

How to Give Great Answers to Interview Questions



Job interviews are always hard, no matter what stage you are at in your career. It would be amazing if the hiring manager emailed you their questions before the interview, but that's unlikely to happen.

While you will not get the questions in advance, you can take away a lot of the guesswork and set yourself up for success by preparing for a few of the most common ones. Here are a few questions that are almost always asked at interviews, and some key points to remember when answering them.

Why are you interested in working for us?

This is a chance to show what you like about the company and your understanding of its values or culture. Don't be fake or go overboard and try to tie your answer back to your own values and goals. Note, there is a chance there will be more questions around their values and goals during the interview. This is a great opportunity to show you've done your homework and are familiar with the company and what matters to them.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

When explaining your strengths, try to identify the skills and experience that you have that make you a great fit for the position and give the interviewer examples of when you demonstrated those strengths. The weakness question is a little trickier; you don't want to give the manager a reason not to hire you, but you can't claim to be perfect either. The best approach is to choose a weakness that would not negatively impact your ability to do this specific job and, more importantly, outline the steps you've taken to overcome it.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Employers usually ask this question because they want to understand how this job fits in with your career goals. Recruitment and training are expensive, and they don't want to invest their resources into you if you are just going to leave them in six months or a year. Also, employers tend to like candidates who are focused on their goals and know what they want. The best way to answer this question is to give them a clear career goal and outline how this position will help you to achieve it. If possible, outline how you hope to grow within their organization.

Why did you leave your last job?

This question helps the manager screen out potential problem employees. The best approach is to be as honest as possible. Do not speak negatively about your previous employer or coworkers. If you were fired from your last job, you may want to explain the situation to the employer, but be sure to also explain what you learned from the experience. Remember: the manager will likely find out what happened through their network or when they are checking your references. If you are still unsure of how to handle this question in an interview, it may be best to talk to an employment counsellor or advisor.

If you get this job, what would be your priorities for the first three months?

This question allows you to paint a picture of how you would perform in this position. Your answer should

show that you understand the challenges of the role and that you are well prepared to address them. The key here is to do your research on the position and company and to determine the priorities for the job from the manager's perspective. If you are unsure, because you are just starting out, reach out to your contacts in the industry or trade, or an employment counsellor, and ask them how they would approach the first three months in the role for insight.

What are your hobbies?

This may seem like an unimportant question, but it may be important to the interviewer. For instance, the business may strive to employ a well-rounded team, or the manager might be trying to gauge your physical health for more strenuous roles, but most importantly, it will help them see if you are a cultural fit for the organization. You probably have a bunch of hobbies and interests, so try to focus on two or three at most that line up well with the job opportunity and company values or showcase your teamwork skills or leadership.

What makes you a good fit for this position?

In other words, why should they hire you over other qualified candidates? Review the job's requirements and responsibilities line by line and create a detailed summary (with examples) of how you are the perfect fit. Remember, the question is about your "fit" with the company. Show how you will be a good match for the company's culture, based on what you learned while researching it.

You can never know for sure everything an employer will ask at an interview. Some managers pride themselves on tripping candidates up by asking wild or odd questions like, "Which Harry Potter character would you be?" or "What is your favourite board game?" Stay professional and honest, and remember to see things from the employer's perspective, and you should do just fine.

A few extra tips:

1. Review the job posting for details to reference in your answers.
2. Research the company by checking out their website and online presence to understand not only what they do as an organization but their values and company culture.
3. With all answers, be enthusiastic and confident.
4. If you receive a question you weren't expecting, ask for a moment to consider your answer, then take a second or two, to organize your thoughts before answering. Not only will this help you give a stronger answer than if you were to just jump in and wing it without consideration, but it will also show restraint and reflection on your actions and words.
5. Don't shy away from talking about your accomplishments but also give credit where it is due. You are there to shine and get the job but highlighting others' contributions to your achievements shows you're a team player and supportive of your coworkers.
6. Be honest and professional. If you stretch the truth, it will come out at some point.
7. Don't let odd questions rattle you.
8. Talk to an employment counsellor and people in your industry or trade for help in developing your interview answers. Family and friends do not have the insight this group will be able to provide you.

To check out Tropicana's Employment Centre's workshops, go to mytropicana.ca/employmentcalendar

