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Job Interview Training Guides
By Pamela Skillings



How To Answer the **Top 10 Questions** You'll Hear in Your Job Interview

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Introduction

How to Use This Guide



Pamela Skillings
Co-founder and President

Job interviews are tough. Most of us aren't accustomed to talking eloquently about our strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, and goals. Especially while sitting across from a judgmental stranger.

Even if your communications skills are stellar, you are probably making mistakes in your job interviews.

The good news is that you can dramatically improve your job interview performance with just a bit of education and practice.

With this e-book, we're providing straightforward tips on how to answer the 10 most common job interview questions out there. Whatever your industry or experience level, you're likely to hear at least 8 out of 10 of these in any given interview.

I'm not offering you one-size-fits-all job interview answer scripts. That approach doesn't work. I'm offering you insight into the hiring manager's thought processes and what they're looking for – along with some strong example answers for inspiration.

If you follow this advice, you will get better at interviewing. Guaranteed. You may even start to enjoy it a little bit. Read on to start improving now. And please email me at pam@biginterview.com to share your interview successes.

Your interview coach,
Pamela Skillings

Q1: Tell me about yourself.



Click to launch video of
a strong answer to this question

This question (or a variation) comes up in just about every job interview and many job searchers hate it. They get frustrated trying to decipher exactly what the interviewer is looking for.

Don't waste the opportunity by simply diving into a long recitation of your resume. This also isn't the time to mention that you love flamenco dancing and bingo.

Instead, try a concise, enthusiastic response that summarizes your big-picture fit for the job. This is also a good opening to briefly share some information about your proudest achievements and goals.

Q1: Tell me about yourself.

Another Example Answer:

"I have spent the last six years developing my skills as a customer service manager for Megacompany Inc., where I have won several performance awards and been promoted twice. I love managing teams and solving customer problems and am looking for a new role that will challenge me."

Q2: Why are you interested in this position?



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

Research is key to answering this question well. Before every interview, research the company and the job description so that you can speak intelligently about why it appeals to you. The interviewer wants to see that you are genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity and that you took the initiative to learn about the company and the role.

While it may seem that your answer should be all about you and what you're looking for, a great answer goes a step beyond that and also mentions your ability to do great work in the position.

Q2: Why are you interested in this position?

Another Example Answer:

"I have always admired your company's products and I was really impressed with the recent Forbes interview with your CEO and his description of the collaborative company culture. The job description also emphasizes communication skills and leadership -- two of my greatest strengths. I really feel that it's a role and organization in which I could excel."

Q3: Describe your current or most recent job role.



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

Your current or most recent role is almost always the most interesting to the interviewer. Be prepared to describe your top achievements and responsibilities in this job. As always, you should focus on the areas most relevant to the work that you would be doing if hired.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- 1) Don't just rattle off your job description. Focus on your accomplishments and how you went above and beyond the normal call of duty.
- 2) Stress any impressive statistics, numbers, or details.
- 3) Don't try to describe absolutely everything that you do. Focus on the highlights that this particular interviewer will care about.
- 4) Keep your audience in mind. Define any unfamiliar terms and skip or explain details that could be confusing.

Q4: Why are you looking for a new opportunity now?



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

This question (or a close variation) will come up in every job interview. Your interviewer wants to know why you are pursuing this opportunity. Your answer should address:

1) If you are not currently employed, why did you leave your last position?

Your interviewer will be looking for any red flags that you were let go as a result of performance or attitude problems.

In the current job market, layoffs are very common, so there's no reason to feel embarrassed about a layoff.

If you can emphasize that the layoff was a budget issue (perhaps one that affected an entire group or class of employee), this can reinforce the fact that it was not linked to your performance.

Q4: Why are you looking for a new opportunity now?

Avoid displaying any bitterness or negativity toward your previous employer. If you have been between jobs for a long period of time, describe the proactive steps you have been taking to improve your skills -- training, volunteer work, or consulting projects.

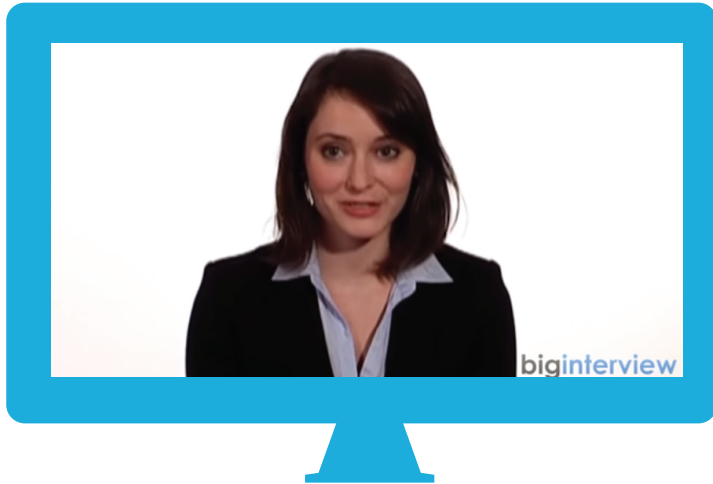
2) If you are currently employed, why are you interested in leaving your position?

Your response should state your positive reasons for seeking a new role and emphasize why you feel you are ready for new challenges that aren't available in your current position.

Make it clear that you have not made the decision lightly. Employers want to know that you are a committed and reliable employee.

Again, avoid displaying any bitterness or negativity toward your current employer. Be diplomatic and accentuate the positive experiences and education gained.

Q5: What are your strengths?



[Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question](#)

Embrace this question as an opportunity to talk about your best qualities. It can help to plan and practice your answer to this question - especially if you are naturally modest or shy. Most of your competitors will not hesitate to brag about themselves. However, if you plan thoughtfully, your response can be much more eloquent and effective than the typical braggart's.

To prepare your answer, write down a list of your top strengths and decide which 3 are most relevant for the position at hand. Review the Big Interview competencies list for example strengths that relate to most jobs.

Avoid choosing generic strengths that anyone can claim. Don't wimp out with general statements that you're a "hard worker" or "people person." Be specific and prepare an example to demonstrate each strength.

Q5: What are your strengths?

Example Answer:

Instead of saying that you're a hard worker, say:

"One of my strengths is my strong work ethic. When I commit to a deadline, I do whatever it takes to deliver.

Last week, we had a report due and got some numbers back late from our team in Singapore. I pulled an all-nighter to finish the spreadsheet because I knew that the client needed to receive the report on time."

Q6: What are your weaknesses?



[Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question](#)

Everybody dreads the "weakness" question and with good reason. There is no perfect answer to this question and it's easy to screw it up. However, with some preparation and practice, you can handle it gracefully and improve your odds of getting hired.

1) Don't try to play a strength off as a weakness. Many experts recommend that you claim a bogus weakness like "I care too much" or "I work too hard." Trust me, interviewers see right through this ploy. In fact, a fake weakness can raise concerns that you have something to hide or are so deluded that you think you're perfect.

2) Don't choose a weakness that could limit your ability to do the job well. If the job calls for someone detail-oriented, don't share that your weakness is being disorganized. If it's a management position, don't tell the interviewer that you can't delegate. Pick a weakness that is real, but benign.

Q6: What are your weaknesses?

3) Don't be defensive or dwell on the negative. You have to answer this question, but your best bet is to do it quickly and then move on to more positive topics. Some applicants find themselves over-explaining or making excuses at length because they feel uncomfortable. This just drags out the topic and leaves less time for talking about your strengths and accomplishments. Name your weakness, provide a little bit of detail, and then quickly move on to how you are addressing it (see below).

4) Show that you are aware of the weakness and striving to improve. Choose a weakness that you are already working on improving. Prepare to describe how you are addressing the weakness and make it clear that it's a non-issue for the position. This allows you to show that you are driven to improve yourself and helps you conclude your answer to the question in a positive way.

Example Answer.

"Sometimes I can be a bit too honest when I provide feedback to coworkers. My personality is naturally very straightforward and to the point, and most of my colleagues really value that, but I have learned that there are times on the job when more diplomacy is required. I took a training class on conflict management and it really opened my eyes to the need to communicate differently with different people. So now I am much better at providing constructive feedback, even if it doesn't always come naturally."

Q7: Why do you want to work for us?



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

This is a variation on, "Why are you interested in this position?" In this variation, the emphasis is more on the company than the job, but you should talk about the appeal of both in your response.

Again, research is key to answering this question well. Before every interview, research the company and the job description so that you can speak honestly and in detail about why it appeals to you.

The interviewer wants to see that you know something about the organization and are genuinely enthusiastic about the opportunity. Be as specific as you can to show that you have taken the time to research the company.

While it may seem that your answer should be all about you and what you're looking for, a great answer goes a step beyond that and also mentions your ability to do great work for the company.

Q7: Why do you want to work for us?

Example Answer.

"I have always admired your company's products and I was really impressed with the recent Forbes interview with your CEO and his description of the collaborative company culture. The job description also emphasizes communication skills and leadership -- two of my greatest strengths. I really feel that it's a role and organization in which I could excel."

Q8: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

This question is about your long-term career goals. Realistically, it's hard for anyone to predict exactly what they will be doing in five years (let alone 10 or 15, which some interviewers will ask about).

What the employer really wants to know is that you have goals and that the position at hand is a good fit for your long-term planning.

Hiring managers want to confirm that you'll stick around if they hire you and that you see a career path with the company.

It's best to keep your answer fairly general, especially if you don't know much about the typical career path within the organization.

The key here is to stress your interest in a long-term career at the company. This is particularly important if you have any job hopping or short job tenures (less than a year) on your resume.

Q8: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Example Answer.

"My goal right now is to find a position at a company where I can continue to grow and take on new challenges over time. Ultimately, I'd like to take on more management responsibilities and get involved in product strategy. But most importantly, I want to work for an organization where I can build a career."

Q9: Why are you the best candidate for this job?



Click to launch video of a strong answer to this question

Here's your chance to wow them with your highlight reel.

What are the top three or four best reasons to hire you? What makes you stand out from the competition?

This is an opportunity to reiterate key strengths and/or describe your most memorable selling points. One approach is to mention any unique combination of skills and experience that you possess. For example, many candidates may have strong programming skills, but what if you combine those with team leadership experience that others don't have? Sounds like a great recipe for a senior programmer.

It's also very important to come across as confident and enthusiastic here. Make them believe in you - your abilities and your commitment.

Q9: Why are you the best candidate for this job?

Example Answer.

"Honestly, I almost feel like the job description was written with me in mind. I have the 6 years of programming experience you're looking for, a track record of successful projects, and proven expertise in agile development processes. At the same time, I have developed my communication skills from working directly with senior managers, which means I am well prepared to work on high-profile, cross-department projects. I have the experience to start contributing from day one and I am truly excited about the prospect of getting started."

Q10: Do you have any questions for me?



**Click to launch video of
a strong answer to this question**

You should prepare at least three questions to ask each interviewer.

During your first interview or two for any position, the goals of asking questions are to 1) show your interest in excelling in the jobs and 2) learn more about the employer's needs to help you form responses to future questions.

At this point, it's not about you and what the employer can do for you. Refrain from asking questions about benefits, vacation time, promotion possibilities, etc. There will be plenty of time to get this information once there's an offer on the table and you have some leverage.

Q10: Do you have any questions for me?

Example Questions:

What qualities do you think are most important for someone to excel in this position?

What do you like most about working for this company?

What are the most important priorities for the company/department right now?

What more can you tell me about a typical day on the job?

What now?



Research shows the people who land the best jobs are the ones who practice their skills over and over again until they become strong.

It's just like going to the gym. You don't work out once and expect to be ripped.

How well you do in an interview all comes down to how well you prepare.

You can't control the economy or the interviewer, but you CAN control your skills and how well you present yourself and your accomplishments in the interview.

If you're curious about how to quickly improve your interview skills, take a quick peek at the Big Interview demo video on our homepage (and a couple screenshots on the next page).

If you have questions, feel free to reach me at pam@biginterview.com

Good luck hunting!

Your interview coach,
Pamela Skillings

What is it?

A cutting edge, interview training system that helps people land jobs.

