

# Interviews – Practice Questions

There are many different types of questions you will be asked in an interview. The majority of questions will relate to the position's specific selection criteria, and focus on your ability to do the job. The interviewing panel will also be likely to want to discover your level of general, transferable skills, also called 'employability skills'. This help sheet provides you with some suggested questions to practise for your interview. Additional resources on interviews in this series include: *Job Interviews – A Guide*.

## Types of Questions

A job interview will be comprised of a combination of different types of questions. If you are applying for an advertised position, then its selection criteria are the best indicators of the likely questions. Some of the criteria will be technical and specific to the job; others will relate to more general skills, often called 'employability skills'.

Employability skills are those broader skills that are necessary for people to work effectively in the labour market, both today and in the future. These skills include teamwork, communication, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self management, learning and technology. Organisations will be looking for applicants with these general skills, so it's very likely interview questions will either directly or indirectly refer to them. For more information on employability skills, refer to the *Employability Skills* sheet.

While different style interviews may focus on using one type of question over another, most will incorporate some of the following:

**Ice Breakers** – questions that aim to find out a little about you and provide a chance for the interviewer and interviewee to establish a rapport.

- Example: Tell me about yourself

**Motivation and career oriented questions** – questions that focus on your goals and reasons for choosing a particular career pathway.

What motivated you to apply for this job?

- Why did you choose this career?
- What would you like to be doing in five years?
- How do you stay knowledgeable about your industry?
- Why did you leave your last position? (Avoid saying negative things about your previous employer)

**Technical questions** – questions that focus on your specialised knowledge of your field

- What are some of the professional boundaries or legislative frameworks that you need to be aware of in this role?

**Questions about your own awareness of the organisation**

- Why do you want to work for our organisation?
- What do you know about our organisation?

**Behavioural questions** – questions designed to understand how you behave in certain situations based on your previous actions.

Questions are formed around your experiences and skills that match the key selection criteria.

- Describe a difficult decision you've made and the process you went through to reach that decision. What was the outcome?
- Describe a time where you had to take charge in a situation. What did you do? What was the outcome of your actions?
- Give me an example when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty. What happened as a result of your actions?

**Case scenario/hypothetical questions** – Questions to evaluate how you might approach a situation you may not have experienced previously.

- How would you handle a situation in which you had to deal with an irate co-worker, or customer? What do you think would be the results?
- What would you do if you came across a task that you had never done before?

**Self-awareness questions**

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses? (only answer with one weakness and try to turn it into a positive)

**Closing questions to finish the interview**

- What kind of salary were you expecting?
- Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Do you have any questions?



## Interviews – Practice

Now you have an idea of the different types of questions, it's time to have a practice! Choose a few of the key questions and have a try at answering them out loud as if you were in an interview situation. Practise will never replace the actual experience of an interview; however it can provide you with important feedback on where you need to improve. You might want to practise using the following suggestions:

- Practise in the mirror or by taping/video recording yourself
- Ask a friend/family member if you can practise with them
- Use the services offered by Monash University Employment and Career Development– you can book into an interview skills workshop (<http://www.careers.monash.edu.au>)

While you may find it difficult at first practising your answers, you'll find gradually that you can more easily find the right words and language to answer particular questions and use appropriate examples. The more familiar you are with the process, the more comfortable and confident you'll feel when you are answering interview questions.

## Behavioural Questions

It is common for interviewers to incorporate behavioural questions as a key component of a job interview. These questions are based on the premise that past behaviour is an indicator of future behaviour and performance. You can often recognise a behavioural question when it starts with a phrase such as, “*Tell me about a time when you .....*”, “*Describe a situation when you .....*”, “*Have you had the opportunity to .....*” followed by the specific focus of the question. When you are asked a behavioural question, the employer is looking for you to provide a specific example which demonstrates your skills in key selection criteria.

One of the techniques you can use to structure your examples and keep your answer on track is the **STAR** approach. The acronym, **STAR**, comes from the words:

**S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult,

which cover the basic structure of your answer to a behavioural question. In your response, you would ‘set the stage’ by describing the **Situation**; you would then identify the **Task** you were responsible for. The **Action** you took – i.e. what you did - led then to a successful **Result**. Have a look at the following example of using the **STAR** model.

**Question: Can you tell me about a time when you used your initiative to improve something in the workplace?**

<b>Situation</b> Set the scene by briefly describing the situation.	I was working in a major retail hardware store as a customer service assistant.
<b>Task</b> Describe what needed to be done and what your role and responsibilities were.	Our shift team had the worst safety record in the store and we needed to improve our record
<b>Action</b> Detail specific action you took to have an impact on the situation. You may also include reasons for your action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I volunteered to be the safety representative and used my science studies background to explain to people good safety practices and why they were important</li> <li>• I arranged for safety to be a regular item on the agenda of staff meetings</li> <li>• I designed posters that could be put in common staff areas to raise awareness</li> <li>• I encouraged new staff to adopt best practice</li> </ul>
<b>Results</b> Discuss the outcomes of your action. How can they be measured? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Quantifiable</li> <li>○ Qualitative</li> <li>○ Your learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of incidents reduced in our shift</li> <li>• People become more conscientious about safety and compliance improved</li> <li>• Management acknowledged our improvement through a team reward</li> <li>• I learned that I enjoyed taking a role of responsibility in a team</li> </ul>
Employability Skills and personal attributes demonstrated in this example	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Team work</li> <li>• Planning and organising</li> <li>• Learning</li> <li>• Commitment</li> <li>• Enthusiasm</li> <li>• Common sense</li> <li>• Motivation</li> </ul>

By referring to specific examples using the **STAR** technique, you will be able to describe what you have learned from your previous experience and how this will help you perform in future workplaces.

Some of the ways you might prepare for behavioural questions are to:

- *Think about activities that you have undertaken in your academic life, at work and throughout extra-curricular experiences. Consider how your skills and attributes were applied in a practical way or how your confidence in using particular skills was developed.*
- *Focus on illustrating the positive aspects of your experiences such as accomplishments or meeting goals. For situations that started out negatively, describe the positives or how you made the best of the situation.*
- *Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.*
- *Use fairly recent examples from at least within the past two years.*

Remember to be specific! Employers claim that many job seekers give vague and indefinite responses. For example, if you claim that you have strong leadership skills, demonstrate them by citing some actual instances from your experiences.

## The 'Weaknesses Question'

The purpose of the employer asking you 'what do you think are your weaknesses?' is for you to demonstrate to them your self-awareness of areas where you need development. Here are some suggestions to answer the "weaknesses" question:

- State a weakness that you have corrected or a lesson learned – acknowledge what you have learned from making a previous mistake and the necessary actions you have taken to prepare you for next time.
- Describe a learning objective – recognise areas for development regarding knowledge you might lack and the steps you are currently working on to improve.

## Questions You Might Ask at the Interview

Normally, there will be an opportunity for you to ask questions of the interviewer. Focus on questions that could give you better insight into the organisation and the industry. Here are some examples:

- What are some of the broad challenges that your industry faces?
- What are some of the areas that the organisation prioritises in professional development?
- What might be some of the future career options for someone working in this position?
- Could you explain the organisational structure? Where does my team fit within the organisational structure?

## Your Next Job Interview

Now you have an idea of the different types of questions, have thought about your strategies for answering, **and practice them**, you will probably notice a difference in your performance at your next job interview.

No matter what the outcome, see every interview as a learning experience; after your next interview, review your performance. What went well? What could have been done better?

As you practice, experience real job interviews, and think about your performance, you'll probably find that you'll be able to describe your strengths and achievements more fluently, and market yourself and your skills more effectively. The ability to market yourself is an important part of building success as you navigate your way through your career.

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This information was current at the time of writing and is intended as a guide only.

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