effective work and study habits.
• Tell me about your academic programme at university.
• How did you reach the decision to study at Cork?
• Describe your most rewarding university experience.
• If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
• What led you to choose your field or major study?
• What college subjects did you like best/least? Why?
• What changes would you make at your university? Why?
• Do you have plans for continued study?
• Do you think that your grades are an accurate reflection of your academic ability?
• What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?

Ability, Competence and Achievement

A chance to discover what inspires you and motivates you to achieve and whether you are a loner or a team person.

• What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
• Describe a time when you led or motivated others.
• What do you feel qualifies you for this position?
• Tell us about a time when you had more to do than you could complete in the time allocated: tell us what you did about it and what the outcome was.

Stress Questions

Designed to test your resilience in the work environment. Are you able to maintain appropriate behaviour in the face of what may seem inappropriate behaviour in others? Are you able to keep inappropriate emotions in check and take responsibility for your own performance?

• How do you react to criticism?
• Can you accept criticism for poor work?
• Describe a time you failed.
• What causes you to lose your temper?
• Do you really feel that you have enough experience for this role?
• Aren't you overqualified for this role?
• Why have you decided to change careers?
• Why have you changed jobs frequently?
• Have you ever been sacked (fired)?
• Why should I hire you?
• What if I told you that you’d work very hard, but recognition of your contributions would be nil?
• How long would you expect to remain with this organisation?
• What salary are you expecting?
• How long do you see yourself staying with us?
• Are there any questions you were expecting that we haven’t asked?
• Tell me about your diary commitments from Monday to Friday of this week?
• How would you describe your work style?
• How would you describe your personality type?
Some 'Interesting' Interview Questions

Often asked by employers to add a bit of interest or inspiration to the interview process to see how you cope with the unexpected or a change in direction. Tend not to have a right or wrong answer.

- What is the most difficult issue facing Ireland today?
- It is the 15th Century. How do you convince the Pope that the Earth is round?
- If I gave you an elephant, where would you hide it?
- Why are soda cans tapered on the top and bottom?
- You are in a boat on a fresh water lake. In your hand is a rock. You throw the rock into the lake. How is the lake’s water level affected?
- Describe your best friend and what he or she does for a living.
- In what ways are you similar or different from your best friend?
- If you had a weekend to spend doing anything you wanted, how would you make the most of the time?

OTHER EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A LIST OF TESTED QUESTIONS

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WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- What made you apply for this position?
- How did you hear about this job opening?
- Briefly, would you summarize your work history & education for me?

WORK HISTORY

- What special aspects of your work experience have prepared you for this job?
- Can you describe for me one or two of your most important accomplishments?
- How much supervision have you typically received in your previous job?
- Describe for me one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history?
- Why are you leaving your present job? (or, Why did you leave your last job?)
- What is important to you in a company? What things do you look for in an organization?

JOB PERFORMANCE
Everyone has strengths & weaknesses as workers. What are your strong points for this job?
What would you say are areas needing improvement?
How did your supervisor on your most recent job evaluate your job performance? What were some of the good points & bad points of that rating?
When you have been told, or discovered for yourself, a problem in your job performance, what have you typically done? Can you give me an example?
Do you prefer working alone or in groups?
What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? Why?
Starting with your last job, tell me about any of your achievements that were recognized by your superiors.
Can you give me an example of your ability to manage or supervise others?
What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
In your previous job what kind of pressures did you encounter?
What would you say is the most important thing you are looking for in a job?
What are some of the things on your job you feel you have done particularly well or in which you have achieved the greatest success? Why do you feel this way?
What were some of the things about your last job that you found most difficult to do?
What are some of the problems you encounter in doing your job? Which one frustrates you the most? What do you usually do about it?
What are some things you particularly liked about your last job?
Do you consider your progress on the job representative of your ability? Why?
How do you feel about the way you & others in the department were managed by your supervisor?
If I were to ask your present (most recent) employer about your ability as a__________, what would he/she say?

EDUCATION

What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
What courses in school have been of most help in doing your job?

CAREER- GOALS

What is your long-term employment or career objective?
What kind of job do you see yourself holding five years from now?
What do you feel you need to develop in terms of skill & knowledge in order to be ready for that opportunity?
Why might you be successful in such a job?
How does this job fit in with your overall career goals?
Who or what in your life would you say influenced you most with your career objectives?
Can you pinpoint any specific things in your past experience that affected your present career objectives?
What would you most like to accomplish if you had this job?
What might make you leave this job?

SELF-ASSESSMENT

What kind of things do you feel most confident in doing?
Can you describe for me a difficult obstacle you have had to overcome? How did you handle it? How do you feel this experience affected your personality or ability?
How would you describe yourself as a person?
What do you think are the most important characteristics & abilities a person must possess to become a successful ( )? How do you rate yourself in these areas?
Do you consider yourself a self-starter? If so, explain why ( and give examples)
What do you consider to be your greatest achievements to date? Why?
What things give you the greatest satisfaction at work?
What things frustrate you the most? How do you usually cope with them?
CREATIVITY

- In your work experience, what have you done that you consider truly creative?
- Can you think of a problem you have encountered when the old solutions didn't work & when you came up with new solutions?
- Of your creative accomplishments big or small, at work or home, what gave you the most satisfaction?
- What kind of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me what you have devised.

DECISIVENESS

- Do you consider yourself to be thoughtful, analytical or do you usually make up your mind fast? Give an example. (Watch time taken to respond)
- What was your most difficult decision in the last six months? What made it difficult?
- The last time you did not know what decision to make, what did you do?
- How do you go about making an important decision affecting your career?
- What was the last major problem that you were confronted with? What action did you take on it?

RANGE OF INTERESTS

- What organizations do you belong to?
- Tell me specifically what you do in the civic activities in which you participate. (Leading questions in selected areas, i.e. sports, economics, current events, finance.)
- How do you keep up with what's going on in your company/your industry/your profession?

MOTIVATION

- What is your professional goal?
- Can you give me examples of experience on the job that you felt were satisfying?
- Do you have a long & short-term plan for your department? Is it realistic?
- Did you achieve it last year?
- Describe how you determine what constitutes top priorities in the performance of your job.

WORK STANDARDS

- What are your standards of success in your job?
- In your position, how would you define doing a good job? On what basis was your definition determined?
- When judging the performance of your subordinate, what factors or characteristics are most important to you?

LEADERSHIP

- In your present job what approach do you take to get your people together to establish a common approach to a problem?
- What approach do you take in getting your people to accept your ideas or department goals?
- What specifically do you do to set an example for your employees?
- How frequently do you meet with your immediate subordinates as a group?
- What sort of leader do your people feel you are? Are you satisfied?
• How do you get people who do not want to work together to establish a common approach to a problem?
• If you do not have much time & they hold seriously differing views, what would be your approach?
• How would you describe your basic leadership style? Give specific examples of how you practice this?
• Do you feel you work more effectively on a one to one basis or in a group situation?
• Have you ever led a task force or committee or any group who doesn't report to you, but from whom you have to get work? How did you do it? What were the satisfactions & disappointments? How would you handle the job differently?

ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS

• Have you ever done any public or group speaking? Recently? Why? How did it go?
• Have you made any individual presentations recently? How did you prepare?

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS

• Would you rather write a report or give a verbal report? Why?
• What kind of writing have you done? For a group? For an individual?
• What is the extent of your participation in major reports that have to be written?

FLEXIBILITY

• What was the most important idea or suggestion you received recently from your employees? What happened as a result?
• What do you think about the continuous changes in company operating policies & procedures?
• How effective has your company been in adapting its policies to fit a changing environment?
• What was the most significant change made in your company in the last six months which directly affected you, & how successfully do you think you implemented this change?

STRESS TOLERANCE

• Do you feel pressure in your job? Tell me about it.
• What has been the highest pressure situation you have been under in recent years? How did you cope with it?

STABILITY & MATURITY

• Describe your most significant success & failure in the last two years.
• What do you like to do best?
• What do you like to do least?
• What in your last review did your supervisor suggest needed improvement?
• What have you done about it?

INTEREST IN SELF DEVELOPMENT

• What has been the most important person or event in your own self development?
• How much of your education did you earn?
• What kind of books & other publications do you read?
• Have you taken a management development course?
• How are you helping your subordinates develop themselves?
Relatively few people actually blow the interview! The problem is that they fail to impress the interviewer with their capabilities and thus, are easily forgotten as candidates. This often occurs because individuals tend to talk in generalities in the interview rather than articulating specific accomplishments and achievements. Describing your past experiences by using stories or anecdotes is one of the most effective means of impressing a recruiter.

Using stories to describe your accomplishments helps you stand out and be remembered. The reason this is true has to do with one of the basic premises of adult education. Adults tend to remember examples better than they remember facts. Thus, if you list off a string of strengths such as resourcefulness, articulate, and pleasant to be around, no one will remember what you said fifteen minutes after you leave the interview. Moreover, by simply articulating a laundry list of strengths, you are not backing up your claim. Maybe these really are strengths, but who knows? By describing situations in which you demonstrated those strengths, you will both convince the interviewer that these are indeed strengths of yours and you will have a higher probability of being remembered after the interview is over.

Telling stories about your background is a skill. Some people are naturally good at it while others are not. However, it is a skill that most people can master with a little practice. The trick is to establish a format for your anecdotes. This will enable you to avoid being too brief or overly long-winded. The acronym STAR is often helpful in providing this framework.

First, think about a situation or task that you faced. Describe this situation in two or three sentences. This establishes the background for your story so that it can be understood by the recruiter.

Next, describe the actions that you took. At this stage, it is important that you speak about what you specifically did. There is a tendency for candidates to gloss over their accomplishments, and thus, hide their light under the proverbial bushel. While you don’t want to appear arrogant, you do want to take credit for the role that you played.

Conclude your anecdote by describing the results you achieved. Discuss how your work helped your employer. Whenever possible, try to discuss the result in measurable or quantifiable terms.

For example, an accountant described a time in which an accounting system he was expected to implement quickly was threatened by a manager who was slow to commit his support. To convince the manager to support the accountant’s effort, the accountant proposed a 7:00am meeting to discuss the project. Both this presentation and the accountant’s willingness to meet so early impressed the manager who gave his approval. The accounting system was then quickly implemented. As a result, the system decreased the time it took to process invoices by 25%.

Pretend you were an interviewer who just heard the anecdote from the accountant. You would probably associate the accountant with such positive traits as initiative, hard working, detail-oriented, and resourcefulness. Additionally, you would likely remember this anecdote and the accountant for some time to come. Thus, it is easy to see why using stories in the interview are such a powerful tool.

Identifying the right stories to tell is a critical step. You will want to prepare an array of anecdotes that can be used as needed during the interview. The first step is to compile a list of situations or activities in which you have been successful in the past. These can relate to work, school, or other outside interests. You should be able to come up with an initial list of at least 30 situations. For each one of these, write out the corresponding actions what you took and the results you achieved. Don’t worry if you can’t quantify all of your results. While it makes for a more impressive story if you can, sometimes the result is simply that the project was completed on time.

A final step before the interview is to put yourself in the interviewer’s shoes. If you were hiring someone for this job, what types of skills would you be looking for? Write them down. Review your list of anecdotes to identify which stories demonstrate your skills in those areas.

Finally, practice articulating your accomplishments out loud. There is a world of difference between thinking how you will say something and actually saying it.

By working on preparing and articulating your anecdotes, you will find that you will be remembered positively while your competition becomes a blur in the recruiter’s mind.