



## THE ULTIMATE INTERVIEW GUIDE



## FOR YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS

When you're seeking a new role as a prospective employee you can maximise your chance of success by really understanding what employers are looking for. Your interview preparation and techniques are key to this ... we hope the following will be helpful in preparing for success.

**"if you fail to prepare, then prepare to fail"** *Benjamin Franklin*

# TOP 10 QUESTIONS

## 1 Why do you want to work here?

To answer this question you must have researched the company – give 3 'facts' to show your knowledge of the organisation and how you see them with reference to your belief that the values of the company' can provide you with a stable and happy work environment - and cultivate your best work.

## 2 What would you like to be doing 5 years from now?

The safest answer contains a desire to be regarded as a true professional and team player. As far as promotion, that depends on finding a manager with whom you can grow. Of course, you will ask what opportunities exist within the company before being any more specific.

## 3 What are your biggest accomplishments?

Don't exaggerate ... you might begin your reply with: 'Although I feel my biggest achievements are still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with ... I made a contribution as part of that team and learned a lot in the process.'

## 4 Tell me about yourself?

This is not an invitation to ramble on and be sure that it has some relevance to your professional endeavours. You should refer to one or more of our key personal qualities, such as honesty, integrity, being a team player, or determination.

## 5 How well do you feel other people rated you?

This is one very sound reason to ask for written testimonials of your work before leaving a company or a letter of recommendation whenever you leave a job. Don't thrust these under your interviewer's nose, but when you are asked the question you can produce them with a flourish. If you don't have written evaluations, try to quote verbal appraisals, such as 'My boss said only a month ago that I was the most valuable member of the team because...'

## 6 What is your greatest strength?

Isolate high points and build in a couple of your key personal qualities, such as pride in your work, reliability and the ability to stick with a difficult task, yet change course rapidly when required.

## 7 What is your greatest weakness?

This is a direct invitation to put your head in a noose! Design the answer so your weakness is ultimately a positive characteristic, for example: '... if I sometimes feel others aren't pulling their weight, I overcome my frustrations with a positive attitude and hope it will catch on.'

## 8 What are you looking for in your next job?

Quite simply – what can you give the organisation ... you want a company where your talents and experience will allow you to contribute to their business say what you can give to – how you can contribute and add value.

## 9 Why did you leave your last job?

You should have an acceptable reason for seeking a new role or leaving a job - pick one of the 6 most acceptable reasons using the **CLAMPS** formula:

**Challenge:** you weren't able to grow professionally.

**Location:** the locations/method of transport changed and the journey to work was unreasonably long.

**Advancement:** there was nowhere for you to go.

**Money:** you were underpaid for your skills and contribution.

**Pride or prestige:** you wanted to be with a better company.

**Security:** the company was not stable.

**REMEMBER ... never make any negative comments about you previous employers... in any way**

## 10 What kind of salary are you looking for?

This question is asking you to name a desired figure but the twist is that it also asks you to justify that figure. It requires that you demonstrate careful analysis of your worth, industry norms, and job requirements. You are recommended to try for a higher figure rather than a lower one. If their immediate response is to say that's too much, accept it as no more than a negotiating gambit, and come back with your own calm rebuttal: 'What did you have in mind?'

## COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWS

The word competency is widely used and refers to the skills necessary to achieve effective performance in a role.

This style of interview is being used increasingly in an effort to ensure the interview process is standard and fair. These are sometimes referred to as **Evidence Based, Behavioural or Situational Interviews**.

The most common types of questions will be used to find how your behaviours in a previous role or situation can contribute to your performance in the future so questions will start with phrases like -

- Tell me about a time when ...
- Give me an example of how ...
- Describe a situation when ...

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR A COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW

The key to preparing for a Competency Interview is firstly to study the Job Description and Person Specification in detail to discover the competencies required and secondly to prepare examples of situations you have been in where you demonstrated each of those competencies.

So for example, if Communication is an essential competency, then jot down your recollection of when you completed a task where excellent communication skills were required. Ask yourself, what was involved, what did you do, what part did you play, why do you choose those actions and what was the outcome of your actions.

All of this is essential when answering competency questions. You will be able to arrive with the information fresh and you will be able to deliver your answers clearly and succinctly. After all what the interviewer wants is for you to prove to them that you can do the job better than any other candidate. And how do you prove you are the best candidate for the job? You give a strong confident relevant example which demonstrates each competency required.



## HOW TO STRUCTURE COMPETENCY INTERVIEW ANSWERS

When preparing we suggest choosing examples based on real experiences you have had. Avoid the temptation to invent or embellish.

Your response needs to be relevant and sufficiently detailed to show that you understand what is required, that you possess the relevant core competency and can use it effectively.

Your answers will be scored and the quality will depend on the extent of your preparation. Use the job description or advertisement to get an idea of the essential competencies required and prepare example of situations where you used these skills to achieve a successful outcome.

Most Competency Based require you to give an example of a situation you have been involved in. This sounds straightforward however it is very easy to give a long rambling answer resulting in a low score. The key to an effective and top scoring competency answer lies in its structure and there are two standard formulas we recommend:



**The STAR technique** = This technique is often referred to as the SAR and PAR technique and gives a logical process to create and deliver your answer as follows:

**S or T = Situation or Task**

Start by describing the SITUATION you were involved in or the TASK that you were asked to complete.

Be concise but sufficient details so that the interviewer can get a full grasp of the challenge involved. If you can also show that you identified the problem and initiated the action this will stand in your favour however it is not essential.

This situation can be from a previous job, from a personal experience or from any relevant event. Give enough detail for the interviewer to understand what was involved. Always use I and give an Introduction rather than 'we' even if your example refers to a team effort. The interviewers want to hear about **what you did** and if you constantly use 'we' it could weaken your answer.

Give an INTRODUCTION consisting a single sentence summarising your achievement for example: "*I recently introduced a new system which reduced the time it takes to deal with customer complaints from 4 days to 4 hours.*"

This has the effect of informing the interviewer and heightening their interest as well as being a powerful statement about you.

**A = Action** Describe the action you took, the process you followed and the steps you completed. Even if you are discussing a group project or task, describe what *you did* rather than the achievements of the team.

**R = Result** This is the most important part of the answer and you will need to show that your actions resulted in a successful outcome. Talk about what you accomplished, what you delivered in terms of benefit and what you learned.

## EXERCISE

### SAMPLE COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here are 5 typical sample questions. Take a moment and see how you would answer them:

Competency Questions	Please provide an example using STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)
Give an example of a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team?  What did you do to help resolve the situation?	
Describe a situation when you had to deal with demands from an unreasonable customer?	
Describe a situation where you have not met your target and how have you have overcome this?	
Give an example where you have received negative feedback from a manager and how you have addressed it?	

## DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?



Almost always, this is a sign the interview is drawing to a close, and that you have one more chance to make an impression. Remember the adage: people respect what you inspect, not what you expect.

### **If you're struggling to keep a clear head, there's no invitation more disconcerting than your interviewer asking the obligatory 'do you have any questions?'**

The most important thing to remember is that the interview is a two way process. You're there to find out information about them as much as they are there to find out about you. This is your chance to find out information that isn't in the job description, and this can help you make an informed decision about whether you definitely want the job.

We suggest writing down **at least 6 questions** and taking a notebook with you to refer to at the close of the interview.

Even if most of the questions are answered in the course of an interview showing the interviewer that you have taken the time to carefully consider the role will impress. To avoid any embarrassing mumbled responses, here are some potential questions for you to consider and prepare for.

#### **Can you tell me more about the company?**

Ask about the clients they deal with, their industry and the marketplace in general. This is a pretty generic question, but you can personalise it by asking about the workplace, what the environment is like, and why it's a great place to work. This one is all about using your initiative. If your interviewer has talked about the company at length, it's probably worth leaving out. However, if you've only talked about your role, use this opportunity to show them what you've found out from your own research. For example: 'I found out from your website that honesty is one of your key values. How do you demonstrate this throughout your business?'

#### **Is this post a new or existing one?**

This can help give you an idea of what's expected of you, and can lead to a wider discussion. If it is, then ask why it's been created or how your performance will be measured. If it's an existing one, ask who you'll be replacing (and if they're big shoes to fill). Again, it's best to use your initiative here (see above).

#### **How many other people are there in the team?**

If you're going to be working as part of a larger team, it's good to get an idea of who that team consists of. What are their specific roles, and how does that relate to this position? If you've talked about working well in a team on your CV, this can be a great way of demonstrating the point.

#### **What would my day-to-day responsibilities be?**

Find out what a typical day in the role would entail. Ask your interviewer if they can describe your area of responsibility, and what their expectations are. This way, there will be no surprises if you end up being offered the job.

**What are the promotion prospects?**

How does this position fit into the company's long-term plans? Is there a clearly defined career path? Once again, this is a great way for you to demonstrate your drive and desire to progress within the company. Also, it's a great way for your interviewer to demonstrate that you won't be stuck in a dead end job.

**Do you run any training schemes?**

Similar to the previous question, this is another chance to find out about progression, professional development and training but one which isn't necessarily motivated by a promotion or financial gain. Personal development can often be just as important as career development for job satisfaction. Showing that you're keen to keep learning can make you a much more desirable candidate.

**What are the company's plans for the future?**

This can be a great question, indicating that you're interested about the business as a whole, and not just concentrating on yourself. It can also give management the delight in singing their own praises. There's a possibility that you won't always understand everything your interviewers are talking about here. If all else fails, just smile and nod.

**How would you describe the ideal candidate?**

Probably the killer question to ask. If you've built up a good rapport by this point this question is perfect, and means you can find out how well your answers have ticked the boxes. This question is strong enough for you to not follow up. Especially avoid saying how much it sounds like you. No matter how good your rapport is, an oversized ego is never a good idea.

**Is there any reason why you would not consider me for the role?**

This question gives you the chance to overcome any hesitations or concerns the prospective employer has and is an especially good question for roles in sales or business development where you need to demonstrate your ability to 'close'.

**When can I expect to hear from you?**

Don't forget this last one. This not only shows you're keen and it's also good for your peace of mind. No-one wants to sit by the phone for the next week, waiting for it to ring.

Of course, you don't have to stick to these questions, and they won't necessarily work in every situation. Keep them in mind though. You never know when they might come in handy.

**Other questions you may like to consider are ...**

- *Find out why the job is open, who had it last and what happened to him or her?*
- *When will you get the opportunity to meet the person to whom you would report?*
- *What type of training is required and how long is it?*
- *What would your first assignment be?*
- *What are the realistic chances for growth in the job?*
- *What are the skills and attributes most needed to get ahead in the company?*
- *Who will be the company's main competitor over the next few years?*
- *If there is a written job description, can you see it?*

But, whatever happens, remember: this is an extra opportunity to sell yourself as the best person for the job and one which you should take full advantage of.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You'll find lots of information on the internet – we've trawled through the many sites currently on the web and here are our own particular favourites that we believe will give you the very best information and help.

[www.bemyinterviewer.co.uk](http://www.bemyinterviewer.co.uk) uses interactive videos and enables you can perfect your interview technique with the help of leading industry professionals such as Duncan Bannatyne from the Dragons' Den.

You'll find lots of valuable and practical advice to prepare you for the toughest questions and interview scenarios you are likely to face.

[www.monster.co.uk](http://www.monster.co.uk) has audio and video clips as well as a wide range of articles giving information from how to enhance your CV to making a gracious exit from your current role. Click on 'career advice' to find out more.

[www.wikijob.co.uk](http://www.wikijob.co.uk) is another great website with so much helpful information, videos, hints and tips ... and more. **'Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions'** by Martin John Yate, the best-selling job-hunting book of all time that no serious job seeker should be without. The book is published by Kogan Page.

Finally, the team at Plum Personnel are here to help. We can offer you

- one-to-one coaching session
- on-line videos on interview techniques

***One last thing ... if you would like to discuss this or any other aspect of your next career move ... we're here to help.***

***Just contact your Recruitment Consultant at Plum Personnel***

***Good Luck!***

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