

# How to answer common interview questions

## Question 1

How was your journey here today?

### Answer

This is not a real question. This is simply an opportunity to break the ice for both yourself and your interviewer. You should answer it in the spirit in which it is being asked, namely with a friendly response which does not veer into the territory of criticising the state of Britain's road, rail or bus services. It is often used to put you at ease. After all you must know the answer!

## Question 2

What motivates you?

### Answer

You could say, "I thrive on daily challenges and from the satisfaction of performing well. I particularly enjoy being part of a productive team and contributing to the overall success of the company".

It may be wiser, however, to relate what motivates you much more specifically to the requirements and duties of the job you are applying for. Stock answers are all very well, but they are certainly no substitute for well-reasoned responses which directly apply to the job in hand. Analyse the key skills required for the job, try and intertwine your motivations within them. Look at the rewards offered by the job and consider these as prime motivating factors. Demonstrate that motivation comes easy to you. Show you are self-motivating. You do not want to appear as someone who always needs an external force to get you going. Give examples of activities you have undertaken or jobs you have completed where your own motivation was a significant factor in getting the job done.

## Question 3

Would you describe yourself as competitive?

### Answer

The easy answer is yes. You must give plenty of examples, from as many aspects of your life as possible. University experience certainly, but also include situations from your early life in order to demonstrate that competition is natural to you. Sporting activities are an obvious source here.

Show that you are competitive on your own as well as within a team situation. You should also suggest that you are successfully competitive. Failing in competition will not look very good. Bring into your answer how other people see you. Do they regard you as a competitive person and if so is that a good or a bad thing? Are you the kind of person others look to when they are faced with a challenge?

## Question 4

What are your strengths?

### Answer

This is your chance to sell yourself. Before any interview you should make a list of your "Unique Selling Points" - anything which makes you a strong applicant: good academic results, relevant work experience, evidence of leadership or other relevant skills for the job.

You need to back up these points with relevant examples of where you have demonstrated these. This question may be phrased in different ways such as "How would your best friend describe you?", "Why should we employ you rather than the other applicants?" or "Tell me something about yourself". Whichever way it is phrased, this is a golden opportunity to convince the selector that you are the right person for the job - don't waste it!

## Question 5

What are your weaknesses?

### Answer

The classic answer is to state a strength disguised as a weakness, e.g. "I'm too much of a perfectionist" or "I push myself too hard". This has been used so often that, even if true it sounds clichéd and false. A better strategy is to choose a weakness that you're working to improve and describe what action you are taking to remedy it.

For example: "I used to find it hard to talk to people I didn't know well, but my job in the library meant that I had to help people with all kinds of queries. Now I'm happy talking one-to-one and I've joined the debating society to give me experience of speaking in front of an audience." Everyone has weaknesses and if you refuse to admit to any the interviewer will mark you down as arrogant or lacking in self-awareness.

## Question 6

Are you a leader?

### Answer

*"Yes, I've always been good at this."*

Where is your evidence - the interviewer is unlikely to take your answer at face value.

*"I'm not sure."*

This may be honest which may appeal to the interviewer, but he/she will have expected you to assess your suitability for the job before applying - if you can't give evidence that you have the skills required backed up by examples, you are unlikely to get very far.

*"Here is an example of where I showed leadership skills...."*

This is what is looked for - evidence of skills as shown by real examples. You need to make sure that you have looked through your CV for examples of where you have demonstrated these skills before the interview.

## **Question 7**

How would you go about solving a problem?

### **Answer**

Here they will be looking for a logical and analytical approach. Show evidence of careful planning e.g. define the problem, do your research, break it down into smaller units and have a contingency plan if things don't work out. Give examples of problems you have solved in the past.

You might include in your answer:

- The research you will need to undertake
- People you will need to talk to
- Estimation of the time it will take
- External help you may have to call on
- Resources you will need

## **Question 8**

Tell me about yourself

### **Answer**

Talking about your interests and hobbies is quite acceptable but unlikely to advance your case unless your hobbies are related to the job or you have achievements in these areas that you wish to put across.

Giving a brief summary of the key decisions you have taken in your life can be a good solution, allowing you to explain positively any problems that you had and to show that you use logical planning and decision making skills when making important decisions.

If however your approach is intuitive and you just fall into things, this might not be the correct approach for you! Start at about the age of 16 and mention any important turning points in your life such as how you chose your 'A' levels, degree subject, University and why you are applying for this position. If there are any weaknesses in your application this can be a good chance to explain these in a positive way.

## **Question 9**

Tell me something interesting about yourself

### **Answer**

Don't be embarrassed or mention that you collect beer mats. Take this opportunity to make some positive statements. In particular your relevant strengths, qualities, achievements and recent experience could all be described. Equally, if you possess a particular distinction it should be mentioned here. An example could be a sporting achievement of significance, a local honour for helpfulness or bravery or anything else that will help the interviewer single you out in their mind, as long as it is positive and commendable of course. You may be asked about something you have mentioned in your application. In which case you will be expected to be reasonably knowledgeable and interested in the topic. Be prepared!

## **Question 10**

Have you got any questions for us?

### **Answer**

Ask questions you really want the answer to. Asking no questions suggests a lack of interest! Research the company carefully, you will find questions naturally arising. Don't ask more than five questions unless you are getting encouragement as other interviewees may be waiting.

Focus on questions that show your interest in the work itself, rather than the rewards it will bring. Ask about training and career progression in preference to pay, pensions, holidays and parking!

Prepare questions in advance: note these down on a card to bring with you. If all your prepared questions are answered during the interview say what you had planned to ask, and that you have already been given answers. You can also mention anything that has not been covered but that is important to your application.