

Library of Skill-based Interview Questions

Here are nearly 200 sample interview questions that hiring managers can use to spot the presence of important “soft” skills:

Adaptability

- You’ve probably had this experience: You worked hard on something, only to be told to change priorities and do it some other way. How did you handle that?
- Which supervisors have you found easiest to work with? Most difficult? Why?
- What kinds of problems have you had in switching from one job to another?
- How do you handle breaks in routine, interruptions, and last-minute changes?

Analysis

- Describe a project or idea you originated in the last year. How did you know it was a good idea?
- What do you do to keep informed about possible work-related problems?
- Have you ever recognized a problem or opportunity before anyone else? What happened?

Attention To Detail

- Have you ever had an experience in which you were glad you had paid attention to some particular detail? Please describe it.
- Have you ever found an error in your own work? How did it happen? What did you do about it?

Communication Skills

- Have you ever had to get a point across to different types of people? What approach did you take?
- Give me an example of how you would 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? Why do you think that happened?
- 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? How did you do? Why do you think things went that way?
- Have you ever done any public speaking? How did you handle the assignment? How did it work out?

Control

- 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?

Decision-Making

- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year? What made it so difficult?
- Describe a work-related problem you had to face recently. What procedures did you use to deal with it?
- Are there any occasions when you feel you make up your mind too quickly? Too slowly?
- Have you ever delayed a decision so you would have more time to think? Give me an example.

Delegation

- 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?
- Have you ever moved up to a position where you had to supervise former peers? How did you handle it?
- 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?
- You’ve probably had a situation in which you delegated a responsibility, but the work wasn’t done as you expected. Why do you think this happened? What would you do differently next time?

Education

- What is the highest level of school you completed?
- What educational training have you had that helped your career?
- I see that you attended [Name of College/University]. Why did you select that school?

- What courses did you start and then later drop out of? Why?

Flexibility

- 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?

Independence

- Give me an example of a project or idea you've undertaken, even though you knew it would not be popular with some people. How did things work out?
- 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?

Initiative

- Give me an example of a time you did more than was required in your job.
- Tell me about a time your effort helped some project or idea succeed.
- What have you done to make your job easier or more rewarding?
- Describe a situation where you found you had a serious problem. What did you do to solve it?
- What do you do differently than other people in your occupation?
- Tell me about an idea you generated. What did you do? How did things work out?

Integrity

- 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? Give me some examples.
- How strictly do you believe your co-workers normally follow the rules? Do you approve of their attitude?
- Did you ever have to deal with a co-worker who wasn't pulling his/her weight? What did you do about it?
- Have you ever been faced with another person stealing credit for an idea you came up with? How'd you handle it?

Interpersonal Skills

- Tell me about the best boss you ever had. What made him/her so great to work for?
- Tell me about a boss that you found it the hardest to work with. What made him/her so difficult to work with?
- Tell me in what areas you believe your current supervisor could do a better job?
- How does your boss get you to do your best work?

Job Accommodations

- 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.
- [Name of Company] is a government contractor that has an Affirmative Action Plan for disabled and special disabled veterans. Do you wish to identify yourself to the company as disabled or as a special disabled veteran?
- 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

- 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?
- How did you hear about this job?
- Why did you choose to interview at our organization?

- Why do you want to work here?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What types of work do you like best? Why?
- What types of work would you prefer to avoid? Why?
- Describe your work ethic, with examples.
- What interests do you have outside work that might positively affect your on-the-job performance?

Job Requirements

- This job requires fluency in [Language]. Are you fluent in this language?
- Do you have the required licenses to perform this job?
- Do you meet our state's minimum age requirement for work?

Judgment

- What was the best decision you ever made? What were the alternatives? How did you go about making it?
- Tell me the same thing about the worst decision you ever made.
- How about the hardest decision you ever made?

Leadership

- 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? How did it work out?
- 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? How effective were you?
- 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. What did you do? How successful were you?
- Describe a situation in which a subordinate had a performance or disciplinary problem. How did you handle it?

Learning Ability

- 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?
- What did you have to learn to be effective in your previous job? How long did it take? Which parts were the most challenging?

Listening Skills

- 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? Why do you think that happened?

Organizational Cooperation

- With what other departments did you normally work 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. How did you try to solve it?
- What other departments have been most useful in providing information or helping with problems? Least useful?
- What contacts do you make with other departments while setting goals?

Persuasiveness

- What do you consider the best idea you ever sold to a superior? A co-worker? A subordinate? How did you do it?
- What do you consider the best idea you ever failed to sell? What do you think the problem was?
- What strategies have you found to work best when trying to sway someone to your point of view?
- How would you respond to a co-worker who suggests an improvement that you know won't work?

Planning/Time Management

- Describe a typical workweek. How did you plan the week's activities? How well did the schedule work?
- Tell me about an occasion when your schedule was upset by unforeseen circumstances. What did you do?
- 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?

Resilience

- Describe a situation in which you suffered a major disappointment. How did you deal with that?
- Have you ever been fired from a job? How did you handle it?
- What is the biggest mistake you've made in your career? What steps have you taken to ensure it doesn't happen again?
- What were the worst working conditions you ever experienced? How did you handle them?
- Have you ever been passed over for a promotion for which you felt you were most qualified? What did you do about it?
- What will you do if you don't get this position?

Safety Awareness

- What are the major safety requirements of your job?
- Do you feel these requirements sometimes interfere with your performance? What do you do then?
- Have you recently seen someone else doing a job in an unsafe manner? Why did you notice? How did you react?
- Have you recently had an accident or a close call? Why do you think it happened?

Sales Skills

- 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. What happened?
- You've probably had an occasion when you realized your initial approach wasn't working and you had to try a different method. What did you do?
- Describe the primary types of people to whom you sell. What approach do you use for each group?
- Many salespeople work without close supervision. How does this affect you?
- What's the best method you've found to obtain new prospects?
- How do your selling techniques differ from those of others you know?
- Have you ever been in a position where you felt you could clinch a sale if you oversold the product just a little? What did you do?
- How far do you feel the average salesperson in your field would go to make a sale? How far have you gone?
- 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? Why do you think this happened? What did you do about it?
- What were your sales goals for the last year? How did you achieve them?
- 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. How did you deal with that problem? Did you make the sale?
- What do you think has been the biggest improvement in your sales ability during the last year?
- Describe a typical sales encounter. Exactly what would you say to convince a customer to buy?
- What are the two most common objections you face, and how do you deal with them?
- 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. How many times did that happen over the past year and what plan of action did you take to get back on track?
- With no undue flattery, if you grade me on how well I'm conducting this interview, what can you tell me about my sales and management style on the basis of the questions I'm asking you?
- Tell me about your quality ratios. How many prospects do you typically see before closing a sale?

Senior Management Skills

- 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. What was the scope of the project, and how were your direct reports affected?
- 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?
- How do you typically confront subordinates when results are unacceptable?

Stress Tolerance

- Under what kinds of conditions do you do your best work?
- What kinds of conditions do you find the most difficult?
- What kinds of pressures do you feel in your job? How do you cope with them? What frustrates you the most?
- Describe a situation in which you were under particularly great pressure. How did you deal with it? How successful were you?
- Do you often take work home? Why?

Supervision

- How would you handle a performance problem with your best employee? Your worst employee?
- What have you done to make your subordinates' jobs easier or more rewarding?
- What have you done to make your group work more smoothly and efficiently?
- Describe a situation in which one or more subordinates had roles in the decision-making process. How did you make use of their contributions?
- 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?

Technical Skills

- 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. What was your role? What did you do?
- 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?
- To what job-related organizations do you belong?
- What job-related publications do you normally read?
- Have you recently attended any conferences or seminars in your field? What did you get out of them?

Work Standards

- How would you define a good job in your line of work?
- What personal performance standards do you set for yourself? What have you done to meet them? What do you do if you find yourself falling short of a standard?
- Do you make extra efforts to meet deadlines? Describe what you have done to complete a project or report on time.
- If you were going to evaluate your own performance, what factors would you consider most important?
- What are the important things your department has contributed to the organization in the last year?
- Are you satisfied with your department's performance? Why or why not?
- What's your definition of the word success? And how about failure?

Written Communication

- What are some of the most important documents you have written? What kinds of problems did you have writing them? What kind of reception did they receive?
- What is the most difficult writing assignment you have undertaken recently? Why was it so challenging? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever written instructions to be followed by employees or customers? What did you do?
- Recall an important report you had to prepare. How did you go about planning and organizing it?
- To what kind of audience do you address most of your written work? What level of language do you use?
- Have you ever had to write technical material for lay people? Please give me an example.

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 is your greatest strength, and how do you take full advantage of it?
- What's the greatest asset you currently bring to your company?
- What is your greatest weakness, and what have you done to overcome it?

- Why should I hire you?
- What makes you stand out among your peers?
- If you started working for us tomorrow, what could you contribute immediately?
- Are you familiar with the corporate culture here? How do you think you'll fit in?
- What would be the ideal way you'd envision spending your first day here?
- What do you feel an employer owes its employees? How about what employees owe their employers?
- Paint a picture of the corporate culture you'll create if we hire you. Do you operate under a more centralized and paternalistic agenda with power centralized in the hands of a few, or do you constantly push responsibility and accountability down the line?

Questions for Recent Graduates

- 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.
- If you worked, how many hours a week? What kinds of jobs?
- 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