



Popular Interview Questions

Hints and tips on how to answer popular interview questions

SECTION 1: ICE BREAKERS



"Icebreakers" asked at the start of an interview, aim to relax you and give you the chance to introduce yourself. The icebreaker/opening question is often based around something you have listed in the hobbies section of your resume. The question is usually quite simple, but it is asked to test what sort of a first impression you make.

Question 1: Tell us about yourself

The purpose of this question:

- To give you an opportunity from the start to mention your relevant skills, accomplishments, strengths and background
- Because one or all member of the interview panel haven't looked at your resume for a while and they want you to refresh their memories as to who you are

Include aspects of your personality and background that you want to promote - aspects that related to the job and what the company is looking for.

Question 2: Tell us about an interest or hobby that you enjoy.

- No interests or hobbies will leave them wondering why you are not interested in anything. It may also leave them thinking that you're not a hard worker.
- Too many interests or hobbies will leave them wondering how you will find time for work.
- A time consuming hobby, for example being a member of the Australian Olympic Ski team, will also leave them wondering how you will find time for work.
- Only listing solitary hobbies, or things you only do on your own, like reading or swimming, may leave them thinking you don't like being around other people.
- Controversial interests or hobbies can have a negative impact, for example: being a member

of an extreme fanatical group, and in some instances religious or political groups.

SECTION 2: GENERAL QUESTIONS



Question 3: Why are you interested in this position?

This type of question is usually asked soon after the ice-breakers. Employers will be listening for some of the following:

- Do you have a realistic understanding of this job and this organisation?
- Is the job/career you describe available in this organisation?
- How much initiative and ambition do you have?
- What can you bring to this job in terms of your skills and experience?

Question 4: Please outline any previous work experience you have and tell me why it's valuable for this job.

This is a two part question: (1) outline the work experience and (2) explain its value.

Part 1. Begin by briefly listing all your work experience (paid or unpaid). However, if you have had a lot of jobs, you may want to be selective and mention jobs related to the job you are applying for; recent jobs; or jobs where you were given responsibility. Talk about how long you have been at some of the jobs and what contribution you made.

Part 2. List the skills you developed from your job - be positive! Every job has something to contribute to your skill set. For example:

- Accepting responsibility
- Developing customer service skills
- Working under direction
- Perhaps give direction or train new staff
- Working in a team and build your team skills
- Coping with repetitive work

- Dealing with managers, suppliers, colleagues or clients. This develops your communication and interpersonal skills.
- Juggling part time work, hobbies and study. This shows your organisational skills, the ability to prioritise, and can meet deadlines under pressure
- Work ethic, a willingness to work
- Self-discipline
- Developing attitudes such as: loyalty, respect and trust

When talking about a past job:

- DON'T speak badly about your last employer
- DON'T say that a job has been a total waste of time. Even bad experiences have a value
- DON'T pretend to have learnt everything from your part time work
- DON'T say that you could not get on with colleagues or your manager

Question5: Tell us about your weaknesses.

Tip 1: Refer to a weakness as an area for improvement. You need to indicate that you are aware of your weakness and that you have strategies to strengthen this weakness. For example, "An area for improvement for me is my time management skills, I plan to overcome this by creating daily checklists in my diary". This puts a positive spin on things!

Tip 2: Try to be light-hearted, or make a joke. However, this is the least recommended way of handling this type of situation. Your weakness could then be eating too much chocolate, your backhand in tennis or lack of exercise. You may get away with this approach, then again, you may be asked to take the question seriously. So you still need to be prepared to answer this question properly.

Four approaches not to take include:

- DON'T confess to weaknesses that make you unemployable! Don't talk about your poor communication or technical skills your problems in getting on with other people, or the fact that you are always late. You do need to be honest; you don't need to commit interview suicide!
- DON'T pretend to be perfect. You are expected to have some personal insight in to your weaknesses. Some employers may think you're a little arrogant for not being able to see any faults in yourself.
- DON'T give a long answer
- DON'T volunteer more than one weakness

Question 6: How do you work under pressure?

In brief, employers want to know that you can stay calm and efficient under pressure. However, this question is also asking about your skills in problem solving; decision making organising and your ability to work under tight deadlines and time constraints. You may be a person who enjoys working under pressure. You may like being busy or having a big workload. Give an example of a time you have worked under pressure and enjoyed it.

Most people prefer not to work under pressure. You could explain some of the following methods you use to manage stress and to reduce the chance that you will need to work under pressure. This may include:

- Planning your workload ahead
- Managing time and yourself well
- Delegating
- Your ability to be a self starter
- Not putting things off till later
- Setting goals
- Prioritising
- Giving the right amount of time to each project
- Having clear routines and keeping other work in control

SECTION 3: BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS



Your past behaviour is the best predictor of your future behaviour. In other words, what you did last time, is probably what you will do next time.

In preparation for these questions, you will need to develop brief, specific, factual examples from your past highlighting the competencies the interviewer is looking for. Discussing these examples or stories will be much easier if you've thought about them before the interview. You can usually find the competencies which will be covered in the interview listed in the position description, job advertisement or on the web site provided by the company.

For each story or example you use, make sure you can cover the following three specific areas:

1. The Situation you had to deal with or the Tasks you had to accomplish. Provide enough information for the interviewer to understand. Be able to:
2. The Action you took in response to the situation or task. Describe the steps you took and any obstacles that you have to overcome.
3. The Results of your actions.

You can use the acronym STAR (Situation, Tasks, Action, and Result) to remember these story elements the interviewer will be looking for.

Question 7: Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a project on time. What did you do to fix the situation? What was the result?

The interviewer wants to see how you manage your time and why you failed to meet your deadline. In answering this question you need to think of a time when you did not meet a deadline. The example should not be too damaging, don't make it seem like you routinely miss deadlines.

Your answer should include the following points:

- That your time management skills are of a high standard and missing this one deadline was an unusual, one-off event
- That the result or outcome was not too serious. Perhaps you still achieved a good result, or an extension was allowed because the reason was out of your control.

DON'T spend a lot of time on the excuse stage of your story most people have heard them all before!

Be clear about what you learned from this situation and how you managed it. The missed deadline should be a time to learn and time to develop better strategies so that the situation doesn't happen again.

Question 8: Tell me about a time when you had to work as part of a team, and you had a team member who wasn't helping or doing their share of the work. What did you do to fix the situation? What was the result?

The question is asking about your interpersonal skills and what you are like as a team player.

Remember to use the **STAR (Situation, Task, Action and Result)** approach when answering behavioural questions.

Situation/Tasks

Think of a time when you had a team member who wasn't being very cooperative or productive. Some examples of the "situation" could be a team member who:

- Avoided responsibility for deadlines
- Didn't work to an acceptable standard because they did not have the skill level required
- Did not share the work ethic and commitment held by the rest of the group

DON'T spend too long on what happened or put all the blame on someone else.

Action

The example must be one where you had the chance to solve the problem. You (and your group) need to

have had an approach or method which worked.

Giving examples of how you were a good team member includes:

- Willingness to listen
- Willing to contribute
- Respectful and encouraging of others ideas
- Team spirit

Results

You need to select an example which has a happy ending, or result. Ideally you will have learned from this situation, and will have even better interpersonal skills and techniques next time you are in this situation:

- To reach agreement from all members each stage of the project
- To work out each team member's strengths and weaknesses to help work out how to divide the tasks

Question 9: Sometimes adjusting to change can be very difficult. Can you think of a specific time when you needed to adapt to change? What did you do to be successful at it? What was the result?

Situation/Tasks

Some examples of change you might want to consider

- The transition to tertiary study after many years at school or work
- Moving out of home
- Moving to Melbourne from the country, another state or overseas
- Changing jobs

Action

The employer will be looking for an active approach where you took steps to ensure a positive outcome.

Results

As the question states, the employer is looking for a "successful" outcome where you managed the change well. Employers will believe that you will make your own success and luck. They will also believe that if you were successful in your approach and style in the past, then you will be highly likely to be successful at it again when you make the change from study to the job they are offering.

Question 10: Describe the biggest problem you have solved in the past year. How did you handle it? What was the result?

Situation/Tasks

Think about a meaningful project or major goal you have set yourself. The example must demonstrate how you get things done; it can be personal or

professional in nature. Professional examples which ever student has are:

- Selecting your course
- Completing your education
- Finding an appropriate job

Personal examples are often not as good as professional ones but can be used. Examples include:

- House renovating
- Raising a family
- Relocating
- Long term care of a relative
- Planning a big event - holiday

Action

- Observe and think about data, people or things logically
- Put forward a possible explanation
- Apply information
- Ability to see the big picture
- Test and evaluate

As always in a behavioural question, your result needs a positive angle to it. For example:

- The actual result of your problem needs to be positive; or
- Your actions resulted in the best outcome possible under the circumstances, or
- You learned from the experience and you will be better placed to deal with the problem next time

Question 11: Tell me about a time when you succeeded as the leader of a group. How did you do this? What was the result?

Situation/Task

The interviewers are asking if you have the ability to lead a group; can you manage, guide or direct other people. To really convince the interviewers that you do have leadership skills you need to give a real and recent example of a time you have led a group. In this situation, it doesn't really matter if the example is from study, work or elsewhere. You could select an example when you were on a committee for a club, society or organising a social event.

Action

Discuss your leadership style, and your method of leading your group toward the accomplishment of a goal or task. Examples of skills and attributes of a good team leader include:

- Open to discussion
- Able to recognise potential
- Vision

- Organised
- Able to make difficult decisions
- Approachable and respected by the team
- Concerned for those they are leading
- Confidence
- Good communication skills
- Self sacrificing
- Able to delegate
- Able to resolve negative conflicts

Result

Your result does not need to be dramatic, but it does need to be realistic. Discuss what your goal was and whether you achieved it. Were you happy with the outcome? How was it viewed and evaluated by others? What it completed at a high standard and in a timely fashion? What was the relationship between you and the rest of the group like at the end of the project?