

# Answers to Tough Interview Questions

Though you can't know every question you'll be asked in an interview, well prepared candidates have thought carefully about their responses to tough interview questions like these.

**Q:** **Tell me about yourself.**

**A:** Your response should be focused and purposeful. Communicate a pattern of interests, skills, and strengths that relate to the position for which you are applying.

**Example:** *"I graduated from Tulane University with a degree in (insert major here). Since that time I have been working as a (insert career here) where I have done (insert key accomplishments here). I'm looking forward to (insert future goals here) and I feel this position would be a great step in that direction."*

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**Q:** **We are considering two other candidates for this position. Why should we hire you rather than someone else?**

**A:** Instead of being distracted by the mention of two other candidates, focus on what strengths you have to offer. These examples should be consistent with four attributes employers are looking for in candidates: competence, professionalism, enthusiasm, and likeability. Be prepared to summarize in 60 seconds why you are the best fit.

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**Q:** **How do you usually engage in solving a problem?**

**A:** The interviewer is interested in learning what logical steps you use to solve the problem and outcomes you're able to accomplish.

**Example:** *"When I solve a problem, usually I begin by making a list of possible causes. After identifying two or three culprits, I then begin to create a list of possible solutions and the steps needed to get to those solutions. Finally, I rate which will be the best or most effective approach and go in that direction."*

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**Q:** **What motivates you?**

**A:** When asked this question, don't say "lots of money." This answer indicates that you are only interested in what you can get from the job and not what you can contribute as an employee. Your answer should reflect that you are hard-working, intelligent, and interested in providing value to the organization.

**Example:** *"I am motivated by taking on new challenges, learning a new skill, and working toward mastery of those I currently pursue."*

## **Q:** What is your greatest weakness?

**A:** The best approach to this question is to identify a weakness that isn't detrimental, inconsistent, or disruptive to your career path, and to explain how you have taken steps to overcome or manage the problem. Be cautious of using a standard answer such as "I'm a perfectionist", "I work too hard," or worse yet, "I can't think of anything."

**Example:** *"While in the past time management was a challenge, I now set aside time everyday to plan and organize my week. I find that I am really a "big picture" thinker who often can easily brainstorm ideas and theories but to carry out the details I must commit to being organized."*

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## **Q:** Why weren't your grades higher?

**A:** Typically with this question the interviewer is hoping to get a better idea of who you are as a person and how you handle adversity. Be sure to remain calm and refrain from placing blame elsewhere. Instead, focus your response on the knowledge, skills, and achievements you formulated from your educational experience and the accomplishments of certain goals.

**Example:** *"When starting my college career, my goal was to start preparation for my life's journey. While one can argue grades are important, I believe that the knowledge gained and networks I built are just as important to being successful. In addition, it was important to me to get involved in campus life so that I could have a really comprehensive experience."*

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## **Q:** How do you handle stress?

**A:** This question is designed to see how you manage your life. Due to employee burnout, many employers like well-rounded employees who can demonstrate the ability to have work/life balance. Use this question to answer the obvious but also attempt to infuse your hobbies as an asset to the job you are seeking.

**Example:** *"I enjoy physical exercise such as running and yoga to de-stress. In addition, the years of training as a competitive athlete taught me how to be self-motivated, focused, and patient. These strengths have also been key to my on the job performance."*

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## **Q:** Tell me about a conflict you encountered and how you handled it.

**A:** When answering this question, be careful not to portray people in a negative manner. The interviewer wants to know how you are able to handle conflict and/or work collaboratively in a team setting. Your ability to compromise and work out challenges without external interventions are crucial.

**Example:** *"When working on a class project, there was a great amount of conflict over which approach to take. I took the lead in working with the members to define our common goal and asked each member to contribute one solution. We worked on developing which ideas could contribute to that goal and voted on the best two scenarios. Next, we split our group into two subgroups and proceeded on from there".*

## **Q:** Where do you plan to be in 5 years?

**A:** Many times people answer this question by saying “management” or something that indicates a progression up the career ladder. Again, answer in a way that is unique to your goals and experiences. The hiring manager wants to learn that you are goal oriented, self-aware and have thought about your career path beyond the interview. Also, be cautious as with any other answer of bringing too much information about your personal life into the discussion.

**Example:** *“In 5 years time, I see myself moving forward in (insert career) and in (the company), learning new skills to the benefit of (the company). I find this (job position) extremely fascinating and motivating. I can see many challenges ahead of me, which I am eager to experience. Therefore, I am willing to invest my 5 years time learning all aspects of the job towards professional advancement.”*

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## **Q:** What color is your brain?

**A:** These types of questions are designed to see how you react in unpredictable circumstances. There is no correct or incorrect answer. The hiring manager is more interested in the process rather than your response. Be creative and prepared to explain why you answered the way you did.

**Example:** *“My brain is orange because I’m bursting with ideas and enthusiasm.”*

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## **Q:** What are your salary requirements?

**A:** In a difficult job market, employers use the salary question to aggressively screen applicants. As a candidate, it is best to approach this question in a strategic manner. It’s best to not state a number, state your interest in the position, and state you are open to discussing salary at a later date.

**Example:** *“I would prefer to discuss salary once we’ve mutually decided that I am a good fit with your company. Again, I am very interested in the opportunity with your organization, and while salary is important, I am confident that we can work out a package that is beneficial for both of us.”*

*Or*

*“I certainly understand your need to verify my salary requirements as they relate to the position. Please tell me the salary range and I can explain how my salary requirements fit into that range.”*

If the employer pursues the salary question further and insists that you provide a number, your response should be a well-researched range for the position. Research can be done through informational interviews as well as on the internet ([www.salary.com](http://www.salary.com), [www.payscale.com](http://www.payscale.com), and <http://www.glassdoor.com/Salaries/index.htm>)

**Example:** *“Based on my research about this position and other Market Research Analyst positions in the area, I would expect the base salary to be between \$35,000 and \$40,000. How does that line up with the salary you have budgeted for the position?”*