

Interview Guidance Pack

This pack is to assist you with your interview process in explaining the different types of interviewing questions available and offering example questions to use.

However, finding and attracting top talent is a highly competitive challenge and there are many things you can do to beat your competitors in winning these people's services.

For advice on this, please visit our website: www.mrkassociates.co.uk/career-advice/interview-management/

What questions you will be asking:

Generally, employers follow a similar format when interviewing. They will ask general open questions at the start to allow the applicant to ease into the interview and these will be followed by more specific situation based questions, better known as competency based interview questions (CBI). The more senior the position the more CBI based the interview becomes.

The open questions will be fairly generic and many applicants will have been asked the same questions at previous interviews. Therefore try to spot any answers that are overly rehearsed and keep them on their toes by ensuring some of your questions are the less common ones that they may not have been asked before.

Please see a list of general opening questions to help you:

Q: Tell me about yourself. (See what they have to say about themselves).

A: This is a conversation starter and is a common question so their response should be fairly fluent. They should spend a maximum of four minutes to describe their qualifications, career history and range of skills. See whether they emphasise the skills that are relevant to the job on offer – this will show good pre-interview preparation.

Q: What have been your main achievements to date? (How much of an achiever are they?).

A: Another common question so the answer should be fairly fluent. Is their achievement experience related, relevant to this job and fairly recent? If not, they may not have many achievements. Have they tried to outline the benefit to you of the skills used in the achievement?

Q: How satisfying has your career been to date? (Do they answer this positively? Are they confident about their career to date? Do they mention aspirations?).

A: The answer must be generally positive but they should be honest if they feel they have hit a career plateau or their career has slowed down.

Q: What are your strengths? (Look for a straightforward answer as to what they are good at and how it is going to add value).

A: This question is asked in every interview – they should answer it well. They should list three or four and explain how they could benefit you as an employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency; ability to learn quickly; determination to succeed; positive attitude; the ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. Ask them for examples if you wish.

Q: What are your greatest weaknesses? (How self-aware are they? Do they actually give you a weakness?)

A: This is another standard question for which they should be well prepared. If they say "none" – finish the interview quickly (they think they're perfect). Look for one of two types of answers - a professional weakness such as them lacking experience (not ability) in a particular area. The second option is a personal or professional weakness that you may actually consider as a benefit. An example would be, "I know my team think I'm too demanding at times - I tend to drive them pretty hard but I'm getting much better at using the carrot and not the stick." Very rarely will someone actually say a weakness – e.g. "I'm short tempered!"

Q: What do you like about your present job? (Try to see how their 'likes' compare with what they will need to do in your job).

A: This is a straightforward question. They should be positive. Also look to see how well they articulate this information. If hugely positive about their job, do they really want to leave and are they susceptible to a counter-offer when they hand their notice in?

Q: What do you dislike about your current job? (Find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities they will dislike or which will make them unsuitable).

A: Keep your ears open with this one! They may draw attention to weaknesses, which you will need to question further if they are detrimental to this job. Also, use this to see whether they 'moan' about their current job or whether they come across as taking it in their stride.

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer? (Try to understand and evaluate their motives for moving).

A: This should be straightforward and the applicants should be honest. However, look for the obvious answers - looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience or a change of environment. Alarm bells should ring if someone is too negative in their reasons for leaving or if they state salary as the primary motivator.

Q: Why do you think you are the best person for this job? (Let the applicant sell themselves – it's a good question to ask all of them and compare the answers).

A: If they have prepared properly, their knowledge of you, the job and the company should enable them to promote their most relevant skills and experiences for the job. Do they do this well?

Q: Why do you want to work for this company? (What research has been done on the company and do they understand it).

A: Ensure they show they have researched into the company's background and current situation as a minimum. Any extra information on top of this should be seen positively as they have probably had to do some networking to get it.

Other questions you could ask:

- How does your job fit into your department and company? (Gives an idea of level of responsibility).
- What do you enjoy about the industry?
- What kinds of people do you like working with?
- What are your preferred working conditions, working alone or in a group and why?
- How do you think you are going to fit in here especially as this organisation is very different to your current employer? (You may not be able to answer until you have established what he/she perceives as the differences).
- What are you looking for in a company?
- How do you measure your own performance?
- What kind of pressures have you encountered at work?
- How do you feel about working long hours and/or weekends?
- What have you failed to achieve to date?
- What can you bring to this organisation?
- What area of your skills do you want to improve? (Try to relate this to the role on offer).
- Which part of this role is least attractive to you?
- Why do you think you would like this role?
- Where would you like to be in five years?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- What would your referees say about you?
- What five adjectives would you use that best describe you? (Both in and out of the workplace).
- Why should I give this position to you instead of the other people on the shortlist? (Strengths).
- What reservations should I have about you as an employee? (Weaknesses).
- What do you do in your spare time?

Competency Based Interview (CBI) Questions:

An employer will ask a CBI question that leads the applicant to discuss one specific situation they have experienced that is relevant. It is imperative the applicant doesn't try to make this into a hypothetical question by saying, 'in a situation like that I would....' They must discuss one situation that actually happened, in detail.

Each question will focus on a different specific competency (that you will have chosen in accordance with the key requirements of the job at the start of the recruitment process) with the aim of uncovering how well they dealt with that situation at the time, i.e. how strong they are with that specific competence. (The basis being that the best indicator of an individual's future behaviour is their past performance.)

As an employer, in order to successfully use this form of interviewing, you will need to know every detail of 4 key parts of an applicant's answer:

S – Situation – of the business/ department/ project

T – Task – that was needed to be done in this situation

A – Actions – that the applicant took to complete the task

R – Results – that were achieved at the end. (The applicant can discuss a negative result if they illustrate what was learnt from the experience.)

By asking lots of questions about each of these 4 elements of their experience, you will be able to ascertain whether they are making it up or how heavily they were involved. Also, look out for applicants using 'we' or 'they' as this shows they were not the sole person making the decisions or completing the actions.

The same questions must be asked in the same format to every applicant so you are able to benchmark and compare the standard of the competencies equally. Noting the answers in the interview is recommended as it is easier to look back at your notes and compare the applicants' answers after you have completed the interview process.

There are a large number of competencies so it is impossible to question for them all but it is possible to test for competencies that are most needed in a particular job. Using your knowledge of the job requirements and your understanding of the company values will allow you to choose the most appropriate ones.

Give the applicants time to answer and don't worry if there is a pause. Applicants will often need to think of a situation on the spot so be fair!

Please see a list of competencies and questions to help you:

Achievement Focus – *persistence and strength of character to win and overcome obstacles.*

- Give an example where you had to go the extra mile to achieve a goal/ objective.
- Tell me about a time when you have had to show persistence in overcoming obstacles to get a project/ piece of work completed.

Adaptability – *maintaining effectiveness in a changing environment.*

- Tell me about the biggest change you have had to deal with. How did you cope with it?
- Which new job did you find the hardest to settle in to and why?

Commerciality – *ability to think outside the box and deliver a real term gain/add value.*

- Tell me about a time where you spotted an opportunity and turned it into a reality.
- Give me an example where there has been a business win with a client thanks to your business acumen.

Communication – *adapting communication to the audience clearly and effectively.*

- Tell me about a time when you have had a very difficult client to deal with.
- Describe a situation where you have had particularly complex information to present.

Compliance – *working to the correct processes and policies.*

- Describe a time when the easier option was to break policy and the lengthy route was to adhere to it. Which option did you take?
- Tell me about a time when you went against company policy. Why did you do it and how did you handle it.

Creativity and Innovation – *questioning conventional approaches and seeing new methods.*

- Describe a time when the old approach wasn't working. What did you do and why?
- Tell us about a situation where you trusted your team to derive a new approach to an old problem. How did you manage the process?

Decisiveness – *making sensible, calculated decisions based on all or limited information.*

- Give me an example where you have had to make an important decision without the prior knowledge of your boss.
- Describe the last business decision you faced and what decisions were needed to be made.

Influencing/ Persuasiveness – *ability to convince others and get acceptance of own ideas/ plans.*

- Describe a situation where you have been presenting an idea and have had to change the mind of senior management.
- Tell me about the most satisfying time when you have got your boss to agree to something they didn't want to do.

Integrity – *belief in doing the right thing and understanding of the impact of this.*

- Tell us about a time when someone asked you something that you objected to. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation where you have had to embellish the truth to get the result you wanted.

Leadership – *acting as a figurehead to drive a vision and set an example.*

- Describe a situation where you have had to get people from different background/ departments to work together in order to get a piece of work completed on time.
- Tell me about a new policy or idea that you have implemented where you have had to drive the change.

Problem Solving/ Initiative – *ability to think laterally or to overcome a difficult situation/ obstacle.*

- Tell me about the most difficult situation you have had to face and how you tackled it.
- Describe a time when your solution to a particular problem has drawn management praise

Team work – *contributes whilst working in a team environment, not necessarily leading.*

- Describe a time when you have had to assist a team member with their workload.
- Give an example where you played an important role in a project as a member of the team (not as a leader)

Other competencies that can be assessed for:

Analytical excellence
Autonomy/ Self-motivation
Building rapport/ relationships
Conflict management
Delegation
Listening
Motivating/ developing talent
Planning and organising
Resilience/ Tenacity
Risk taking
Sensitivity to others
Strategic focus
Working under pressure/ deadlines

What questions you may be asked at interview:

One of the key areas of under-achievement in an interview is that applicants do not close their interviews very well. Their closure of the interview should begin with the questions they have to ask you. The interview is a two-way process so you should expect applicants to have questions prepared.

They should feel the need to ask some questions anyway, as this is their opportunity to make sure the company and job match their own requirements.

Be warned that some of these questions may catch you off guard, so you need to ensure you are prepared for them and know the answers. In fact, often the better applicants are the ones with the questions you haven't heard before.

Please see a list of questions you may be asked:

- What will my responsibilities be? (Rarely should they ask this as you should have covered it earlier in the interview)
- Who will I report to and are there people reporting to me?
- How does the role fit into the structure of the department?
- What's the makeup of the team as far as experience?
- How does the department fit into the organisation as a whole?
- Where does my line manager fit into the structure?
- Who are the key decision makers that I would need to get along with, and how would you describe each of them?
- How do you see this role developing?
- How will you assess my performance?
- What sort of budget would I have for running the team?
- What do you see as the immediate challenges for me if I were to be given the job?
- What's the most important thing I can do to help within the first 90 days of my employment?
- What does this company value the most and how do you think my work for you will further these values?
- What are the business goals for the next 12 months? How well have these been communicated and followed?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- What encouragement is given to undertake further training?
- Who are your customers?
- Where is the company going? Expansion plans?
- What challenges is the organisation currently facing?
- Where is the specific location of the position?
- Will the position entail travelling?
- Why has the position become vacant?
- How soon will you decide on the appointment?
- What is the next step?