

Questions you can count on

Below is a list of questions commonly asked by potential employers in an interview. How many are you prepared to answer?

General/Traditional Questions

Graduate interviews always include seemingly harmless general questions. Despite the conversational tone, these questions are designed to uncover your motivations, attitudes and self awareness. These questions often relate to your interests, skills, and career aspirations.

1. What activities, organisations or sports have you been involved in during your time at university?
2. What made you decide on [whatever your field is] as a career?
3. What do you think you have to offer this company?
4. What do you think this position involves?
5. What do you see as your greatest strength?
6. What would you say your weaknesses are?
7. What are your long-term career objectives?
8. Are your grades a good indication of your academic ability?
9. Do you plan to do any further study/courses over the next three years?
10. How would you describe yourself?
11. What are your career interests/specialisations?
12. What was your favourite and least favourite subject?

Commonly asked interview questions

“Tell me about yourself”

Most people hate this question. By preparing for it and knowing what a wonderful opportunity it offers to sell yourself, you should look forward to it. It is the most frequently asked question during interviewing. It usually serves as a bridge to go from small talk to the real interview. To answer it, briefly describe your education and your work history. Briefly describe interesting aspects of your education or a job and look for opportunities to share accomplishments. Add in your personal interests.

“Are your grades a good indication of your academic ability?”

If you worked hard at your studies, a person might say, “I worked very hard and really took my studies seriously. I graduated with a 5.2 GPA (or with honours). Even the classes I didn’t do so well in grade-wise, really taught me something” or “I worked hard and got good grades, but I also wanted to balance my education. I was active in [e.g. debating, sports, volunteer work].” If you were a poor student, you could admit to a lack of focus at the time, adding that you are very focused now. If you got your best results in your major, or individual subjects, mention those rather than your overall GPA.

“Why would you like to work for us?”

If the question is asked at or near the beginning of the first interview, you have an opportunity to describe what you know about the organisation. If the question is asked after the interviewer has described the job and the company in detail, you could mention positive points that you had discovered on your own, as well as some mentioned by the interviewer. This might include the reputation of the company or department, its rapid growth, or your personal affinity with some of the concepts presented by the interviewer.

“What are your weaknesses?”

This is an opportunity for the interviewer to find out how aware you are of yourself as a person. Use no more than two words to describe your weakness (e.g. shy, quiet). Provide the answer in three parts. For example: 1) Sometimes/some people say that I am (quiet), 2) the good aspect of that is that I (listen well or when I do say something it usually makes a significant contribution to the conversation), 3) but I know I need to work on (being a bit more outgoing).

“Why did you choose your major?”

To answer this, recall your reasons for choosing your major. And then give only the most positive ones. Demonstrate forethought and planning ability. Indicate



This working material is part of the Online

Modules www.career-modules.eu of the **European Career Development Programme (ECDP)**

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

that the decision was made after considerable thought. If you are not using your major – a psychology major now looking to get into banking – indicate the strengths you were able to develop as a result of your major.

“Why should I employ you?”

This question is often asked at the end of an interview and allows you to summarize your strengths. Since this is a summary, you can discuss points that you’ve already covered and add new ones. Sell yourself. Be prepared to take up to four minutes. Try to focus on everything you have learnt about the job, your future boss, and the needs of the company. With such limited time, you must cover only those points that will have the greatest impact. You can create that impact by describing a combination of personality skills, transferable skills, and technical skills.

“What are your career aspirations?”

This question tests whether you’ve determined your career goals and whether your goals match the

organisation. Sound definite and express your goals based on what you know about the organisation.

“What is your greatest strength?”

The question asks for your number-one strength, skill, or asset and requires you to analyse yourself. You should have several strengths in mind and share the one you feel is the most appropriate for the position you are applying for. Begin with a brief statement, and provide a clear example.

“Do you prefer to work individually or as part of a team?”

The best responses depend on what you know about the job and how you see yourself in the position. If the organisation is looking for a decisive person, you would emphasise your individualism and independence. If most work is done by committees and task forces, emphasise your ability to work as part of a team. If you are not sure, describe how you enjoy both aspects.

Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions are becoming increasingly popular within the interview process. Behavioural questions relate specifically to the selection criteria such as communication skills, team work, customer focus and time management. An example of a behavioural question is “Tell me about a time when you’ve had to deal with conflicting priorities.”

The idea behind behavioural questions is that past behaviour is a fairly accurate indicator of future performance.

If you have demonstrated a particular skill in one context, there’s a possibility that this skill is transferable into another context - the job you’re applying for.

When answering a behavioural question you need to use the STARL approach: Situation – Task – Action – Result – Learning.

If you then link your answer with one of the job requirements, that’s even better!

Behavioural Questions may include the following:

1. Describe a time when you have taken on a role that involved leading or co-ordinating the activities of a group. (*Leadership - initiation/responsibility*)
2. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult situation within a team. (*Teamwork - interpersonal skills/contribution*)
3. Describe a time when you were under pressure. What strategies did you use to get organised and achieve the required task/s? (*Time Management - deadlines/multi-tasking/support*)
4. Tell me about a time when you were under great time pressure to complete some work on time. How did you deal with the situation? What was the outcome? (*Time Management - deadlines/multi-tasking/support*)
5. Tell me about a time when you had to work as a part of a team and you had a team member who wasn’t being very cooperative or productive. What did you do to help the situation? What was the result? (*Teamwork - interpersonal skills/contribution*)
6. Sometimes adjusting to change can be very difficult. Can you think of a specific time when you needed to adapt to change and what steps you took in order to be successful? What was the outcome? (*Problem Solving - flexibility/conflict management/negotiation*)
7. Tell me about a time when you were able to use your initiative to improve a situation. What did you do? How did it change things? (*Leadership - initiation/responsibility*)
8. Tell me about a really good team you have worked in. What part did you play in its success? (*Teamwork - interpersonal skills/contribution*)
9. Describe a situation in which your initial attempts to gain someone’s support and co-operation failed. Did you try again? What was your approach? (*Communication - interpersonal skills/persuasion*)
10. Describe a problem you encountered at work in the last 6 months. How did you go about gathering information to help you make a decision? (*Problem Solving - flexibility*)