



Standard Interview Questions

Standard Interview Questions:

“Tell me about yourself.”

The ultimate interview question, and often the initial one, can be a stumbling block due to its open ended nature. Because this answer is very unique to each person, it is easiest to break the answer down into both good and bad points. This answer isn't about your hobbies; it is about your skills and qualifications for the job.

Mention the following things: Your key accomplishments and skills, a brief history of your interest in the industry and the specific job you are applying for, and how you see yourself developing in the position. You need to maintain good eye contact and body language throughout.

You should avoid the following: Lack of eye contact, a general meandering answer or something irrelevant to the position, showing a lack of enthusiasm for the position for which you are applying.

“What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?”

Pick skills and strengths that relate to the position. Are you excellent at meeting deadlines, have a natural ability to relate to people, or have excellent communication skills? Many candidates for positions simply get lost in their answers and forget their target audience. Don't fall into this trap.

For weaknesses you want to pick an actual weakness – yes, even you have at least one – that isn't lethal to your job. Ideally you will pick a weakness that you have already addressed through past experience and corrected. It shows that you are willing to work on areas of your skill-set that are not perfect to make sure you progress as an employee.

“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Don't say, “Doing your job.” This has been said too many times to be amusing and it probably isn't a good idea to tell your potential boss that you are gunning for them before you've even started. Be insightful and say something to the effect of, “Depending on the opportunities that present themselves at the company, I would like to master this position and move into a position of leadership within the division. I believe that I've already demonstrated leadership skills through my activities during college and in previous employment settings.”

Go ahead and use this question as another opportunity to talk yourself “up” and highlight your leadership potential as well as any other skills. Research the industry prior to the interview and learn the typical job progression within your given profession. This will allow you to be specific and intelligent while also displaying personal skills.

“Why did you choose the major you did and what was your favorite / least favorite course?”

Let’s start with the easier part – what you should say. You want to discuss how you felt your major would prepare you for exactly the career path for which you are interviewing. You can begin with a story about selecting your major for a different reason but by the end of your story make sure the interviewer feels that your major was intended to build you into a person who can succeed in the position for which you are interviewing. Talk about skills gained through classes, both practical and theoretical. Talk about topics and studies involving responsibilities that were posted in the job announcement.

What shouldn’t you do? Don’t blame faculty for your course struggles. It is certainly true that not all teaching styles will match up with students’ learning styles, but you don’t want to give the interviewer reason to believe that you don’t take responsibility for your own struggles. Identify a challenge in a course, what you did to overcome it, and make sure you select an example with a positive outcome! You will have to do many tasks at work that you won’t necessarily enjoy, but you will still have to do them well. Give an example of a time in a class or previous job where you faced that situation and succeeded.

“What was your favorite job and why?”

We are straying into behavioral question territory since the interviewer is looking for specific past examples to verify your work experience. This is a good general question to think about because of the double meaning of the word “favorite” here. Many of us have had fun jobs in the past that had nothing to do with our career path. Being a lifeguard can be fun and relaxing – perhaps a little boring at times – but if you are interviewing for an accounting position it is probably not the best example to use. Even if the similar job example wasn’t the most enjoyable, it can still be your favorite because of what you learned on the job and the meaningfulness of the work you were doing.

You want to use a former job example, when possible, that has a similar look and feel to the one for which you are applying. Choosing a job example that is too different from the one you are trying to acquire may worry the interviewer. She/he might think that you will dislike the position for which you are interviewing and may result with you leaving the company after they spend considerable time and effort to train you. Or, the interviewer might suspect that you will put minimal effort into your job performance.

Other typical questions could include:

“How do you handle change?” – Change occurs very rapidly in this technical age. Showing that you are adaptable is important.

“Are you an organized person?” – You will most likely have to multitask in a position today. Are you able to prioritize and keep multiple things moving at once?

“How do you go about making important decisions?” – What is your thought process? What things do you consider before making a decision? Are you a feeling person or a more logical person? Depending on the position either of these could be valuable.

“Are you proactive or reactive to situations?” – Do you address problems before or after they occur? Most employers would want to hire someone who can keep problems at bay, so have some proactive examples handy for whatever your answer is going to be.

“What do you know about our company?” – Do your research before the interview. Look up recent news stories about a product release or new client. Get an idea of size and services provided. Don’t go into an interview without knowledge of the company to which you are applying.

These are a few examples of questions you may face. For more assistance contact the Career Services Office at 860-768-4287.