

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND TECHNIQUES

## Open-ended questions

This question type is often used at the start of an interview. They don't ask for a specific example and require you to summarise information. They are a great opportunity to communicate your key selling points.

### Key techniques

- Summarise 3-5 key selling points for you as a candidate and incorporate this in your answer. This can be a sentence you can practice in advance (an 'elevator pitch').
- Ensure your selling points include facts not just assertions: 'My last two jobs have used my strengths as a communicator' is more convincing than 'I have good communication skills'.
- Listen to the question asked and ensure your answer addresses the question.

### Sample questions

- What led you to apply for this job?
- Tell us about yourself?
- What do you feel you could contribute to this role?

## Job knowledge questions

These questions assess whether you've really thought about the job, if you have a good understanding of the opportunity, and whether you've been motivated enough to research beyond the job description.

### Key techniques

- Prepare and research in advance: see our *Interviews* information sheet for a preparation checklist.
- If you don't know the answer, be honest, but share the knowledge that you do have (e.g. 'I'm not familiar with x, but it is similar to y...?').

### Sample questions

- Who would you say our competitors are? Is there anything we could learn from them?
- What could happen in the next few years that would have an impact on our work? How would you help us to manage that impact?
- What key changes have happened in the sector recently that we need to respond to?
- How does this role contribute to the organisation? How could you enhance that contribution?
- What challenges are this industry/organisation is facing at the moment?

## Strengths-based questions

Larger organisations may use a specific methodology to score answers, from a commercial occupational psychology company (e.g. [Capp.co](#)). However, many organisations will ask similar questions without a scoring methodology; both methods at their heart are simply trying to understand your motivation and mindset.

### Key techniques

- Be authentic and enthusiastic – you can't 'fake' these answers, so just be you!
- Give detailed and rich responses, use specific terminology and spontaneous examples (as often happens naturally when we're enthusiastic about something).
- Use statements that describe your feelings or personality: e.g. 'I love...', 'I'm really passionate about...', 'I have always done/felt/thought...'.
- Give a full answer – there aren't usually as many opportunities for follow up questions.
- Open and relaxed body language (no crossed arms or fidgeting) can help to convey authenticity.

### Sample questions

- What is your greatest non-academic achievement?
- What kind of task would you look to do first, if you had a list of non-urgent tasks?
- How would your friends describe you?
- Do you prefer starting, working on or finishing tasks?
- What was a particularly a successful day you've had? What made it feel successful?

## Competency questions

These questions ask you to give an example of a time when you demonstrated one of the competencies (an area of skill or capability) in the selection criteria for the role. The key technique is to use the structure STAR (Situation, Target/Task, Action, Result): see our *STAR Technique* information sheet for more.

### Sample questions

- Tell us about a time when you had to solve a problem as part of a team?
- Give an example of a time when you worked well under pressure?
- Can you give an example of a time when you successfully prioritised to manage multiple tasks?

Be prepared for possible follow-on questions such as 'what were you most proud of?', 'what did you learn from the experience?' or 'what would you do differently next time?'.

## Values-based questions

These are an increasingly common question style for larger organisations and common throughout the NHS. The idea is to assess whether your values (your key principles, what you believe is important) match the employer's values. For more see the [TargetJobs.co.uk](#). Sometimes these are mixed with other interview question styles, and you can incorporate those techniques too.

### Key techniques

- Research the organisation's values in advance (often under 'About' sections of a website).
- Reflect on when you've showed these values in action: list examples as you prepare for an interview and be prepared to give a detailed STAR examples.
- Reflect on your own values – see if you can shortlist 3-5 that are particularly important to you (if they're very different from the employer's this might be a clue that the opportunity may not be fulfilling).

## Sample questions

- Which organisations (other than us) have values that match your own? What are your values?
- What do you think [insert value] looks like in this role? What does it mean for what we do or don't do?
- (*Competency style*) Describe a situation where you demonstrated [this value]?
- (*Strengths style*) What's on your CV that best demonstrates what's important to you in life?

## Situational questions

These questions ask what you would do in a hypothetical scenario, usually a challenging scenario that you could realistically encounter in the job.

### Key techniques

- Ask for the question to be repeated if you need it, particularly if the scenario is complex.
- Talk through the different factors and decisions before you come to a conclusion, then they can give you credit for your steps and thought process, even if there is a misstep at the end.
- Once you choose what you would do, talk through the pros and cons (could you mitigate any cons?) – again, they can give you credit for your thinking process and consideration of salient factors.
- Consider 'what' you would do, but more importantly 'how' you might do it – detail your approach.
- Remember the organisational values and selection criteria: this gives you a clue to where some of their expectations might lie.

### Sample questions

- If a client wants x and your manager wants y, but you feel z is the right option, what do you do?
- If the project you're working on could be delivered on time but only 80% complete, or two days late but 100% complete what would you do?
- You have an hour left at work and you're an hour away from finishing work your boss asked you to do today. A more senior manager asks if you can come and help them. What do you do?

## Weakness/negative questions

These can be particularly tricky questions to answer, as they involve addressing uncomfortable information.

### Key techniques

- Give honest and self-aware answers. Show that you understand why something is not great.
- Talk about what you've done in the past to work on this area or mitigate negative impacts.
- Talk about what you'd do in the job to continue to improve on this area.

### Sample questions

- What are your weaknesses?
- What areas of the job will you find the most challenging?

## Aspiration/negotiation questions

These questions are designed to ensure that the candidate has a realistic impression of the role and where it could lead (and isn't likely to leave or turn down the role because their expectations weren't met).

## Key techniques

- Research in advance typical salary, responsibility and progression. Larger organisations may publish information on career progression, or see [prospects.ac.uk](https://prospects.ac.uk), LinkedIn profiles or job adverts.
- Be honest about your deal-breakers (anything that is absolutely non-negotiable for you).
- Be flexible about everything else – first focus on getting the job offer, then you can negotiate.
- Try not to state a numerical figure for a salary (they'll never offer you more, and you don't want to negotiate without a job offer on the table); indicate willingness to be flexible for the right opportunity.

## Sample questions

- Where do you see yourself in five years? What are your expectations in terms of promotion?
- What salary are you looking for?

## Quirky questions

These are often used to 'break the ice' and assess interpersonal skills, often in organisations which value a sense of humour and 'fun'. Embrace the quirkiness and give an answer a go in a positive spirit.

### Sample questions

- What's a surprising fact about you?
- If you were a biscuit, what kind of biscuit would you be?

## Logical reasoning questions

These are logical or numerical problem questions often used when interviewing for a role which involves analytical or numerical skills (for example, management consultancy, analyst roles, IT).

### Key techniques

- Take them seriously. They're assessing key skills, often estimation, or mental arithmetic.
- Describe the thinking as you go if you can, then you can get credit for the steps you took, even if there is a misstep at the end.

### Sample questions

- What's larger:  $15 \times 7$  or  $14 \times 8$ ?
- How many postboxes are there in Margate?
- With the numerical date format dd/mm/yyyy, what's the next possible date where the digits are arranged in ascending order? What was the previous one? (repeated digits are acceptable).

## Questions for them?

Most interviewers will allow time for you to ask one or two questions at the end. After all, an interview is a chance for you to get to know more about them, as well as a time for them to assess you!

### Key techniques

- Avoid any questions about areas that would be better left to a negotiation after a job offer has been made (when you're in a stronger negotiating position): hours, pay, benefits, titles, etc.
- Prepare questions that show off your research and knowledge (it's still a chance to impress them).