

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

This question is an opportunity to set the tone of the job interview and emphasize the points that you most want this employer to know about you. Use the following formula:

- 1. Who You Are** - Your first sentence should be an introduction to who you are professionally, an overview statement that shows off your strengths and gives a little sense of your personality too.
- 2. Expertise Highlights** - Briefly highlight 2-4 points that you think make you stand out. This could be number of years of experience in the industry, special training, technical skills, etc.
- 3. Why You're Here** - End by telling them you want the position and why.

Example: *"I have more than five years of experience as a technical project manager at top Wall Street companies. Most recently, I led the development of an award-winning new trading platform. I'm a person who thrives in a fast-paced environment so right now I'm looking for an opportunity to apply my technical expertise and my creative problem solving skills at an innovative software company like this one."*

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW OPPORTUNITY NOW?

This is for candidates who are currently employed. If you've got a job, why do you want to leave it? The general rule here is that you should always be leaving to move toward a better opportunity. Highlight the positive reasons for considering a new position and avoid talking about any negative ones.

Example: *"I have been at my company for three years now and have learned a lot from working with some amazing salespeople. I worked my way up to regional sales manager 18 months ago and my region has beat our sales projections by at least 25% each quarter since. However, I am starting to feel like I need some new challenges. This position really appeals to me because it would allow me to manage a bigger team and sell more innovative products."*

If you are not currently employed, your answer to this question is even more important. You have to be able to explain why you left your last position and why you are a fantastic candidate for this job.

Example: *"Unfortunately, the company's biggest client went out of business at the beginning of the year and that had a major effect on revenues. As a result, they had to eliminate some positions and I was among the five most recently hired in our department. I am proud of the work that I did there, I got stellar performance reviews, and my former manager is one of my strongest references."*

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?

You must prove that you are the perfect fit for THIS JOB at THIS COMPANY. A good answer will demonstrate a knowledge of the company and industry. That means you must do your homework so that you can identify specific reasons for wanting to work for the organization.

Reasons could include one or more of the following: Company reputation, reputation of key leaders, admiration of products/services, admiration of other company initiatives (marketing campaign, community involvement, training programs), awards, management philosophy, values, positioning in market, or growth/success. Use the company website, media coverage, and your own networking contacts to find this information.

Example: *“I have more than five years of experience as a technical project manager at top Wall Street companies. Most recently, I led the development of an award-winning new trading platform. I’m a person who thrives in a fast-paced environment so right now I’m looking for an opportunity to apply my technical expertise and my creative problem solving skills at an innovative software company like this one.”*

DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT OR MOST RECENT JOB ROLE.

- 1. Focus on results** - Show how you went above and beyond the job description rather than just listing job duties. Stress any impressive achievements (a promotion, an award), statistics (#1 sales person, 26 people managed), numbers (revenue generated, expenses reduced), or other details.
- 2. Customize for the position** - Develop a standard approach to this question, but be prepared to customize it for each new job opportunity. Analyze the job description and think about how you can show that your current position has prepared you to master the new role’s responsibilities.
- 3. Be concise** - Don’t try to describe absolutely everything that you do. Focus on the highlights that this particular interviewer will care about.

Example: *“For the last two years, I’ve worked as a lead project manager on the redesigning of a trading platform used by 4,000 investment managers at MegaInvestments. In that position, I was responsible for a cross-functional team of 14 from information technology, operations, and project management. And I was able to complete the project under budget and a few months ahead of schedule.”*

WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY EXPECTATIONS?

Before you consider answering the question, it’s important to **know the going rate for jobs in your field and in your job market (location)**. These can be found at websites like: Payscale.com, Glassdoor.com, Salary.com. Arrive at a reasonable salary range that seems fair based on market value and your current or recent salary.

Example: *“Well, according to my research and past experience, my understanding is that 75-90K per year is typical based on the role and requirements.”*

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?

The interviewer wants to understand more about your career goals and how this position would fit into your grand plan. They care about your career goals because they want to hire someone who is motivated, proactive, and likely to stick around and work hard if hired.

- 1. Keep your answer fairly general**, especially if you don’t know a lot about the typical career path at the company. Make your answer truthful, but broad enough that it doesn’t raise doubts about whether you would be a good fit for this position at this organization.
- 2. Stress your interest in a long-term career** at the company. Remember that the organization is going to be investing considerable time, energy, and money in hiring and training someone for this job. You must at least show an honest intention to stay long enough to be a good investment.
- 3. Demonstrate your enthusiasm** for the job as an exciting next step for you. Most importantly, make it clear that you are motivated to take on this opportunity right now.

Example: *“My goal right now is to find a position at a company where I can grow and take on new challenges over time. Ultimately, I’d like to assume 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.”*

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

It's important to take the time to identify your strengths and PRACTICE talking about them in advance. Brainstorm a list of your top strengths. Your strengths could include experience, talents, soft skills, or education/training.

- 1. Be accurate and relevant** - Analyze the job description and identify the most important strengths for each opportunity. Choose strengths that you actually possess. You want to be yourself in an interview, but also convey your relevance to the employer.
- 2. Be specific** - Instead of "people skills", go with "relationship building" or "persuasive communication." Don't be generic. Could 90% of your friends claim your strength? Pick another one.
- 3. Don't be too humble** - Pick something impressive. Don't go with "pleasant to work with" as your main selling point. To get the job, you have to show you would bring more to the position.
- 4. Be prepared to demonstrate** - Have a concise example ready to back each strength up. Your answer should be 1-2 minutes long. If you want to share three strengths and back each up with an example, you will want to practice in advance so that you can do it in a concise way.

Example: *"One of my strengths is my strong work ethic. When I commit to a deadline, I do whatever it takes to deliver. For example, 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 HAD to receive the report on time."*

WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?

- 1. Briefly describe a real weakness that wouldn't be a major handicap on the job** - Be authentic, but consider the job requirements and don't cite a weakness related to any of the top required skills or desired qualities. Choose something that is relatively minor and "fixable"- or something that can be improved through work and motivation.
- 2. Demonstrate that you are working on your weakness** - Discuss your proactive efforts to improve. This shows that you are self-aware, have a drive to be your best, and that the weakness will not slow you down.

Example: *"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."*

WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?

Be prepared with a concise summary of the top reasons to choose you. It's better to have three or four strong reasons with memorable descriptions and/or examples than to rattle off a laundry list of twelve strengths without context. Accomplishments and success stories are always good bets, especially if you can describe how a key accomplishment (a successful marketing campaign, for example) demonstrates a desired competency (creativity, results-orientation).

Example: *"I have the experience and the attitude to excel in this production assistant position. I have almost two years of television production experience -- including two summers interning at The Ellen Show, where I was exposed to all aspects of TV production and worked so hard the first summer that they invited me back for a second summer and gave me more responsibilities."*

During my senior year at UC San Diego, I have been working part-time for a production company, where I have served in an assistant role but also recently had the chance to help edit several episodes. I have a reputation for getting things done -- and with a smile on my face. That's because I love working in the television industry and am excited to learn and get experience in every way possible."

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS FOR ME?

An interview is a two-way street. Prepare at least 3 questions that demonstrate your interest in the position, your drive to excel in the role, and the fact that you've done homework (researched company and industry). Here are some possible questions to ask:

1. Can you tell me more about the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
2. What do you think are the most important qualities for someone to excel in this role?
3. What are your expectations for this role during the first 30 days, 60 days, year?
4. Describe the culture of the company.
5. Where do you think the company is headed in the next 5 years?
6. Who do you consider your top competitor, and why?
7. What are the biggest challenges facing the company/department right now?
8. What do you like best about working for this company?
9. What is the typical career path for someone in this role?
10. What are the next steps in the interview process?

Adapted from Big Interview



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