

Interview Prep: Questions to Be Prepared to Answer

There's a difference between intellectually knowing the answer to a question, and being able to give a concise, intelligent response when you're stressed out in the middle of an interview. Have a buddy ask you these questions, or practice answering them out loud in the shower or while you're driving.

- Why did you leave your last position?
(NEVER badmouth other companies, managers, or co-workers. It's a small world out there!)
- Tell me about yourself.
(Don't start at the beginning. Start with the elements that are most related to the position you're interviewing for.)
- What are your greatest strengths?
(Don't be modest. Choose one element or two and give specific examples applicable to the position you're interviewing for.)
- How would your last boss describe you? Your coworkers?
(Even if you're leaving your last position on less than great terms, choose flattering, yet honest, responses. Even the biggest jerk might agree that you're always on time, or dedicated to your job, even if your personalities clashed.)
- Why should we hire you?
(Be specific. Highlight your unique qualities.)
- What about this job appealed to you?
(Link the position to your skills. For instance, "I'm excited to be able to use my managerial skills in a start-up.")
- What do you know about our company?
(Do your homework so you have some concept of what they do and who their market is. It's great to ask questions that show that you did at least a bit of research.)
- What's the biggest challenge you faced on the job?
(Relate the challenge to skills you developed, or unique skills you possess. Example: "When the company was acquired in the middle of last year, our team lacked leadership. Even though our boss left, I was able to pull our team together and meet our deadline.")
- Do you have any questions for us?
(Again, never say "No." Have some specific questions about the company or the person who is interviewing you, even standard questions like, "What advice would you give a new employee?" Or "How did you handle the new regulations that kicked in January 1?")
- In what kind of environment do you do your best work?
(They're looking to weed out people who don't fit their company culture. If you don't know what that is, just try not to step on any landmines. Keep your answer generic, along the lines of, "I like a balance between collaboration and independent work. I like a steady pace, but I also enjoy the occasional all-night hackathon.")
- Tell me about a time a project you were working on failed. How did you handle it?
(Focus on a failure or setback that wasn't catastrophic, and that you were able to learn some lessons from. The worst answer is to say, "Yeah, this bad thing happened" but you have no self-reflection or redeeming lessons as to how to avoid a repeat in the future.)