

# How should I respond to job interview questions?

Although there is no set format that every job interview will follow, there are some questions that you can almost guarantee will crop up. Here's a list of the most common questions and a guide to the kind of answers your interviewer wants to hear.

- **Tell me about yourself...**

This is usually the opening question and, as first impressions are key, one of the most important. Keep your answer to under five minutes, beginning with an overview of your highest qualification then running through the jobs you've held so far in your career. You can follow the same structure of your resume, giving examples of achievements and the skills you've picked up along the way. Don't go into too much detail – your interviewer will probably take notes and ask for you to expand on any areas where they'd like more information. If you're interviewing for your first job since leaving education, focus on the areas of your studies you most enjoyed and how that has led to you wanting this particular role.

- **What are your strengths?**

Pick the three biggest attributes that you think will get you the job and give examples of how you have used these strengths in a work situation. They could be tangible skills, such as proficiency in a particular computer language, or intangible skills such as good management. If you're not sure where to start, take a look at the job description. There is usually a section listing candidate requirements, which should give you an idea of what they are looking for.

- **What are your weaknesses?**

The dreaded question, which is best handled by picking something that you have made positive steps to redress. For example, if your IT ability is not at the level it could be, state it as a weakness but tell the interviewer about training courses or time spent outside work hours you have used to improve your skills. Your initiative could actually be perceived as a strength. On no accounts say "I don't have any weaknesses", your interviewer won't believe you, or "I have a tendency to work too hard", which is seen as avoiding the question.

- **Why should we hire you? or What can you do for us that other candidates can't?**

What makes you special and where do your major strengths lie? You should be able to find out what they are looking for from the job description. "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills and the ability to build long-term customer relationships" is a good opening sentence, which can then lead onto a more specific example of something you have done so far in your career. State your biggest achievement and the benefit it made to the business, then finish with "Given the opportunity, I could bring this success to your company."

- **What are your goals? or Where do you see yourself in five years time?**

It's best to talk about both short-term and long-term goals. Talk about the kind of job you'd eventually like to do and the various steps you will need to get there, relating this in some way back to the position you're interviewing for. Show the employer you have ambition, and that you have the determination to make the most of every job you have to get where you want to be.

Say, I envision being part of a dynamic, growing organization where many personal growth opportunities are being created. Based on my track record of having made a solid impact, the organization promotes me, in five years, to higher levels of responsibility.

- **Why do you want to work here?**

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought. If you've prepared for the interview properly, you should have a good inside knowledge of the company's values, mission statement, development plans and products. Use this information to describe how your goals and ambition matches their company ethos and how you would relish the opportunity to work for them. Never utter the phrase "I just need a job."

- **What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?**

This is a great time to brag about yourself through someone else's words. Try to include one thing that shows your ability to do the job, one thing that shows your commitment to the work, and one thing that shows you are a good person to have in a team. For example, "My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can always rely on me, and he likes my sense of humor."

- **What salary are you seeking?**

You can prepare for this by knowing the value of someone with your skills. Try not to give any specific numbers in the heat of the moment – it could put you in a poor position when negotiating later on. Your interviewer will understand if you don't want to discuss this until you are offered the job. If they have provided a guideline salary with the job description, you could mention this and say it's around the same area you're looking for.

- **If you were an animal, which one would you want to be?**

Interviewers use this type of psychological question to see if you can think quickly. If you answer 'a bunny', you will make a soft, passive impression. If you answer 'a lion', you will be seen as aggressive. What type of personality will it take to get the job done?

You should always have some questions for your interviewer to demonstrate your interest in the position. Prepare a minimum of five questions, some which will give you more information about the job, and some which delve deeper into the culture and goals of the company.