15 Most Typically Used Interview Questions and Answers

According to the reports of job seekers, made from thousands of job interviews, done at 97 big companies in the United States, we selected the 15 most commonly asked questions in an interview, purely according to the statistics.

We analyzed each question, looked at it from the point of view of an interviewer as well as job seeker, and prepared a good answer (answers) to it.

For each question from the list, you can find in this publication the following information:

- Why employers/recruitment companies use the particular question
- How to answer the question, what to focus on in your answer
- Sample of a good answer or more samples
- Additional explanation if it is needed

List of interview questions analyzed in this e-book.

1. Can you tell me something about yourself?
2. Why did you apply for this job?
3. Why did you leave your last job? / Why do you plan to leave your last job?
4. Can you tell us something about your education?
5. Can you tell us something more about your working experience?
6. Why should we hire you?
7. What are your strengths?
8. What are your weaknesses?
9. What are your goals?
10. What are your biggest achievements?
11. What characterize a good boss/colleague from your point of view?
12. What motivates you? / How do you motivate the others?
13. What are your salary expectations?
14. When are you able to start?
15. Do you have any questions?

Let’s have a look at each question in detail right now. It should help you significantly in your job interview.

Sincerely

Jacob Gates, author of the e-book
Question I: Can you tell me something about yourself?

Why do they ask it?

• This is typically the first question in a job interview. It is a warm up question. However, if you answer it well, you will make a **good first impression**, feel more relaxed in the rest of the interview and logically have better chances to get a job.

What to focus on?

• You should **focus on work related traits** in your answer. That means, what you do, what you are good at, what you have done before, what are you looking for in your career, etc.

• You can mention also something from your personal life and hobbies briefly, but **it is not what the employer is interested in.**

• I advise you to not spend more than one minute answering this question. It is simply not good to tire the interviewers right in the beginning of the interview.

Example of a good answer:

• *I like to manage people and work on interesting projects. I have been working for IBM for the past two years, but I am looking for a new challenge right now. I like to play sports, especially football and spend my free time with my wife.*
Question 2: Why did you apply for this job?

Why do they ask it?

- Interviewers need to understand your intentions. It is perfectly all right and good for you. If you prepare a good answer to this interview question, you will convince them that your intentions are clear and honest, and your main goal is to help their business to prosper.

What to focus on?

- The key thing is to speak about the company, not about you. You should simply show them that you did not chose this job because of the good salary offer, but because you believe to be the right person for the job.
- Honest compliment of the company culture, achievements of the company, etc. is also a good form of an answer to why did you apply for this job question.
- You should definitely spend some time reading company website and the job description, to be able to prepare a good answer to this interview question.

Examples of a good answer:

- I really like the job description. I believe to be the perfect match for the job and a potential asset for your team.
- I decided to apply because I really like the vision of your company and the possibilities for my professional growth there. I can use my full potential at this company and help it to grow.
Question 3: Why did you leave your last job? / Why do you want to leave your present job?

Why do they ask it?

• Career change or job change is a normal part of life. The employers understand this fact. However, employers want to understand the reasons why you want to make a change, or why you are forced to make a change. That’s why they give you this question. Your honesty and ability to talk about unpleasant things is also tested at this place.

What to focus on?

• It is important to stay positive and to not talk bad things about your previous employers. You should simply focus on the future, not on the past.

Examples of a good answer:

• My last job was not challenging enough. I was not motivated to work anymore and I needed a change. Based on the job description, I really believe that I can find what I am looking for in your company.

• There was a downsizing in our company. Similarly to most people in my department, I was fired. However, it is the past. I am ready to use the gained knowledge and experience to start my new career in your corporation.

• I want to be very honest to you. I have been in this company for seven years, achieved great results and helped it to become the leader on the market. However, I did never get a raise and were never promoted, although I asked for it. I believe that the results of my work can be rewarded better somewhere else, maybe in your company. That’s why I want to leave my present job and look for a new one.
Question 4: Can you tell us something about your education?

Why do they ask it?

- For certain employers and positions, your education is very important. Employers tend to inquire about it. Degrees like MBA are prestigious and many employers simply prefer candidates with degrees.
- On the other hand, if you do not have a degree (or do not have a desired one), the employers need to be sure that you still have the knowledge and experience needed for the job.

What to focus on?

- Try to focus not only on the names of the schools, but also on the knowledge you gained there.
- Have you learned something that can help you in this specific role you are applying for? This is what interests the employer and what you should focus on.

Example of a good answer:

- I studied at Cambridge. I acquired knowledge from statistics, project management and process management. I was very active during my studies and took part in many practical projects. My studies were strongly business oriented and I believe that I am well prepared for this job of a project manager, from both theoretic and practical point of view.
Question 5: Can you tell us something more about your working experience?

Why do they ask it?

- Employers know what your experience is – they can see it on your resume. However, they want to hear what you consider to be important as well as if your resume reflects your real working experience.
- Everyone can use a nice formulation on a resume. However, the employers want to know what you have really done before.

What to focus on?

- You should choose just one or two roles you had and briefly describe what you did there and what you learned there. Focus on things that could be important for this new role you are applying for. The best thing to do is to mention your former duties that are relevant to the duties in this new role.
- You should not spend a long time answering this question. One to three minutes is an ideal time frame to answer it.

Example of a good answer:

- I had done a lot of different things in my life. It helped me to get a good overall understanding of business. From 2001 to 2004, I worked on a position of a project manager at Siemens. We were working mostly on smaller energetic projects. I believe that I can utilize the knowledge and contacts I gained during at Siemens in your company. I learned how to budget the project and lead it from the scratch to completion. From my other experience I can briefly mention my position in marketing from 1998 to 2001 and my freelancing experience from 2005 to 2008.
Question 6: Why should we hire you?

Why do they ask it?

- It is simple. If the employer hires you, it will cost several thousands dollars every month. He needs to have a good reason for such an investment.
- On the other hand, HR managers get paid for an ability to assess your skills and decide if it makes sense to hire you or it doesn’t. So, the secondary intention of this question is to assess the level of your trustworthiness as well as if you can see the benefits your hire could bring to the organization.

What to focus on?

- You should simply focus on your USP (Unique selling point). It means to show the employer something special, something other candidates can not offer. To use general phrases will not help at this point. You simply need to find the USP by yourself.
- If you can not find the USP, you should at least show the employer that they need you in the company.

Examples of a good answer:

- I believe that I bring success with me to the company. All the companies where I worked were prospering. It is good to have such a worker in your team, isn’t it?
- I fulfill all the job requirements. However, some other applicants do probably also fulfill it. But I think that I am a nice guy and help to create a good atmosphere in the workplace. You can contact my previous employers to inquire about it.
- I have a relevant experience for the job and I am strongly motivated to work for your company.
Question 7: What are you strengths?

Why do they ask it?

• The primary intention is to see if you’re able to assess your own skills.
• It is as well a good hint for the company to evaluate your strengths.

What to focus on?

• You should always choose the strengths that are the most relevant for the job. A strength that can help you to do the job better than the other candidates can do it is the ideal trait to mention.
• We recommend you to pick the strength that the employers can see by themselves from your behavior in an interview.
• For example, if you say that you can work under pressure and are always confident, but are stressed in the interview, it will not help you too much… What you say should always correspond with what they see.

Examples of a good answer:

• I have good communication skills. I believe that communication skills are crucial in every job, but especially in this one.
• I am very responsible person and I always accomplish all my duties in time.
• I am a very organized person, what is strongly reflected in the high quality of my working results.
**Question 8: What are your weaknesses?**

**Why do they ask it?**

- The interviewers are in fact testing your weaknesses all the time in an interview. Asking you this question, they only want to see your point of view.

**What to focus on?**

- It is not so important which weaknesses you speak about. More important is to define how exactly you **try to get rid of your weakness**. This is what the employers want to hear.
- Secondly, you should choose the weakness that is not important for the job you are applying for, or the weakness that can be in fact considered as a strength.

**Examples of a good answer:**

- *I am not very patient, what is obviously not good. But I am working on it every day, doing various exercises to improve my patience.*
- *I struggle to focus on one task at a time only. However, I practice every day and my concentration has improved a lot over the years.*
- *I trust people too much sometimes. It is nice to live with it, but it has brought me many problems. However, as I am getting older, I am starting to distinguish who I can trust.*
Question 9: What are your goals?

Why do they ask it?

- Every responsible man has some goals. At least that is the point of view of an employer. When asking you about your goals, they simply want to hear that you have some worthy goals.

What to focus on?

- Some people like to mention that they dream about their own business. This is not a good answer. Companies do not want to hire someone who will leave the company in two years time to start own business.
- You should choose a goal which corresponds with your intentions to get this job and stay at the company for a long time.
- You can also talk about personal goals. But please, be careful. To say that you want to start a family and have kids in one year time will not make any employer happy.

Examples of a good answer:

- My goal is to become a better manager and help my employer to achieve good results on a regular basis.
- I simply want to have a good job to grow as a person. I believe that your company is a right place to achieve my goals.
- I would like to be promoted in five years and have a really good job in a really good company.
Question 10: What are your biggest achievements?

Why do they ask it?

- For the employers, achievements are more important than your experiences. The main reason for this question is to find out what you really have done in the past.
- Employers try to find out if you consider the achievements from a personal point of view (such as promotion or a good graduation marks) or also from a point of view of the employer (such as helping to achieve good profit or good level of customer satisfaction ...).

What to focus on?

- Employers can be impressed by both tangible and intangible achievements. If you was a heavy smoker before and quit smoking, it reflects a strong determination and will.
- On the other hand, it is good to focus on the achievements from the point of view of the company, such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph. Employers always prefer to hire people who have the goals of the company at the first place.

Examples of a good answer:

- When I worked like a sales manager in Cobeco Inc., the sales of the company grew every year by 20 percent.
- I became a better person over the years. I learned to listen to the others and see the good in people. I consider this as my biggest achievement as it helps me to lead the others in work better, as well as have a balanced private life.
- I was able to run marathon under 3:30. I trained for it very hard and it strengthen me both physically and mentally.
Question 11: What does characterize a good boss/colleague from your point of view?

Why do they ask it?

- You do not work alone in most of the companies. Interviewers try to understand if you could fit the company and get along with your potential colleagues.

What to focus on?

- We suggest you not to mention anything tangible. For example, to say that you prefer older or male boss is a risk. (If the boss is younger or female, they will not choose you.)
- The good idea is to use a neutral answer and say that you can get along with everybody, as well as that you try to understand the point of view of each person and never have conflicts

Examples of a good answer:

- I can get along with everybody. All I want to be sure about is that my colleagues are qualified for the job.
- There isn’t something like an ideal boss for me. I simply focus on my job and on my own performance and try to avoid any conflicts with other employees.
Question 12: What motivates you? / How do you motivate the others?

Why do they ask it?

- Motivation is important for every single job. You need to convince the employer that you are motivated to do the job and do not need any special incentives to work hard. If the employer does not see it in your answer, you will hardly be offered any job.

What to focus on?

- Try to show the enthusiasm in the interview. Try to be full of energy all the time! If you do so, you may even not get this interview question about motivation. They will see that you are motivated enough.
- However, if the question comes, focus more on the work itself, than on the salary.

Examples of a good answer:

- I want to feel important in my job, do a good job for my employer. This is very important for me, to see a purpose in my job. It naturally motivates me to work hard and try to become a better employee every day.
- I just like to work. I like the duties from your job description. If I was not strongly motivated to do this job, I would not apply for it. I would never work for money only.
**Question 13: What are your salary expectations?**

**Why do they ask it?**

- This is actually a good question for you. If the employers ask it, it means that they consider hiring you (or at least giving you a chance). This question could also be a part of the interview template simply because the employer is not sure what is the appropriate salary offer for the position and tries to get this information from the job candidates.

**What to focus on?**

- You should **emphasize** that the salary is not the **deciding factor** for you. You should simply focus on the other factors.
- On the other hand, if it comes to numbers, you should never say less a figure representing your minimum expectations. **It won’t make any sense**… If you need to mention the number, it is always better to mention the range than the sole figure. Also, it is good to have something to backup your expectations.

**Examples of a good answer:**

- Salary is not the most important factor for me. I really like the job description and want to get this job. I will accept an average salary for this position, what is something between $35,000 and $40,000, according to my knowledge.
- I really like this job and would like to do have it. I have looked at the average salaries tables and found out that the average salary for this position is between $35,000 and $40,000. I would accept the lower figure from this range, as I really would like to have this job.
Question 14: When are you able to start?

Why do they ask it?

- Companies have their plans and needs. If they need someone from the beginning of next month, they need him and that’s it. They need to know if you are available to start this job on time, or if they need to look for someone else or reconsider their plans as you are a really good candidate for this job.

What to focus on?

- The best option (if you have such) is to say that you can start when they need you.
- However, if you really can not short circuit the notice period in your present job or something similar, you still can save yourself with an exceptional answer, stating that you would try to negotiate the notice period with your boss, or showing a right attitude, mentioning that you would like to finish your current projects before changing your job.

Examples of a good answer:

- I am ready to start as soon as possible.
- I work under a two months notice period in my company. However, I have a good relationship with my boss, so I could try to negotiate about it and leave earlier. I will try to do so if you decide to offer me a job.
- I could possibly start tomorrow, but I want to finish the project I currently work on. It would be very unprofessional and irresponsible to leave my present job now. I need two or three more weeks to finish the work. I am ready to start my job in your company right after that.
Question 15: Do you have any questions?

Why do they ask it?

- In every good job interview, there is a place for the questions of the candidates. Employer simply wants to see if you still have interest for the job. It can be reflected in a question from you.

What to focus on?

- It is good to ask one or two questions. You should definitely not ask about something that was already answered in the interview or in the job description.
- Also, to ask something personal or not related to the job would be a mistake.

Examples of a good answer:

- What are the next steps of the recruiting process?
- Can you tell me something more about the working environment in this company?
- What are the goals of your company in long term horizon?
Final word from the author

Please, do not forget that the job interview is not only about your answers to interview questions.

Sticking to the advice from this e-book will significantly increase your chances of succeeding in an interview.

However, you also need to work on your non-verbal communication in an interview and prepare well for the specific questions asked in every company.

On the top of that, you need to present yourself as an ideal person for the job, be motivated, enthusiastic, and show an appropriate level of respect in an interview.

If you can do it and combine it with the right answers to the most common interview questions from this e-book, you will get a job offer in at least 9 of every 10 interviews. We wish you good luck!

Jacob Gates, Author of the e-book

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