



## ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### INTERVIEW PREPARATION RESOURCE

### Types of interview questions

There are 4 main types of interview questions – open-ended, behavioural, situational, and technical. This resource explains each of the question types and provides examples and approaches to answering these questions effectively.

### OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions can be quite broad and are a way for the interviewer to learn more about you as a professional in terms of what motivates you, what your goals are, your self-awareness of your own capabilities, limitations, and more. These can be especially challenging to prepare for as they are not as easily tied to the job description; however, there are some common questions that you can anticipate.

#### Why do you want to work here?

The interviewer wants to know if you have done your own research on the company, and whether you believe yourself to be suitable for the role given the information you have found. Try to identify specific and unique aspects of the company and relate it to your experiences and/or personal values.

#### EXAMPLE (P&G - Marketing Coordinator)

“Since completing a class in marketing, I have really come to appreciate companies who conduct relevant research to ensure cultural sensitivity. What I value about P&G is their strategy to global penetration and growth, including having an entire department (GBS) dedicated to region- specific marketing plans. I think that this approach of understanding regional differences perfectly resonates with my own method of effectively researching a clients’ market presence and competitors in various locations.”



## Tell me about yourself.

What can you say about yourself beyond what is listed on your resume? If you are in an interview, they already believe you are qualified. This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate why you feel you are the best candidate for the role. Try to highlight your professional achievements in alignment with the role, consider mentioning some values that you share with the organization, and your work ethic - which may include the mentioning the type of environment you thrive in, while giving the employers a sense of your personality.

## What is your biggest weakness?

The interviewer wants to determine what you consider to be a weakness and whether it conflicts with the responsibilities of the job or the practices of the company. Try to avoid mentioning clichés such as perfectionism, and instead work on how you might articulate an honest and genuine response. A key part of answering this question is not only to name an area where you hope to improve, but also the efforts you have made to address that weakness and grow as a professional.

### EXAMPLE (Scotiabank - Administrative Assistant)

“In previous roles, I sometimes found it challenging to manage multiple projects at the same time. However, I made an effort to address this challenge by having conversations with my direct supervisor on how to determine the projects by priority. Now that I have a clear method for prioritizing my responsibilities, I like to organize my projects by breaking them down into daily tasks in a calendar - allocating more time towards projects with higher priority while still making time to work on remaining tasks.”

## What are your salary expectations?

For this question, the interviewer is trying to determine whether you're knowledgeable about industry standards, and whether you know your worth. Current students and recent graduates tend to undermine what they bring to the table and settle for a “minimum wage” salary. Before the interview, research what the average salary for someone in this role at your seniority level makes, so that you can provide a salary range based on your experience and qualifications. Salary is one of various factors to consider in terms of a workplace (e.g. benefits, flexible work options, pensions), so you may want to consider the overall package while being ready to negotiate.



## EXAMPLE (SIDI - Entry-Level Web Developer)

“I know that web development has recently become a career that is in demand and valued across industries. Given my knowledge and the contributions I’ve made to my teams, I’m seeking a salary between \$50,000 and \$60,000. That being said, I’d love to learn more about the expectations of someone in this role and the scale of the projects I would be working on - and later discuss a salary that would be most appropriate.”

## What is your greatest accomplishment?

This is the best question for you to be honest rather than occupied with what you think the interviewer wants to hear. More than your actual answer, the interviewer wants to learn about what makes you excited and see whether there is opportunity for you to accomplish similar things at their company. It also helps to paint a picture for the interviewer - what made this role exciting for you? What were the challenges, and how did you overcome them?

## EXAMPLE (RBC - Business Analyst)

“A project that I’m incredibly proud of is the networking conference I planned alongside my teammates from the ground up, with more than 300 students in attendance. As a founding member of the club who is responsible for finances and external relations, I remember not knowing how to even approach the task of planning an event with no prior funding. The first step was determining the budget, and with venue and catering costs in mind we landed on a budget of \$10,000. I must have cold called close to a hundred representatives to pitch the event, and through a meeting with our school administrators. The school offered to sponsor our venue costs in full! As a result, not only were we able to afford the event, we made over \$7,000 in profit from ticket sales and additional savings. Most importantly, we put on a valuable event for students.”



## BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

A behavioural question is one of the most common types of question an interviewer could ask. The applicant is prompted to describe their actions in a given situation (provided by interviewer) from their past experiences. It is used to predict future performance based on past experience. You can identify a behavioural question if it starts with “Tell me about...”

**QUESTION:** Tell me about a time when you were unable to meet a project deadline.

**APPROACH:** Detail a real-life example by using the S.T.A.R. method.

**SITUATION** Tell them the circumstances, and what happened.

**Example:** “In my role as a marketing assistant, I was tasked with completing a set of three social media posts to be posted on our calendar. It was scheduled to be released two weeks after I was expected to complete it. At the time, I was managing two other projects, and a day before the deadline I realized that although two posts were done, I wouldn’t have enough time to completely finish the campaign.”

**ACTION** Tell them what you did, and how you did it.

**Example:** “I believe in accountability, so I brought up my concern to my immediate supervisor. I apologized and explained the situation. I then, suggested a revised timeline by examining the urgency and priority level of the other projects. This new timeline would ensure the project was completed at least a week before publishing, so that there would still be time for any necessary revision.”

**RESULT** Tell them the outcome, impact, and what the reactions were.

**Example:** “My supervisor appreciated my transparency, and worked with me to make sure I had time to complete the project without sacrificing the quality of work with the other projects. We ended up implementing the priority metrics strategy I came up with for all future projects that other team members were able to more accurately understand how to manage their time effectively. I haven’t missed a deadline since, and there’s ongoing trust between my supervisor and I.”

Try to have a different story for each skill. In this example, the interviewer is looking for evidence of time management and problem solving. In the answer above, communication and initiative are also demonstrated. By using this approach you can be sure that your answer won’t be too short, and it also gives the interviewer a clear idea of how you react to a situation – by focusing on achieving positive results.



## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS

A situational question is another common type of question you can expect in an interview. In these questions, applicants are asked to describe how they would react in situations they would likely encounter on the job. An interviewer uses this method of questioning to see how a candidate approaches problems, and uses the answers to predict future performance based on intentions.

**QUESTION:** How would you react if your co-worker wasn't actively contributing to a group project?

**APPROACH:** Explain your thinking by outlining steps that show you share the company values. A helpful acronym to keep in mind is A.A.P. – Analyze, Address, Prevent.

**ANALYZE** Tell them what your personal goal is from the situation.

**Example:** “First, I would want to analyze the situation for some more context. Is this a pattern? or is it a one-time situation? Based on the circumstances, I might approach the situation differently. But ultimately, my goal would be to address the issue as soon as possible with the parties involved - which would be my coworker, and if it escalated, then our supervisor.”

**ADDRESS** Tell them how you will be proactive, and why.

**Example:** “My next step would be to approach my coworker on a one-on-one basis. I would bring up my concern in a professional manner, careful not to use blaming language. For example, I would say “I would really appreciate more support in these areas” versus “You aren't doing what you needs to be done.” Then, I would ask for their perspective. Sometimes, it's a simple misunderstanding - a lack of communication about expectations, a personal issue that's affecting their performance - whatever it is, I would want to be able to understand them before having to escalate the situation. From there, I would suggest a solution that would work for both of us, and be clear about how the work might be affected if the pattern continues. If it does, then I would take the next step to involve my supervisor.”



# RESOURCES

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**PREVENT** Tell them the steps you would take in order to avoid having this situation occur.

**Example:**

Finally, I would touch base regularly to make sure it doesn't reoccur. Of course, I would want to prevent rather than react - so before it ever gets to this point, I would want to build a relationship with my coworker at the very beginning that clearly communicates responsibility and trust.

This kind of question is a perfect opportunity to highlight some of the interpersonal skills outlined in the "Qualifications" section of a job posting, and using steps makes your answer easier to follow. This example demonstrates teamwork, conflict resolution, and honesty. If these are qualities that the company lists as their values, it also helps to portray yourself as a suitable candidate.

## TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

Technical questions are highly specific and typically require subject-matter knowledge or hard skills. You can think of these as similar to tests or assignments that you may undertake as part of your studies.