

There are some questions common to all job interviews. Prepare yourself and you'll stand out.

Q: "So, tell me about yourself?"

This may be asked to assess your personality, preparation, communication skills and ability to think on your feet. Prepare a list of what you do (your current or last job), your strengths (stick to job-focused skills) and a summary of your career trajectory, linking your experience to the job at hand.

Q: "Why did you leave your last job?"

Respond positively ". . . for better career advancement or promotion opportunities, increased responsibility, more variety at work. . ."

Q: "Why do you want to do this job/work for this company?"

Demonstrate your knowledge of the company and re-emphasise your suitability for the job.

Q: "What do you think you have to offer this company?"

This is a chance to sing your own praises - concentrating on the skills you have that are required for the position. For example: "I have strong sales skills, am a good team player and am very keen to be involved in the new markets you are developing in the Asian region."

Q: "What do you think this position involves?"

This question is designed to reveal if you have thought about the position, done some research, listened to the interviewer, and can summarise all of this information clearly.

Q: "What do you know about the company?"

Demonstrate your interest in the job, and your understanding of the organisation and industry. Talk about the research you did into the company's key areas of interest, its size, its main customers or current status.

Q: "Do you have any questions you would like to ask?"

Always prepare a question to ask the interviewer. Ask about the position, request clarification of general information about the company, or summarise your understanding and request confirmation. If they have already answered your questions tell them (be specific) so they know that you have thought about the position in preparing for the interview.

For example: *"What do you see as being the main focus of this role?"*

"I'd like to ask about the organisational structure ... are the publications produced on a national basis or individually by each regional office? How are budgets controlled/allocated?"

Q: "What do you believe are your key strengths?"

Prepare responses that give examples of your strengths at previous positions that will support your job application.

Q: "What do you believe are your weaknesses?"

No one readily admits weaknesses in an interview. It is general knowledge that this is an opportunity to turn the question into a positive. Think of something that relates to your experience of work that is plausible as a weakness but is not really a negative point. For example: "I am very particular about detail, I become very focused on the projects I am involved in."

Q: "Why have you had so many jobs?"

If you have had jobs in different industries or several positions in a short period, describe the positives - that you were learning new skills, following different career paths, and travelling overseas etc. Refer to the experience you gained that relates to the position under discussion.

Q: "What do you enjoy most about your current/last job?"

The trick with this question is to list what you have enjoyed about work that strongly relate to the key competencies of the position in question, and mention that you are looking forward to expanding your experience and scope in these areas.

Q: A question requesting confidential information about a previous employer.

This may be a test of your discretion and professionalism. It is best to reply that you would prefer not to divulge any confidential information (sales figures, for instance), citing the fact that you are sure your interviewer would expect the same discretion from their employees.

Q: 'Where do you see yourself in five years'time?'

This is an assessment of the extent of your ambition and career planning. You should demonstrate that your long-term goals are appropriate for the position being discussed and your commitment to them.

Q: "Can you give me an example of your creativity, managerial or organisational skills?"

Think of some examples that prove that you possess the key attributes and competencies requested in the job description. These are probably the areas on which your interviewer will probably focus.

Q: "Do you work well under pressure?"

Answer with a "yes", and give a specific example of a time when you were under pressure and how you rose to the challenge.

Q: "Tell me about when something went wrong."

Q: "Tell me about a time when you have encountered conflict in the workplace."

Q: "Have you ever had to deal with conflicting deadlines? How did you decide which task to complete?"

These are behavioural questions designed to elicit information about the required competencies for the position. Cite experiences in your past jobs, and always try to inject a positive note into your answer (eg, that you learnt from the experience).

If you are uncomfortable with any question, politely and professionally refuse to answer it or request clarification on its relevance to the position. Some suggestions are:

- "I don't think we need to talk about this. I would rather focus on issues relevant to the position and the requirements of your organisation."
- "I don't understand how this question is relevant to the position or my ability to perform in the role. Could you clarify for me why you think it is important, and I will try to provide you with the relevant information."

If you have had a negative experience with an employer (retrenchment or redundancy, sexual harassment, or clashes with colleagues), prepare to be asked about them in job interviews. The best strategy is to be honest, positive and to avoid criticising former employers or expressing grudges.

For example, **termination**:

"I was asked to leave that company. The grounds my employers gave were dissatisfaction with my performance/attitude..."

"But I disagreed with their assessment and believe that the termination was based on personal differences rather than performance issues. If you check with my referees from other positions you will find that I have not had problems of a similar nature anywhere else and I am confident that they will not occur again."

"Unfortunately, that year I had some personal commitments that I had to deal with. I had to make a choice to focus on these commitments or on my job, and I chose to concentrate on personal commitments. Unfortunately, this did mean that my work suffered, but I am now able to fully commit myself to my work again and am confident that I will be able to meet your performance requirements."

Sexual harassment/personal clashes: "I decided to leave because of some personal issues within the workplace which I would rather not discuss."

If legal proceedings took place: "There have been some legal proceedings regarding my position there and so for confidentiality reasons I would prefer not to discuss it."

- Sydney Morning Herald