

INTERVIEWS



Student Career Centre

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Interview for Success

The interview is a critical point in your job search. These 30 or 45 minutes may determine your future. It is time to tell relevant, pertinent stories about yourself.

Purpose of an interview

The interview allows for an exchange of information between the candidate and the employer. The interview allows both parties to determine if:

1. You can do the job in terms of your training, skills and expertise.
2. You are motivated to achieve the goals of the job.
3. You will fit into the companies cultural.

Interview Formats

- **One-on-one:** One job seeker, one interviewer.
- **Panel:** One job seeker, two or more interviewers present.
- **Telephone/Teleconference:** One job seeker, one or more interviewers not physically present.
- **Presentation:** Job seeker requested to prepare (typically in advance) a presentation to an audience during the course of the interview.
- **Reception/Dining:** One or more job seekers, one or more interviewers. The interview is conducted over a meal or beverages
- **Role Play:** Involves the job seeker participating in a fictional situation, designed to replicate a scenario that might occur in the position sought.
- **Video Conference:** One job seeker, one or more interviewers conducting the interview via camera and monitor.

Types of interview questions

There are mainly **3 types of interview questions: Standard, Behavioural and Unusual.**

Standard Questions

These questions are broad in scope, relating to information pertaining to your abilities, knowledge and individual differences.

Examples of standard questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
3. What is your greatest strength? What is your weakness?

Behavioural Questions

The behavioural based interview proceeds from a structure pattern of questions designed to probe past behaviour in specific situations. The intent of this style of interview is to get an idea or prediction of how an individual will manage work based on his/her past behaviour.

Use the S.T.A.R method to answer behavioural questions by telling a brief story describing when you exercised the skill in question.



S – **Situation** (briefly describe the situation)

T – **Task** (what had to be accomplished)

A – **Action** (what you did)

R – **Result** (what was the result)

Example: **Tell me a time that you were able to manage and meet a deadline?**

S: I was once faced with a situation where a shipment of pipe was delayed due to manufacturing problems with the supplier.

T: I knew a crew was scheduled for a particular time and date and the arrival of the shipment was critical.

Behavioural Questions continued

- A:** I negotiated with the supplier to put an extra crew on over the weekend to ensure the shipments timely arrival.
- R:** The pipe arrived on time and the project was completed within the deadline set. The customer was happy and the company was spared by standby expenses.

Unusual questions

Companies often ask these questions to see how you would handle something unexpected. Your response demonstrates aspects of your thought process.

Examples of unusual questions

1. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?
2. Why are manhole covers round?
3. How many quarters does it take to reach the top of the Empire States building?

Answering interview questions

When answering interview questions it is important to:

- Be prepared
- Stay on topic
- Be relevant
- Avoid nervous ramblings

Just because an interviewer keeps looking at you doesn't mean you need to keep talking. Order your thoughts in response to the question and in a conversational tone, answer the question. When you've finished your answer, stop talking! If the interviewer wants more clarification, they will ask additional questions on the subject.

Inappropriate / Illegal Questions

Under the Employment Standards Act of BC, questions pertaining to age, race, ancestry, religion, colour, sex, marital status, and physical/mental disability, place of origin, political beliefs, family status, and sexual orientation are illegal. Below are examples of such questions:

Inappropriate / Illegal Questions continued

1. Are you planning to have a family?
2. Would you say that you are generally healthy?
3. Have you ever missed work as a result of stress?
4. Are you married or single?
5. "Bryce," is that a European name?
6. How are you planning to vote in the election?

Answering inappropriate interview questions

When thinking about your answer, keep in mind that the first inappropriate question you encounter in an interview may simply be a slip up on the part of an inexperienced interviewer and is not intended to discriminate. The best thing to do when you encounter an inappropriate question is to direct the conversation towards a discussion of your skills and abilities as they relate to the position.

Sample Question: When were you born?"

Option 1: **Refuse to respond**

Sample Answer

I'd rather not answer that question as it has nothing to do with my abilities to perform the job.

Refusing to answer a question can be risky as the employer may perceive you as resistant, secretive or a troublemaker.

Option 2: **Inquire how the question relates to the job.**

Sample Answer

I'm not sure why you are asking that question. My age won't affect my ability to do a great job.

By phrasing your response in an open manner, the interviewer will then have the opportunity to explain the reason for this question, if there is one.

Option 3: **Answer the question and address the underlying issue.**

Sample Answer

I imagine that your question stems from a concern that I may be young for this kind of work. In many ways, my age will be of benefit to you. My education is very recent so I am up to date on the latest in the industry. I am energetic and eager to do well.

This answer will satisfy the interviewer who has a concern about your ability to perform the job but who may not realize that they have asked an inappropriate question.

Option 4:

Sample Answer

Simply answer the question. *I was born in September 1985.*

If you choose to answer in this manner, it may be helpful to add more information that you believe the employer is seeking. For example, *“I am a mature 22 year old and I have considerable skills and experience. My education is very recent so I am up to date on the latest in the industry.”* This type of answer acknowledges the facts and presents them as an advantage, not a disadvantage.

Top 10 questions to ask in an interview

1. Describe the atmosphere of the office?
2. How will my performance be measured? By whom?
3. What types of people seem to excel here?
4. What is the company’s policy on providing seminars, attending workshops and training so employees can develop their skills?
5. What is the potential for this position and are there opportunities for advancement within the company?
6. Where are the major concerns that need to be immediately addressed in this job?
7. What are the companies short and long term goals?
8. How will I be trained or introduced to the job?
9. What are the expectations of the job in the first few months?
10. Can you give me an idea of a typical workday in this position

Interview Checklist

- **Be prepared.** Things to bring to your interview include:
 - Resume
 - References and reference letters
 - Pen and paper
 - Copy of the job description
 - Research notes on the organization
 - Your list of questions
- **Dress to impress.** Your interview attire should be clean, presentable and wrinkle-free (e.g. business professional)
- **Be on time.** Arriving 10 minutes before your interview is considered good timing.
- **Make eye contact.** Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake, warm smile and direct eye contact.
- **Demonstrate that you're a team player.** Employers want a team player who can take direction.
- **Be honest.** You should never stretch the truth on your resume or during the interview.
- **Act professional.** Do not chew gum, slouch or steer the conversation too far off work related themes. Sit up straight and conduct yourself in a professional demeanor at all times.
- **Ask questions.** The interview is a fact finding session for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Ask questions about the job, clients, or projects and engage the interviewer.
- **Say "thank you."** Close the interview with another firm handshake, a "thank you" and a smile.

Sample Behavioural Questions

1. Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skill
2. Give me a specific example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it
3. Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem
4. Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion
5. Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete
6. Tell me about a time when you've had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
7. Tell me about a time when you've had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
8. What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
9. Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa)
10. Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
11. Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
12. Give me an example of a goal that you set in the past and tell me about your success in achieving it.
13. Describe to me a time when you had to deal with a difficult customer.
14. Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work or school. Tell me what happened, who was involved and what you did in terms of problem solving.
15. How do you get your peers to accept your ideas and contributions?
16. Describe a situation where you were involved in a leadership role.

Sample Behavioural Questions continued

17. Describe a responsibility you have had that requires a high attention to detail.
18. Describe a situation where you had a disagreement or an argument with a superior. How did you handle it?
19. Tell me about a time when you were asked to complete a task that required the use of information that wasn't easily accessible. Describe the process you went through to obtain that information.
20. There are many jobs that require creative or innovative thinking. Give an example of when you had such a job and how you handled it.
21. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with conflict within your workplace
22. Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives
23. Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
24. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
25. Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your co-workers or subordinates.
26. Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.
27. Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
28. Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you've completed.
29. Describe a team experience you found rewarding.
30. Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What would you have done to prevent this?
31. Tell me about a time when your coworkers gave you feedback about your actions. How did you respond? What changes did you make?

Sample Behavioural Questions continued

32. What have you done in your previous job that went beyond what was required?
33. Tell me about a time when your initiative caused a change to occur.
34. Describe a time when you took action to solve a problem. How did you go about it?
35. Tell me about a time when you had to develop new procedures and implement them into your workplace. What steps did you take to ensure accuracy?
36. Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
37. Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
38. Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
39. Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
40. Describe a professional relationship that you have established, and tell me about a situation where you have used it to deal with a work-related task or problem.
41. Give an example when you had to deal with a difficult ethical issue. How did you handle the issue?
42. Tell us about a time when you had to adapt to a wide variety of people by accepting/understanding their perspective.
43. Tell me about a time you had to alter your work style to meet a diversity need or challenge?
44. Tell me about a time that you evaluated your own beliefs or opinions around issues of difference.