



Interviewing Tips

1. Tell me about yourself.

Most people get tongue-tied on this one. For one thing, they don't know where to start. Should you go back to childhood? Should you discuss your personal life? Should you give dates? Here use the rule of thumb, "*Stick to business,*" and emphasize anything pertinent to the particular job you're interviewing for.

Consider this appropriate answer (but make sure yours matches the situation!):

"I am dependable and a quick learner. I have two years' experience as an analyst. I'm looking for a company that will give me an opportunity to use my skills while helping the company achieve its goals."

2. Where do you see yourself one year from now, or what are your career goals?

Most people will respond with an honest answer such as, "I want to grow and advance with the company. I'm ambitious and eventually want to be in management, moving up the corporate ladder."

That sounds OK, until you put yourself in the employer's position. He or she is thinking, "This person wants to advance too quickly," or "This person wants my job." Or perhaps, "This person is not willing to do the job for which we are interviewing for as long as we need them in that position."

Employ this rule of thumb: Be honest, but be generic.

Consider:

"After a year with the company, I'll probably be looking for additional responsibility because I'm a person who enjoys a challenge. I would like to be paid accordingly for that responsibility but, most importantly, I'm looking for a company I can be with for years to come."

3. What do you expect from a job?

Be honest, but remember that growth and advancement are *taboo*.

"I expect to be given respect as an employee and as a person. I like to feel appreciated when a job is well done."

4. What is your best quality, or what is your greatest asset?

Use a quality that would be beneficial to the employer for this job. For instance, if it's a management position, your best quality could be "motivating others," "delegating" or "being fair." If you're applying for a receptionist position, your answer could be "my telephone skills" or "a warm and patient personality."

5. What is a quality you need to develop, or what is your worst quality?

This question calls for a positive negative:

“I’m a perfectionist. I always want things done perfectly, although I realize I have to allow others to make mistakes.”

Or:

“I’m always early for appointments instead of just being on time, and sometimes people aren’t prepared.”

6. What would you consider an ideal job for you?

If possible, be general. The moment you get specific, you limit yourself.

Take, for example, a specific answer such as, “I would be working independently with numbers and learning a new computer system.”

A safer answer would be:

“My ideal job would be a position where I feel I am contributing and productive, and where I’d be learning new things about my job and the company.”

7. Give two reasons why I should hire you.

Employers want to hear words such as “loyal,” “dependable,” “team player,” “efficient,” “workaholic,” “dedicated,” “organized,” effective.” Be careful, however, to only use words that truly apply. Otherwise you start off on the wrong foot, trying to be something you are not.

You can become more specific when your qualities or technical abilities match the position:

“I could increase company profit and productivity in six months with my production scheduling experience and management skills.”

8. What do you know about our company? What can you do for us?

Do your homework. Quite often the local library or Better Business Bureau can provide valuable information about a company. But do make an effort, even if you have to do it in the waiting room by asking the receptionist questions such as, “How many employees does the company have?” “How long has the company been in business?” “Are there other companies with similar goals?” Employers are impressed when you care enough to check them out. They then know you are sincere about looking for a permanent home for yourself.

Then you can respond to this question intelligently:

“I’m eager to learn more, but I do know the company was founded in 1946 by the Saunders family, that you now have three divisions in two states, that you have more than 6,000 employees, and that you pride yourselves on service. Providing top-notch service is certainly part of my philosophy, and that’s one of the reasons I feel I will fit in well here.”

9. What kind of salary are you looking for?

This is the most dreaded question of all and yet one of the most important. There are two good responses:

"I have been interviewing for positions ranging between \$_____ and \$_____. However, finding the right company is really most important to me, because I plan to be with that company for a long time."

Or:

"I'm currently at \$_____, so I'd like to at least make a lateral move. Finding the right company for my future, however, is what is most important to me."

Both of these responses give a figure, but they also show some flexibility so you don't lose out on an opportunity because of miscommunication. Your goal is to get the offer. You can always accept or reject it, but without an offer, you don't have a decision.

10. Would you consider less?

Respond with a question:

"What figure did you have in mind?"

"A lot depends on your benefit package. Could you explain that to me?"

Notice how asking a question gets you out of the "hot seat" and back in control.

11. What have you done that shows initiative?

Choose something that will exhibit an ability you'd use in the position you are interviewing for, such as:

"I read the computer tutorial and documentation at home and taught myself the new software package the company just purchased."

12. Who has influenced your life?

Be prepared with the name of your mentor or idol and the reason their influence has made a difference so you aren't caught off guard.

For example:

"Armand Hammer, the industrialist, has set an example for me. He not only made a fortune through brilliant business deals, he also influenced our world through diplomacy. I didn't always agree with his beliefs, but I do admire the way he worked to make the world a better place for all people."

13. How do you define success?

You may have your own answer for this one but if not, here are a couple that are sincere and to the point:

"Success to me is doing exactly what makes me happy."

"Success is feeling good about myself."

“Success is setting personal goals and attaining them.”

14. What major problems have you faced in your career, and how have you solved them?

Once again, if you have had a major problem, try to be general. For instance, if you had trouble with your boss and finally quit, you might say:

“I worked with someone who had different principles and standards, and I learned that sometimes you have to walk away from a situation in order to grow personally. This was especially tough for me, because I’m usually persistent and very loyal.”

15. Which is more important to you: the money or the type of job?

Straddle this one:

“Both, to a degree. If I’m not happy doing a particular job, then no amount of money would be sufficient. If however, the money is right but I’m bored or just not feeling good about myself, then the money doesn’t matter in the long run.”

16. Why have you held so many (or so few) jobs in the past six years?

“I know it may look like I’m a job hopper, but there were a lot of circumstances beyond my control. The most important thing for me right now professionally is stability in both the company and my position.”

17. What did you like most about your last job?

The answer should fit the job for which you’re applying. In other words, don’t say, “a Fortune 500 atmosphere” if interviewing with a small company. Or, don’t say “interaction with co-workers” if the job requires you to work alone.

Try something such as:

“I enjoy paying attention to detail, the fast pace and the team atmosphere.”

Least?

When answering the second part of this question, don’t say, “managers,” “my boss,” “my co-workers” or anything else that puts down the company. The interviewer will immediately picture you saying something similar about this company the next time you’re in the job market, so once again say something such as:

“It’s more than 20 miles from my home.”

Or:

“There wasn’t enough work to keep me busy.”

18. What did you like most about your last manager?

Again, be careful about being negative. For the first part of the question, consider:

“She was very challenging.”

Least?

"I would have liked more feedback on the job I was doing."

19. Why did you leave?

Be truthful, but if it's too negative, such as you had a personality conflict, think of another way to say it.

"I felt I had stagnated professionally and, after discussing the situation with my boss, we both felt I would have more opportunity with another company. It was a mutual parting."

If you quit or were terminated and there was new management, you could also mention that there was a lot of turnover at that time.

20. Why did you move?

Instead of saying, divorce, death or some other negative that reveals your personal life (which is no one's business), it's best to say one of these:

"I felt there are more opportunities here."

"I wanted to be closer to family members."

"I was seeking a more dynamic community."

It helps to go through these questions with someone else or even alone just so you get used to hearing your voice. You'll learn to articulate the questions you seem to fumble over, and you'll become much more comfortable with them-and yourself.

When you're preparing for and finally in the interview, keep in mind that there are many different ways to ask the same question. If, however, you are prepared with the basic responses and realize that both parties want the same things (appreciation, stability, team orientation, dependability and loyalty), you will do very well on your interview.