



ANSWERS TO CHALLENGING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS!

For many people, job interviews are the most stressful part of the job-search process. And it's true that an interview is often a make-or-break moment: If you flub the interview in a big way, you probably won't make the cut--no matter how good your resume is, or how excellent your qualifications are.

You can combat nerves and increase your chances of success by practicing your answers to difficult interview questions. Here are some of the toughest, with suggested answers:

1. Why do you want to work in this industry?

Incorrect answer:

"I love to shop. Even as a kid, I spent hours flipping through catalogs."

Tip:

Don't just say you like it. Anyone can do that. Focus instead on your history with that particular industry, and if you can, tell a success story.

Correct answer:

"I've always loved shopping, but my interest in retail [marketing](#) really started when I worked at a neighborhood boutique. I knew that our clothes were amazing, but that we weren't marketing them properly. So I worked with management to come up with a marketing strategy that increased our sales by 25 percent in a year. It was great to be able to contribute positively to an industry I feel so passionate about, and to help promote a product I really believed in."

2. Tell us about yourself.

Incorrect answer:

"I graduated four years ago from the University of Michigan, with a bachelor's in biology--but I decided that wasn't the right path for me. So I switched gears and got my first job, working in [sales](#) for a startup. Then I went on to work in marketing for a law firm. After that, I took a few months off to travel. Finally, I came back and worked in marketing again. And now, here I am, looking for a more challenging marketing role."

Tip:

Instead of giving a chronological work history, focus on your strengths and how they pertain to the role. If possible, illustrate with examples.

Correct answer:

"I'm really energetic, and I'm a great communicator. Working in sales for two years helped me build confidence and taught me the importance of customer loyalty. I've also got a track record of success. In my last role, I launched a company newsletter, which helped us build on our existing relationships and create new ones. Because of this, we ended up seeing a revenue increase of 10 percent over two years. I'm also very interested in how companies can use web tools to better market themselves, and would be committed to building on your existing platform."

3. What do you think of your previous boss?

Incorrect answer:

"He was completely incompetent, and a nightmare to work with, which is why I've moved on."

Tip:

Remember that if you get the job, many of the people interviewing you will someday be your previous bosses. The last thing they want is to hire someone they know will badmouth them. Instead of trashing your former employer, stay positive, and focus on what you learned from him (no matter how awful he really was).

Correct answer:

"My last boss taught me the importance of time management, didn't pull any punches, and was extremely deadline-driven. His no-nonsense attitude pushed me to work harder, and to meet deadlines I never even thought were possible."

4. Why are you leaving your current role?

Incorrect answer:

"I can't stand my boss, or the work I'm doing."

Tip:

Again, stay away from badmouthing your job or employer. Focus on the positive.

Correct answer:

"I've learned a lot from my current role, but now I'm looking for a new challenge, to broaden my horizons, and to gain a new skill set--all of which I see the potential for in this job."

5. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Incorrect answer:

"Relaxing on a beach in Maui," or "Doing your job."

Tip:

There's really no right answer to this question, but the interviewer wants to know that you're ambitious, career-oriented, and committed to a future with the company. So instead of sharing your dream for early retirement, or trying to be funny, give an answer that illustrates your drive and commitment.

Correct answer:

"In five years I'd like to have an even better understanding of this industry. Also, I really love working with people. Ultimately, I'd like to be in some type of managerial role at this company, where I can use my people skills and industry knowledge to benefit the people working for me, and the company as a whole."

6. What's your greatest weakness?

Incorrect answer:

"I work too hard," or for the comedian, "Blonds."

Tip:

This question is a great opportunity to put a positive spin on something negative, but you don't want your answer to be a cliché--joking or not. Instead, try to use a real example of a weakness you have learned to overcome.

Correct answer:

"I've never been very comfortable with public speaking--which, as you know, can be a hindrance in the workplace. Realizing this was a problem, I asked my previous employer if I could enroll in a speech workshop. I took the class, and was able to overcome my lifelong fear. Since then, I've given several presentations to audiences of over 100 high-level executives--I still don't love it, but no one else can tell!"

7. What salary are you looking for?

Incorrect answer:

"In my last job I earned \$45,000--so now I'm looking for \$50,000."

Tip:

"If you can avoid it, don't give an exact number. The first person to name a price in a salary negotiation loses. Instead, reiterate your commitment to the job itself. If you have to, give a broad range based on research you've conducted on that particular role, in your particular city."

Correct answer:

"I'm more interested in the role itself than the pay. That said, I'd expect to be paid the appropriate range for this role, based on my five years of experience. I also think a fair salary would bear in mind the high cost of living here in New York City."

8. Why should I hire you?

Incorrect answer:

"I'm the best candidate for the role."

Tip:

A good answer will reiterate your qualifications, and will highlight what makes you unique.

Correct answer:

"I've been an Administrative Assistant for the past ten years--my boss has said time and time again that without me, the organization would fall apart. I've also taken the time to educate myself on some of the software I regularly use (but didn't really understand the ins and outs of). I'm an Excel whiz now, which means I can work faster, and take over some of what my boss would traditionally have had to do herself. What's good enough for most people is never really good enough for me."

9. What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?

Incorrect answer:

"I never finished law school--and everything that's happened since has taught me that giving up, just because the going gets tough, is a huge mistake."

Tip:

You don't want to highlight a true major regret--especially one that exposes an overall dissatisfaction with your life. Instead, focus on a smaller (but still significant) mishap, and how it has made you a better professional.

Correct answer:

"When I was in college, I took an art class to supplement my curriculum. I didn't take it very seriously, and assumed that, compared to my engineering classes, it would be a walk in the park. My failing grades at midterm showed me otherwise. I'd even jeopardized my scholarship status. I knew I had to get my act together. I spent the rest of the semester making up for it, ended up getting a decent grade in the class. I learned that no matter what I'm doing, I should strive to do it to the best of my ability. Otherwise, it's not worth doing at all."

10. How do you explain your gap in employment?

Incorrect answer:

"I was so tired of working, and I needed a break," or "I just can't find a job."

Tip:

Employment gaps are always tough to explain. You don't want to come across as lazy or unhireable. Find a way to make your extended unemployment seem like a choice you made, based on the right reasons.

Correct answer:

"My work is important to me, so I won't be satisfied with any old job. Instead of rushing to accept the first thing that comes my way, I'm taking my time and being selective to make sure my next role is the right one."

11. What did you like least about your last job?

Incorrect answer:

"A lack of stability. I felt like the place could collapse around me at any time."

Try and stay away from anything that draws on the politics, culture or financial health of your previous employer. No matter how true it might be, comments like these will be construed as too negative. Also, you don't want to focus on a function that might be your responsibility in the next role. So think of something you disliked in your last job, but that you know for sure won't be part of this new role.

Correct answer:

“There was nothing about my last job that I hated, but I guess there were some things I liked less than others. My previous role involved traveling at least twice a month. While I do love to travel, twice a month was a little exhausting — I didn't like spending quite so much time out of the office. I'm happy to see that this role involves a lot less travel.”

12. Describe a time when you did not get along with a co-worker

Incorrect answer:

“I'm easy to get along with, so I've never had any kind of discord with another coworker.”

Interviewers don't like these types of 'easy out' answers. And besides, they know you are probably not telling the truth. Think of a relatively benign (but significant) instance, and spin it to be a positive learning experience.

Correct answer:

“I used to lock heads with a fellow nurse in the INCU ward. We disagreed over a lot of things — from the care of patients to who got what shifts to how to speak with a child's family. Our personalities just didn't mesh. After three months of arguing, I pulled her aside and asked her to lunch. At lunch, we talked about our differences and why we weren't getting along. It turns out, it was all about communication. We communicated differently and once we knew that, we began to work well together. I really believe that talking a problem through with someone can help solve any issue.”

13. What motivates you?

Incorrect answer:

“Doing a good job and being rewarded for it.”

It's not that this answer is wrong — it's just that it wastes an opportunity. This question is practically begging you to highlight your positive attributes. So don't give a vague, generic response — it tells them very little about you. Instead, try and use this question as an opportunity to give the interviewer some insight into your character, and use examples where possible.

Correct answer:

“I've always been motivated by the challenge of meeting a tough deadline — in my last role, I was responsible for a 100% success rate in terms of delivering our products on time and within budget. I know that this job is very fast-paced and deadline-driven — I'm more than up for the challenge. In fact, I thrive

on it."My favorite part of the job, and it showed – I was rated as "Good or Excellent" 95% of the time. Part of the reason I'm interested in this job is that I know I'd have even more interaction with customers, on an even more critical level."