



Solution

Interview Prep Guide

Job Search Master Class® Interview Basics

- Listen HARD to the question
- Pause, think of no more than three points you want to make
- Say three points and pause, giving them time to write or digest them.
- Be engaging; not a robot.
- When they ask you to expand or elaborate, be prepared and have a conversation
- Non-verbal tips: Make eye contact, sit up straight, smile, high energy

Most Common Questions	Answer Instruction
What are your greatest strengths? OR What would prior co-workers say your strengths are?	<p>This is one of the easier interview questions you'll be asked. But most candidates miss the opportunity.</p> <p>When you are asked a question about your strengths, it's important to discuss attributes that will qualify you for this specific job. Highlight the skill, then describe how you are strong at it!</p> <p><i>There are 3 strengths I'd like to share with you today:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>One Time management: I complete projects well ahead of schedule and can juggle many tasks at the same time.</i>• <i>Two, Analytics: I have great attention to detail and proud of my accuracy and analytical skills.</i>• <i>Three, Customer Service: I am good at listening to customer issues and solving them.</i>
What are your greatest weaknesses? OR What would prior co-workers say your weaknesses are?	<p>Please develop three "areas of improvement." You will share two and keep one in your hip pocket in case they ask for a 3rd!</p> <p>Try to turn a negative into a positive.</p> <p>"I'm working on the following two areas of improvement."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One, I used to triple-check every item in a spreadsheet; now, I try to limit my reviews.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two, Being organized wasn't my strongest point, but I implemented a time management system that really helped my organization skills. <p>-----</p> <p>(Just in case they ask for a 3rd!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I used to wait until the last minute to set appointments for the coming week, but I realized that scheduling in advance makes much more sense.
<p>Tell me about yourself. (Your "Elevator Pitch")</p>	<p>I'm surprised! This is such a common interview question. However, most candidates don't spend the time to prepare for exactly how to answer it. Script it! Use the Law of Threes. Here's the formula:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A short ice-breaker*, then one sentence about your education Two sentences about your professional experience (not a resume walk-through!) Last two sentences about why you are here today – why it's a great opportunity <p>Then pause and stop talking.</p> <p>This introduction will set the stage for further discussion and set you apart from your competitors. Be conversational and share interesting things if they are relevant and professional.</p> <p>*Ice-breaker ideas are where you were raised, at what age you knew you had the passion for X or skills for Y or a hobby you have that is interesting. Not a long version...super short!</p> <p>Do not share anything about your family, your kids, marital status, age, ethnic make-up, a personal disability, etc.</p>
<p>How do you handle stress and pressure?</p>	<p>Keep this answer short. They want to get to know you, so be a person!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At work, I handle stress and pressure by _____ From a personal perspective, I manage stress by visiting the gym every evening. It's a great stress reducer.
<p>Describe a difficult work situation or project and how you overcame it. OR</p>	<p>These are behavioral interview questions designed to discover how you handled certain situations. The logic behind these types of questions is that how you behaved in the past is a predictor of what you will do in the future.</p>



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<p>Tell me a time when you....?</p> <p>Do you have experience in...?</p>	<p>In advance of any interview, prepare three concrete examples of situations that actually happened at work. Then be prepared to discuss what you did to solve the problem. Keep your answers positive.</p> <p>Script each of the three examples that illustrate times when you have successfully solved a situation.</p> <p>During the interview, offer only one story with three sentences, then stop! They will probe for more if needed.</p> <p>Formula to answer: S.A.R.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Situation: Describe the situation – briefly!• Action: Describe what you did, using "I," not "we." Provide 3 actions you took – this is how they get to know your strengths.• Result: "The result of my actions were..." Use metrics and facts as much as possible. <p>Here's an example: "Yes, I would like to share the following: The situation was <fill in> The actions I took were _____, _____, and _____. As a result, _____"</p>
<p>Why are you leaving, or why have you left your job?</p>	<p>No matter what the circumstances, be proud and confident. Don't get defensive and NEVER blame anything on the prior company, their management, or a "bad boss."</p> <p>Keep it brief; keep it honest, and keep it moving. One or two sentences then move on.</p> <p>Some ideas to consider:</p> <p>If you were let go from your prior company and are no longer there:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Due to the economy, they had a reduction in force.• My boss and I agreed that it was time for me to move on to a position that would tap into my strengths.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I outlasted several downsizings, but the last one included me. Sign of the times, I guess. • The company was cutting back, and, unfortunately, my job was one of those eliminated. <p>If you left on your own:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm ready to take on more responsibility. • I'm looking for a bigger challenge and growing my career, and I couldn't job hunt part-time while working. It didn't seem ethical to use my former employer's time. • I'm relocating to this area due to family circumstances and left my previous position in order to make a move. We are here to stay and love <city>. • I am interested in an opportunity to use my technical skills and experience in a different capacity than I have in the past. • I recently received my degree, and I want to utilize my new skills in a new position. • If you have a gap: I left my last position to manage a critical family situation. Circumstances have changed, and I'm more than ready for full-time employment again. • Veterans: My commitment to the U.S. Army was completed with great success. Now I am proud to be pursuing a career in _____.
<p>Why do you want this job?</p>	<p>Customize this answer to fit your particular circumstances and the job you are applying for.</p> <p>Pull out three characteristics of the job, per the job description, and talk about those.</p> <p><i>There are three major reasons:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One, your engineering requirements are challenging; two, your new product launches are exciting and, three, I enjoy leading people. • One, your technology is fascinating, two, the marketing opportunity is tremendous, and, three, you have a winning management team.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One, I'm excited about the analytical requirements; two, I'm passionate about learning from an amazing team and, three, _____. <p>Avoid "I'm a perfect fit, it leverages my capabilities, I have the skills you are looking for," etc.</p> <p>Caution, most people answer why you want this company. That is not the question! Prepare your own answer for the company.</p>
<p>Why should we hire you?</p>	<p>The best way to respond is to give three concrete examples of why your skills and accomplishments make you the best candidate for the job.</p> <p>Formula:</p> <p><i>There are 3 main reasons you should hire me</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One, because you're looking for <this requirement from their job description> and I have <that>. Two, because you're looking for <this requirement from their job description> and I have <that>. Three, because you're looking for <this requirement from their job description> and I have <that>. <p>Once you complete the JD Profile tool from Module 3, Lesson 4, you will have the answers to this question.</p>
<p>What are your goals for the future?</p>	<p>Refer to the position and the company you are interviewing with. Don't discuss your goals for returning to school or having a family. They are not relevant and could knock you out of contention for the job. Do not answer what you want to learn. That is not the question here.</p> <p><i>I have two goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First, I want to become a top-performing employee in a well-established organization, like this one. Once I gain additional experience, I would like to take on new challenges.
<p>What was your most recent compensation?</p>	<p>Companies are being pressured to move away from asking this since it triggers pay inequities. However, you need to prepare for it. Even if it's illegal in your state, please do not say, "This is an illegal question."</p>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <Name, my prior position was in a different market. Therefore, my compensation there is irrelevant." • However, I would be happy to discuss compensation when we arrive at the offer stage, which I hope happens. <smile> • If asked again or pressured: "I am here today since I am so excited about this position for so many reasons other than compensation. Can we please postpone this topic until the last stage of your hiring process?"
<p>What is your target compensation?</p>	<p>BEWARE! Don't fall into the trap of providing a number if you can avoid doing so. Coming in too high or too low can hurt you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here's my favorite: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "I am interested in this great position for all the right reasons, and I am confident your company will pay market-competitively." ○ And if they press you for a range, avoid giving one again! ○ "My goal is to exceed your expectations in this job. Again, I trust you will make an offer for a market-competitive package." <p>Note: Remember to use "market-competitive" and "package."</p> <p>Note: On online applications, the employer may require that a number be populated in a required field. Research market salaries on Glassdoor.com and put in a market-competitive number.</p>
<p>What motivates you?</p>	<p>There isn't a right or wrong answer to interview questions about what motivates you. Reminder: They want to get to know you, so be a person!</p> <p>Choices I like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork and seeing the team win • Finishing a really hard project and celebrating with the team • Getting an "at-a-girl" (or at-a-boy) for a job well done <p>I do not recommend things like "my family" or "learning something new." Try to be specific. What triggers you to go home and say, "that was a great day."</p>
<p>Are you overqualified for this job?</p>	<p>If you are asked this question, it is because they are concerned that you will get bored and will leave in 6 months or ask for a promotion or job move. You need</p>



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	<p>to convince them that there is "stretch" in this job and things you will learn and enjoy doing.</p> <p>This is a common question for the 50+-year-old candidates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, I believe I'm fully qualified. • Even though I have experience, there are elements of this job that I will learn so much about (give 2-3 examples). Select things from their job description or call out the industry, the new technology, the way this company handles a situation, etc. <p>Avoid, "no, I'm the perfect fit" or "No, this job meets my needs."</p>
<p>More Behavioral or Situational Interview Stories to Prepare using S.A.R. (Situation, Action, Result)</p>	<p>I recommend you develop bullet-point answers for each of the below, as applicable to your job type.</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>For questions like these, you want a story that illustrates your ability to work with others under challenging circumstances. Think team conflict, difficult project constraints, or clashing personalities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ S. ○ A. ○ R. • Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ S. ○ A. ○ R. • Describe a time when you struggled to build a relationship with someone important. How did you eventually overcome that? • We all make mistakes we wish we could take back. Tell me about a time you wish you'd handled a situation differently with a colleague. • Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?



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	<p>Client-Facing Skills</p> <p>If the role you're interviewing for works with clients, definitely be ready for one of these. Find an example of a time where you successfully represented your company or team and delivered exceptional customer service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?• Give me an example of a time when you did not meet a client's expectations. What happened, and how did you attempt to rectify the situation?• Tell me about a time when you made sure a customer was pleased with your service.• Describe a time when you had to interact with a difficult client. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?• When you're working with a large number of customers, it's tricky to deliver excellent service to them all. How do you go about prioritizing your customers' needs? <p>Ability to Adapt</p> <p>Times of turmoil are finally good for something! Think of a recent work crisis you successfully navigated. Even if your navigation didn't feel successful at the time, find a lesson or silver lining you took from the situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?• Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?• Tell me about the first job you've ever had. What did you do to learn the ropes?• Give me an example of a time when you had to think on your feet in order to delicately extricate yourself from a difficult or awkward situation.• Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with this situation? <p>Time Management Skills</p>



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	<p>In other words, get ready to talk about a time you juggled multiple responsibilities, organized it all (perfectly), and completed everything before the deadline.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me about a time you had to be very strategic in order to meet all your top priorities.• Describe a long-term project that you managed. How did you keep everything moving along in a timely manner?• Sometimes it's just not possible to get everything on your to-do list done. Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?• Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?• Give me an example of a time you managed numerous responsibilities. How did you handle that? <p>Communication Skills</p> <p>You probably won't have any trouble thinking of a story for communication questions, since it's not only part of most jobs; it's part of everyday life. However, the thing to remember here is to also talk about your thought process or preparation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way at work.• Describe a time when you were the resident technical expert. What did you do to make sure everyone was able to understand you?• Tell me about a time when you had to rely on written communication to get your ideas across to your team.• Give me an example of a time when you had to explain something fairly complex to a frustrated client. How did you handle this delicate situation?• Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit. <p>Motivation and Values</p>



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	<p>A lot of seemingly random interview questions are actually attempting to learn more about what motivates you. Your response would ideally address this directly, even if the question wasn't explicit about it.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment. 2. Describe a time when you saw some problem and took the initiative to correct it rather than waiting for someone else to do it. 3. Tell me about a time when you worked under close supervision or extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that? 4. Give me an example of a time you were able to be creative with your work. What was exciting or difficult about it? 5. Tell me about a time you were dissatisfied with your work. What could have been done to make it better?

List Questions you will ask in the interview here:

Download the handout called "Interview Questions to Ask," so you prepare your most effective questions to ask in an interview.

You may bring this sheet into the interview (it shows you pre-prepared, which is a good thing!) and be sure to write down their answers in front of them (if on video or face-to-face)

You may ask the same questions to multiple people during a day of interviews for the same job.

Order of Importance	Question	Good for the recruiter	Good for the Hiring Manager
1.	<i>My goal is to exceed expectations in this role. How will I be measured after six months?</i>	✓	✓



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