

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND TECHNIQUES



Open-ended questions

Example questions:

- *What motivated you to apply for [this opportunity]?*
- *What do you think you have to offer [this organisation]?*
- *Tell us about yourself!*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Summarise a range of key points rather than just focusing on one aspect
- Be detailed and specific – avoid vague answers that any candidate could say
- If you can, think about your unique selling points and practise a summary sentence.

Questions that test your research

Example questions:

- *What do you know about [this opportunity/this organisation]?*
- *Who would you say are our competitors? Is there anything we could learn from them?*
- *What do you think the challenges are [in this role/for this organisation]?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Do your reading in advance: know the job description, research the organisation website, identify competitors and research them, read 'trade press' (websites/magazines/blogs dedicated to that sector).
- If you don't know the answer be honest but showcase the knowledge you do have – try techniques like 'I'm not 100% sure, but from my knowledge of ... I'd surmise that...'

Strengths based questions

Example questions:

- *What do you feel is your greatest achievement?*
- *What do you feel is more important: taking extra time to produce flawless work or completing work more quickly but to a lower standard?*
- *Describe the last time you learnt something quickly and applied it to your work.*
- *What do you find you always do first on your 'to do' list, and what do you put off?*
- *What energises you?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Be genuinely honest and enthusiastic – signs of this include rich, detailed responses, use of specific terminology, spontaneous examples, energy and enthusiasm
- If you need to think before you speak – make sure what you're saying is authentic. These questions aren't designed to be heavily 'prepared for' or anticipated.
- Start sentences with strong statements which show your motivation: 'I love...', 'I'm passionate about...', 'I have always...', 'I naturally do...'
- Open and relaxed body language can help too – sit comfortably on your chair
- Be comprehensive – there often aren't follow up questions so say as much as you can the first time.

Competency questions

Example questions:

- *Tell us about a time when you [used this competency]? Give us an example of a time when you [used this competency]?*
- *Competencies are specific to each opportunity but common competencies include teamwork skills, communication, negotiation and persuasion, problem solving, analytical skills, getting results, prioritisation, time management, taking initiative etc.*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- STAR framework for your answer (Situation, Task/Target, Actions, Result)
- Try to briefly describe Situation and Task – the focus should be on the Actions you took
- List all the different aspects of the Actions you took so they can see what you would be able to do in a similar scenario requiring this competency.
- It can be helpful to think about what Actions you can observe in someone else who is strong at that competency. For example, when you've worked with a great team member in the past they've probably used listening skills, reiterated the task to help the group keep focused, used humour to build rapport, been positive about getting the task done, come up with ideas to overcome problems, observed where other group members needed help and provided it... These are all actions you could include in your example.
- End on a positive result!

Weakness/challenge questions

Example questions:

- *What do you think your weaknesses are?*
- *What would be the most challenging aspects of this job?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Be honest and genuine – show that you understand the potential problems
- Be positive and reflect on what you have already done to overcome or develop them, and what you might do in the role to overcome them

Aspiration/negotiation questions

Example questions:

- *Where do you see yourself in 2/3/5 years?*
- *What salary range/benefits are you looking for?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Do your research in advance – what's a typical salary/progression for this role? Look at jobs advertised by competitors, LinkedIn profiles, or 'trade press' (magazines, websites, blogs dedicated to the industry) to find out.
- Be honest, but not inflexible – you're still sizing each other up!
- Don't give a salary figure (e.g. 'I'd want £££') at this stage – they haven't offered you the opportunity yet and you don't know how you stack up against other candidates. If you have to give them an idea, give a range rather than a specific figure, e.g. "I know that recent adverts for this level of vacancy have been offered in the £18 – £22,000 range".
- Try open-ended sentences that reiterate your motivation, e.g. "I'm keen to build/apply my [experience/skills/knowledge] in the role and I know it has lots of potential in the future for [where you'd like to be]..."

Self-awareness and personality questions

Example questions:

- *How would you describe yourself?*
- *How would friends describe you?*
- *How do you spend your spare time?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Be honest – show that you understand yourself and your own strengths, interests and values
- This is another opportunity to emphasize your key selling points – don't be modest, but give genuine positive answers which show your strengths.

Unexpected questions

Example questions:

- *??! Any questions you didn't anticipate!*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Treat it positively - there is usually a reason behind it, and quite often it's to assess your ability to think under pressure, to reason, to present a persuasive argument and to deal with the unexpected!
- Ask for some time to think if you need it. Try phrases like 'that's a great question, can I just take a moment to think about that...'
- Give it your best shot! Talk through your reasoning as well as the answer so that they can see how you got to your conclusion and the strength of your ability to think and reason.

Situational judgement questions

Example questions:

- *An unexpected scenario that requires you to think on your feet*
- *If our client wanted x and your manager wanted y, but you felt that z was the right option what would you do?*
- *How would you cope with [typical problem you might encounter]?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Ask for some time to think if you need it, avoid rushing in with a quick inflexible answer.
- Talk through your reasoning, identifying the different factors involved in the scenario so that they can see what you're taking into account as you go.
- Tell them why you'd choose to do what you'd choose to do – what are the benefits of your approach. Any disadvantages – are there ways to mitigate them?

Questions for them?

Example questions:

- *Have you got any questions for us?*
- *Is there anything you'd like to ask the interview panel now?*

Techniques to enhance your answer:

- Avoid asking a question that you really should have researched in advance – if it's in the job description, on their website etc., then this will show poor preparation.
- Avoid negotiating on aspects of the job before they've offered it to you! It will put them off!
- Avoid saying nothing – show that you're interested and motivated!
- A safe bet are questions which ask for their own personal interpretation, opinion, or projections – these are unlikely to be things that you could have researched ahead of time.