

# Questions, Questions



**Introduction:** The main part of a job interview, of course, consists mainly of questions. A majority of the questions are asked by the interviewer, since he/she is trying to find your strengths and weaknesses. The interviewer wants to be convinced that you have the skills, experience and personality to do a good job. But you will also have the opportunity to ask questions to get a clearer picture of the company and the potential job.

This unit will provide information about questions typically asked during an interview--usual questions, tough questions, illegal questions, and questions you should ask. Spend time before your interview to organize your thoughts--how your skills and experience relate to the position for which you are interviewing, what excites you most about this job, why you've selected this job and/or career. Study the following questions and sample responses to help you prepare for your interviews.

## Usual Questions:

### A. **Tell me about yourself.**

This is probably one of the simplest questions that you will receive, but one that throws people off. It really means, tell me what you can do for this company and how well you'll fit in here if we hire you. Think of a one-minute commercial advertising you--personal and work qualities that would interest an employer.

For a sales job you might concentrate on previous sales experience and personal characteristics that fit the job: "Even when I participated in our JMG chapter fund raisers, I enjoyed developing strategies that would move the product faster." In any job, basic traits are good to mention. "I'm very healthy, rarely miss a day at school or my part-time job."

### B. **Why do you think you would be good at this job (or why should we hire you)?**

Here's where they find out how well you understand their needs and how confident you are of your qualifications for the position. "I think you should hire me because I have the skills you need in this position." "My communication skills are strong as a result of my participation in our career association activities." "I have been preparing for a career in this field, and I know I will be successful."

### C. **Why do you want to work for this company?**

This is where research pays off. Briefly tell them what you have learned about the company and why it fits into your career plan. "Your company is a leader in your field, and it is growing." If you use a statement like this, be able to back up the source of your information. "I think this will be a great opportunity for me to grow professionally."

### D. **What is your greatest strength?**

As you review the job description, compare it to your skills and experience and make a list of your 10 strongest points that relate to the job. "I am organized and manage my time well. I also work well under pressure." It helps to give an example to illustrate.

- E. **What is your greatest weakness?**  
Mention something that is actually a strength or something which you are continually improving. "I am not a strong public speaker. That's why I joined Toastmasters three months ago; I'm pleased with my progress and recently received our monthly award." "My word processing skills are a little weak; that's why I'm taking a course in Word at our local training school."
- F. **What interests you most about this position?**  
As with all questions, give a truthful answer. "The opportunity for professional growth." "The opportunity to grow with a company that is a leader in its field."
- G. **What are your plans for the future? Where do you see yourself in five years?**  
Think about your short- and long-term career goals--what you want to achieve professionally. "I hope I'll still be working here and have increased my level of skills and responsibilities based on my experience and performance." "There are many things I want to do over the next five years. One is to get settled in the career I've decided on and learn as much as I can."
- H. **How does your previous experience relate to this job?**  
Again, this is where research pays off. Match your skills to those required for the job--maximizing the matches. If you are weak in one or more areas, plan how you'll strengthen them if asked by the interviewer. Don't neglect unpaid (volunteer) experience. "I have a good background in selling, both for my school and career association activities as well as my part-time job."
- I. **What will your former teachers and employers say about you?**  
Contacting references beforehand will enable you to ask them to relate your skills to the skills required of the position. "I'm sure they will tell you that I am an organized person who always met deadlines." Again, relate your strong points to the job.
- J. **What was your favorite subject in school? And why?**  
Relate this, again, to the job. For a receptionist position, you might say "My office practices class because the class and participation in the office club provided me with good experiences. Last year, I won the state competition for telephone techniques."
- K. **What school activities did you participate in?**  
"I participated in basketball, Vocational Industrial Clubs of America and student council because I enjoy working with others toward a common goal."
- L. **What jobs have you held? Why did you leave?**  
"I worked for the forest service last summer. It was only a seasonal job but it was a great experience and I learned a lot from my supervisor about forest management."

- M. **Tell me about a problem you've had at school or work and how you solved it?**  
 "I was assigned a project with another student and our schedules conflicted--we solved the problem by meeting during the lunch hour and were able to complete the project on time."
- N. **What is your biggest accomplishment so far?**  
 Remember to relate it to the job--if it is a sales job you might say, "I was the top salesperson for our JMG chapter's Annual Halloween Fund Raiser."

### Tough Questions:

- A. **How long will you stay with the company?**  
 If you see yourself with another company or another department, tread lightly. "As long as I can continue to learn and grow."
- B. **Our company has a "no smoking" policy. Will this be a problem for you?**  
 No, I'm not a smoker and appreciate working in a clean environment." "I do smoke, but will certainly follow any company policies."
- C. **What do you expect to get paid for this position?**  
 Your research of the company should include the pay range for this particular job in the community. "I need to further explore the responsibilities and opportunities of the job before I can know what salary to expect." "My research indicates the salary range for this kind of job here is ...; I feel comfortable with the range." If possible have the interviewer suggest a salary.
- D. **Have you ever been fired from a job?**  
 If you were fired for some reason, such as absenteeism, explain to the employer how you realize your mistakes and have changed. "Yes, I was fired from my job at Smith's because of absenteeism. I was having car problems; however, I have more reliable transportation now, and I know this will not be a problem."

### Illegal Questions

When you are asked illegal questions, you can answer if you want to. However you run the risk of giving information that does not relate to the job and which could harm your chances of getting the job. You can refuse to answer--how you do it may make you sound confrontational or uncooperative. Examine the question for intent and respond with an answer as it might apply to the job.

- A. **Marital/Family. Are you married? Do you have children or plan to have children? What are your child care arrangements?**  
 "Child care is not a problem for me."
- B. **Affiliations. What clubs or other organizations do you belong to?**  
 "I am very active in community activities and enjoy working with others to better our community."



- C. **Personal. Questions about weight, height, etc.** Questions about height and weight are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of a job. They can ask, for instance, if you are able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards if that is part of the job.  
“Can you tell me how this relates to the job?”
- D. **Disabilities.** They can ask you if you are able to perform the essential function of the job-- this should be after the interviewer has thoroughly described the job to you.  
“I don’t see any problems performing the functions of the job as you have described it to me.”
- E. **National Origin/Citizenship. Are you a U.S. citizen?**  
“I am authorized to work in the United States.”
- F. **Age.** How old are you? What’s your birth date? Age can only be asked if it relates to the position.  
“I have my license and am able to perform the duties of the job.”
- G. **Arrest Record.** They can only ask if you have been convicted if the crime named is reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.

### Questions You Should Ask

If the information has not been covered in the interview, you might show interest and enthusiasm by asking some of the following questions.

- A. What would be a typical first day assignment for this job?
- B. Is there a typical career path for a person in this position?
- C. What are the company’s current challenges?
- D. What training programs does the company offer employees? What are the opportunities for advancement?
- E. What are you looking for in the person you hire?
- F. What additional education and training would help me advance in your firm?
- G. What qualities do you look for in a new employee?
- H. Is there anything more you need to know about me in order to be considered for the job?
- I. I was excited about this job driving here, but I’m really excited now. Would you tell me about the process to fill the position?
- J. Is there any travel required for this job? If so, will I be using my own transportation or will that be provided? How are travel expenses handled?
- K. What type of orientation or training do new employees receive?
- L. How many people will I be working with? How many people are in my department?
- M. If I am hired, what is the starting date for the position?
- N. What employee benefits does the company offer?