

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE TOP 5 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



POSITIVE CAREER ADVICE

1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

An interviewer will often use this as an opening question to help you relax.

Your answer will create a first impression of you and will help set the tone for the rest of your interview.

Many interviewees spend too long answering this question as there are no parameters so, focus on your skills, characteristics and successes and what makes you a strong candidate in relation to the job description.

A great answer will address the following points;

- What are your primary selling points for this job?
- Why are you interested in this position?

Structure your answer using the following three components.

1. Who you are professionally - an overview statement that shows off your strengths and gives a sense of your personality too.

Good example – "I'm an innovative HR Manager with eight years of experience managing all aspects of the HR functions, from recruiting to training to benefits for Fortune 500 companies." - Concisely summarises a diverse background.

Poor example – "Well, I grew up in London. As a child, I always wanted to be an Engineer, then later became interested in science. I excelled at school in all three science subjects from early on and visited lots of museums." - Too much information.

2. Highlight your expertise - Never assume that the interviewer has carefully read through your CV and knows your qualifications. Use your answer to briefly highlight 2-4 points that you think make you stand out.

Good example – "I have spent the last six years developing my skills as a Customer Service Manager for xxx company. I won several performance awards and received two promotions. I enjoy managing people and solving customers problems."

Aim to emphasise your experience, enthusiasm and proof of performance.



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Poor example – "My first job was as an administrative assistant for xxx company. I enjoyed the role and, it served me well for eight years. I wasn't sure about my career path at the time, so I took a position as a Receptionist. It only lasted six months, but I enjoyed it"

The interviewer is not going to be interested in a job eight years ago. If you start your answer with the least impressive part of your career, the interviewer is likely to disengage early on.

3. Why you are here - End by telling them why you are keen to be considered for the position.

Good example – "Although I enjoy my current role, I feel I am now ready for a more challenging position, and this position excites me. From my understanding of the job description, there is a strong focus on developing the customer journey. I was part of a project team that looked at this in my current company, and it's something that I feel passionate about". - Concise and positive.

Poor example – "Because of the company's financial problems, I am worried about my job's stability and have decided to look for new opportunities."



Reassure the interviewer that you are enthusiastic about THEIR job, not just any job.

So, avoid;

- reciting your CV from the very beginning. It can turn in to a long monologue that starts with one's oldest and probably least relevant and impressive experience.
- being too modest. If you are, your responses will be humble and vague and may fail to communicate your most substantial attributes to the role.
- be wary of talking too much about your personal life and hobbies. Focus on who you are professionally unless asked about hobbies or outside pursuits.
- overthinking this question. It is easy if you do not prepare to ramble.

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2. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

Your strengths should reflect on how you perform a job, whereas your skills and aptitudes show what you are capable of doing.

Aim to reassure the interviewer that you are the perfect candidate, the answer to all their hiring needs. Preparing for this question in advance and outlining several possible answers, you'll be in a much better position to come up with a great response in the interview which will help you to appear polished, well prepared and confident. The trick is to tailor your answer. Ensure your response is truthful, relevant to the position and the company you're applying for.



Example Answer:

"I'm a problem solver. I enjoy tackling a problem and looking at it from every angle. I am motivated by work that challenges me and pushes me to think outside of the box. I relish opportunities where I am allowed to work with other people to come up with creative solutions. At my last company, I needed to come up with ways to increase our department's workflow without decreasing our accuracy. I spent time with management colleagues analysing what their associated departments were doing to find better ways we could work together more efficiently. By doing this, I was able to streamline the process and also beat our previous deadline by three days delivering superior service as a result."

Solid leadership/management skills/competencies demonstrated.

Willing to take on responsibility / Ability to meet deadlines / Determination / Problem resolution / Adaptable / Attention to detail / Quick learner / Strong people skills / Team player / Innovative / Reliable & Dependable / Positive & Optimistic / Future-focused

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3. WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?

This question very often goes hand-in-hand with a question around your strengths. Always interpret your weaknesses as areas for development, so you consider how you will improve them.

Why do hiring managers ask this question? Well, they aren't so much looking at your answer but more with how you answer it. Knowing this is your secret to turning this question into an opportunity to showcase yourself as the perfect person for the job. It is a question that you have the chance to prepare for, so ensure you do.

To help you answer this question think about instances when you've had challenges previously;

- What have you learnt from those experiences?
- How have you developed as a person?
- Do you struggle to move on from situations?
- Are you afraid of change or fear the unknown?
- Do you find it hard to receive criticism without getting defensive?

Now take those things and examine them. Are you fixing them?

How did you overcome these challenges? What did you learn and do you continue to apply what you learnt to similar situations now?

Consider the job and relate your weaknesses so you can tailor your answer to help fit what the hiring manager will be hoping to hear.

Example Answer:

"I sometimes get nervous speaking in front of other people. While this isn't normally a problem, I've found that there have been times during meetings that I haven't spoken up and shared my ideas and insights when I should have done. My supervisor in my last job encouraged me and often asked me directly what I thought about things and asked me for suggestions. My confidence grew as I realised that my voice was important. While learning to speak up wasn't easy, it's helped me to do my job more efficiently and has resulted in improved productivity for my department overall".

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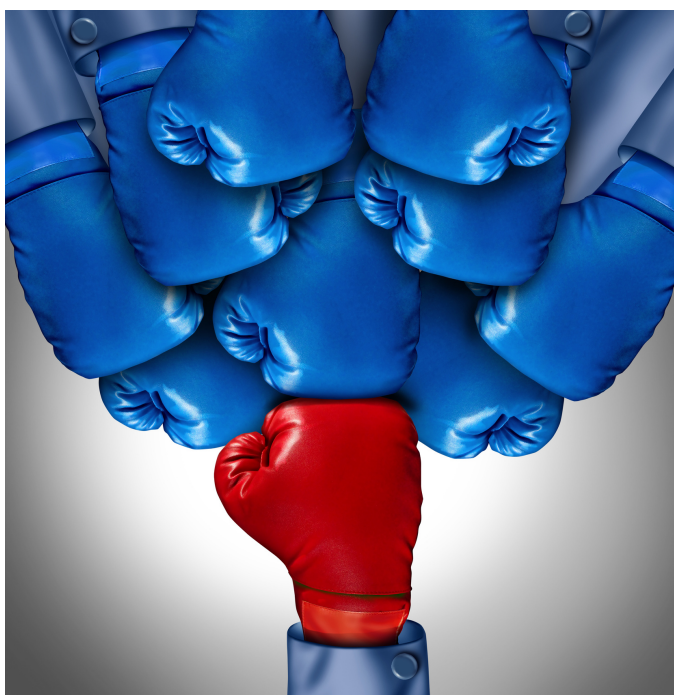
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What if your most significant weakness is that you do not have any evident experience in relation to the role?

It is a weakness that even the interviewer can see based on your CV, so face it and bring it up, odds are whoever is going to hire you will anyway. Your aim is to convince the hiring manager that although you lack experience specific to the job, you more than make up for it in other valuable ways.

- Can you think about something from your past work experience that relates to the job?
- What are you doing outside work (such as further training) that relates to the position?

This will show that you are taking this weakness and tackling it head-on to prepare yourself for the job.



4. WHY SHOULD I HIRE YOU?

Remember, employers hire people to solve problems, whether it's boosting sales or streamlining processes or building a brand. You must show that you are the best person to solve that problem.

As you are preparing for your interview and reviewing the job description and the requirements for the role consider the required personality traits, skills and qualifications and start to make a list of your qualities that fit the requirements of the role.

For each quality, jot down a specific time that you used that trait to achieve something at work. Remember to think beyond the job description and consider which of your skills and accomplishments make you a better candidate than the competition.

Remember when delivering your answer, be positive and reiterate your interest in the company and the position. Keep your answer concise, no more than a minute or two long. Focus on what makes you unique. The interviewer wants to know the individual value you bring compared to other applicants. Therefore, focus on one or two qualities you possess that are different from what other interviewees might offer.

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Example Answer

"You have explained that you are looking for a Sales Manager who can effectively lead twenty-four employees. In my 15 years of experience as a Sales Manager, I have developed strong team-building skills. I received two awards for 'Manager of the Year' for my innovative strategies for motivating employees to meet and surpass quarterly deadlines. If offered this position, I will bring my leadership abilities and strategies to drive a high performing culture".

5. TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU HAVE HAD TO COPE WITH A DIFFICULT SITUATION?

Hiring managers love to ask behavioural questions, and one of their favourite subjects is conflict.

The aim of these types of questions is for the interviewer to find out more about the interviewee's conflict management ability and general interpersonal skills.

With behavioural questions, interviewers seek examples of how you've handled specific situations in the past. It is challenging to come up with an answer instantaneously, so this again is a question you must prepare in advance.

Prepare your answer using the S.T.A.R. format which, will allow you to structure the shape of your response.

Example answer to "Tell me about a time you experienced conflict on a team project?"

S/T(Situation/Task) – Set the scene, by providing enough background information and context as to why the conflict arose. Then consider the part you played and the responsibility you had when solving the problem. (Example used from biginterview.com)

"I was managing the creation of our new corporate brochure. I was working to a very tight deadline because I had to have the brochures printed in time for a big upcoming trade show. I was in charge of delivering them on time, this involved coordinating team members from Marketing, Sales, Graphic Design and Product Management. The Designer assigned to the project was very talented, but unfortunately missed a deadline which we agreed. When I approached him about it, he was very defensive".



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A (Action/Approach) –What was the action that you took? Describe how you resolved the disagreement in a professional manner.

"I was surprised by his response, but I remained calm. I acknowledged that the deadlines were tight and explained the reasoning and the importance of having the brochure ready for the trade show. He relaxed a little when he saw that I wasn't accusatory. He told me about all of his other competing projects and how overwhelmed he was. I asked him if there was any way that I could help him come up with a solution. Eventually, we agreed that it would help if his manager had a better understanding of how important and time-consuming this project was. We decided we would speak with her together. She ended up assigning some of his other projects to another designer, which took some pressure off him".

R (Results) – A good interview story always has a happy ending. End your response with a description of the positive outcome(s) of your action. The business impact and/or feedback you received.

Results are more powerful when they are quantifiable (increased sales by 25%, save the company £30k) or anecdotal (the client was delighted and sent my manager an email, my manager loved my approach and commended me on the high-quality service I provided).

"As a result, the Designer was able to focus on the brochure and meet the deadline. He apologised for how he reacted and thanked me for my help. We successfully completed the brochure on time for the trade show and we received numerous compliments from both our own sales reps and potential customers. Our trade show presence led to £500,000 in new sales leads and I believe the new brochure helped us to achieve that."

Remember an interview is a DIALOGUE, not a MONOLOGUE.

It's a conversation between two or more parties that enable relationships and rapport to form.

Your answers should be concise, well prepared and specific and relevant to the company and the job.

