

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS EXERCISE

This exercise will help you identify how to respond to common interview questions. The questions fall into five categories: Opening, Behavioral, Situational, General, and Closing. Below each question, you will see recommendations on what to include in your response.

For some questions, you will prepare responses only one time that you may use again and again in various interviews with minor changes, such as questions about your past behaviors. For other questions, particularly those related to a specific job or employer, you need to prepare entirely new answers before each interview with a new employer. Accordingly, the questions in this exercise fall within “Single Response Questions” or “Multiple Response Questions.”

## *Single Response Questions*

For these questions, you will prepare responses you will say many times in different interviews with very few changes. You may find some of your answers from the Module 1 exercises useful as you come up with responses.

### **Behavioral Interview Questions**

You will be asked to describe how you behaved in employment-related situations in the past, which will help the interviewer predict how you might behave in the future. Write two to three points below each question.

Recount a time when you had to deliver bad news.

- Some examples of bad news: Your team will not meet the deadline, you need to miss work for an emergency, you're firing a person
- Explain who you delivered the news to. (E.g., A client, co-workers, or a manager)
- Share steps you took to prepare for the difficult conversation.
- Show how you carried out the news. (E.g., Respectfully, telling the person directly but compassionately, avoiding mixed messages, explaining your rationale behind the news, telling how the decision was made and alternatives considered)
- Show how you handled the reactions. E.g., answered questions, allowing venting, not debating

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Tell me about a time you faced an ethical dilemma at work.

- E.g., Someone asked you to do something unethical like a cover-up or changing numbers, you uncovered wrongdoing by someone else, or you were asked to lie to customers
- Explain the situation, tell if it was about you or others but don't name names.
- Explain how you dealt with the situation. Were you able to effectively handle it without involving management or did you report it to someone with more authority?

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Tell me about a challenge you faced and how you resolved it.

- Show what you learned, if there was trial and error involved, if you sought help from a manager, and the result of your efforts.

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Tell me about a team experience. How did you contribute?

- What role(s) did you play on a team? E.g., leader? Delegator? Encourager? Helper when people couldn't finish their work? Conflict-mediator? Organizer/planner? What was the result of your team's efforts?

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Recall an occasion when you had to have a difficult conversation with a coworker.

- Express what you wanted to accomplish and what you accomplished.
- Show you adapted your approach to the person, revealing your emotional intelligence.

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Tell me about a time where you faced multiple competing deadlines. How did everything turn out?

- Explain your project management system and how you set priorities.
- Discuss the role of communication.

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Recall a time you had to work with a difficult superior or coworker and how you handled it.

- Without revealing identities, describe the person's behaviors, any trial and error you tried, and what ultimately worked for you.

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Tell me about the most challenging part of your last job. Why was it difficult?

- Describe a challenge that you improved upon significantly and explain the steps you took to make the task less challenging, showing growth and initiative.

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Share an example of a time you missed a deadline because you were interrupted.

- Show how you responded, highlighting your flexibility and strong communication skills in managing the situation.

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*Add your own questions below based on your research about what questions you may be asked.*

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## Situational Interview Questions

Your interviewer will present a hypothetical situation that could happen on the job and will ask you to describe how you would respond. You should assess the situation and provide a solution. Show off your problem-solving skills here, giving clear, specific examples of how you would handle situations. But much like a behavioral interview response, you may mention past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities to support your approach. Write two to three points for each question.

Your company executives ask you whether you think your company should spread operations into China, Brazil, and India. Do you encourage or discourage the expansion? What are your reasons?

- Explain what you know about operating in the countries mentioned.
- Explain where you would look to learn more before making a recommendation.
- Explain any previous experiences and lessons learned from expanding operations.

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What would you do if you knew your boss was wrong about something? E.g., Her data has an error

- Display confidence: show that you think for yourself and that you would correct your boss.
- Show you would do it politely and diplomatically. It will show you're a team player.
- Share an example and positive outcome if possible. E.g., Your boss thanked you
- Do not to talk bad about any former boss.

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You're a new employee. What would you do to learn how the organization works?

- Perhaps you would:
  - Learn how things work through active participation in training and onboarding activities as well as listening, observing, and asking questions to understand the job responsibilities, deliverables, and how the job fits into the department's overall goals.
  - Ask your boss for feedback on how you are doing and how you can do better.
  - Ask for further guidance as needed as you learn more about the job.
  - Introduce yourself to everyone and quickly learn their names and their roles.
  - Offer help if there's an opportunity and work extra as needed to fully learn the role.
  - Wait to introduce new ideas until you truly understand how things work.

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Someone shares an idea with you for your department. Describe how you would vet the idea.

- Perhaps you would:
  - Ask the person the elaborate on their idea to see if it offers a solution or improvement.
  - Ask questions to fully understand the idea.
  - Ask logistics questions. E.g., timeline and implementation

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You are assigned a project (more details will likely be shared). Describe your next three steps.

- Perhaps you would:
  - Ask questions to make sure you understand expectations and deadlines.
  - Break down the project into actionable steps and add the new project tasks to your master task management system.

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Your team members live in different states. What are the steps you would take to facilitate collaboration?

- Perhaps you would:
  - Identify project management tools that could help, such as Asana.
  - Identify communication methods and tools to use like a database you could access anywhere or other tools such as Slack, Skype, and Google Docs.
  - Set dates for video meetings to build trust and to create accountability.

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What would be your priorities in the first 30, 60, and 90 days of the job?

- Tell your plan of action. Show your knowledge of how to perform the job functions.
  - Focus heavily on activities that would help you learn and perform tasks well and build relationships.

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You complete your tasks early for the week. What would you do with your “free” time?

- Perhaps you would:
  - Offer help to your teammates.
  - Acquire new knowledge or skills. E.g., Begin an online course or certification
  - Revisit a list of ideas of things you could work on or explore should you have free time e.g. writing job processes, updating a manual with updates you’ve thought of recently
  - Have a creative brainstorming session, including reflection about your work and ideas. to improve your work or work processes.

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You must make a critical decision for your department and all the options will likely be unpopular with the staff. How do you make a decision? What input do you gather? What factors do you consider?

- Perhaps you would:
  - Identify your options and the pros and cons of each option.
  - Ask some staff members or other stakeholders about their experiences with the situation and how they would handle it.
  - Consider how it will affect morale and motivation, revenues, costs, and time obligations.

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Someone makes an unfair decision that affects you. How do you react? (E.g. Unfair distribution of workload so that you have to consistently work overtime while other team members have free time)

- Perhaps you would:
  - Try your best to see the reason behind the decision and ask questions about it and mention that sometimes managers have to make decisions that come across as unfair but are good for the company.
  - Remember that unfair is subjective.
  - Meet with them to provide additional details so they may reconsider if you believe the person made the decision without fully understanding the implications.
  - Ask them to reconsider and suggest some alternatives if communication efforts have failed and it’s a very obvious case of unfairness and would have negative repercussions for you.

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Add your own questions below based on your research about what questions you may be asked.

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## General Interview Questions

Your interviewer will ask you questions to reveal your knowledge, opinions, self-awareness, values, and beliefs. Some questions will be straightforward. With others, you can incorporate brief examples and anecdotes that bring some weight to your responses. Write two to three points for each question.

When answering general questions about processes, explain the steps you take in an organized way. For example, "The first step I take is... Then I.... Finally, I..."

How do you handle stress?

- Reassure the employer you can manage stress.
- If you have a high-stress threshold or even thrive under pressure or situations where many others would feel stress, say it.
- Explain situations where others may feel stress and where you feel another positive emotion.
- Share stress reducing methods you employ. This could be daily habits or responses in the moment E.g., deep breathing, taking a short break, talking with co-workers, playing sports, or watching a funny show and laughing over your lunch break

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How does "corporate culture" contribute to a company's success?

- Explain how culture is linked to/influences employee engagement and productivity.
- Share an example from your professional experience.

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Based on your experience, you seem underqualified (or overqualified) for this position. Are you certain you want to be considered for this position?

- If you're technically underqualified, focus on the experiences and skill sets you'll bring to the position, the value you'll deliver, and your eagerness to work hard and learn so that you can perform the role at a high level.
- If you're overqualified, talk about the value you'll bring to a team, including mentorship, and what additional opportunities about the position interest you.

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How do you deal with uncertainty?

- Perhaps you:
  - Ask questions and research before making decisions.
  - Weigh the pros and cons.
  - Remember there's never 100% certainty and make the best of the decision made.

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What is your greatest professional achievement?

- Choose something you're proud of, and that shows skills that are relevant to the role. E.g.,
  - Accomplishing a challenging professional goal.
  - Performing your job above and beyond expectations such as overseeing a product launch where you were under budget or delivered before the deadline.
  - Seeing someone you've managed or mentor develop and achieve professional success.

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What did you like most and least about your most recent position?

- Mention items you liked that demonstrate your hard or soft skills that you know the employer is seeking in a candidate. E.g., Being part of a team
- If possible, mention items you didn't like that you already know the prospective employer provides. E.g., Lack of training, lack of support, limited opportunities to work on projects that really excite you

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What is one of your strengths?

- Choose something that is impressive, that sets you apart, and that the employer desires in a candidate.
- The strength could be skill-based such as mastery of a program or character-based strength like the ability to be flexible. Share an example of how you've used that strength to solve a problem or achieve something important.

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What is one of your weaknesses?

- Share an actual weakness, but not something that is critical to the job, and describe steps you've taken to work on the weakness.
- For example, you could say you take on too many projects at once, that you spend too much time on assignments, you struggle with patience, or you struggle with a particular software.
- The employer wants to see honesty, self-awareness, and an ability to develop yourself.

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*Add your own questions below based on your research about what questions you may be asked.*

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## Closing Interview Questions

Closing questions give you a final opportunity to express anything you may not have had the chance to bring up during the interview. You could also answer final questions the interviewer may have for you. At this time, you will have the chance to ask questions about the company as well.

Tell me about what's not on your resume.

- This is your cue to talk about something not related to work.
- It's a chance to talk about your interests, hobbies, and what's most important to you in your personal life.
- It's a chance to show off your soft skills in a different way.

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How do you spend your free time?

- Show you have a life outside of work and engage in activities keep you healthy and recharged for work. E.g. Physical exercise, meditation, cooking
- Show any activities that would boost your work performance. E.g., classes or meetup groups related to your job
- Know your audience and use caution about mentioning activities that could be alienating. E.g., Certain political or religious activities or even family activities, depending on the workplace.

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## -----*Multiple Response Questions*-----

For multiple response questions, update or write new answers each time you are invited to an interview with a new employer. You may find some of your answers from the Module 1 exercises useful as you come up with responses.

### **Opening Interview Questions**

Opening questions break the ice and give you the chance to explain your interests and motivations. Write two to three points below each question.

Tell me about yourself. (Respond in 2 minutes or less. You are not selling yourself; it's just an introduction. Revisit your Professional Story Exercise from Module 1 and Job Search Introduction from Module 4.)

- Explain your present employment situation. E.g., "I'm currently a [title] at [company name] where I [what you do, starting with strong action verb]."
- Shift to the past.
  - Give a brief overview of career highlights, achievements, and professional interests as a story. They've seen your resume; connect the dots.
  - Briefly explain when you discovered interests, why you chose the field, why you left jobs, or what you've learned.
  - Focus on the future: Say why you're excited about the job.

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Why did you leave your job?/Why are you looking to leave your job?

- Explain why you left or are looking to leave, even if that means you were laid off, and express any opportunities, challenges, or responsibilities you're seeking in the job for which you have applied. If you're looking to transition to a new industry, explain that as well.
- Do not talk badly about your current or former employer.
- Show your ambition and goals.

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What drew you to this role/job?

- Show you know the job description like the back of your hand.
- Mention the aspects of the job that interest you the most.
- Explain if there are opportunities for you to learn new skills or apply your skills.
- Mention if you learned about the role from someone who works at the company or if you read positive reviews from people in that position online.

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Tell me about your work background and how it relates to the position for which you're applying. (You're more likely to get this question if you have a non-traditional background that doesn't match the position perfectly.) In your response, show how your skill set matches the current position.

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Why do you want to work at our company?/In this industry?

- Show you understand what the company does and its mission and vision like the back of your hand.
- Mention what differentiates the company from its competitors.
- Talk about what you've learned about the company culture from research or employees.
- Show you've had an interest in the company for a long time. They want to feel you're not applying to a ton of jobs, but that you specifically want to work for their company.
- Mention other things you know about the employer's business ties, locations, and customers.

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What are your career goals and where do you see yourself in the next five years?

- Show you're committed to the company.
- If you want to advance in the company in five years, mention specific and logical job titles. If the company has any programs you'd like to be selected for, mention that too. E.g., A leadership training program.
- If you want to be in the same position for 5 years, mention specific skills you want to develop.

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In your opinion, what does a company need to be great?

- Express your opinions here based off of what you've observed in your career so far. You could talk about culture, management styles, growth opportunities, or other things that matter to you.
- Mention some items that you know the company possesses.

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Describe your ideal job.

- Express some of your preferences about responsibility and work style.
- Be sure to mention items you know will be an asset for the job.

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*Based on your research, add more questions below that you may be asked.*

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## Closing Interview Questions

Based on our interview, has your perception of the job opportunity changed?

- As long as you learned more and your perception has changed, go ahead and answer yes and briefly explain how.
- Take the opportunity to ask questions to clear up any misunderstandings about the position.
- If you're still interested in the position after what you've learned, reaffirm your keen interest.

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Why should we hire you over other candidates?

- Share your competitive advantage that you believe would be relevant and valued by the employer.
- Do not share that you meet the qualifications. Instead, explain how you surpass the qualifications.

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What are your salary expectations?

- Try to avoid telling your salary expectations until you are offered the job.
- If you're absolutely pressed to give a number, give a salary range, with the number you want being at the low end of your range.
- Redirect the conversation by asking your own question, such as:
  - "To give me a point of reference, could you give me a pay range for this job?"
  - "Perhaps you could give me an idea of the pay range for this job."
  - "I'd feel more comfortable if you could give me an idea of the salary range."
  - "Would you mind telling me the budget for the position?"
  - "Could you give me an idea of the current salary for this position?"

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Why do you think you would succeed in this position?

- Mention the skills you have that they are looking for.
- Mention other skills you have that will help you succeed. E.g., You get along well with different types of people, your passion for job at hand, expected culture fit.

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What questions do you have for us?

- See the example questions below and then add your own questions.
- Consider anything you need to know about the company to determine your level of interest in the job. E.g., You may have questions about the job, training and professional development, performance expectations, the company, the team, the culture, or next steps that you were unable to find answers to in your research and that were not revealed in the interview.
- You may also ask questions about the interviewer's experience at the company, which can help build rapport.

Example Questions:

- Could you tell me why you are looking for a [mention job title here]?
- Does your company have professional development opportunities?
- What do you like best about working for the company?
- What are the most important qualities you look for in potential employees?
- What are the company and team culture like?
- What do you and others typically do for lunch?
- What's the team like that I'll be working on?
- What's been one of the internal changes you have seen since you started working for the company?
- Is the work environment here more independent or collaborative?
- What is the time commitment for this position?
- What does the training process look like for this role?
- In considering my fit for this role, is there anything in my background that you have more questions about or that concerns you?

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