

What are your greatest strengths?

- Describe your perceived strengths, particularly as they relate to the nature of the job.
- Discuss between two to four of your greatest strengths.
- Use examples or stories to illustrate your strong points.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

- The interviewer is looking to find out how ambitious you are. **Do not state: “right here, working for you.”**
- A possible response would be: “After I acquire a thorough knowledge of the organization, I would like to become a part of the decision-making management team.”

Why should I hire you?

- A possible response would be: “I don’t know who else you are interviewing. I am sure there are many qualified candidates; however, I can guarantee you that no one will put forth more effort, more drive, and more initiative than I will.”
- Avoid a long-winded answer; be direct and to the point.
- If necessary, discuss how your skills directly match those required of the “perfect candidate.”

Why are you looking for another position?

- If employed, a possible response would be: “I have learned a lot and have contributed a great deal to my present employer. However, I have more to contribute, and would like to find a company in which I can do so.”
- If unemployed, a possible response would be: “As a result of a (merger, downsizing, closure, etc.), I now find myself looking to become employed by a company in which I can make a significant contribution.”

What income level are you looking for?

- If they ask, you must answer; however, you need not give a specific amount, state a general range.
- Never make a defensive remark such as, “I won’t take less than...”
- A possible response would be: “I was earning in the mid-to-high 20s. I am not looking to make a step backwards, but I do want to work with an organization in which I can contribute.”
- Don’t discuss income again until after the company makes an offer.

We want to offer you the position at a salary of \$30,000 per year, what do you think?

- A possible response would be: “I’d love to join your

company. I am convinced I can make a contribution here. I was (am) making \$_____ and had a figure in mind of \$_____, but I am willing to reduce my objective if you can see your way to invest a few thousand dollars. Any investment you make in me will be returned many times over.”

Note: It will be extremely helpful here if you have done your homework by researching the market and assessing your true value.

- Don’t “think about it.” Companies want decisive individuals; be prepared, know what you want and what you need.
- Let silence work for you but don’t be too impatient. If the company can work within your range they will, if they can’t they may be able to include some additional perks.

With the question of salary always on the mind of everyone involved, additional information needs to be brought out at this time:

As a general rule, the one who asks about salary first loses! It’s recommended that you should not talk money until you know there is a job offer. Wait until the interviewer **is sold on you**; no matter what. If you must, wait for the second or third interview. The more time they invest in you, the more they have at stake.

Still, the money question can come up at any time during the interview process. Let’s look at the following examples:

In the beginning: Interviewer says: “I have read your résumé and you certainly have a lot of experience and you have worked for some high profile companies. How much money are you looking for?”

Warning: This is a screening or eliminating question. If you give an answer and it is the wrong answer, the interview is over. Your goal is to get to the next level.

In the middle: Interviewer is done asking job related questions. Before he asks if you have any questions, he might say, “Now that you have heard what we are looking for in the ideal candidate, I have one final question “What are your salary requirements?” One possible response could be: “I’d like to work with you to meet both the company’s needs and my needs. What is the typical hiring range for a candidate with my skills?”

Questions the Interviewer Should NOT Ask

Although discriminatory questions are not supposed to be asked, sometimes honest mistakes happen, putting you in an uncomfortable and even difficult situation. Many discriminatory questions are prohibited by federal, state, and/or local laws and legal regulations exist which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or citizenship, ancestry, medical condition, physical handicap, marital status, arrest record, group affiliations, and age.

True enough, questions addressing these areas are unlawful, but, unfortunately it does not prevent some individuals from asking these improper or prohibited questions. The plain, unvarnished truth is that discriminatory questions are still being asked during interviews. When this happens, your options are limited. Three common ways to handle these questions are:

- **Simply answer the question.** This may be the easiest way to handle the situation but not necessarily the most appropriate. Under this circumstance, respond to the question as directly as possible without rambling or showing nonverbal signs of anxiety. If you feel overly uncomfortable, do not answer.
- **Do not answer the question and let the interviewer know you do not see the relevance of the question.** Unfortunately there may be repercussions with this response as it may easily lead to an increase in the level of tension within the interview, turning a cordial meeting into a confrontational one. Chances are, if you display anger or resentment toward the interviewer, you will be summarily disqualified as a candidate. Treading a tight line by calling out the interviewer on inappropriate questions will not be easy, to say the least.
- **Answer the question by responding to the concern behind the question.** This is not as easy as it sounds and it may appear as if you are averting the situation by creating an impression of not being a team player. If responded to with tact and poise, this can be successful. An example of an inappropriate question and a tactful response under this circumstance might be the following:

Question: I notice you are wearing a wedding ring: Who will be taking care of any children if you or your spouse becomes sick or if school is out?

Real Question: Are you a person we can depend on to be in the office during summer months or will you be a stay at home mother before being a serious career woman?

Possible Answer: Throughout my career, my dedication to getting the job done has always been a number one priority. There has never been any question when it comes to trusting my ability, character, and loyalty to any company I worked for. My previous supervisor will attest to the fact that I have the highest level of commitment to excellence in completing goals.

Your Turn: Questions You Should Ask

“Do you have any questions for me” is the most typical closing at interviews. But what does it mean and does anyone really want more questions, especially from the interviewee? Ultimately, **questions you ask are just as critical as the responses you give.** When you get an opening and a chance to direct the interview your way, don’t waste this golden opportunity with the typical “No, you did such a great interview, all of my questions were answered.”

Instant replay: Questions you ask are just as critical as the responses you give.

By not asking informed and well-researched questions, you leave the interviewer in doubt as to your interest and knowledge of the position and organization. When it comes to making final decisions, your return questions do play a pivotal part in separating the ones only claiming to be interested from those who truly are, as well as in separating those who have nothing to offer the company from those who will make a contribution to the bottom line.

Is there an echo in the room: The questions you ask regarding a prospective position are as characteristic of your attitude and competence as the answers you provide in response to the interviewer’s questions.

By asking the right questions, you emphasize your desire to understand the organization’s expectations. You can also be reasonably sure you will find the work challenging and

appropriate to your strengths and be able to identify major contributions you might make. In other words, questions clarify what the interviewer has in mind while building his or her respect for you.

Warning: Your questions should not reveal ignorance of fundamentals or illustrate too great a concern for your own self-interest.

The kinds of questions you ask in an interview fall primarily into one of three areas: industry background, company background, and corporate culture.

Area 1: Industry Background

You should make yourself fully prepared by reading industry trade publications, association journals, press releases, general business articles, and news releases over the time period of your active job search.

Area 2: Company Background

Be aware of company products, markets, annual sales, forecasts, achievements, charitable affiliations, community involvement, staffing requirements, and turnover. Current problems, mergers, and acquisitions are also important.

Area 3: Corporate Culture

You should prepare as much as possible on the subject of corporate culture: What makes this company progressive? What is the company's stated mission? What does it take for an individual to succeed? What is the style and/or management philosophy? What are the values of the company?

The upcoming paragraphs detail issues you may want to consider asking a prospective employer. The answers to these will have a major impact on whether you will be happy in your new position, be well-paid, be in the right environment, and/or be working with people who will respect your values, interests, and contributions.

Your questions should be designed to get the type of information which will help you decide whether or not you want to pursue a possible job offer with that firm.

It is certain even the most well-prepared and conscientious interviewer will not be able to provide complete answers to all of these questions. However, it is equally certain the more information you know about those issues directly affecting your ability to perform in your new position, the better

off you will be. While it is not advised to ask a battery of questions during an interview, it is desirable for you to work your most pressing questions—the ones whose answers will be most critical or meaningful to you and your employment decision—into the interview taking place.

It is **YOUR** responsibility to ask questions. The interviewer doesn't know if you have any questions and doesn't know which issues are important to you. When possible, work your questions into the fabric of the discussion.

To summarize: Ask questions. Listen to answers. Speak clearly and directly and to the point. These are factors that make job candidates successful in an interview and lets you know **IF** you want to work for a particular company.

Asking the right questions serves several purposes:

1. Demonstrates you've done your homework and are prepared for the interview. This, in turn, confirms interest in the position and desire to work for the company.
2. Allows you to get a feel of the company culture and helps in determining if this will be a good fit for both.
3. Gives you an opportunity to understand behind the scene issues.

FYI: By getting information about what the company needs, the expectations and the requirements, you position yourself for a proper follow-up.

Be remembered for the quality of your questions. Keep two or three questions until the end and the interviewer asks if you have any questions. Your answer is a deliberate question: "When is the next interview?" and then, perhaps, "How many people are you interviewing for this position?"

Repeat worthy: Be remembered for your answers **and** your questions.

"I don't think that there is any other quality so essential to success of any kind as the quality of perseverance. It overcomes almost everything, even nature."

- John D. Rockefeller

The following sample questions are phrased so they can be used in connection with a variety of organizations. Rephrase them by adding specific information uncovered through your research or in a way that is relevant to an organization's specific needs.

Sample questions you might ask in an interview.

General

- What is your job like?
- Could you tell me a typical day in the life of...?
- Which classes best prepare someone looking to do...?
- What are some of the expectations from your supervisor?
- What do you find the most challenging?
- How did you get started in this job?
- What are your favorite things about working for...?
- What can a student do to prepare for this type of job?
- How do you see this industry growing in the next few years?
- How long have you been employed with this company?
- What differentiates your company from the competition?
- What are several jobs in this field at your company?
- What type of professional development courses are offered?
- How has your job changed in the past few years?
- What is a typical career path in the industry?
- What factors do you believe would prevent advancement?
- What is the best way to enter this profession?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for your position?
- What type of organizations do you recommend joining?
- Are there any certifications or licenses required for advancement?
- What is the corporate climate like?
- How does one succeed in your company and industry?
- If you were not working here, where would you like to be?
- How did you get to where you are today?
- How would you describe the people who work around you?
- What is the dress code?
- Are there many opportunities to transfer within the company?
- Are there required out of town meetings or conventions?
- How do you think the demand for your position will change?
- How has your job affected your lifestyle?
- What are some of the rewards for working for this company?
- What problems do you see affecting this role or department in the future?
- If you could go back, would you choose to work in this field?
- What educational requirements are there for this job?
- What courses would you recommend me to take in order to prepare for this type of position?
- What personal traits do you believe are required to succeed in this type of position?
- What does a typical entry-level employee do?
- What type of training sessions are there for new employees?
- Do you recommend outside resources such as books or magazines which will better prepare me in this field?
- What kinds of people do you usually look for?
- What sort of person are you looking for to fill this position?
- What are you personally looking for in the successful candidate?
- Can you tell me about your own experience with the company?
- What have you liked most and least about working here?
- What happens during the training program?
- What was your first job in your career?
- What does it take to advance in your field?
- What aspects of your job provide you with the most satisfaction?
- How will I know whether I have fulfilled these responsibilities?
- What aspects of your job provide you with the least satisfaction?
- Has your company hired YTI graduates before and how have they done?
- How do you rate your competition?
- What do you consider to be your organization's three most important assets?
- What are your plans for expanding the department?
- Is this a newly created position or is someone being replaced?
- What is the person who previously held this position doing now?

Education/Training

- What additional training might be necessary for this position?

Company

- What are the organization's strengths?
- What do you see ahead for your company in the next ten years?
- What problems does this department or company face?
- What significant changes do you foresee in the near future?
- How would I best learn the practices, policies, and corporate expectations enabling me to perform all responsibilities successfully?
- What do you see ahead for the company in the next five years?
- What budget is available to me to achieve the goals?
- What do you see in the future for this industry?
- What type of training program does the organization offer?
- Can you describe the company's culture?
- How does the company recognize diversity in its workplace and with its customers?
- Does the company promote from within? From what areas?

Position

- What are the main objectives of the position?
- What are the main problem areas needing attention in the position? (Troublesome or demanding people, poor working environment, etc.)
- How does the organization expect these objectives to be met?
- What qualities did the person have who held this position previously?
- Can you tell me about the primary people who I will be dealing with?
- What are the main responsibilities of the position we are discussing?
- Can you describe a typical day?
- Is this a newly created position? If not, how long did the previous person hold it?
- What is the potential for promotion?
- Who would I report to?
- How and when would my performance be evaluated?

- Is regular travel a part of this position?
- What results would you expect from my efforts and on what timetable?
- What improvements need to be made on how the job has been completed?
- Will I face any resentment or problems if I am offered and accept this position?
- How much authority will I have to carry out these responsibilities?
- What capabilities do you feel are the most important?
- Who would be my key associates?
- Who held the position before and why is it now available?
- What are the capabilities of the subordinates who would report to me?
- What are the objectives the person hired will have to complete?
- Is training done in a classroom/group session or is it handled on an individual basis?

Interviewer

- Can you tell me how your career has developed at the organization?
- How would you describe your management style/philosophy?
- What do you enjoy most about working for this organization?
- Am I telling you the things that are of the greatest help in making a decision?
- If you could change one thing about your position or the organization, what would it be?
- How long have you worked for this organization?
- What qualities are you looking for in a new hire?

Conclusion

- Are there further questions about my qualifications I can answer?
- What is the next step in the process?
- When do you expect to make a hiring decision for this position?

"In order to excel, you must be completely dedicated to your chosen sport. You must also be prepared to work hard and be willing to accept constructive criticism. Without one-hundred percent dedication, you won't be able to do this."

-Willie Mays

Time to Practice

Make blank copies of the worksheets on the next few pages to prepare and practice for your interviews.