

# Questions Employers Ask Candidates

Employers will ask numerous questions during the interview, usually with a special purpose in mind. The manner in which you respond, and the thought given to the response, will enter into the final decision to invite you for a follow-up interview or send you a rejection letter.

When preparing for the interview, you need to ask yourself what it is that you want, and what you have to offer. Take the time to really evaluate whether the job you are applying for will fulfill your needs. Also, be honest during your interview. Obtaining a position through falsification could leave you under-qualified and unhappy in a place where you will spend at least 40 hours a week.

It is recommended that you develop a personal theme to emphasize throughout the interview process based on the skills or personality traits you feel represent you the best. This theme should help distinguish you from other candidates. While it will be worth your time and effort to review the following list of general interview questions you may be asked, consider referencing some books, your university career services department or online resources for industry-specific questions and additional interviewing tips.

- ◆ Tell me about yourself.
- ◆ What personal qualities do you possess that distinguish you from other applicants?
- ◆ Why did you decide to interview with our company?
- ◆ Why did you choose your college?
- ◆ What have been some of the more important aspects of your education?
- ◆ What type of work interests you?
- ◆ Under what type of conditions do you work best?
- ◆ What personal factors do you consider most important in evaluating yourself or your success?
- ◆ What have you enjoyed most and liked least about the work you have done?
- ◆ How do you schedule your time? Set priorities? What are your hobbies?
- ◆ What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses?
- ◆ Give some instances in which you anticipated problems or influenced new directions?
- ◆ How do you deal with pressure?
- ◆ Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
- ◆ In what school activities have you participated? To what extent?
- ◆ At this point in your life, what would you like to be doing in the foreseeable future in terms of your career goals?
- ◆ What qualifications do you have which will make you successful in your career?
- ◆ Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- ◆ What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?
- ◆ What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- ◆ How do you determine success?
- ◆ What are your long-term and short-term goals? How do you plan to achieve your goals?
- ◆ Give me a specific example of something you did that helped build enthusiasm in others.
- ◆ Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
- ◆ Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult person. How did you handle the situation?

To best prepare for an interview:

**Know thyself** –

Thales (640 AD - 546 AD)

**Books:** Adams Job Interview Almanac, 101 Dynamite Questions to Ask At Your Job Interview

**Online:** [www.nova.edu/career](http://www.nova.edu/career), [www.collegegrad.com](http://www.collegegrad.com), [www.monstertrak.com](http://www.monstertrak.com)

**Career Services NSU:** [www.nova.edu/career](http://www.nova.edu/career) (954) 262-7201

## Sample Questions to Ask During an Interview

A job interview is a two-way process. Appropriate questions show interest in the particular employer and an awareness of how you can fill their needs. Questions should not be so basic that the interviewer thinks you have not researched the company. The ones you ask will allow employers to determine how seriously you are considering the job and how well you understand what you are applying for. Additionally, they learn what is important to you, how much research you did, how prepared you are (or would be) for a business meeting and your level of maturity and intellectual curiosity.

**General Guidelines:** Your questions should help you get the job or learn things you should know about the job and company, so try to exclude those questions which are unsupportive of this goal. Do not ask questions about your needs first, especially during the first interview (i.e. salary, benefits). If you are looking for clarification on something, rephrase what you understand followed by your clarifying question to avoid appearing as if you were not listening. While you will probably be given the opportunity to ask your questions during the last 8-10 minutes of the interview, you can ask a question at any time if it relates to the discussion you are having. Also, write out your questions as it will help you articulate your thoughts, but simply use them as a reference to jog your memory – do not read them to the interviewer while staring intently at the page.

### Sample Questions:

- ◆ If you had an ideal candidate, what skills and personal qualities would that person have?
- ◆ If I perform well in this position, where could I be in three to five years?
- ◆ It is the nature of the industry and the nature of the job that there are going to be some really intense periods with long days and tight deadlines. Still, could you describe what a typical week or month on the job might be like?
- ◆ Can you tell me how your career has developed at Yourco?
- ◆ Was there anything about your job that came as a surprise when you transitioned from college to corporation?
- ◆ What do you see in the future for this industry?
- ◆ How do you rate your competition?
- ◆ What sort of personnel turnover have you experienced in your department?
- ◆ What are some of the objectives outlined for this position?
- ◆ How will this position be evaluated?
- ◆ What kind of support does this position receive in terms of people, budget, etc..?
- ◆ Tell me about your customers. Describe an ideal customer. How close to ideal are your customers?
- ◆ In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance and what has been the biggest setback?
- ◆ What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of this company?
- ◆ Tell me about your initial and future training programs.
- ◆ How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
- ◆ Are there any immediate plans for expansion in your organization, either in offices, new market areas or new fields? In what directions are you moving?
- ◆ How will problems (economy, government action, etc...) affect your operations? Your services?
- ◆ What is management's policy about promotion within the organization?
- ◆ How are you responding to the problem of? (Latest trend, competition, etc...)

***The most important strategy is to enter the interview prepared!***

## Strategies for Nightmare Interview Questions

In any interview, there is the potential that you may be faced with a question that you feel unprepared to respond to. The following represents some strategies you may consider for some of the more difficult questions interviewers ask.

### **“Tell me about yourself”**

That is never easy to do when it's the first question because you do not know what the interviewer wants to hear. However, this is one of the best questions to be asked. You want to be sure to capture the interviewer's attention with a clear, quick and focused response. This is your opportunity to tell the interviewer about accomplishments you are most proud of or how you have contributed to your present employer's bottom line, but stick to related issues. Before the interview, prepare your answer to this question. Choose 3 - 4 highlights you are most proud of and rehearse your method of delivery placing the events/accomplishments in chronological order. Be sure to back these qualifications up with examples, probably from your resume. Then, explain how you believe you can help this employer and what your value is in their future.

### **“If we offered you the job, would you take it immediately?”**

They want to test your commitment to their job. If you say, “Yes,” you're breaking every rule of job hunting strategy. Instead, reply, “I'm very interested in the job, but I've always thought a serious offer demands serious thought. I wouldn't treat any offer you made frivolously.”

### **“We need someone who can take charge and work without direction.”**

Don't touch this until you've examined it. This statement and others like it are please for help from someone who hasn't put together a serious job description. Begin by asking the obvious questions about staffing, budgets, goals, etc. Look for every opportunity to eliminate extraneous elements and then affirm that with minimal direction you could do the job that you and the interviewer have just created.

### **“How much overtime would you be comfortable with.”**

You are being worked on by a processor, i.e., someone who values effort more than results. However, if the job interests you, find out how much overtime is customary. Ask, “Does the company have a specific overtime policy?” It may have one – probably unspoken – that says the upwardly mobile will give the company a minimum of 50 hours a week. Be sure to point out that you always work until the job is done rather than by the clock.

### **“What do you know about our company?”**

This should be an easy question to answer provided that you have done your research and enter the interview prepared. This is your opportunity to shine and show that you are familiar with the company and the industry. Should you, for some reason, enter an interview without this information, do your best to express your knowledge about the industry without making things up because this will be obvious to the employer. You could attempt to place this back on the interviewer by asking for clarification on a certain aspect of the company such as, “I recognize that your company specializes in management consulting, but I am not clear on who your main customers are. Could you tell me about what clients you work with most often?”

### **“What is your greatest weakness?”**

Be careful. Now is not the time to confess a major flaw that would disqualify you from further consideration. Select a weakness that can be interpreted as a strength. Be prepared for several follow-up questions: Why is this a weakness? or What are you doing to improve upon this weakness?

### **“What salary are you looking for?”**

You want to avoid answering this question if you can by responding with statements such as “I'm willing to accept any reasonable offer,” or “I'm sure you could better estimate what a position like this is worth.” Be sure that you have done your research in case you cannot avoid a more direct answer. At this point, you want to give the employer a salary range that you are comfortable with but that also matches the going rate for this position in this particular industry. Many online resources have salary information ([www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com)), but be sure to adjust for cost of living in the pertinent city. For additional salary information websites, visit [www.nova.edu/career](http://www.nova.edu/career) -> students -> explore -> salary information sites.

## Illegal Interview Questions

Be aware that in the United States employers are not legally allowed to ask you for information regarding the following topics:

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Religious beliefs
- ◆ Ancestry, national origin, parentage, birthplace
- ◆ Native language, language spoken at home, or how you learned the language
- ◆ Marital status
- ◆ Disabilities
- ◆ Arrest record
- ◆ Sexual orientation
- ◆ Parental status

Should you be approached with a question regarding this topic, you reserve the right to choose not to answer, but there are other ways to answer such questions. It is important to assess the intentions of the interviewer. Most illegal interview questions are asked in true innocence without considering how the information could be used in a

discriminatory way.

Ironically, most illegal questions are asked when the untrained interviewer is trying to be friendly and asks a seemingly innocent question about your personal life or family background. Should you respond defensively while firmly enforcing your constitutional rights, you may place the interviewer on the same defensive harming what may have otherwise been a successful interview.

So what is the proper response? Any response depends on the particular situation and the personalities and motives of those involved, but overall you have three basic options: (1) answer truthfully if you feel your response will not hurt you, (2) inform the interviewer that the question is illegal and risk offending them and ending your chances for the position, or (3) base your answer on the requirements of the job and your ability to perform it. Here are a few examples of casually asked illegal questions and suggested responses:

**Q:** Does your family mind the travel required for this position?

**A:** I am accustomed to significant business travel. In fact, I find being on the road invigorating, and my track record has been very consistent under these conditions.

**Q:** Are you religious? Will your religion prevent you from working extra hours or on weekends when we have a big project?

**A:** I suppose everyone is religious in their own way. I do not foresee any circumstances that would interfere with the quality or commitment of my performance.

**Q:** You have a very unusual last name. What is its origin?

**A:** It really is a mouthful, isn't it? I've always used my first name and last initial in my business e-mail address, as it is easier.

**Q:** Are you planning a family in the near future?

**A:** Currently, I am focused on my career and although having a family is always a possibility, it is not a priority at the moment.

**Q:** How many more years do you see yourself in the work force (before retiring)?

**A:** In today's world people don't retire like they used to; some can't. My career and my need to earn an income are priorities that I do not foresee changing in the near future.

Still, if the question leaves you feeling highly offended and sensing blatant discrimination, you reserve the right to state that you do not feel you would be a good match for the position and leave the interview. One final note of caution...if an employer can ask you for illegal information during the interview, you may be interviewing with a company that feels comfortable taking advantage of their employees. Ultimately, the response you give rests highly on your interpretation of the situation and the intensity of the question. Additionally, just because a question is asked does not mean a crime has been committed. That would be up to the courts to decide.