Mastering Common Interview Questions

- Different interviewers will ask different questions, and may have different expectations, depending on their role.
  - An HR manager is looking to make sure the candidate has the minimum qualifications for the role and is a good fit.
  - A supervisor is most interested in your past experiences and the specific skills you can bring to the job.
  - A potential coworker will ask questions to determine if you are a good fit for the team.
- Ask the recruiter for a schedule of the interview and the names of interviewers.
- Review the company website, as well as press releases and media mentions about the company to determine company culture and get a sense of company norms.
- Common question formats:
  - Behavioral: draws from past experiences to show skills and knowledge. “Tell me about a time...” “Give me an example of....”
    - STAR Method
      - Situation/ Task- describe the assignment or project
      - Action- define the steps you took or solutions you considered
      - Results- explain the outcome of the task, and what you learned from it
    - Experience + Learn = Grow Method
      - Experience- describe a past experience that relates to the position
      - Learn- discuss what you learned from that experience
      - Grow- explain how you grew from the experience and how you will apply that knowledge in the future
  - Situational: shows problem-solving, analytical, and planning skills. “How would you...”
  - Resume-based: asks about specific experiences from your resume.
  - Technical: asks about specific technologies, concepts, or projects related to your field
- “Tell me about your strengths.”
  - Interviewers are trying to determine your competency for the job.
  - Identify the skills required for the job, and prioritize what you would focus on.
  - Prepare specific examples of a time when you utilized the strengths.
- “Tell me about your weaknesses”
  - Be realistic and honest.
  - Analyze the job description, and determine which qualifications you don’t have. Determine which of the qualifications are the least important, or that you could learn quickly.
  - Describe a plan to improve upon the weaknesses.
- “Why are you interested in our company?”
  - Explain how you would contribute to the position.
  - Express interest in the company and demonstrate that you understand the position.
  - Employers might also be asking this to determine how long you might stay in the job. Explain how the company fits into your long-term goals.
- “Are you willing to relocate or travel?”
  - Preferred answer is yes, but do not be insincere.
• Ask questions to better understand the company’s needs: “Can you tell me what career trajectory I can expect within the new position?” “How long is the average stay at a project site?”
  o Be honest if the answer is no, and give a valid reason.
• “What would you like to accomplish in the first 90 days?”
  o Use past experiences to demonstrate how you will perform in the future.
  o Highlight what’s good about the organization and describe how your skills can improve the company. “I really like x project, and I think it will be even better if we can also use xyz skills to improve it.”
  o Make a few realistic recommendations based on what you know. Let the interviewer know that this may change as you learn more about the position and the company.
  o Address how you will work with your supervisor and team.
• “When have you gone above and beyond at work?”
  o This is a behavioral question intended to determine work ethic.
  o Have a few examples prepared about how you have exceeded expectations, but make it clear that your example was not a one-time thing.
  o STAR Method or Experience + Learn = Grow Method
  o Three motivation types:
    ▪ Achievement- motivated by a sense of accomplishment
    ▪ Authority- a drive to lead or be heard by others
    ▪ Affiliation- motivated by helping others
  o Relate your examples to the current company.
• “Tell me how you handled a difficult situation”
  o Use this question to demonstrate your problem solving and people skills.
  o Show your critical thinking skills as well as your ability to fit into company culture.
  o Develop your answer to show integrity, initiative, and professional growth.
  o Do not speak ill of coworkers or the organization. Do not use an example in which you did not learn or grow from the situation.
• “How did you handle a disagreement with your boss?”
  o Understand the company’s conflict culture.
  o Choose an example that highlights your understanding of different viewpoints. Make sure your example has a positive outcome, and describe what you learned.
  o Explain how you advocated for your point of view and show that you listened to the other person’s side of the issue.
• “What makes you interesting?”
  o Focus on the role and why you should be hired; don’t discuss topics unrelated to the job.
  o Showcase your personality through a story, and be excited about the project/company.
  o Describe any specific skills or experiences that relate to the position, especially if they go above and beyond the job description.
• “What questions do you have?”
  o Always ask questions at the end of the interview, otherwise you may seem uninterested in the position.
- Prepare different questions depending on who you’re interviewing with (for example, questions about specific projects aren’t appropriate for an HR manager, but they would be for a team lead).
- Ask about company culture, and ask for specific examples.
- Good topics to ask about: work environment, collaboration, criteria for success.
- Use this time to re-address any answers you weren’t confident about earlier in the interview.
- Prepare thank you notes ahead of your interview and mail them ASAP. Send a thank you to each person you interviewed with.