

Test yourself: practice questions

We believe that proper preparation can enhance your chance of success at interview. You should allow several hours to prepare for each interview. You should do this in good time before the interview, giving you plenty of time to think through suitable answers. Practise answering questions to boost your confidence.

The questions listed below will help you focus your ideas in preparation for an interview so that you are ready to give effective answers to the questions you are asked. When considering how you might reply, also consider what similar questions might be used. We have prepared an approach to prepare and guidance of suggested questions that might be helpful. This is based on extensive recruitment experience in Mango. It is not exhaustive, and is generic advice so you will need to tailor this to suit your interview situation.

What to do

As you review the list of questions, think about or write down possible answers and try to identify specific examples from your experience. When you create an answer, think about how it might be used to answer more than one question. It is best to also prepare more than one example to illustrate important points you want to make, as you may be asked for additional ones. Keep answers short and concise; if the interviewer needs more detail, they will ask. You do not need to learn the answers word for word; this would look stilted and you might be tempted to use the answer where it isn't quite relevant.

Remember

- Questions will be open-ended and will need more than 'yes' or 'no' answers. The interview should resemble a structured conversation.
- If the question confuses you, ask for clarification.
- If two questions are asked at one time, answer the first one, making a note of the second and come back to it.
- If you are asked a really difficult question, request a moment or two to think about it.
- One technique you can use at interview when asked to provide evidence of previous performance is a handy acronym called STAR.
 - Situation – set the scene.
 - Task – describe what was involved.
 - Action – describe what you did.
 - Result – what was the impact?
 - Keep this in mind when answering questions as it will help you to keep focused on giving a full but succinct answer.

Practice questions

About you

A common question that can throw a lot of people is 'tell me about yourself'. Think carefully about this one; how do you put yourself in the most positive light without giving them your life history? Try to come up with an answer that will take less than two minutes. In answering this question consider what motivates or inspires you, your professional background and what others say about you.

Other questions might include

- How would your friends describe you?
- How would your critics describe you?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Which achievement are you most proud of?
- How do you get things done?

Your skills

Questions about your skills will relate to the specific job, so make sure you are familiar with all the skills required for the job and have your examples ready as proof of your abilities.

- Can you give an example of when you had to work under pressure?
- How do you ensure you meet deadlines?
- How good is your time management? Give an example.
- What good team skills do you have?
- Are you more comfortable in a leadership or supporting role when working in a team? Why?
- Tell me about your IT skills. Can you give an example of when you have had to use them in your study or work?

Work experience

- Can you give an example of when you had to deal with a difficult situation?
- What were your main responsibilities at XYZ?
- When you were supervising others, what did you find most difficult?

The organisation/employer/sector

You can get background information about an organisation by looking at their annual report.

- What do you know about our organisation/projects?
- Who do you see as our main beneficiaries?
- What are the main threats/opportunities for the organisation/projects?
- Why do you want to join our organisation?

About the job

- Why do you want the job or think you are suitable for the job?
- What do you know about the job?
- Which parts of the job might you find difficult to handle (for example, being away from home or dealing with difficult customers)? How would you deal with these aspects of the job?
- Which parts of the job would you be particularly good at?
- Are you currently applying for any other jobs? How are they progressing?

Your future

- What training/mentoring/general support do you think you might need if we offer you this job?
- Where do you see yourself in a year's/five years' time?
- Do you see this job changing as a result of your input or because of outside influences?

'Do you have any questions for us?'

Think of questions that show you have thought about the job and how it relates to you. Compile a list of possible questions, and then whittle them down to the one or two you consider most appropriate. Avoid detailed questions about salary, terms and benefits at this stage. Avoid contentious issues (such as 'how much holiday will I get?', or 'when might my first pay rise be?'), even if these questions might be important for you. Don't ask questions where the answer can be found in the company literature. Adopt the right tone and convey a positive attitude - you want to ensure this opportunity works for you, not against you.

Possible questions:

Can you please tell me how the role relates to the overall structure of the organisation?
With this question you are drawing attention to a preference for teamwork. It looks as though you want to know where you would fit in and how your contribution would affect the rest of the company.



How would you describe the work culture here? What qualities do people have here?
Here you are signalling that you want to be able to operate at your optimum and understand that for this you require a positive environment. In turn, this can indicate you are a good self-manager who is aware of how to get the best out of yourself.

Ask interviewers what they like about working in the organisation. What does it take to fit well in to this organisation?

This will help you to understand more about the culture of the organisation and the personalities of the interviewers

In what way is performance measured and reviewed?

This question can flag up that you appreciate the importance of making a difference. You can be seen to be someone who understands the value of commitment, reliability and impact.

What are the most important issues facing the organisation at the moment?

These variations both show that you are interested not just in the job but in the employer behind it. It will be apparent you have done some research, done some thinking, and are now eager to hear their analysis.

What challenges might I face in this position?

This might open up the opportunity to understand more of the complex issues which you may be facing, and also uncover more about the type of person they're looking for.

If the job is not a new position, ask who does this role replace and why have they moved on?

This may give you a deeper insight in to the history surrounding the position.

Other examples:

- *Who is in this team currently? Have they been here long?*
- *Is this a new post?*
- *How has the vacancy arisen?*

For more tailored support and advice, contact the recruitment team.

financestaff@mango.org.uk