

ESSENTIAL CAREER RESOURCE

PREPARING FOR COMMON **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

INTRODUCTION



PREPARING FOR COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

THERE ARE FIVE MAIN TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. **Personal questions** – “tell me about yourself” or “what are your greatest strengths/weaknesses”
2. **Behavioural questions** – “tell me about a time when...”
3. **Hypothetical questions** – “how would you handle a situation where...”
4. **Case interview questions** – used primarily for consulting jobs
5. **Technical questions** – specific questions related to carrying out the duties of the job

Since it is impossible to prepare for every possible question, this guide walks you through how to prepare for the most commonly asked **Personal** and **Behavioural** questions.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Below are the most commonly asked “Personal” questions. Prepare your responses to each one. Even if you think you know the answer to these questions, practice them aloud with your career center advisor or peer coach.

QUESTION	GUIDANCE	YOUR RESPONSE
Tell me about yourself	<p>Keep it short and sweet. One sentence (at most!) on each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your PAST – Name and where you’re from • Your PRESENT – what you’re studying or your expertise • Your PASSION – What are you passionate about? Or what’s a problem you’re trying to address? 	<p>Ex: My name is Kwame and I’m from Uganda. I’m a third year business school student, and I’m super passionate about business solutions to climate change.</p>
Why do you want to work for us?	<p>Have 3 concrete reasons prepared. Align them to the company’s mission, culture or values.</p>	<p>Ex: Your company is the best in the business and I want to learn from the best. I also like the fast-paced environment and believe deeply in the mission.</p>
What are your greatest strengths?	<p>Identify your top 3 strengths and come up with a supporting example for each.</p>	<p>Ex: I am enthusiastic in everything I do and that enthusiasm is contagious. I can quickly synthesize complex information. For example, in my last project...</p>
What’s your greatest weakness?	<p>This question is not about the weakness itself. It’s about your own self-awareness, and showing what you’re doing to improve upon this weakness.</p>	<p>Ex: In the past, I have suffered from “analysis paralysis” – I want all of the information before making decisions. Since I know that’s not possible, I’ve had to practice listening to my intuition, and it has served me well.</p>
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	<p>You don’t need to know where you’ll be in 5 years. This question is about your priorities and what’s important to you.</p>	<p>Ex: I have no idea where I’ll be in 5 years but I hope to be surrounded by super smart people I can learn from, and working on something that contributes to the world.</p>

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Behavioural Questions

BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS: STAR TECHNIQUE

To answer behavioural questions (“Tell me about a time you managed a conflict”), use the STAR framework: Situation, Task, Action, Result. This helps keep your answers clear and concise.

Situation – Background, setting, etc.

Task – What needed to be done

Action – What the candidate actually did

Result – How it turned out

The following table includes 8 of the most commonly asked behavioural questions. Before your interview, prepare your STAR answers for each.

For examples of good responses, see **STAR Responses** on page 7 & 8.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



EXAMPLE

PRACTICE WITH THESE QUESTIONS

QUESTION	SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
Describe a stressful situation & how you handled it	One time, at my last job, my coworker had a family emergency and needed to miss work for some time, and their super-important project was left unfinished and without a manager.	My supervisor instructed me to take on the project, and with no leniency on the deadline, I had days to complete a project that originally should have taken several weeks.	I requested and was granted a reduction in my weekly goals, allotting me more time to attack the special project. For my weekly goals, I was able to delegate them evenly to some of my teammates.	With the reduction in my daily goals, I was able to dedicate more time to the special project. This allowed me to finish it on time and with complete accuracy. My supervisor appreciated my attitude and drive, and I was given several more projects after that, along with an eventual promotion & raise.
Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work				
Detail a mistake you made and how you reacted?				
Tell me about a time when you performed well under enormous pressure.				
Have you ever dealt with a sticky situation involving another department?				
Give me an example of a goal you met.				
Give me an example of a goal you couldn't meet and how you handled it.				
Describe a time when you went above and beyond.				

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



STAR Technique - Responses

HERE ARE A FEW SAMPLE STAR RESPONSES TO INSPIRE YOU

Tell me about a time you had a conflict at work.

STAR Model Answer:

There was a disagreement I had with a coworker which originated from a miscommunication. To keep our work environment professional and positive, we had to discuss it and make amends. I sat down with them one day during lunch, paid for their meal, and took initiative by apologizing for my part in the whole mess. Now, we work together well and are often praised for our impressive teamwork.

Can you describe a stressful situation and how you handled it?

STAR Model Answer:

At my last restaurant, I once found out mere hours in advance about a health inspection. As the head chef, I was in charge of making sure everything was in order in the kitchen before the inspector arrived. I quickly called in employees from the last shift to help out, leaving the others available to prep for that evening's dinner. As a result, we were able to ace the inspection - less costly in the long run compared to giving employees a few hours of overtime.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



STAR Technique - Responses

HERE ARE A FEW SAMPLE STAR RESPONSES TO INSPIRE YOU

Can you detail a mistake you made and how you reacted to it?

STAR Model Answer:

One time, I switched the packing labels of two packages I sent to customers. I had to correct the problem without angering the clients. I called them both up and provided them with shipping labels with the correct addresses while offering each of them a small gift certificate to use on a future order. The customers not only helped me fix my mistake, but they were both satisfied and will return and shop again.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



THINK YOU'RE READY FOR YOUR INTERVIEW?

Complete the checklist on the following page to find out!



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



Interview Checklist

INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

RÉSUMÉS/CV CRITERIA	YES	NO	NOTES
BEFORE			
Researched the industry?			
Researched the company? (mission, values, 5-year plan, dress code, etc.)			
Researched the person? (if applicable)			
Prepared responses to most common PERSONAL questions? (e.g. what are your strengths?)			
Prepared STAR responses to most common BEHAVIOURAL questions? (e.g. "Tell me about a time when...")			
Prepared some questions to ask the interview panel (e.g. what is your biggest challenge?)			
Practiced how to present yourself?			
DURING			
Dressed to match their company's styles			
Arrive 15 minutes early (if virtual, sign on 5 min early)			
Firm handshake & eye contact (if virtual, extra big smile)			
Be friendly, professional, warm			
Show your appreciation for their time			
Ask thoughtful questions			
AFTER			
Thank you note 1-2 days after			
Thank you gets specific about what you appreciated			
Share something that might be useful to them (article, etc.)			
Identify/reiterate next steps, if any			

You can use this through the process of a real interview to ensure you are taking the right steps before, during and after.