

# Interview Guide

LET'S GET TO WORK.



# 4 Common Interview Questions (and 4 Perfect Answers)

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[themuse.com/advice/4-common-interview-questions-and-4-perfect-answers](https://themuse.com/advice/4-common-interview-questions-and-4-perfect-answers)

Interview invitations should really come with a warning: Strong feelings of excitement changing suddenly into dread are imminent upon receiving this invitation.

Career counselors (and yes, I'm guilty of this, too) will frequently say, "Oh, it's a two-way street. You're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you." And while that is partially true—you should definitely use the interview as a way to gauge whether or not you want to work for a company—there is still a power imbalance. Ultimately, the hiring manager will get to decide first whether you'll get an offer. So, it's understandable to be nervous.

But fear not! With a little preparation, you'll know exactly what to say to impress. To get you started, - here are four tricky, but common, interview questions and how to tackle them.

## 1. Tell Me About Yourself

This completely open-ended opportunity to talk about yourself throws a lot of people off. Worse, it's usually the first question interviewers ask! The confusing part about this question is that it actually isn't an invitation to tell your life story. The interviewer really just wants to know why you're interested in this position and what makes you qualified.

One way to structure this answer is to start with your present, go into your past, and finish off with your future. This approach covers all your bases by answering the question, giving you an opportunity to talk about your relevant skills, and getting to what the interviewer genuinely wants to know: How are you going to perform in this position? Remember to focus your experiences and accomplishments on what's most relevant to the position and the employer.

*"I'm a second-year master's student studying computer science and a research fellow at the Hudson Lab. I have previous industry experience at Dell, where I honed my skills in modeling and data analysis. This experience really piqued my interest in the field of big data, so I'm excited to learn more about your company and the chance to contribute to your data science department."*

## 2. What is Your Greatest Weakness?

Surprisingly, this isn't actually meant to be a trick question. A more straightforward way an employer could ask this question would be, "Are you knowledgeable about the areas that you can improve upon? I prefer to hire people who are reflective about their skills and actively seek to improve themselves."

And I'm sure you've heard the advice to spin this into a strength, but don't. Don't say you're such a perfectionist that it sometimes affects your work. No one is going to believe that, even if it's true. Instead, give a genuine weakness—whether that's delegating to others or attention to detail—but push it back into your past.

## 4 Common Interview Questions (and 4 Perfect Answers) cont'd...

Talk about the concrete steps you took to address your weakness and show improvement.

*"When I first started college, I was a pretty horrible public speaker. I knew this was something I wanted to overcome, so I promised myself to speak up more in small groups. Later, I took it a step further and took a public speaking class. Now, even though it doesn't come naturally to me, I think I've made some big improvements. In fact, I recently presented at a student conference to an audience of over 100."*

Not bad, right? Now just make sure you *don't* say public speaking, because everyone uses that example.

### 3. Tell Me About a Time You Failed

Again, this is a time to be real. Talk about real failure, not the B+ you got in Introduction to Psychology. Maybe it was a group project that wasn't meeting deadlines or a miscommunication with your supervisor during a previous internship—the failure doesn't need to be huge. It just needs to involve a mistake that you can reflect on thoughtfully. Interviewers are less interested in making you cry and more interested in seeing how you handle setbacks. Do you bounce back? Ask for feedback? Learn from your mistakes? Talk about the failure and, most importantly, discuss the lessons you learned from the experience.

*"At my last position, there was a three-month period of time when my supervisor had a very intense travel schedule, which meant most of my communication with her was via email. At some point, there was some miscommunication over who would be the point person for a new client, resulting in some confusing interactions and repeat memos to him. Ultimately, it wasn't the best customer experience. From then on, I personally made it a point to clarify what information I was sharing with each of our clients on a weekly basis to my supervisor if not in person, then over the phone. I definitely learned the importance of frequent and clear communication."*

### 4. Where Do You See Yourself in 5 Years?

In other words, "How long are you going to stick with us? Are you worth the investment of training?" Ethically, you don't want to say that you'll stay with their company forever, because you probably won't. Maybe you want to eventually move on to a smaller company or you want to go get your MBA—whatever your plan is, it's probably not going to line up with what your interviewer has in mind.

The good news is you can still answer this question thoughtfully and with specifics without lying. After qualifications and fit, interviewers usually care more about your ability to make an impact at their company than anything else. So, play to that, but also bring up your excitement to join their company.

*"Well, I'm definitely really excited about the associate consultant position at Midnight Consulting, and I can see myself growing professionally in this role. I think, generally speaking, within the next five years I would seek to make a significant impact at Midnight Consulting, particularly in the energy sector. I'm also looking forward to eventually taking on additional managerial responsibilities and possibly taking the lead on some projects. Another big part of my life is mentoring, so I would hope to incorporate more of that as my knowledge of this industry develops."*

As with all things, practice makes perfect. Make sure to practice answering these questions aloud several times for maximum confidence during your interview.

## SALARY INFORMATION TIPS

1. Some job postings do not state salary. A little research ahead of time will avoid eliminating yourself from consideration. Remember: some employers use salary as a screening tool. To obtain an accurate range:
  - a. look for advertised positions that are similar in nature and provide a salary range;
  - b. talk to people, other students, Career Services, professors who may be familiar with salary ranges;
  - c. arrange an information interview and ask for salary ranges;
  - d. research salaries on the internet using career services sites, professional associations and search engines. (ie: [payscale.com/research/CA/Country=Canada/Salary](https://payscale.com/research/CA/Country=Canada/Salary) or [jobbank.gc.ca/wage-outlook\\_search-eng.do?reportOption=wage](https://jobbank.gc.ca/wage-outlook_search-eng.do?reportOption=wage) )
2. Factors that affect what salary to expect include: the industry of the employer, the geographical location, the demand for your skill sets, your timeline for finding employment (if living at home, you may be able to take more time), and your career path.
3. If you cannot avoid giving your salary expectations, then provide a range. Keep the range amount realistic - \$5,000 is the usual rule. For example, between \$35,000 and \$40,000 not between \$35,000 and \$45,000.
4. If you are entering the labour market from college, try not to make salary the most important factor. Check to see what opportunities it may give you down the road such as advancement into more senior positions, professional development to enhance your skills and/or the first chance to add job specific skills to your resume. Remember sometimes after 3 months, salaries can escalate quickly if you do a great job and/or have a contract or agreement for a salary review.
5. Sometimes salary is not as important as the benefits, depending on your individual needs.
6. Never bring up salary during the interview - it sends the wrong message. Let the employer broach the subject first. Otherwise, employers may think that you are not as interested in the company as you are in what the company can give you.
7. If you can, when asked about salary requirements, emphasize the importance of the opportunity and that you would consider a reasonable offer.
8. Employers may ask for a salary range on the cover letter. Try and determine whether you will eliminate yourself from consideration if you do not provide a salary range. Some employers will use this technique as a screening device.

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION WEBSITES

### SENECA CAREER SERVICES

[senecacollege.ca/student/careerservices/students/interview/](https://senecacollege.ca/student/careerservices/students/interview/)

View our tips and guidelines on what to do before, during and afterward an interview.

### SETTLEMENT.ORG INTERVIEW RESOURCES

[settlement.org/ontario/employment/find-a-job/job-interviews](https://settlement.org/ontario/employment/find-a-job/job-interviews)

Includes information on interview preparation and interview questions, including those employers are not allowed to ask.

### CANADIAN CAREERS

[canadiancareers.com/interview.html](https://canadiancareers.com/interview.html)

Learn how to succeed in behavioral interviewing. Includes sample interview questions and interview tips.

### LIVECAREER

[livecareer.com/quintessential/tag/interview-advice](https://livecareer.com/quintessential/tag/interview-advice)

Provides a guide to interview resources, information on types of interviews and 50 sample interview questions, even specific questions for recent graduates.

### VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS - UCONN CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

<https://career.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/08/Virtual-Interview-Tips-2.pdf>

Provides information on the various types of virtual interviews and tips on how to succeed in a virtual interview.

# INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

## **Preparation:**

Confirm interview time, address, and employer telephone number. Ask if there will be any testing and how many people will be in the interview.

Take a folder that contains:

- Several copies of your resume
- A printed list of references
- Paper and pen for notes
- Copies of important certificates/diplomas
- A portfolio of sample work (if applicable)
- List of questions you have prepared

## **Arrival:**

- Go alone to the interview
- Allow time to figure out bus routes, traffic and/or to find parking
- Check out your appearance in a restroom
- Take a few minutes to relax; be friendly and business like with everyone
- Introduce yourself to the receptionist, mention your appointment, be polite and friendly
- Wait quietly and review your notes or read job-related material; think about work, not personal issues

## **During the Interview:**

- Greet the interviewer and introduce yourself; be ready for a handshake
- Follow the lead of the interviewer, stay on topic, ask for clarification if necessary
- Provide copies of your resume or reference information sheet when asked or when needed
- Be attentive to body language - maintain eye contact; don't cross your arms
- When asked if you have any questions, briefly ask any suitable questions that have not already been answered
- State your interest in the position and organization with enthusiasm
- State your appreciation for the interview
- Ask when they will be making a decision and when you will hear from them; if it is not definite, arrange to call them
- Shake hands if appropriate and say goodbye

## **After the Interview:**

Write a thank you email expressing the following:

- Your appreciation for the interview
- Your interest in the job
- Clarification regarding anything that came up during the interview

## THANK YOU LETTER

- Following an interview, promptly (within two business days) write the interviewer a letter expressing appreciation and thanks for the interview.
- Reiterate your interest in the position and in the organization.
- Review/remind the employer about your qualifications for the position. If you thought of something you forgot to mention in the interview, mention it in your thank-you letter.
- Follow up with any information the employer may have asked you to provide after the interview.

Attn: Mariam Patel, Human Resources Manager  
True Fashion Retailing Group  
1A Street Avenue  
Toronto, ON M1M 1M1

March 31, 2017

Dear Ms. Patel:

Thank you for taking the time to interview me yesterday for the management trainee position with your company.

I enjoyed learning about your exciting new initiatives and sharing my keen desire to be a part of your management trainee team. As mentioned, I am particularly excited about the opportunity to share my retail management work experience and my knowledge of the youth consumer market, which I believe would be an asset to your initiative aimed at attracting younger customers to your stores.

As I have done in my past retail roles, I am confident that I could make an immediate and significant contribution to your company and management team.

I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to highlight my qualifications and interest during our recent interview. Please feel free to contact me should you require any additional information or if you have any questions. I look forward to hearing from you regarding your hiring decision.

Sincerely,

Joe Redberry

## CREATING A LIST OF REFERENCES

- DO NOT include references or company contact information in your resume.
- It is best to have your reference contact information typed out and prepared to give to the interviewer.
- Try to have at least 3 references (employer, professor, etc). Be sure to contact them prior to your interview to seek permission.

### Required Information:

- Name of Reference
- Title
- Company Name
- Company Address
- Phone Number
- Email
- Relationship ( e.g. Previous Supervisor)

### **JOE REDBERRY**

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### REFERENCES

Tanisha Brooks, Manager  
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