



Interview Question Tips

A guide for students and
graduates



We all know how nerve-racking interviews can be, and little is worse than feeling unprepared for a tricky question. This guide runs through the questions that come up again and again in graduate interviews, the thinking behind why employers ask them, and how to approach your own answer.

Related Step Guides

This guide focuses on individual questions. For the overall interview process, specific formats, and other skills, see our other Step guides:

- Interview Hints and Tips, for essential advice to help you perform your best on the day
- Interview Tips: What to Wear, for dress code by sector and video interviews
- Interview Tips: The STAR Technique, for compelling answers using Situation, Task, Action, Result
- Interview Tips: Telephone Interviews, for phone-specific preparation and etiquette
- Interview Tips: Video Interviews, for live and pre-recorded video interview formats
- Interview Tips: Assessment Centres, for what to expect and how to stand out in assessment days
- Psychometric Tests Hints and Tips, for confidence in aptitude and personality tests

Types of Questions You Might Face

- Motivational questions, such as “Why do you want this job?”, which explore your genuine interest in the role.
- Employer-focused questions, such as “What do you know about us?”, which test how much research you have done.
- CV and career questions, such as “Tell me about your placement year” or “Where do you want to be in five years?”
- Competency or values-based questions, such as “Give an example of when you worked in a team to solve a problem,” which are best answered using the STAR technique.
- Strength-based questions, focused on what you enjoy and what you are naturally good at, such as “What motivates you?”
- Hypothetical or curveball questions, such as “How many dice would fit in this room?”, designed to see how you think rather than to test a specific fact.

You are unlikely to be told in advance exactly which categories will come up, so it is worth preparing across all of them rather than assuming a first-round interview will only cover motivation, or a later one will only cover technical detail.



Common Questions and How to Approach Them

How is your degree relevant?

- State your degree and grade. The interviewer likely already knows this from your CV, but it confirms it clearly.
- Go deeper. Think about specific modules, assignments, presentations, or placements that gave you skills relevant to the role.
- Spell out the connection. Confirm how those skills, or the subject knowledge itself, transfer to the job and the company.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Choose strengths that are genuinely relevant to the role, and back each one up with a specific example.
- For a weakness, choose something real that you have acknowledged and worked to improve, rather than a skill essential to the job.
- Avoid weaknesses dressed up as strengths, such as “I work too hard” or “I’m a perfectionist.” Interviewers hear these often and they rarely land well.

Why should we hire you?

- Highlight your relevant, transferable skills without simply repeating your answers to previous questions.
- Be specific. “My communication skills and confidence will help me take control of client conversations” says far more than a general claim to be a good communicator.

Where do you want to be in five years?

- Research the typical progression path for the role and relate your answer to it realistically.
- Show you are thinking about a genuine future with the company, not simply using the role as a stepping stone elsewhere.

Why do you want to leave your current job?

- Give positive reasons for joining the new company rather than negative reasons for leaving the old one.
- If there is a valid practical reason, such as location, it is fine to say so directly.
- Avoid criticising a current or previous employer, however tempting, since it tends to reflect on you rather than them.

You graduated a few years ago. Why are you applying for this now?

- Be ready to explain any gap in employment on your CV, such as travelling or working abroad.
- If you have been working since graduating, explain your reasoning honestly, such as wanting a different direction or a genuine fresh start.

What did you like most or least about your previous role?

- Handle this professionally. Avoid venting about a previous employer, however justified it might feel.
- Use it to reinforce why this role suits you better, such as explaining that a lack of progression is exactly what drew you to a role with more room for growth.
- Be honest about what you liked, and pick examples that support your suitability for this role specifically, such as enjoying being customer-facing if you are applying for a customer-facing job.

How would your manager, tutor, or a close friend describe you?

- Treat this as a chance to show self-awareness rather than an embarrassing exercise in self-praise.
- Draw on real feedback you have received, such as a performance review or specific praise from a placement, and give an example that illustrates it.

Handling Tricky or Curveball Questions

Some interviewers deliberately ask unusual questions, such as being asked to sell an everyday object or estimate an oddly specific number. These are rarely about the exact answer. They are testing how you think under a bit of pressure, whether you can stay logical and calm, and whether you can structure a response on the spot.

- It is fine to pause and think, or to say “that’s an interesting question, let me think it through” before answering.
- Talk through your reasoning out loud rather than trying to produce a single, polished answer straight away.
- If a question feels deliberately provocative, stay assertive rather than defensive, and use it as a chance to highlight something genuinely relevant.

Talking About Salary

Salary questions can feel awkward, but they are common and worth preparing for. Research the typical salary band for the role and sector in advance, and answer with a realistic, confident figure rather than a vague deflection. If asked what you currently earn, be honest, since this is easy for an employer to verify later in the process.

Using AI to Prepare Your Answers

Practise The Thinking, Not Just The Wording

AI tools can help you understand what a question is really testing, or suggest a few different ways to structure your answer. Where this goes wrong is if you end up with an AI-written answer that sounds slightly generic or overly polished, since interviewers ask these questions across hundreds of candidates and can usually spot one. Use AI to sharpen your thinking, then answer in your own words, based on your own experience



Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Having a few thoughtful questions ready shows genuine interest, but avoid asking anything you could easily have found out yourself, such as a basic question about what the company does.

- How could I impress you within the first six months in the role?
- What do you like most about working here?
- What are the next steps in the process?
- What have previous employees done particularly well in this position?
- What is one of the most interesting projects you have worked on here?

Top Tip

Keep questions about salary, holiday entitlement, and other practicalities for later in the process. Asking them too early can make it look like these details matter more to you than the role itself.

Do and Avoid

DO	AVOID
Back up every strength with a specific example	Listing strengths with no evidence to support them
Choose a genuine weakness you have worked to improve	Disguising a strength as a weakness, like being a perfectionist
Prepare for all question types, not just one category	Assuming a first interview will only cover motivation
Stay calm and think out loud on curveball questions	Panicking or refusing to answer an unusual question
Use AI to understand what a question is really testing	Reciting an AI-written answer word for word
Give positive reasons for wanting the new role	Criticising a current or previous employer
Ask thoughtful questions about the role and progression	Asking about salary or holidays early in the process

Checklist Before Your Interview

- ☐ Prepared answers across motivational, employer-focused, and competency questions
- ☐ Chosen two or three genuine strengths with specific examples
- ☐ Chosen one honest weakness, along with how you are improving it
- ☐ Practised staying calm and thinking aloud through an unusual question
- ☐ Researched typical salary expectations for the role and sector
- ☐ Written down two or three questions to ask the interviewer



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