



**Candidate Interview
Guidance Pack**



This pack is to assist you with some of the questions that you should expect in an interview process – both yours and theirs.

However, there is a lot of other work that needs to be done before an interview to ensure you are fully prepared. This ranges from background preparation about the company and the interviewers, through to clarifying travel arrangements and what to wear.

Visit our website to read more about this: www.mrkassociates.co.uk/career-advice/interview-guidance/

If you have any further questions before your interview, don't hesitate to contact us.



What Questions to Ask at Interview



One of the key areas of under-achievement in an interview is that jobseekers do not close their interviews very well. This process starts at the point of you asking questions about the company and job (and anything else that is relevant).

Remember, the interview is a two-way process so you will be expected to ask questions. You should actually feel the need to ask questions because you have to ensure both the company and the job is right for you.

Before the interview, prepare a long list of questions that you want answered and take them into the interview with you. A long list ensures that, no matter how thorough an interviewer is in explaining the situation, you will still have questions that remain unanswered.

Finally, whatever happens, don't forget to ask the two questions at the end to close the interview properly (see our closure and commitment advice).

- What will my responsibilities be? (Rarely will an employer not have answered this already)
 - 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?

What Questions you Will be Asked



Generally, employers follow a similar format when interviewing. They will ask general open questions at the start to allow you 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 will become.

The open questions will be fairly generic and, if you are attending interviews with a few companies, many will ask the same questions so preparing for them should be easy.

Q: Tell me about yourself. (The interviewer is saying "I want to hear you talk")

A: This is a conversation starter and is a common question so your response can be practiced – although don't make it sound rehearsed. Spend a maximum of four minutes to describe your qualifications, career history and your range of skills. Emphasise those skills that are relevant to the job on offer.

Q: What have been your main achievements to date? (The interviewer is saying, "Are you an achiever?")

A: Another common question so be prepared. Select an achievement that is experience related, relevant to this job and fairly recent. Identify skills you used in the achievement and quantify the benefit.

Q: How satisfying has your career been to date? (The interview is really asking about your self-esteem and self-confidence, your career aspirations and whether you are a happy, positive person)

A: The answer must be generally positive but if you have hit a career plateau or you feel you are moving too slowly, then you must qualify the answer.

Q: What are your strengths? (The interviewer wants a straightforward answer as to what you are good at and how it is going to add value)

A: You are going to get asked this question so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four and explain how they could benefit this employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency; ability to learn quickly; determination to succeed; positive attitude; your ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. You may be asked to give examples of the above so be prepared.

Q: What are your greatest weaknesses? (The interviewer is asking about your self-perception and self-awareness)

A: This is another standard question for which you can be well prepared. Don't say "none" – you're not perfect. You have two options - use a professional weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part in one area that is not vital for the job. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered a strength and the steps that you have taken to combat it.

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."

Q: What do you like about your present job? (The interviewer is really trying to find out whether you will enjoy the things this job has to offer).

A: This is a straightforward question. All you have to make sure is that your 'likes' correspond to the skills etc. required for the job on offer. Be positive, describe your job as interesting and diverse but do not overdo it, after all, you are leaving!

Q: What do you dislike about your current job? (The interviewer is trying to find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities you will dislike or which will make you unsuitable).

A: Be careful with this one! Do not be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses, which will leave you open to further problems. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company such as its size - its slow decision making etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride as part of the job!

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer? (The interviewer is trying to understand and evaluate your motives for moving).

A: This should be straightforward and the general advice is be honest. However, state how you are looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience and a change of environment. NEVER be too negative in your reasons for leaving and it will rarely be appropriate to state salary as the primary motivator.

Q: Why do you think you are the best person for this job? (The interviewer is giving you a chance to sell yourself and promote what differentiates you from the other applicants).

A: Proper preparation means your knowledge of the company, job and interviewer should ensure you know what skills/ experiences you need to promote. Be honest but push the most relevant points for the job.

Q: Why do you want to work for this company? (The interviewer is testing you have done some research on the company and wants to see your understanding of the company).

A: Show you have researched into the company's background and current situation and any other information you have been able to ascertain through networking etc.

Other questions you may be asked

- 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?
- What are you looking for in a company?
- How do you measure your own performance?
- What kind of pressures have you encountered at work?

- What have you failed to achieve to date?
- What can you bring to this organisation?
- 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 do you do in your spare time?

Competency Based Interview Questions



The employer will ask questions that lead you to discuss one specific situation you have experienced that is relevant. It is imperative you don't make this into a hypothetical question by saying, 'in a situation like that I would...'. Discuss one situation that actually happened.

Each question will focus on a different specific competency with the aim of uncovering how well you dealt with the situation, i.e. how strong you are in that specific competence.

The employer will want to know about 4 key areas in order to fully understand how successfully you dealt with that situation: STAR - The Situation in which the Task that was being undertaken with the Actions that were followed and the Results achieved.

There are numerous competencies so it is impossible to prepare for them all but it is possible to predict which competencies an employer may be looking for in a particular job. Studying a job spec and understanding the ethos of the company may allow you to predict that certain competencies are more likely to be tested for, e.g. leadership and commercial awareness competencies may be more important than adaptability and creativity so prepare accordingly. Entering any interview you should have 5-6 (at least) real examples of situations you have experienced. Most examples will be relevant for a number of questions so preparing this many examples means there will be very few moments in an interview where you need to think of another example on the spot.

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.
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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?
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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.
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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.
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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

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.
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Creativity and Innovation – questioning conventional approaches and sees 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?
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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.
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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.
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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.
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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.
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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)



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