



Understanding Types of Interview Questions

You've just received a phone call asking you to come in for an interview. What then? Do you just walk into the interview and wing it, hoping for the best?

Most interviewers will generally use a combination of six lines of questioning: Traditional, Situational, Behavior Description, Achievement, Abstract and Confrontational.

Traditional Interview Questions

These have been the most commonly used types of questions. Some examples of traditional interview questions include:

- Why do you want this job?
- Why should we hire you?
- What makes you think you can succeed in this job?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What would you bring to our company?
- What are your goals?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What do you value most in a job?

Situational Questions

Situational questions have become more frequently used by all industries. These questions ask how you would handle a theoretical situation. Examples of situational questions might be:

- Your division hasn't achieved budget in the last 3 quarters. Your immediate manager tells you to get your act together or your job is on the line. Describe the steps you'd take in this situation, and why.
- On a routine sales call to an existing client (in your new territory), you discover that the client refuses to deal with you because he is so unhappy with the company's past service. How would you handle the situation?
- Let's say you have a misunderstanding with a co-worker that results in her making a disparaging remark under her breath and walking away. How would you handle the situation?
- You encounter a technical problem with _____ (fill in the blank to make it relevant to you). How would you handle this type of a situation?

Behavior Description Questions

This style of questioning was developed when people began to notice that situational questions don't always predict how someone would behave in a real-life situation, where there might be personality conflicts, deadlines, pressure, stress, etc. Behavior description questions ask you to describe your behavior in actual, real-life situations that you encountered in your work or personal life. Each question generally has 4 parts: a question about a real situation that you encountered, a question asking you to describe your behavior in that situation, a question about the outcome, and a question on your learning. An experienced interviewee will automatically answer these four questions in their initial response. Two examples of behavior description questions might be:

- Can you tell me about the last time that you had a conflict with a co-worker? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome? In hindsight, what would you have done differently, if anything?
- Describe the last time you had to make a tough decision. What was the situation? How did you handle it? How did things turn out? What did you learn from that situation, if anything?

Achievement Questions

Achievement questions are designed to discover which category you fit into. They are based almost entirely on facts, and often have a numerical component to show how well you performed in any given position. Of course, most experienced recruiters will confirm your achievements with past or current employers during a reference-checking process, so you'll want to be honest without underselling yourself.

Examples of achievement questions include:

- Describe the situation you walked into when you started your current position. What were some of the challenges you faced? How did you handle these challenges? What steps did you take to improve the situation? How have your actions impacted your organization?
- Have you taken any steps to increase sales revenues? What was the result? Have you expanded your product or service offering in any way? Have you led any restructuring initiatives? What was the result? Have you upgraded any systems or infrastructure? How else have you improved efficiency or productivity? What have you done to improve customer satisfaction? What was the result?

Abstract Questions

The rationale behind this line of questioning is to learn how you think, how quickly you can respond to unexpected questions/situations, how creative you are, how well you think in the abstract, how you perceive yourself and others, etc. Some examples of abstract questions include:

- If you were a bird, what kind of a bird would you be? Why is that?
- If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be? Why is that?

There are many more variations, but you get the picture...

Confrontational Questions

Some employers want to see how you would react under pressure or adverse conditions. If the target position involves dealing with irate people, sensitive situations, multiple deadlines or other types of stresses, the interviewer might adopt a confrontational approach to test your reactions. The secret is to remember that they are probably using this same approach with every applicant, and that the interviewer's tone has very little to do with you and your competence. So don't take anything personally. Stay calm, no matter what! Examples of confrontational questions might be:

- Your company's share price is 20% below what it was 2 years ago. Why is that?

- Why haven't you been able to reverse that abysmal trend?
- Aren't you embarrassed by your results?

Come prepared with questions for them!

- What do you think is the most important aspect of this position?
- When do you expect to make your hiring decision? What is the next step in the process?
- How would you describe your management style?
- What advice can you give about succeeding in your organization?
- What do they feel is the largest asset of the program in comparison to other programs?

A Word of Advice

The questions listed above are only a few of the thousands of questions that might be asked. More than anything else, they are designed to inspire you to think a certain way. Use them as a guide to brainstorm other questions that might be relevant to your field, to the target position and to the prospective employer. Then formulate your answers to show the interviewer you have the right combination of experience, skills, qualifications and attitudes to succeed in the target position. **Make sure to practice your answers out loud** with someone else posing as a recruiter. This will dramatically improve the smoothness of your answers in a real interview. Remember to keep your answers honest. Most experienced recruiters have excellent intuition when they are given a dishonest or grossly exaggerated answer.


Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- Who or what has had the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- Why are you interested in our organization?
- What kind of work do you want to do?
- What is your GPA? Does your GPA reflect your ability?
- What goals have you set for yourself?
- How do you plan to achieve your goals?
- Tell me how you perceive your strengths? Weaknesses?
- How do you evaluate yourself?
- What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?

- Why did you choose the extracurricular activities that you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?
- What one academic course did you have that had the greatest impact on you and why?
- How do you motivate people?
- What frustrates you the most?
- What interests or concerns you about the position or company?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Describe your leadership style.
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- What can you contribute to our organization?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- How are you conducting your job search and how will you make your decision?
- What are your expectations of your future employer?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
- What do we need to know about you that have not been covered?
- Why should we hire you?
- What was the most useful criticism you received and who was it from?
- Give examples of your "team player" qualities.

Sample Behavioral Based Interview Questions

1. Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.
2. Describe a project that you worked on where you didn't have enough information and the goals were unclear, what did you do?
3. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
4. Tell me about a time when you had to use your spoken communication skills in order to persuade an audience.
5. Can you tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt?
6. Tell me about a project that you implemented and evaluated.
7. Describe a situation where you conformed to a policy even though you didn't agree with it.
8. Give me an example of a time when you took the initiative to find resources and implement a complex project.
9. Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation that you've completed.
10. Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
11. Describe a situation where you had to communicate with a diverse group. Be specific.
12. What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? .

- 
13. Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others.
 14. Describe your most recent group effort.
 15. What were the biggest problems you encountered in college? How have you handled them? What did you learn from them?
 16. How do you solve conflicts?
 17. Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical skills.
 18. Take me through a project where you demonstrated planning skills.
 19. What types of situations put you under pressure and how do you deal with the pressure?
 20. Tell me about a difficult decision you have made.
 21. Give an example of a situation in which you failed and how you handled it.
 22. Give me a specific example of your work or learning in a multicultural setting and what impact did the experience have on you?
 23. Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it.
- 