

Key Skill	Sample Behavioral Interview Question
Administration/ Management	Tell me about a time when you were in charge of managing of a complex program or project that involved a number of people or organizations. Describe what you were able to achieve as a result of your skills in administration.
Analytical Skills/ Problem Solving	Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation. To whom did you make the recommendation? What was your reasoning? What kind of thought process did you go through? Why? Was the recommendation accepted? If not, why?
Communication	Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation? What obstacles or difficulties did you face? How did you deal with them?
Adaptability/Flexibility	Tell me about a situation in which you have had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it? What challenges did you face as a result?
Creativity	Give me an example of a time when someone brought you a new idea that was odd or unusual. What did you do?
Decision Making	Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Why? Were you happy with the outcome?
Goal Setting	Tell me about a goal that you set that you did not reach. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?
Initiative	Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? What was the result? What do you wish you had done differently? What was the best idea you came up with during your professional career? How did you apply it?
Integrity	Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree. Why? Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?

Key Skill	Sample Behavioral Interview Question
Interpersonal Skills	<p>Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it? How did the relationship progress?</p> <p>Describe a recent unpopular decision you made. How was it received? How did you handle it?</p>
Leadership	<p>What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? What were the obstacles? How did you handle the situation? What were the reactions of the group members? What was the end result?</p>
Planning and Organization/ Time Management	<p>How do you prioritize projects and tasks when scheduling your time? Give me some examples.</p>
Teamwork	<p>Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the result?</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague who was not doing their share of the work. How did you handle it?</p>

Silent Speech

Approximately 75% of all communications that we have with others is totally silent. We give away valuable clues to how we think, work, and react to pressure, etc., through our body language. How you use your hands, arms, torso, legs, feet, head and facial expressions while participating in a meeting can help spell the difference between success and failure.

NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR	INTERPRETATION
Brisk, erect walk	Confidence
Standing with hands on hips	Readiness, aggression
Sitting with legs crossed, foot kicking slightly	Boredom
Arms crossed on chest	Defensiveness
Walking with hands in pockets, shoulders hunched	Dejection
Hand to cheek	Evaluation, thinking
Touching, slightly rubbing nose	Rejection, doubt, lying
Rubbing the eye	Doubt, disbelief

Hands clasped behind back	Anger, frustration, apprehension
Locked ankles	Apprehension
Head resting in hand, eyes downcast	Boredom
Rubbing hands	Anticipation
Sitting with hands clasped behind head, legs crossed	Confidence, superiority
Open palm	Sincerity, openness, innocence
Pinching bridge of nose, eyes closed	Negative evaluation
Tapping or drumming fingers	Impatience
Steepling fingers	Authoritative
Patting/fondling hair	Lack of self-confidence
Tilted head	Interest
Stroking chin	Trying to make a decision
Looking down, face turned away	Disbelief
Biting nails	Insecurity, nervousness
Pulling or tugging at ear	Indecision



The interviewer's agenda

An interviewer is concerned with your personal impression, your competence, whether or not you appear to be likable, your motivation/enthusiasm, your leadership, your communication skills, your poise and maturity, your outside interests and your personal relationships. If you can effectively respond to each issue and its related components, you almost guarantee yourself a return trip. Some of these may not be asked as questions, but they are issues that will be evaluated.

Personal impression

Making a good personal impression to the interviewer is crucial. Since the interviewer will want to know about you as a person, he/she will evaluate the manner in which you present yourself. The interviewer will be assessing:

- Would he/she be an effective representative of our organization?
- Will he/she look professional, serious and dress attractively?
- Will he/she socialize well and make clients feel comfortable?
- Will he/she make customers want to be involved with us?
- Does he/she display confidence, warmth and interest?
- Would I be impressed by him/her if he/she were the first person I met in the organization?

Competence

Your competency is always in the forefront of an interviewer's mind. Be prepared to defend your resume and to expand on your capabilities. An interviewer will want to know:

- Can he/she carry out the responsibilities of this job?
- Has he/she had related experience?
- Can I detect skills in his/her background that will help in this job?
- What does his/her resume say? Can I believe what is on it?
- How do I know he/she can do those things?
- What can I ask that will cue me about his/her abilities?
- How good will he/she be at doing this job?
- Can he/she tell me things that will reveal his/her capabilities?

Likeability

An interviewer definitely wants to hire someone who will fit in well with the organization. Although he/she may not directly ask you these questions, questions like the ones listed below will be going through his/her mind.

- Would I like to work with this person?
- Is he/she enjoyable to be around?
- Will he/she get along with others here in the office?
- Will he/she be able to work with a wide variety of people?
- Is he/she a good listener?
- Will he/she relate well to people with more authority?
- Is he/she all work and no play?
- Will his/her personal life affect his/her attitudes or moods towards this job?

Motivation, enthusiasm and commitment

A future employee's motivation toward the company and his/her level of commitment is extremely important. Someone who openly shows his/her excitement about the job and the company and portrays a commitment has a definite edge over someone who does not. *Remember, it is important that the interviewer believe this opportunity is your first choice.* To determine this, the interviewer will evaluate:

- How badly does he/she want to work for this company?
- Is he/she excited about this position?
- Does he/she project enthusiasm?
- Is he/she interested in this field or just looking for a job?
- If hired, will he/she be with us long enough to make real contributions?
- What does he/she really want from his/her career?

Leadership

Whether you can effectively direct and guide people are qualities many interviewers seek. Questions asked to determine your leadership abilities include:

- Does he/she have potential for taking responsibility for our company?

What evidence is there that illustrates his/her leadership in other settings?
Would he/she set a good example for the rest of the staff?



Answering questions effectively

The key to being successful in an interview is to answer each question well, with strong content and credible delivery. To do this, you must anticipate and practice what to say, display confidence and enthusiasm and show that you have a positive attitude.

The *way* you deliver your responses can be just as important as *what* you say. Look directly into the interviewer's eyes; give short, crisp, smooth answers that don't sound memorized. Put energy in your voice.

Traditional interview questions and recommended approaches for response

1. Tell me about yourself.

Structure your response in two parts: the professional and the personal. You might begin with your resume summary, adding most recent positions and employers. Speak of competencies related to the position for which you are interviewing. On the personal side, you might express where you live/grew up, where you went to school, unique hobbies, travel or volunteer work. Close your response with a transitional statement such as, "I am looking to advance my career in auditing management and believe I can make a significant contribution to Millennial Bank." **Limit your answer to one to two minutes.** This ought to be a "broad brush response." More detailed information will unfold later in the interview.

2. Why did you leave your last position?

Deliver your "public statement" which you developed early in the job search process and recorded in Chapter One. Be brief and positive.

3. Why do you want to work for us?

List reasons that are outgoing and generous rather than "what's in it for me?" responses. Love of the work, reputation of the company, strong belief in the product, opportunity to meet new challenges, etc.

4. Why do you believe you are qualified for this position?

State your relevant skills, experience and education. Keep your answer direct and give examples of achievements that relate to the job for which you are applying.

5. What are your strengths?

List relevant strengths and give examples that applied at work. For example, being hardworking and conscientious could mean you do accurate work on time and within budget.

Traditional interview questions and recommended approaches for response, continued

6. What is a weakness of yours?

Choose a weakness not related to your core competencies. A graphic designer may say she is not naturally organized. "...So I begin each day by lining up my projects and reviewing my deadlines. This system has greatly improved my organizational skills."

7. Do you take initiative?

Come up with an example such as suggesting a change in procedure, or a solution to a problem or taking on extra work without being asked.

8. How do you deal with pressure?

Some people thrive on pressure and respond to it well; others don't. It is advisable to get the question clarified. What kind of pressure is the interviewer talking about? Is it the kind that comes in short bursts or pressure that is an ongoing part of the job?

9. What did you like most about your previous job?

List relevant factors related to the job for which you are applying.

10. What did you like least about your previous job?

Try to minimize your answer to this question, and ensure that your answer does not relate to the job for which you are applying. "I didn't like the paperwork," could mean you are a poor administrator.

11. What would your previous supervisor say about you?

Try to recall positive things that your previous supervisor said. Don't dwell on anything negative.

12. What are your salary expectations?

You could reply:

"My research indicates that the salary range for this job would be (fill in an amount); could you tell me what your range is?" or

"I would be happy to answer that question after I have a better understanding of the duties and responsibilities of the position."

13. What do you know about our company?

This question underlines the importance of researching the company with which you are interviewing. You need to know as much about them as possible.

14. Why should we hire you?

This question aims at your **Competitive Advantage**. This is the combination of skills, experience, attributes that are going to make you stand out over the other applicants. It is critical that you be clear on your competitive advantage yourself if you want to express it clearly to a prospective employer.

Traditional interview questions and recommended approaches for response, continued

15. Do you have any questions?

Have at least two questions ready. They could relate to: the procedures; the systems; reporting relationships; size of working group; equipment; or immediate goals of the department or position. Do not ask questions about benefits or holidays until you are close to a job offer.

16. You seem overqualified (or underqualified).

You did get invited to the interview so when the interviewer raises the issue of over and under qualification, consider this a test. Actually it can be a blessing if the interviewer raises the issue because you then have a chance to address the concern head-on. It is more frustrating when the issue was never raised in the interview and you get a letter telling you that they have filled the position with someone “more suitably qualified.” Make sure that, somewhere in every interview, you include answers that will address these potential objections even if they are not verbalized.

Overqualified generally contains three fears: 1) You are going to cost us too much money. 2) You will be under challenged in this position and keep looking for something else. 3) One person on the hiring team feels you might be a threat to his or her position. You probably do not know which of these issues is most troubling to the interviewer. It does not hurt to probe. Ask the interviewer to elaborate.

To address issue #1: NEVER bring up money. Instead, tell the interviewer how you have helped your previous supervisor meet and exceed his or her goals. This approach helps you to address issue #3 as well. You need to make it very clear without saying it directly that you consider your number one job to be making your boss successful.

To address issue #2: While acknowledging that you are highly qualified, tell them about a recent experience that demonstrates that you are a life-long learner and a team player. Make sure that your example shows how you have learned from and teamed with younger co-workers or supervisors. There is always more to learn. They are probably concerned that you will not be satisfied/challenged and therefore will not stay long. Let them know that your experience is not a disadvantage, but rather will allow you to hit the ground running and more quickly solve the challenges they face. Perhaps you can give them the sense that you will find your own challenges by improving processes, developing employees or creating cost savings.

In response to underqualified, you need to ask them "in what way?" and try to respond directly to the objection they are raising.

17. Are you willing to work overtime?

Most companies need people who can work overtime when it is necessary. However, this is an excellent opportunity for you to point out your organizational skills and your ability to get most work done within the required time frame.

18. Are you ambitious?

The answer must be YES! But don't scare the interviewer. Qualify your answer. “When I have become totally familiar with the company culture and mastered the job we are discussing, certainly I would want to be promoted when an appropriate opening occurs,” you might state.

Traditional interview questions and recommended approaches for response, continued

19. What is the last book you read? Or, movie you saw? Or, trade journal you read?

Some interviewers like to depart from asking all traditional questions. They believe the answers to the above questions reveal another side of the applicant. Such questions force you to think quickly on your feet.

20. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

This question probes your personal and professional goals and intentions of staying with a company if hired.

21. Why have you changed jobs so frequently?

Make a negative a positive. “Each change was a promotion in responsibility, earnings and personal growth,” and/or “I’ve learned much from each assignment and am prepared to now make a career commitment in applying my considerable knowledge.” Make the point that your moves were voluntary, if they were, and that your performance never was a question.

22. How many people have you supervised?

This question tests your depth of experience and level of responsibility. Be honest. If you haven’t supervised, say so, but add that “I recognize the importance of the responsibility and welcome the prospect of supervising others” – if that is true.

23. Describe the major accomplishments of your last position.

Resume preparation is very helpful here. Read your resume before every interview. Pick three accomplishments relevant to the job for which you are interviewing, and address the problems you faced, the action you took and the results of that action.

24. Will you be able to travel and if so, how much?

If travel is a requirement of the job, you should know that before the interview. If it is a problem, you must be candid with the company before you schedule the interview.

If the question is unexpected, be honest with your limitations, but don’t rule out the job until you have had more time to think things through.

Behavioral interview questions

Many employers are moving away from a resume-driven style of interviewing to a behavioral format. Behavioral interviews are very probing in nature and are based on the concept of “predictable future behavior.” In other words, what you have done in the past strongly suggests what you will do in the future.

Navigating these interviews successfully requires that you know yourself inside and out. This will require a lot of introspection and soul-searching on your part.

You must be able to:

Know why you have made the decisions you have made that have brought you to this point in your life.

Explain and defend your decisions.

Provide concrete, specific examples of where you have demonstrated the proficiency employers are seeking.

Example Behavioral Interview Questions

1. How have you demonstrated initiative?
2. How have you motivated yourself to complete a task that you did not want to do?
3. Think about a difficult boss, professor or other person. What made him or her difficult? How did you successfully interact with this person?
4. Tell me about the riskiest decision that you have made.
5. Can you tell me about an occasion where you needed to work with a group to get a job done?
6. Describe when you or a group that you were a part of was in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do?
7. Tell me about a time when you worked with a person who did things very differently from you. How did you get the job done?
8. Describe your three greatest accomplishments to date.
9. Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time. How did you proceed?
10. Can you tell me about a complex problem that you solved? Describe the process you utilized.
11. Tell me about a challenge that you successfully met.
12. What leadership positions have you held? Describe your leadership style.
13. Summarize a situation where you successfully persuaded others to do something or to see your point of view.
14. Give an example of when your persistence had the biggest payoff.
15. Describe a situation where work or personal activities conflicted. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time? What was the outcome?
16. How have you most constructively dealt with disappointment and turned it into a learning experience?
17. Describe a situation in which you effectively developed a solution to a problem by combining different perspectives or approaches.

STAR Interviewing Response Technique for Success in Behavioral Job Interviews

One strategy for preparing for behavioral interviews is to use the STAR Technique, as outlined below. (This technique is often referred to as the SAR and PAR techniques as well.)

Read the technique, and then try it out with the list of sample behavioral interview questions.

Situation or Task

Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

Action you took - Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Do not tell what you might do, tell what you did.

Results you achieved - What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

Sample Interview Combining Traditional and Behavioral Based Questions

It is important that you understand the questions and the interviewer's motivation when asking them. Most interviews combine traditional and behavioral based interview questions. A combined interview would look like the following:

Why do you want to work here?

What is your educational background?

What courses/seminars have you taken beyond formal schooling?

Why did you leave your last employer?

What did you like most about the people you worked with? Why?

What did you like least about the people you worked with? Why?

Which boss did you look up to most? Why?

What areas are you working to improve?

What is your greatest achievement?

What is the biggest mistake you ever made?

What did you learn from it?

What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year? What made it so difficult?



Interview Questions

Can you think of an example of a time when it was possible to be loyal to your employer but still disagree with some rules and policies?

Have you ever had to introduce a new policy or idea that departed from the usual methods?

What are your career goals?

What magazines and books do you read?

What community activities are you involved with at present?

Can you give me a specific example of when you were assertive?

If offered the job, when could you begin?

Why should I hire you?



Overcoming objections

What is an “objection” in the interview process? An objection can indicate at least two possibilities:

- a reason why the interviewer believes you cannot successfully handle the open job; or
- a desire on the part of the interviewer to see how you handle confrontation.

In any case, these items can be potentially damaging if not handled well. Every interviewee faces objections, and the candidate who best overcomes each objection is the one who gets the competitive edge.

The first step you need to take when faced with an objection in an interview is to clarify what the interviewer is really objecting to. Many interviewers will throw out vague statements that cannot be responded to, such as “I don’t think you have the right educational background.”

“What is it about my education that concerns you?” or “Could you tell me where my education does not appear to match your needs?” you need to ask.

To make this question work for you, you must be genuinely interested and not defensive, and you must wait and listen carefully to the interviewer’s response.

“Well, everyone in this department has an MBA, and I’m concerned that you might have difficulty keeping up and getting along with the others.”

Rather than be upset by these statements, accept them for what they are and formulate a proactive strategy for how you will try to turn them around. Your response, or rebuttal, should be based on a past experience where the perceived problem has not negatively impacted your ability to get things done. It should illustrate how you have accomplished your goals, or provided value to your employer, in spite of or because of the objection.

“In my last position, I was chosen by my manager to be the liaison between Worldwide Consulting and our CFO. As you know, Worldwide Consulting is made up of the top MBA’s and professionals in the industry. My input and coordination of that project resulted in significant cost savings in our accounting procedures and systems, and the project was brought in on time and within budget. The report, which I can share with you, even notes some of my contributions. So, I can understand your concern and hope I have been able to illustrate my ability to keep up and get along with your staff.”

As you can see, an effective response can illustrate a range of positive characteristics: positive attitude, good communication skills and an ability to face pressure. Once you have answered the interviewer’s questions, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions as well.

Interviewers make hiring decisions as much from the questions you ask as from the answers you give. Be prepared with questions that show your concern for the employer’s welfare, not just your own.

Losing questions

Poor questions deal with promotions, benefits, vacation or job security. These self-centered questions indicate that you are more concerned about what's in it for you than what you can offer the company. Wait until the company shows interest, later in the process before asking these types of questions.

“When could I expect a promotion?”

“What happens after my probationary period?”

Winning questions

Good “applicant” questions are related to the job for which you are applying and position you to further describe skills that will be important to your employer. Ask about job duties, the department structure, company goals and growth plans.

By asking these kinds of questions, you show that you are interested in bringing benefit to the company. Put yourself in the place of a hiring manager, and consider how you would react to hearing the following questions:

“Describe the type of person who does best in your company or your department.”

“What is it that you need this person to do, right now, to make a contribution?”

“Tell me more about how my work or role here would fit into the whole picture.”

Such questions convey that you are interested in working for the company and in giving them something of value.

List of winning “applicant” questions

Is this a newly created position? If yes, ask why.

What do you see as the most important long-range goals for this new position?

What do you see as the priorities in this position?

What is the most urgent part of the job?

What is the most difficult part of the job?

What are the expectations of the supervisor?

What is the management style of the company as a whole?

What are the most important qualities of the person you will hire for this position?

How would I be measured in this position?

Will I receive any orientation or training?

When will you be making your decision to fill this job?

How would you describe the ideal candidate for this job?

What should the new hire accomplish during the first six months on this job?