

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS BY SUBJECT

These categories are common job requirements (in alphabetical order) and the types of questions you might use to judge whether candidates fit those qualifications that you require. Adapt and tailor each set of questions to the specific job description you need to fill.

1. ADAPTABILITY

General

- 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 to another?

Recent Graduates

- Going from high school to college is usually a big change in your life. How did you handle it?
- Switching from one school to another must have been difficult. What problems did you have? How did you deal with them?

2. ADMINISTRATIVE/MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- What did you like best about your previous job? Least?
- What part of your work has given you the greatest feeling of achievement and satisfaction?
- What part of your work have you found the most frustrating or unsatisfying?
- Why did you choose this particular line of work?
- What are the most important administrative responsibilities you have taken on? How well did you like them?

3. 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?

4. 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?

5. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

General

- 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 they did it wrong? Why do you think that happened?

Fact Finding

- 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?

Presentations

- Provide an example of a time you had to sell 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?

Sales

- 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?

6. CONTROL

- Describe the procedure 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' performance?
- What do you do when you find that a subordinate is not meeting your standards?

7. 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.

8. 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?

9. FLEXIBILITY

General

- Have you ever had an experience in which you failed to sell 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?

Sales

- 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?

Supervision

- How would you handle a performance problem with your best employee? Your worst employee?

10. INDEPENDENCE

General

- 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?

Sales

- Many salespeople work without close supervision. How does this affect you?

11. INITIATIVE

General

- Give me an example of a time you did more than was required in your job.
- Tell me about a time your effort helped carry out some project or idea.
- 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?

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?

Sales

- What's the best method you've found to obtain new prospects?
- How do your selling techniques differ from those of others you know?

Supervision

- 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?

12. INTEGRITY

General

- 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 strictly than others? Give me some examples.
- How strictly do you believe your co-workers normally follow the rules? Do you approve of their attitude?

Sales

- 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?

13. JUDGMENT

General

- 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.

Supervision

- Describe a situation in which one or more subordinates had roles in the decision-making process. How did you make use of their contributions?

14. 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 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 a subordinate had a performance or disciplinary problem. How did you handle it?

15. LEARNING ABILITY

General

- Have you ever had trouble learning a new machine or procedure? How did you deal with that situation?
- How long did you have to learn to be effective in your previous job? How long did it take? Which parts were the most challenging?

Recent Graduates

- What were your strongest courses in school? Your weakest?
- Did you take (specific subject)? How well did you do?

Sales

- How well 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? Most difficult?

Technical

- How did you gain the technical knowledge you needed to do your job?
- How long did you have to study before you took your occupational license exam? How many times did you take the test?

16. LISTENING SKILLS

General

- 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?

Sales

- 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?

17. 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 helpful?
- What contacts did you make with other departments while setting your goals?

18. 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?

19. PLANNING/TIME MANAGEMENT

- Describe a typical work week. 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?

Sales

- What were your sales goals for the last year? What did you do to achieve them?
- Describe a typical sales trip. How do you decide which prospects to contact?

20. RESILIENCE (To recover or to adjust)

General

- Describe a situation in which you suffered a major disappointment. How did you deal with that?

Sales

- 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?

21. SAFETY

- 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?

22. SALESMANSHIP

- 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 situation. Exactly what would you say to convince a customer to buy?

23. 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?

24. TECHNICAL ABILITY

- Give me an example of an especially difficult assignment or project.
- Have you received any praise or awards for your performance?
- It says on your application that you have operated a personal computer. Describe a typical project on that machine.

25. TECHNICAL/PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

- 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?

26. WORK STANDARDS

General

- 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?

Group Performance

- What are the important things your department has contributed to this organization in the last year?
- Are you satisfied with your department's performance? Why or why not?

Supervision

- In your mind, what is the greatest thing that distinguishes a superior employee from someone who gives only a good performance?
- What factors do you consider most important in judging a subordinate's performance?

27. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

General

- 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? Why?
- 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?

Technical

- 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.

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