

Common Interview Questions – Why they ask them, What they are looking for in an answer, How to prepare answers

Tell Me About Yourself

Why? Employers truly want to know more about you and how you may fit in with their overall organization.

What? Demonstrate that you are unique to separate yourself from other applicants. Avoid common descriptions – do not just say you're hardworking—explain what has driven you to become diligent and why you believe it is important.

How? Talk about your passions, hobbies, and interests and practice talking about them with others. You can discuss what inspires you or what your friends/family/coworkers/boss like about you. When do you feel most comfortable? What makes you the proudest? Be specific and try to make yourself memorable.

Why Are You Interested in This Company?

Why? This is important and one in which you should prepare, since employers want to see that you're taking the job-seeking process seriously and have a genuine interest in working for them.

What? Discuss your interest in the position and company, the mission of the company, or anything else that drew you to the company. Be thorough and specific. Do not talk about prestige or rankings (they already know how they are ranked, etc.), and do not say you just want to work there because it's close to home, friends, high salary, benefits, etc.; none of this shows genuine interest in *their* company.

How? To answer this question well, research the company. Take advantage of the wealth of information provided on the Internet. You should be able to cite specifics when answering this question.

Why Do You Want this Particular Job?

Why? Companies are interested in your career goals and want to see that you are interested and inclined for the position you seek.

What? Discuss why a certain aspect of the position inspires you or why you're passionate about it. Avoid saying that you're interested in a certain position to one day make a lot of money or have job security. This does not demonstrate genuine interest and will make you appear shallow.

How? Think about *why* you want to pursue the position. Why do you find it fascinating? What experiences provoked your interest in the job and field? How will the position help you to reach your professional goals while contributing positively to the company?

What Are Your Strengths?

Why? In an effort to get to know you as an employee, companies are interested in getting your perspective on where you excel.

What? Avoid simple answers such as, "I'm great at data analysis." When discussing your strengths, explain *how* you've capitalized on your strengths. If you're an excellent writer, for example, how have you used your writing skills to excel in previous positions and/or at school? How do you plan on continuing to use your strengths?

How? Know your strengths. Explain how you currently use them and how you plan to use them in the future.

What Are Your Weaknesses?

Why? Companies want to hire good employees, but they're aware that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Companies want to see that you have the persistence and work ethic to succeed despite your challenges and know how you have addressed any weaknesses.

What? Companies want students who can demonstrate their ability to confront and overcome challenges. Try revealing strategies or specific approaches you've taken to improve upon your weaknesses. Perhaps you have a story to share about how you managed to do well in a subject that was especially difficult for you.

How? Be aware of your weaknesses and how you've addressed them. **Do not state that you do not have any weaknesses.** We all have weaknesses and you'll want to avoid coming off as arrogant.

What Do You Plan to Contribute to This Organization?

Why? Companies want to hire employees who will make positive contributions to organization. They're looking for individuals who will make the work environment and company even better.

What? Avoid limiting your answer to vague positive traits. Don't just say you'll demonstrate a good work ethic. Are there specific skills and experiences you have that you can use to the benefit of the organization? How will your presence at the organization make a difference?

How? Know the specific contributions you want to make to the organization. Identify your goals as well as the duties you would like to fulfill and achieve to the satisfaction of the employer.

What Do You Like to Do for Fun?

Why? This question is designed to get a better sense of your general interests and overall personality. Companies like to see that you engage in healthy activities during your down time and/or to balance your work/school/personal life.

What? Your answer doesn't only have to include activities that are academic and work-based in nature. After all, you probably wouldn't be believed if you said all you do for fun is read science textbooks and do math problems. If some of what you do for fun *is* intellectual, though, explain why you find these activities fun. Finally, try to avoid general answers such as "hang out with friends."

How? Spend some time thinking about *why* you enjoy the activities in which you engage.

What Is an Obstacle You've Faced and How Did You Get Through It? How did you deal with a difficult customer/situation/person?

Why? Companies are interested in knowing if you have faced and overcome any significant challenges in your life. They also want to see that you're persistent and willing to work hard in order to overcome obstacles, as well as how you respond to others when dealing with conflict. This information is telling of how you will handle yourself and challenges you may face as an employee.

What? It's fine if you haven't had some awful, incredibly difficult obstacle in your life. Think of a time when you faced a problem that challenged you, and you put in a lot of effort to solve it. Your obstacle could be related to your job, school, or an extracurricular activity. In your response, explain how the obstacle challenged you and emphasize what *you* did to overcome it.

How? Think of a significant challenge you've had in your life and how you dealt with it. What did you learn from the problem? How did you solve it? Did it change or influence the way you address similar problems?

What Do You Expect to Be Doing In 5 Years? 10 Years?

Why? You do not need to have your entire future figured out. Employers understand that you probably won't have everything decided and your plans may likely change. What they *do* want is employees with direction.

What? Companies desire students who are motivated to achieve their goals. Avoid a generic answer such as saying you expect to have a fulfilling career and be making a positive impact on the world. What are some specific activities you'd like to do? How do you plan on impacting the world? You don't have to limit your plans to professional goals. Do you want to take your family on a vacation or have weekly gatherings with your friends?

How? You can write down some detailed notes answering this question. Paint a picture of the life you want to have in 5 and 10 years. That picture will reveal how unique you are.

What Is Your Favorite Book?

Why? This question is designed to help schools learn more about your interests. Colleges also probably want to make sure that you actually read books!

What? Don't limit your answer to the name of a book; think about why you like the book so much. How did it inspire you? Did a particular character resonate with you? Did you learn something from this book that influenced your opinions or behavior? Did this book help shape your perspective or values?

How? Really think about books you've read that you connected with and why. You may be asked about a news article you recently read, so try to stay up to date with the news as well.