



10 tough interview questions to expect

1. Tell me about yourself.

It seems like an easy interview question. I can talk about anything, right?

Wrong. What the hiring manager really wants is a quick, 2-3-minute snapshot of why you are the best candidate for this position.

So as you answer this question, talk about what you've done to prepare yourself to be the very best candidate for the position. Use an example or two to back it up. Then ask if they would like more details. If they do, keep giving them example after example of your background and experience. Always provide an example when you have the opportunity.

Tell me about yourself does not mean tell me everything. Just tell me what makes you the best.

2. Why should I hire you?

The easy answer is that you are the best person for the job. And don't be afraid to say so. But then back it up with what specifically differentiates you.

For example: You should hire me because I'm the best person for the job. I realize that there are likely other candidates who also have the ability to do this job. Yet I bring an additional quality that makes me the best person for the job - my passion for excellence. I am passionately committed to producing truly world class results. For example...

Are you the best person for the job? Show it by your passionate examples.

3. What is your long-range objective?

Make the hiring manager's job easy. Make that person want to hire you.

The key is to focus on your achievable objectives and what you are doing to reach them.

For example: Within five years, I would like to become the very best accountant your company has on staff. I want to work toward becoming the expert that others rely upon. And in doing so, I feel I'll be fully prepared to take on any greater responsibilities which might be presented in the long term. For example, here is what I'm presently doing to prepare myself . . .

Then go on to show by your examples what you are doing to reach your goals and objectives.



4. How has your education prepared you for your career?

This is a broad question and you need to focus on the behavioral examples in your educational background which specifically align to the required competencies for the career.

An example: My education has focused on not only the learning the fundamentals, but also on the practical application of the information learned within those classes. For example, I played a lead role in a class project where we gathered and analyzed best practice data from this industry. Let me tell you more about the results . . .

Focus on behavioral examples supporting the key competencies for the career. Then ask if they would like to hear more examples.

5. Are you a team player?

Almost everyone says yes to this question. But it is not just a yes/no question. You need to provide behavioral examples to back up your answer.

A sample answer: Yes, I'm very much a team player. In fact, I've had opportunities in my work, school and athletics to develop my skills as a team player. For example, on a recent project...

Emphasize teamwork behavioral examples and focus on your openness to diversity of backgrounds. Talk about the strength of the team above the individual. And note that this question may be used as a lead in to questions around how you handle conflict within a team, so be prepared.

6. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How was it resolved?

Note that if you say no, most interviewers will keep drilling deeper to find a conflict. The key is how you behaviorally reacted to conflict and what you did to resolve it.

For example: Yes, I have had conflicts in the past. Never major ones, but there have been disagreements that needed to be resolved. I've found that when conflict occurs, it helps to fully understand the other person's perspective, so I take time to listen to their point of view, and then I seek to work out a collaborative solution. For example...

Focus on the behavioral process for resolving the conflict and working collaboratively.

7. What is your greatest weakness?



When it comes to performance at work, there is always room for improvement. Select a professional development challenge that you have been actively trying to improve. For example, “I have had trouble in the past with planning and prioritization. I’m now taking steps to correct this. I just started using a great new app on my phone that keeps me organized.” Or maybe, “Spreadsheets are difficult for me, but I am taking an online class that has really helped.”

Talk about a professional development challenge that you are trying to improve.

8. If I were to ask a former boss or professor to describe you, what would they say?

This is the reference check question. Do not wait for the interview to know the answer. Ask any prior bosses or professors in advance. And if they’re willing to provide a positive reference, ask them for a letter of recommendation. Safety tip: Always ask a potential reference if they will provide a *good* recommendation. Do not assume.

Then you can answer the question like this: I believe she would say I'm a very energetic person, that I'm results-oriented and one of her best performing former employees. Actually, I know she would say that, because those are her very words. May I show you her recommendation?

Be prepared with letters of recommendation and you'll make a strong impression.

9. What qualities do you feel a successful manager should have?

Focus on two words: leadership and vision.

Here is a sample of how to respond: The key quality in a successful manager should be leadership--the ability to be the visionary for the people who are working under them. The person who can set the course and direction for subordinates. The highest calling of a true leader is inspiring others to reach the highest of their abilities. I'd like to tell you about a person whom I consider to be a true leader . . .

Then give an example of someone who has touched your life and how their impact has helped in your personal development.

10. Tell me about a time that you made a mistake or failed at work.

Successful people look at failure as an opportunity to learn. What could I have done differently to make the outcome better/different? We all make mistakes, but that experience can have a positive outcome if you learn something in the process.

Admitting error is a sign of humility. Highlight the learning and how you’ve moved forward.

And get on to hopefully the interviewer’s last question – **“When can you start?”**