

# Ace Your Next Interview!

There are a number of questions employers commonly ask during an interview. Being aware of some of these questions and thinking about your responses will help you to provide meaningful and appropriate answers.

## Skills and Personal Qualities

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why should I hire you? What special skills do you have that make you stand out from other candidates?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If I spoke with your last boss, what would he/she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the toughest challenge you have faced? Why was it so tough?
- What accomplishment has given you the greatest satisfaction? Why?
- What motivates you to put forth your best effort?
- How do you define success? Failure?

## Career Goals

- Why did you choose this particular career field?
- What are your long-term and short-term career goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?

## Education

- Why did you major in \_\_\_\_\_?
- How has your education prepared you for this job?
- What is your GPA and how does it reflect your academic abilities?
- What was your favorite class/least favorite class in college? Why?
- If you could start college over again, what might you do differently?
- How have extra-curricular activities provided experience applicable to the workplace?

## Work Experience

- What have you learned from your internship?
- What experiences and skills do you have that would help you in this job?
- Name a job you had and tell me how you made a difference.
- List three things former co-workers would say about you.
- Tell me about a time when you had to handle a difficult customer or co-worker. How did you handle the situation?
- In your current or last position, what tasks did you like the most? Least?
- Describe a time when your work was criticized.
- Describe a major problem you encountered and how did you deal with it.
- What qualities does a successful supervisor possess?

## Knowledge of the Industry and/or Organization

- What do you know about our organization?
- Why do you think you would like to work for us?
- What attracts you to this industry?
- How do you keep up with what is going on in your company/industry/profession?

# Behavioral Interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is an interviewing technique that helps employers predict how a candidate will perform on the job and fit into the organization. The premise behind this technique is that the most accurate predictor of future performance is past behavior in a similar situation. The employer can get a better sense of how you will probably respond to circumstances in the position they are considering you for by finding out how you reacted in past situations.

Unlike traditional interview questions where you can say what you *might* or *should* have done in a given situation, behavioral interview questions require you to give a specific example of a situation in which you demonstrated a particular behavior or skill, explain how you dealt with the situation, and what the outcome was. For example:

Traditional Interview Question – “Do you work well under stress?”

Behavioral Interview Question – “Tell me about a time when you had to work under stress.”

## How to Prepare for the Behavioral Interview

First, you need to understand the skill sets - *the knowledge, skills, and traits* – the employer feels are necessary to successfully do the job. Review the job description carefully. What skills are required? Research the company to find out what key “competencies”/behaviors are considered important.

Next, identify examples from past experiences where you demonstrated the “competencies” (skills, experiences, and attributes) related to the position you are applying for. Use examples from internships, class projects, activities, team participation, community service, hobbies, work experience, etc. as examples of your past behavior. You could even use examples of special accomplishments, whether personal or professional, such as scoring the winning shot, being elected to an office in Student Government, winning a prize for your artwork, or raising money for charity. Recent experiences are best and quantify your results whenever possible. Numbers always impress employers.

## How to Answer Behavioral Questions

Once you understand the skill sets required for the job and have identified your own personal experiences that show you exhibit these skills, you are now ready to prepare “stories” to illustrate your experience.

STAR is a structured method of responding to an interview question by discussing a specific situation/task, action, and result of the experience you are describing.

<b>S</b> ituation or <b>T</b> ask	Describe the situation you were in or the task you needed to accomplish. Be specific and provide enough details for the interviewer to understand. The situation can be a previous job, internship, volunteer work, class project, etc.
<b>A</b> ction	Describe the action you took and keep the focus on what you did, even if it was a team effort. Use the word “I”, not “We”.
<b>R</b> esult	What happened due to your actions? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Even if you feel you did not handle the situation as well as you could have, tell what you learned and show how you applied the learning in another situation.

Be sure to follow all parts of the STAR method. Remember that a good story has a beginning, middle, and end. Be as specific as possible, without including too much information. For example:

**Question:** "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member was not pulling his weight".

**Answer:** "I was assigned to a team to develop a business plan for a start-up company. One of our members was not showing up for our meetings or doing his assignments (*Situation/Task*). I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked what he needed to get back on track. He told me he was having trouble with another class and it took up most of his time. I recommended he contact a person from the Tutoring Center to get help with the course (*Actions Taken*). Not only was he able to spend more time on our project, but he was very grateful to me for helping him out. We finished the project on time and received an A+ on it (*Results*).

Be aware that interviewers may ask negatively phrased questions to get you to reveal your weaknesses, as well as your strengths: "Tell me about a time when you were unable to complete a project on time" or "Tell me about a time when you made a bad decision." When answering this type of question, you should show that you have the insight and maturity to understand your own weaknesses, and you have overcome those weaknesses. Keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result, such as "losing a game", can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.

### **Additional Tips**

- Listen carefully to what the interviewer asks and provide an answer that is relevant to the question. If you are unsure about what they are asking for, ask for clarification.
- When answering questions, be specific and provide details.
- Don't be afraid to take a few moments to think about the question before giving an answer.
- Separate your actions from the actions of others. Use "I" more than "We".
- Be honest!

### **Sample Behavioral Interview Questions**

- Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty to get the job done.
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.
- Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in attaining it.
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to get out of a difficult situation.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Give an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your way of dealing with conflict? Give an example.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you made over the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when you something you tried failed.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Describe a situation where others working with you on a project disagreed with your ideas.
- Give an example of how you applied knowledge from a previous class to a project in another subject.
- Sometimes it is easy to get in over your head. Describe a time where you had to request help or assistance on a project or assignment.

- Tell me about a time when you worked with a colleague that was not completing their share of the work? How did you handle the situation?
- Give examples of your experiences at school or work that were satisfying. Give examples of your experiences that were dissatisfying.
- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

### Common Attributes Evaluated by Behavioral Questions

Ability to Learn	Flexibility	Leadership Listening	Problem Solving
Adaptability	Initiative	Motivation	Stress
Communication	Integrity	Negotiation	Teamwork Technical
Decisiveness	Interpersonal Skills	Planning/Organizing	Knowledge Work Ethic
Delegation	Judgment		

## Illegal Interview Questions

According to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is illegal for interviewers to consider an applicant's race, color, religion, sex, age, or national origin when making employment decisions. Interview questions must be related to the job for which you are applying and evaluate if you can perform the functions of the job.

### Handling Illegal Questions

There are three ways to answer an illegal interview question:

1. **Answer the question.** Keep in mind that the information you provide is not job-related and may or may not help your chances of getting the position.
2. **Refuse to answer the question.** You are within your rights, but you risk the chance of coming off as uncooperative and confrontational. You want to maintain your professionalism.
3. **Examine the intent of the question and answer as it might apply to the job.** For example, the interviewer asks, "Who will take care of your children when you travel?" You might respond by saying, "I understand that traveling is part of the job and the ability to travel on short notice would not be influenced by my personal life".

### Examples of Illegal Questions

Inquiry Area	Illegal Question	Legal Question
<b>National Origin / Citizenship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you a U.S. citizen?</li> <li>• Where were you/your parents born?</li> <li>• What is your "native tongue"?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorized to work in the U.S.?</li> <li>• What languages do you read/write/speak fluently? (<i>Okay if this ability is relevant to the job.</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How old are you?</li> <li>• When did you graduate?</li> <li>• What is your birthday?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you over the age of 18?</li> </ul>
<b>Marital / Family Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your marital status?</li> <li>• With whom do you live with?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you plan to have a family? When?</li> <li>• How many kids do you have?</li> <li>• What are your childcare arrangements?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you be able and willing to travel as needed for the job? <i>(Okay if all applicants for the job are asked this question.)</i></li> <li>• Would you be able and willing to work overtime as necessary for the job? <i>(Okay if all applicants for the job are asked this question.)</i></li> </ul>
<b>Affiliations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What clubs or social organizations do you belong to?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you belong to any professional, trade groups, or other organizations that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job?</li> </ul>
<b>Personal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How tall are you?</li> <li>• How much do you weigh? <i>(These questions are not acceptable unless minimum standards are essential to the safe performance of the job.)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you able to lift a 50-pound weight and carry it 100 yards, as this is part of the job?</li> </ul>
<b>Disabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have any disabilities?</li> <li>• Please complete the following medical history. Have you had any recent or past illnesses or operations? If yes, list &amp; give dates.</li> <li>• What was the date of your last physical exam?</li> <li>• How is your family's health?</li> <li>• When did you lose your eyesight? How?</li> <li>• Do you need accommodations to perform the job? <i>(Can be asked after a job offer has been made.)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you able to perform the essential functions? <i>(OK if the interviewer has thoroughly described the job.)</i></li> <li>• Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?  <i>** As part of the hiring process, after a job offer has been made, you will be required to undergo a medical exam. (Exam results must be kept strictly confidential, except medical/safety personnel may be informed if emergency medical treatment is required, and supervisors may be informed about necessary job accommodations based on exam results).</i></li> </ul>
<b>Arrest Record</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever been arrested?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever been convicted of _____? <i>(Crime should be reasonably related to the performance of the job in question.)</i></li> </ul>
<b>Military</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have been in the military, were you honorably discharged?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what branch of the armed forces did you serve?</li> <li>• What type of training or education did you receive in the military?</li> </ul>