

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & TIPS

Q. Tell me about yourself.

Tip. This is the dreaded, classic, open-ended interview question and likely to be among the first. It's your chance to introduce your qualifications, good work habits, etc. Keep it work and career related.

Q. Why did you leave your last job?

Tip. Be careful with this. Avoid trashing other employers and making statements like, "I need more money." Instead, make generic statements such as, "It's a career move."

Q. Tell us about a time when your character strengths were tested. How did you handle it?

Tip. Describe a time in your past work experience when you had to use your personal strengths to deal with a situation and what the positive outcomes were.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

Tip. Everybody has weaknesses, but don't spend too much time on this one and keep it work related. Along with a minor weakness or two, try to point out a couple of weaknesses that the interviewer might see as strengths, such as sometimes being a little too meticulous about the quality of your work. (Avoid saying, "I work too hard." It's a predictable, common answer.) For every weakness, offer a strength that compensates for it.

Q. Which adjectives would you use to describe yourself?

Tip. Answer with positive, work-oriented adjectives, such as conscientious, hard-working, honest and courteous, plus a brief description or example of why each fits you well.

Q. What do you know about our company?

Tip. To answer this one, research the company before you interview.

Q. Why do you want to work for us?

Tip. Same as above. Research the company before you interview. Avoid the predictable, such as, "Because it's a great company." Say why you think it's a great company.

Q. Tell us about a time when you had to complete a task under pressure. How did you handle it?

Tip. Describe a situation when you had to meet a tough deadline, work short handed or handle a problem on your own. Be sure to explain the situation, the actions you took and the positive results.

Q. What past accomplishments gave you satisfaction?

Tip. Briefly describe one to three work projects that made you proud or earned you pats on the back, promotions, raises, etc. Focus more on achievement than reward.

Q. What type of work environment do you like best?

Tip. Tailor your answer to the job. For example, if in doing your job you're required to lock the lab doors and work alone, then indicate that you enjoy being a team player when needed, but also enjoy working independently. If you're required to attend regular project planning and status meetings, then indicate that you're a strong team player and like being part of a team.

Q. Why do you want this job?

Tip. To help you answer this and related questions, study the job ad in advance. But a job ad alone may not be enough, so it's okay to ask questions about the job while you're answering. Say what attracts you to the job. Avoid the obvious and meaningless, such as, "I need a job."

Q. Why should I hire you?

Tip. Point out your positive attributes related to the job, and the good job you've done in the past. Include any compliments you've received from management.

Q. Explain how you overcame a major obstacle.

Tip. The interviewer is likely looking for a particular example of your problem-solving skills and the initiative you have taken to ensure a positive outcome. Be sure to outline the situation, the actions you took and the positive results.

Q. Where do you see yourself five (ten or fifteen) years from now?

Tip. Explain your career-advancement goals that are in line with the job for which you are interviewing. Remember that the interviewer is likely more interested in how he, she or the company will benefit from you achieving your goals than what you will gain. It's not a good idea to tell your potential new boss that you'll be going after his or her job, but it's okay to mention that you'd like to earn a senior or management position.

Q. What qualifies you for this job?

Tip. Tout your skills, experience, education and other qualifications, especially those that match the job description well. Avoid just regurgitating your resume. Explain how you have demonstrated these skills in past jobs.