Behavior and Situation Based Interview Question Library

Plan approximately 5 minutes per question to allow time for follow ups and candidate questions. Allot more time for higher level positions.

**Action Oriented / Initiative (12)**

- Tell me about a time you took unexpected initiative. Follow up: Can you tell me about another?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities.
- Describe a project or idea you originated in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time you did more than was required in your job.
- What have you done to make your job easier or more rewarding?
- Describe a situation where you found you had a serious problem.
- What do you do differently than other people in your occupation?
- Tell me about an idea you generated.
- Tell us about an idea you started that involved collaboration with your colleagues.
- Tell us about a time when you identified a new, unusual or different approach for addressing a problem or a task.
- How do you handle experiencing multiple hurdles or setbacks while trying to achieve a goal?
- Tell us about a time that you found yourself working with a team that was not motivated.

**Adaptability/Flexibility (13)**

- Can you tell us about a time you worked hard on something, only to be told to change priorities and do it some other way?
- Which supervisors have you found easiest to work with? Most difficult? Why?
- Tell us about instances where you have had breaks in routine, interruptions, and last-minute changes?
- Tell me about a time you had to learn a new system or software at work.
- Give me an example of when you and your co-workers had to adjust to a major change in the work environment.
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a colleague’s working style in order to complete a project or achieve a goal.
- Have you ever had an experience in which you failed to see an idea or gain cooperation the first time, but succeeded later? What was the difference?
- Tell me about a time you had to surmount an obstacle to reach a goal. What was the problem, and what did you do about it?
- Describe the biggest change you have brought to your company.
- Describe a time in which you had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control.
- Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline and you were interrupted and did not make the deadline.
- Have you ever had trouble learning a new machine or procedure? How did you deal with that situation?
- How long were you in your previous job before you felt at ease with the company’s products or services?

**Analysis/Problem Solving (14)**

- What do you do to keep informed about possible work-related problems?
- Describe a time you had to solve a problem with limited information.
- Explain how you troubleshoot (x problem).
- Tell us about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- Have you ever recognized a problem or opportunity before anyone else?
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Tell me about a complex problem that you solved.
- Describe a situation in which you developed a solution to a problem.
- We can sometimes identify a small problem and fix it before it becomes a major problem.
- Give an example(s) of how you have done this.
- Tell me about a time from your work experience when your manager or supervisor was unavailable and a problem arose.
- Tell me about a time when you had to solve a problem with very little guidance or direction.
- Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job.
- Can you think of a problem you have encountered when the old solutions didn’t work?
Attention To Detail (6)

- Have you ever had an experience in which you were glad you had paid attention to some particular detail?
- What tools do you use to ensure accuracy in your own work?
- Tell me about a time you found an error in a co-worker or superiors work.
- Do you prefer to work on the “big picture” or the “small details”?
- Tell us about a time that you were confused by a customer or boss’s request.
- Have you ever found an error in your own work?

Communication Skills (17)

- Have you ever had to get a point across to different types of people?
- Give me an example of when you had to explain a complicated procedure to someone who was new to the situation.
- Have you ever given instructions to someone, and then learned he/she did it wrong?
- Describe a decision you made based largely on data you obtained by asking questions.
- How do people react when you ask questions? How well do they seem to understand what you want to know?
- Can you give me an example of a time you had to pitch a proposal to a group of your superiors or co-workers?
- Have you ever done any public speaking?
- Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Tell us about a recent experience in creating and delivering a speech or presentation.
- Describe a time when you had to present to a group of people with little or no preparation.
- What are some of the most important documents you have written?
- What is the most difficult writing assignment you have undertaken recently?
- Tell us about a time you created written instructions to be followed by employees or customers?
- To what kind of audience do you address most of your written work? What level of language do you use?
- Please give me an example when you had to write technical material for lay people.
- Tell me about an instance from your previous job when you had to rely on verbal information from someone else to get the job done.
- Have you ever had an occasion when you misunderstood someone else’s instructions?

Customer Focus (2)

- Tell me about a time when you did your best to resolve a customer or client concern and the individual still was not satisfied.
- Tell us about the most difficult customer service experience that you have ever had to handle.
- Can you tell me about a time you received poor customer service?
- Tell me about a time you dealt with an unreasonable customer.
- Give me an example of a time you had to explain something complex to a frustrated client or coworker.

Decision-Making (12)

- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year?
- Describe a work-related problem you had to face recently.
- Are there any occasions when you feel you make up your mind too quickly or too slowly?
- Describe a time you make an unpopular decision.
- Give us an example of a time you delayed a decision so you would have more time to think.
- Give us an example of a business decision you made that you ultimately regretted.
- Describe a situation where you handled decisions under pressure or when you were faced with time constraints.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you’ve made in your job during the last year.
- Tell me about a time when you were faced with making a difficult decision at work.
- Tell me about a time when a willingness to share your knowledge significantly enhanced an outcome or decision.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation.

Independence (5)
Give me an example of a project or idea you’ve undertaken, even though you knew it would not be popular with some people.

What were the limits of authority in your previous job? Did you ever find it necessary to go beyond them?

It’s possible, of course, to be loyal to your employer, but still to disagree with some rules and policies. Can you cite an example in your own experience?

On what occasions did you feel you had to consult with your boss before proceeding with some action? When did you feel it was proper to act on your own?

Could you tell me about a time you made an important decision without the help of a supervisor?

Integrity/Trust (10)

Give me an example of a time you found it necessary to make an exception to the rules in order to get something done.

Do you feel some rules should be obeyed more stringently than others?

Did you ever have to deal with a co-worker who wasn’t pulling his/her weight?

Have you ever been faced with another person stealing credit for an idea you came up with?

Tell me about a time when a situation tested your integrity.

Tell me about a time that you bypassed the standard procedures in order to get the job done more quickly.

Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

What are some of the responsibilities on your job you feel you have done particularly well or in which you have achieved the greatest success?

What are your standards of success at work?

Give me an example of a time that you were entrusted with something that had great importance?

Interpersonal Skills/Conflict Management (13)

Tell me about the best boss you ever had.

Tell me about a boss that you found it difficult to work with.

Tell me about a time you strongly disagreed with your manager.

Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual.

Give me an example of a time when you knew that a supervisor had given preferential treatment to a co-worker.

Recall an instance when you cheered up a co-worker.

Think about a time that you had to verbally interact with higher level management.

Describe a situation where you used humor to deflect a difficult or awkward situation.

Tell me about a time when you felt another employee wasn’t being treated fairly.

Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas.

Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.

What do you do when you know you are right and your boss disagrees with you?

Tell of a time when you worked with an individual who was not completing his/her share of the work.

Tell me about a time you had to deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).

Job Accommodations (9)

This job requires you to [Name an Essential Function]. Are you able to do that with or without reasonable accommodation? How would you accomplish that task?

Can you perform the functions (essential and/or marginal) of this job, with or without reasonable accommodation?

Would you be willing to take a physical for the job? All new employees are required to pass it.

The hiring process involves an interview, timed written test, and job demonstration. Do you need a reasonable accommodation for this process?

There will be a number of weekend conferences you will need to attend. Does overnight and weekend travel present a problem for you?

You may have to stay overnight when traveling with other co-workers. Would that bother you?

Are you able to meet required work schedules?

You might be asked to work later than 5 p.m. on occasion. Would you be able to meet that requirement?

Can you meet the attendance requirements of this job?

Job Interest (7)

What’s something great about your current or previous job?
- What do you believe you can achieve with us personally or professionally that you can’t anywhere else in the world?
- What are you really good at, but never want to do anymore?
- What part of your work has given you the greatest feeling of achievement and satisfaction?
- What part of your work have you found to be the most frustrating or unsatisfying?
- Why did you choose this particular line of work?
- Why did you choose to apply at our organization?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What types of work do you like best?
- What types of work would you prefer to avoid?

Judgment (4)

- What was the best decision you ever made? What were the alternatives?
- Tell me the same thing about the worst decision you ever made.
- How about the hardest decision you ever made?
- Describe a time when you had to make an immediate decision on a critical issue.

Leadership/Supervision (26)

- Have you had to introduce a new policy or idea that departed from the customary way of doing things? What approach did you take to gain cooperation?
- Tell me about a time that you had to gain the cooperation of a group over which you had little or no authority.
- What did you do to help your subordinates set performance objectives last year?
- Describe a situation in which you had to help a subordinate solve a problem or meet an objective.
- Describe a situation in which a subordinate had a performance or disciplinary problem.
- Describe the procedures you have used to keep track of things that require your attention.
- Describe a typical staff meeting in your department.
- What do you do to keep track of your subordinates’ progress on delegated assignments?
- What procedures do you use to evaluate your subordinates’ performances?
- What do you do when you find that a subordinate is not meeting your standards?
- Describe a project that required a major effort by many members of your staff. Who did you ask to participate? Why did you choose them? What assignments did they have?
- Two employees are having regular conflicts with each other and often disturb the team’s balance. How would you handle this situation?
- Tell us about the toughest group you ever had to lead.
- Describe a time when you have not only been responsible for leading a team of people but for also doing the same job as your team members.
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- What do you like about managing people?
- Tell us about a time you had to deliver bad news to your team.
- Tell us about a time you handled a performance problem with your best employee? Your worst employee?
- What have you done to make your subordinates’ jobs easier or more rewarding?
- Describe a situation in which one or more subordinates had roles in the decision-making process.
- In your mind, what is the greatest thing that distinguishes a superior employee from someone who gives typical good performance?
- What factors do you consider most important in judging a subordinate’s performance?
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Describe your normal methods of assigning work to subordinates.
- Who is in charge while you are gone? How do you inform this person of the limits and responsibilities you expect him/her to observe?
- Tell me how you decide what should be delegated and what you not delegate.
- Have you ever moved up to a position where you had to supervise former peers?

Organizational Cooperation/Teamwork (13)

- What other departments did you normally work with in your previous job?
- How did events in your department affect other parts of the organization?
- Tell me about a problem you have had that would affect more than one department.
- Tell us about your experience working with other departments to solve problems.
- What contacts do you make with other departments while setting goals?
- What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
- Tell me about a time when you put the needs of a group before your own when completing a task.
Tell me about a time when you worked with a person who did things very differently from you.
Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with.
From your experiences what have you found are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment?
Give an example of a situation where you have had to deal with a person very different from yourself.
Tell me about a time when you were a part of a team.
Describe a situation when working with a team produced more successful results than if you had completed the project on your own.

Persuasiveness (5)

What do you consider the best idea you ever sold to a superior? A co-worker? A subordinate?
What do you consider the best idea you ever failed to sell? What do you think the problem was?
What strategies have you found work best when trying to persuade someone to your point of view?
How would you respond to a co-worker who suggests an improvement that you know won't work?
Tell us about a time when you changed someone's mind about something.

Planning/Time Management (10)

Describe a typical workweek.
Tell me about an occasion when your schedule was upset by unforeseen circumstances.
How do you determine which activities have top priorities on your time?
Describe a situation in which your department experienced a major backlog, or the threat of one. How did you deal with that problem?
How do you develop short-range plans for your organization? Long-range plans?
Give me an example of a time when expenses in your department threatened to run over budget. What did you do about it?
How many hours a week do you find it critical to get your job done?
Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
Recall a time when you were assigned what you considered to be a complex project.
Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when you suggested a better way to perform a process?

Resilience (5)

Describe a situation in which you suffered a major disappointment.
Tell me about a time you had to deal with a major crisis.
What is the biggest mistake you've made in your career?
What were the worst working conditions you ever experienced?
Have you ever been passed over for a promotion for which you felt you were most qualified?

Safety Awareness (5)

Tell me about a time you had to follow specific safety protocols in your previous job.
Do you feel these requirements sometimes interfere with your performance?
Tell me how you resolved a safety deficiency you observed during an audit.
Have you recently seen someone else doing a job in an unsafe manner? Why did you notice?
Have you recently had an accident or a close call?

Self-Development (7)

Among the people you’ve worked with, who do you admire and why?
What do you want to do differently in your next role.
What’s one misconception your coworkers have about you?
What’s one critical piece of feedback you’ve received that was really difficult to hear?
Imagine yourself in three years. What do you hope will be different about you then compared to now?
Describe a time when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance.
Give me an example of a time when you set a goal
Can you describe for me a difficult obstacle you have had to overcome?
Tell me about a situation where you had to learn something new in a short time.
Describe a situation in which you found that your results were not up to your supervisor’s expectations.
Give me an example of a time when you tried to accomplish something and failed.
• Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome.

Sales Skills (21)

• Give me an example of the approach you would take to explain the features of a product or service to a customer who has trouble understanding them.
• Describe a selling situation where it was important to obtain good information.
• Tell me about an occasion when you realized your initial approach wasn’t working and you had to try a different method.
• Describe the primary types of people to whom you sell.
• What’s the best method you’ve found to obtain new prospects?
• Have you ever been in a position where you felt you could clinch a sale if you oversold the product just a little?
• How did you gain the technical knowledge you needed to sell your previous employer’s product line?
• What did you find easiest to learn about the product? Hardest?
• Have you ever found it difficult to make a sale because you had trouble understanding the customer’s requirements?
• What were your sales goals for the last year?
• Describe a typical sales trip. How do you decide which prospects to contact?
• How does it affect you when someone turns you down?
• How does it affect you when an unusual number of people turn you down?
• Describe the biggest sale you ever lost. How did you react?
• Describe one of your toughest sales experiences.
• What do you think has been the biggest improvement in your sales ability during the last year?
• Describe a typical sales encounter.
• What are the two most common objections you face?
• Role-play with me, if you will, presenting yourself to me over the phone as if you were a headhunter. Convince me that this “product” you’re selling is worth my time.
• How do you define your closing style?
• Tell me the last time you failed to meet your quota.

Senior Management Skills (9)

• Looking back on the last five years of your career, what’s the highlight?
• Give me an example of your ability to facilitate progressive change within your organization.
• Tell me about the last time you inherited a problem unit — one suffering from poor productivity or low morale.
• Tell us how you have created a shared purpose among people who initially differed in opinions or objectives.
• If hired, what would be your priorities be in the first 30 days? 90 days? 6 months?
• Did you create a culture of open information, sharing, and increased accountability by giving responsibility to your subordinates, or did you focus more on establishing their parameters and controlling the decision-making process?
• How do you typically stay in the information loop and monitor your staff’s performance?
• Tell me about a time you had a subordinate with unacceptable job performance?
• Tell me what you felt was unfair decision or situation in your last position.
• Paint a picture of the corporate culture you’ll create if we hire you.

Stress Tolerance (9)

• Under what kinds of conditions do you do your best work?
• What kinds of conditions do you find the most difficult?
• Tell me what kinds of pressures do you feel in your job.
• Describe a situation in which you were under particularly great pressure.
• Do you often take work home?
• How do you prepare for an important presentation the day before it is due?
• Can you describe a time you were juggling multiple projects at once?
• Tell me about a time when your work was criticized by a supervisor.
• Tell me about a time when you dealt with an abusive customer.
Technical Skills (10)

- How did you gain the technical knowledge you need to do your job?
- How long did you have to study before you took your [Name of Specific License] exam? How many times did you take the test?
- Give me an example of an especially difficult assignment or project.
- Have you received any commendations for your performance?
- It says on your application that you have used specialized computer software. Describe a typical project.
- What do you think is the most important development in your field today? What impact do you think it will have?
- How do you keep informed about what’s happening in your field?
- Which job-related organizations do you belong to?
- What job-related publications do you normally read?
- Have you recently attended any conferences or seminars in your field?

Other Commonly-Asked Questions
Some questions don’t fit neatly into a job competence category, but are commonly-asked to give you a better feel for the candidate. These questions routinely focus on applicants’ abilities to perform a self-analysis of their skills and on their expectations coming into the job.

- What skills do you enjoy using most? Why?
- What makes you a stand out candidate for this position?
- What makes you stand out among your peers?
- If you started working for us tomorrow, what could you contribute immediately?
- What do you feel an employer owes its employees? How about what employees owe their employers?

Follow-Up Questions:
These will test for consistency and assist in getting greater detail and more information. Make note of when you need to ask follow up questions in order to get the full story from the candidate.

- “Can you give me an example?”
- “What did you do?”
- “What did you say?”
- “What were you thinking?”
- “How did you feel?”
- “What was your role?”
- “What was the result?”
- “What do you wish you had done differently?”
- “What did you learn?”
- “What have I not asked you that I should have?”

Questions for Recent Graduate

- How often did you take on extra credit projects in your school courses? Describe a few of them.
- Have you ever developed any new ideas or made suggestions in your school or social activities?
- What were your strongest courses in school? Your weakest?
- Did you take [Name of Subject]? How well did you do?
- Going from high school to college is usually a big change in your life. How did you find it?
- Switching from one school to another must have been difficult. What problems did you have? How did you deal with them?
- How does your degree prepare you: a) for a career in [Name of Industry] or b) to excel as a [Job Title]?
- Tell me about class or club offices you held.
- What was your major? What determined this choice?
- What were your overall grades?
- What additional education have you had since you graduated?
• What qualifications do you have beyond academics that qualify you to make a successful transition into business?
• Do you think your grades are a good indicator of your ability to succeed in business?
• What other types of positions and companies are you considering right now?