



**Job Search  
by Doing Business In English™**

# **JOB SEARCH COACHING**

## **3 INTERVIEWING**

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## Introduction to Interviewing

There are many misunderstandings on how companies interview candidates and what candidates can do to increase their chances of success. Many candidates ask friends and family for advice and the advice they receive is often out of date or simply not relevant to the companies they are applying to.

These presentations will hopefully provide understanding, specific tips and examples that help you. Companies have different approaches to interviewing but what is clear is that the best companies across the world have more in common in their approach and what they expect in the interview process.

The following videos and booklets will.

1. Provide ideas on how to prepare and the importance of preparation.
2. Share common best practice and lessons learnt.
3. Explain the different types of interview questions and how to answer them.

We aim to help by bringing our experience of working with customers who have successfully interviewed with many of the world's leading IT, Finance, Consultancy, Manufacturing companies globally plus many others.

The first interview will often be with a member of HR team or a recruiter who is not an expert in the work you do, they have the job advertisement and are simply trying to understand which candidates they should recommend the Hiring Manager interviews.

A Hiring Manager is looking for answers to the same questions and will often go into more depth, asking additional questions, interviewers want to understand.

Are you able to do the job?

*They want to understand from your answers whether that you have the skills, relevant experience and any specific achievements.*



**Would you be able to manage or fit in with a specific team?"**

*They will assess whether you are a good fit with the people you would work with.*

**Would you fit in with the company's culture?**

*They want to know whether you are able to and suited to working the way the company likes to work.*

**Do you really want the job?**

*They want to know whether you really want the job.*

## **The Purpose of Interviews for Candidates**

The interview is your chance to connect, present yourself and show you are the best person for the position. Many candidates sit back and in effect let the interview simply happen hoping that the interviewer asks the questions they want to answer and hope that the interviewer gives them an opportunity to share their successes and skills – this approach rarely works.

**What should you show?**

**1. Show you able to do the job**

*How will you make sure you can show your skills, relevant experience and any achievements?*

**2. Show you able to manage or fit in with the team**

*How will you explain what type of person you are plus why you are a good match for the position you are applying for in your answers?*

**3. Show can fit in with the company's culture**

*You have researched their company culture - how can you show you are able to and are suited to the way they work?*

**4. Show you really want the job**

*How will you show your motivation and commitment is both genuine and will last?*



## **Mistakes Many Candidates Make**

**Many candidates believe that they can not or do not need to prepare for interviews. Actually preparation significantly improves your chances of offer and the interviewers' assessment of your suitability.**

**Many candidates do not take an interview seriously if it is an opening interview with a member of the HR team or a recruiter.**

**But most Hiring Managers trust the opinion of recruiters and HR staff believing they are as good or even better at spotting good candidates.**

**Many candidates assume that just because something is written on their cv the interviewer is aware of it.**

**In reality Interviewers often have many cvs, can get candidates mixed up and do not read each cv carefully.**

**Many candidates believe that because they were invited for an interview by the company or a recruiter they do not have to sell themselves in the interview.**

**The company might have invited you but you do not know how many other people they invited – remember the others might present themselves effectively.**

**Many candidates expect the interviewer to find the candidates selling points plus the areas in which they are stronger than the other candidates.**

**Candidates who are well prepared are ready and prepared to use the best stories from their past when opportunities arise.**

**The employer has 2 questions to answer, firstly which applicant do they offer the position to and secondly what salary do they offer. It might be that a candidate is selected to be offered the job but if they have not presented themselves effectively the salary will often be at the bottom of the salary range. Because they have not effectively shown their skills, achievements and experience in the interview process they are then in a weak position if trying to negotiate a better salary.**



## Types of Interview Questions

Each type of question is featured in its own presentation during this series, you can prepare for each to differing levels and the series will hopefully provide you with some useful tips.

**1. Opening and traditional questions – these have been around for many years but are becoming less relevant.**

**2. Competency / behavioural questions - these questions are often the most important in interviews, the world's leading companies expect you to answer these in a specific way and you can prepare and practice for them.**

**3. Hypothetical questions - these questions aim to understand what you would do in a hypothetical situation in the future if they employ you.**

**4. Questions about the Company and industry**

**Employers want to know if you understand their company's vision, culture and any relevant current news about them plus what is going on in the sector.**

**5. Questions you ask the interviewer**

**Interviewers expect you to have questions that are thought through and are a good opportunity for you to show what is important to you.**



### Some Guidance from Doing Business In English

Please remember the employer has a choice of alternative candidates or simply employing nobody. Globally companies are becoming more careful and thorough in the interview process to ensure that they are recruiting the best and suitable people. Candidates only get one chance, candidates that prepare plus make the best of the opportunity to present themselves effectively are always more successful.

Stop thinking the company is interviewing you! Start thinking you are being given a chance to show that you are the best and most suitable candidate. Ask yourself are you committed to doing the work to win?

Remember – make sure you are really clear on why you are looking for a new job, never forget this and constantly remind yourself as you go through the job search, only you are able to maintain your motivation.

Understand - ensure you understand everything in the job advertisement.

Research - find all the relevant information about the company and sector that you can.

Prepare - it is not possible to prepare for everything but preparation improves your chances of success and how valuable the employer believes you are.

Practice - practice as much as possible, do not practice until you get it correct – practice until you can not get it wrong.

Overcome - accept there will be setbacks that will feel like personal rejection – improvise, adapt and overcome every challenge.

Believe - believe in yourself, if you do not nobody else will.

Securing a new job is not easy, actually it is not meant to be easy but the best and most suitable candidates should never fear the process as it is there to give them a chance to show their value to the employer.

## Opening Interview Questions

These questions are often used to open the interview, the interviewer is often simply giving the candidate a chance to speak about a subject they know and understand their accent.

1. "Tell us about yourself"
2. "Talk us through what you are doing in your current position."
3. "Talk us through your employment history."

Most interviewers ask opening questions, these 3 questions are common so should be prepared. Following are some examples of answers, candidates must try and assess how detailed an answer the interviewer wants, if the interview has been booked for an hour then a longer answer can be given than 30 mins and started late. The candidate must remember that the interviewer has the candidates' cv so answers should offer something additional, put events in context or explain the 'why' not the 'what'.

## 1 "Tell us about yourself"

The interviewer is often asking this question to simply get you talking, understand your pronunciation / accent and get the communication started. Give a pitch—one that is concise and compelling plus shows exactly why you are the right fit for the job. Start off with the 2 or 3 specific accomplishments or experiences that you most want the interviewer to know about, then finish by talking about how that previous experience has positioned you for this specific role.

A standard answer for this can be prepared but then must be adapted for each interview - the first question is your first opportunity to make a great impression and possibly the most important.

### Model answer - "Tell us about yourself"

“After graduating with a degree in computer science I joined an It Consultancy company where I worked on several projects creating apps as a front-end engineer. I was ambitious so took further training and became a full stack engineer which enabled me to take more responsibility in some really innovative projects.

In my late 20s I realised I wanted to join a start up and make more complex apps that could also benefit society so I joined GreenTech where I worked as a full stack engineer before being promoted to Tech Lead following delivery of 2 apps that within a year were both very profitable and had over a million users.

I am now looking for a new challenge in which I can help develop great innovative products plus develop engineers and the tech they use when working. I would like to do this as part of a company with great values, vision and purpose such as yours.”

When answering mention specific achievements, in this example for example creating an app and also use numbers eg a million users, plus make sure you finish with a strong sentence.

2 "Please talk us through what you are doing in your current position."

Summarise your duties and responsibilities. - make sure what you mention is relevant to the job you are applying for

Summarise a key relevant achievement – use an achievement that connects in some way with the job you are applying for

Summarise why you are looking for / are open to a new opportunity – give a clear reason for why you are ready for a new position or looking for a new position  
(Answer length 6-9 sentences / 90-135 words)

Model answer - "Please talk us through what you are doing in your current position."

"In my current role as Tech Lead I work with 4 engineering teams each lead by a product manager. The teams are working on creating 1 app and the upgrade of another. The work involves adopting new programming languages, new ways of working and constantly meeting tight deadlines. I focus on 2 areas that can be split into tech and people responsibilities.

Firstly, I help the team with problem solving and improving how they work technically when they require it, which happens on an adhoc basis, but my main tech focus is on the introduction of new tech. I am constantly introducing new tech and how to use existing tech more effectively, I attend customer meetings to understand expectations clearly and also attend team meetings when appropriate. This work is team and work focused.

Secondly, I am responsible for the ongoing training and performance of engineers. I have monthly 1-1 meetings with each engineer in which I try to provide a mix of support, guidance and motivation. In additional I work with engineers on their personal development plans, this is something I really enjoy and in which I am developing my skills. Over the past 2 years the teams and individuals have grown and matured, in addition the work will focus on optimization and user growth.

I am now looking for a new opportunity in which I can help develop engineers, create effective teams and build innovative apps."

### 3 "Talk us through your employment history."

Summarise key moves, promotions and qualifications – think of what is really of interest to the interviewer

Summarise what you are looking for next – summarise positively what you want next in your career

(Answer length 6-9 sentences / 90-135 words)

Model answer - "Talk us through your employment history."

" Talk us through your employment history."

"After graduating I was not sure what type of IT company I wanted to join, I secured a position in T2 IT Consultancy where I could work on a range of projects. In this position I discovered my love of developing apps, developed from a front-end engineer to a full stack engineer. I was very fortunate in my time, taking more responsibility and was approached by a number of companies to join them including several companies that were customers and collaborating companies.

During my time at T2 I realized I wanted to join a purposeful start up and make more complex apps, I joined GreenTech where I was later promoted to Tech Lead. As a lead I developed my management skills, I still love developing apps but in this role I have developed my leading, coaching, and collaborating skills which I want to develop further.

I am now looking for a new challenge, developing engineers and the tech they use to solve problems and innovate."

## Traditional Questions

There are 2 types of traditional questions, in one type your aim is to explain and provide information and in the other you are going to sell what you have achieved, your skills and experience.

Type 1 - to answer you are *explaining*

Type 2 - to answer you are *selling*

Traditional Question – Explaining types of question

1. *"What are your development areas and / or weaknesses?"*
2. *"Why do you want to leave your current company?"*
3. *"Discuss your educational background."*
4. *"What are your career goals?"*
5. *"What do you do in your spare time? in your spare time?"*

Here we have some questions that require an explaining approach - With these questions you are aiming to explain and provide useful relevant information that support your application. Please try and use every question to develop your credibility and suitability for the position.

## Example of an Explaining Answer

1. *"What are your development areas and / or weaknesses?"*

(This is often the most feared question in an interview)

Development area = something you want to get better at, you might be ok at it currently and want to get better or you are good and want to be great.

(this is a good opportunity to show ambition and / or a desire to continually improve)

Example - *"I have spent a lot of time developing my technical skills throughout my career, in the last year I have started managing a team and now I would like to develop the ability to coach and mentor them."*

Weakness = something you are not good enough at for the job and that is a potential problem.

(be careful - review the job description / advertisement and make sure you do not select anything that is either critical or important for the job)

Example - *"I am very customer focussed, when the customer has an urgent requirement or we have let them down, I can be very demanding with my team mates. I am learning to improve this but I still must focus on this."*

If you feel confident you can pick a weakness that they might actually see as a strength this can often work but please be very careful if doing this.

## Traditional Question - Explaining Ideas

Try and answer within 75 - 100 words subject to the complexity of the question plus remember the interviewer has your cv.

### 2. *"Why do you want to leave your current company?"*

What have you achieved / what do you want / why do you want or need to leave

(answer positively, show ambition, wanting responsibility and career development)

### 3. *"Discuss your educational background."*

Why did you do that type of degree / what learnt at university that is relevant to the job / what have studied since

(Do not read from the cv - focus on what is relevant to the job for examples subjects you studied and any relevant skills you developed)

### 4. *"What are your career goals?"*

Short term goals / longer term goals / why do you have them?

(Ensure relevant for the application – do not say you want the hiring manager's job – instead talk about wanting more responsibilities, new tasks and challenges)

### 5. *"What do you do in your spare time?"*

Hobbies / sports / personal development

(Think about the type of person they want – if the company is looking for dynamic people at work they probably want people who are dynamic in their own time)

## Traditional Questions - Selling

1. "What are your strengths?"
2. "Why are you interested in working for our company?"
3. "Why should we hire you?"
4. "What specifically can you offer us that someone else can not?"
5. "Why are you looking for a new job?"
6. "What motivates you?"

These questions are very common, you should be ready to answer them and use them as an opportunity to share key achievements, skills and experience. Cross reference the job description and identify what exactly the company is looking for – try to use every question to show your suitability.

## Type 2 - Selling Question Structure

We have put together a framework – it is not always easy to keep to the number of words but please try to unless you have a particularly powerful point to make.

Create an overview – 3 selling points and then summarise.

### 1 Overview

*"I believe / I am / I have x, y and z."* (1 Sentence / 15-20 words)

### 2 Selling Points

*"Firstly X I ....."* (1 Sentence / 15-20 words)

*"Secondly Y I ....."* (1 Sentence / 15-20 words)

*"Thirdly Z I ....."* (1 Sentence / 15-20 words)

### 3 Summary

*"These strengths / skills / experiences / achievements / qualifications ....."*  
(1 Sentence / 15-20 words)

## Type 2 - Selling Structure Example

### 1. "What are your strengths?" or "Why should we employ you?"

The example shown here is an answer to – "What are your strengths that are relevant for this position as an IT Project Manager?"

*"I believe I have a combination of Project Manager training, experience working in IT teams and achievements delivering projects.*

*Firstly I completed my Project Management training with PMI and then many courses on different types of project management and skills for project management.*

*Secondly I have worked as both a Project Manager and Scrum Master delivering many different types of projects in 3 IT companies for 9 years.*

*Thirdly during my career I have delivered complex projects that have ranged for innovation, improving processes and measuring performance plus several that are similar to the work being discussed for this position.*

*In summary I think I have the skills, relevant experience and achievements for this position."*

Always pause before answering to show you have listened to the interviewer's question, emphasize firstly / secondly and thirdly, use numbers, then finish strongly!

## Type 2 - Selling Questions Ideas

### 2. *"Why are you interested in working for our company?"*

The specific job and work / the company's values, purpose and vision / what you can contribute in the role

What is it that you like about the work and role, is there anything about the company that inspires you and what do you think you can add to the company?

### 3. *"Why should we hire you?"*

Why you can do the job / why you want the job / what you will contribute

Highlight your ability, track record, motivation and specifically the value you can bring.

### 4. *"What specifically can you offer us that someone else can not?"*

A specific key skill / a specific relevant achievement / a specific key responsibility

Assess your selling points and give a clear answer that shows your suitability, value and connects with the interviewer.

### 5. *"Why are you looking for a new job?"*

How you want to develop / challenge / contribute

Be genuine and consider what type of person the company are looking for – make sure you are positive in everything you say.

### 6. *"What motivates you?"*

In your career / in yourself / value you want to create

Be careful – do not say money or other people are what motivates you. Show you are self-motivated - answers such as being successful, creating great products and helping others are most effective.

## What is a Competency Based Interview Question?

Competency questions have become the dominant type of question for many of the world's leading companies. Amazon only ask competency questions in their opening interviews and many others simply tell you when they invite you be ready to answer this type of question.

Competency based interview questions are phrased in several ways however they normally start with words such as;

*"Tell me about a time when..."*

*"Describe a situation when..."*

*"Talk me through a situation when..."*

*"Describe a situation when..."*

These are often the questions that determine which candidates are selected.

The aim of these questions is to give you a chance to explain something that has actually happened in the past and demonstrate your skills, achievements and ability.

These questions can be prepared for and actually you must prepare and practice to give yourself the best chance of success.

## Common Competency Interview Questions

The questions cover many areas of your experience, skills you have used and frankly many feel like a trap!

1. *"Tell us about your greatest achievement?"*
2. *"What was your greatest failure and how did you learn from it?"*
3. *"Tell me when you have been part of creating an important product, process, plan or project."*
4. *"Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult customer."*
5. *"Talk me through a time when you found a way to work with a difficult colleague."*
6. *"Tell me about an experience of handling a difficult stakeholder."*
7. *"Describe a situation where you overcame a challenge or crisis."*
8. *"Tell me about the biggest change you have had to deal with."*
9. *"Tell me about one of your favorite experiences working with a team and the contributions you made."*

There is no way of knowing which questions they will ask – but by analyzing the job advertisement you can often predict what type of competency questions they will ask. Do your homework and your chances of performing well and significantly better.

## The STAR Interview Structure

Companies expect an answer in the STAR structure as shown below;

**SITUATION** - what was the situation?

**TASK** - what were you expected to do, how and what challenges did you face?

**ACTION** - what you did and how did you do it?

**RESULT** - what did achieve, measured by what and what value was it?

When explaining the result try and use numbers to quantify your actions eg reduced waste by 10% and the result eg resulting in an increase of profits by 5%. Another example could be reduced coding errors by 20% which resulted in launching the product 4 weeks early.

When trying to prepare the first step is to identify the best situations from your past – think about

## How to Answer a Competency Question

Many companies such as Amazon, Microsoft and others will let you know when they are inviting you to be ready to answer this way and others will expect you to know.

Situation 2-3 sentences (up to 45 words) - 15% of the answer

Task 2-3 sentences (up to 45 words) - 15% of the answer

Action 6-10 sentences (up to 110-150 words) - 55% of the answer

Result 2-3 sentences (up to 45 words) - 15% of the answer

In most answers the *situation* and *task* are not within your power so the Hiring Manager will not be impressed by them. Be careful to summarise and move to the *Action*.

The *action* is the critical section as that is what you did and what the Hiring Manager will be buying if they select you, so make sure this is the main part of your answer.

The *result* is important as the Hiring Manager will want to understand the impact of the *action* and how you evaluate the value of your *action*.

## Competency Interview Question Example

### 1. "What is your greatest achievement?"

*(Star) "Whilst I was working as Product Manager at Zerco we were asked to create a new app for one of the company's largest customers using new software and integration tools.*

*(Task) We were expected to convince the customer we could deliver a great product within 4 weeks otherwise the customer would talk to our competitor about making it.*

*(Action) We decided to make a MVP, using feedback from the Product Manager we understood the key requirements for convincing the customer and focused on them, nothing else.*

*To understand both the software and integration I arranged for 2 engineers to get some training from a Tech Lead in another division of the company. We ensured that the Product manager could carefully manage the expectations of the customer and at the same time take on their reservations such that we could prove we could overcome any issues.*

*At one point when we were under extreme pressure we had to adopt some extreme programming techniques, at this time I made sure I supported and motivated the team. Before the presentation to the customer we rehearsed the meeting and prepared for all types of questions that could be asked.*

*(Result) The result was a great meeting with the customer, we were able to present a MVP that convinced them and answered their questions effectively that resulted in us securing a very significant project for the company."*

When possible use numbers to show what you improved and the value achieved, if this breaches the confidentiality of a previous employer use adjectives. For example we achieved an increase in quality, speed or sales of more than a percentage figure or use phrases such as on time, within budget or quality expectations of stakeholders. Competency questions are commonly the questions that decide who gets the offer – so prepare and use the job description to try and predict what they will ask.

## Preparation

Competency questions can be asked in many different ways – so preparing precise answers is not an effective approach.

But there are steps that you can take that will help you remember the best of your achievements in your career and then practice putting together answers.

The first thing to do is try and identify all the key points in your career -

### **1 Situation**

- challenges, projects, achievements, teams, learning, crisis and innovation.

Then try and clearly identify the task in clear simple language and where possible use numbers to identify the result that was wanted.

### **2 Tasks often involve**

- build, solve, create, design, lead, present, convince, sell or understand

### **3 Action – what did you actually do?**

- identify 5 verbs that explain 5 steps or actions

### **4 Result – be clear and specific**

- identify result and explain with numbers and/or adjectives

## Alternatives to the STAR method

The most common method for answering behavioural and competency questions is the STAR method but there are alternatives. Many companies will state clearly they expect candidates to use the STAR method, if that is the case then there is no point adopting an alternative.

### STAR versus SOAR versus PAR versus DIGS

#### STAR

S – Situation T – Task A – Action R – Result

SOAR – good when showing handling problems and being aware of the impact

S – Situation O – Obstacle A – Action R – Result

CAR – good for simple short answers

C – Context A – Action R – Result

STAR+L – good when showing continual learning or the ability to learn is important

S – Situation T – Task A – Action R – Result L – Learnings

SPAR or PAR – good for explaining problems and can be shortened to PAR

S – Situation P – Problem A – Action R – Result

DIGS – for emphasizing the situation and communicating the impact as well as results

D - Dramatize I - Indicate G - Go S – Summarize

SCARF – good when feedback is important

Situation, Challenge, Action, Result, and Feedback

STARI – good when delivering results is key

S – Situation T – Task A – Action R – Result I – Impact

PARADE – a detailed approach for explaining complex scenarios

P – Problem A – Anticipated consequence R – Role A – Action D – Decision E – Evaluation

## 2 Hypothetical Interview Questions

Hypothetical interviews are questions in which the interviewer puts you in an imaginary situation and wants to assess how you would handle that situation.

You must assess the situation and offer solutions on how you would handle it or have handled a similar situation in the past. There is an important point here - If you have handled a similar situation well in the past you can simply answer the question using the STAR process for competency questions (please see presentation 2 in this series).

Interviewers ask hypothetical interview questions to understand how a candidate would deal with an unexpected or difficult situation.

In a changeable world the reality is we can not plan everything so the interviewer is simulating a situation to assess what you would do.

This also allows the interviewer to see whether you would fit in with the company's culture and the way they like staff to work. Please remember what behaviour and skills the employer has highlighted they are looking for in the job advertisement.

### 3 Hypothetical Interview Questions

Hypothetical Interview questions often present problems, challenges and decision making – the interviewer wants to see how you will behave in new situations plus understand how your mind works.

The following are examples;

#### Hypothetical Interview Questions

1. *"What would you do if you had to work with a difficult coworker on a task?"*
2. *"What would you do if you were put into a situation where you were required to put in additional effort to complete a task?"*
3. *"What if I instructed you to make a change to your schedule that warranted you to prioritize a separate obligation over finishing a task at work?"*
4. *"How would you react if you had to complete a task that made you dissatisfied with your job? How would you address this with management?"*
5. *"How do you plan on working on a large-scale objective that greatly affects the success of the company?"*
6. *"How would you respond to a problem that you discovered?"*

### 4 Hypothetical Interview Questions

7. *"What if you were expected to work with a tough client or manager on a task?"*
8. *"How would you make a great impression with a client during a meeting?"*
9. *"Tell me the way you would manage a large workload."*
10. *"How would you approach working on a long-term project that needed to be completed by the end of the quarter?"*
11. *"If I told you that you failed, what would be your first reaction?"*
12. *"What if I told you that you had to step in for a manager to give a presentation?"*
13. *"What if a coworker is slow to respond to the information you need to carry out a certain task?"*
14. *"Do you think you could persuade a coworker to see your viewpoint about the direction of a strategy? If so, what techniques would you use to persuade them?"*

Be careful with these questions to remember what characteristics the company have mentioned they are looking for in the job advertisement – if they are looking for someone who is careful, disciplined and methodical show that in your answers.

## 5 How to Answer a Hypothetical Question

### How to Answer a Hypothetical Question

#### Type 1 Answer

*Use this when you do have a situation from the past you want to use*

- so create an answer explaining what you did.

Adapt the STAR method – so answer as a competency question - starting with

*"I had a similar situation before ....."*

#### Type 2 Answer

*Use this when you do not have a similar situation in the past that you want to use.*

- so create an answer explaining what you did.

When answering adapt the STAR method - start with *'I would .....*

- talk about a possible situation in the future

## 6 Hypothetical Question Answer Structure (1)

When you *do* have a situation from the past you want to use

- create an answer explaining what you did.

Use the STAR method - answer as a competency question - starting with

*"I had a similar situation before ....."*

**SITUATION** - what was the situation?

**TASK** - what were you expected to do, how and what challenges did you face?

**ACTION** - what you did and how did you do it?

**RESULT** - what did achieve, measured by what and what value was it?



## Hypothetical Question Answer Example (1)

*We have created an example here of how to answer a hypothetical situation using an example from a previous experience.*

*"What would you do if you had to work with a difficult coworker on a task?"*

*(Situation) "I tried to approach the situation positively, I really tried to understand their personality and sensitivities plus be sensitive to them."*

*(Task) I made a conscious effort to work well with them and actually I decided to treat it as a challenge to build a really great working relationship."*

*(Action) At the beginning of the task I arranged a meeting with the coworker to discuss the task, share understanding, expectations of each other, ideas and then agree a plan. I made sure I was prepared for the meeting, I started with clear questions, was ready to explain my views and constantly looked for win wins. I was open, actively listened and receptive whilst also demonstrating my knowledge, views and defending them. Throughout the task I made sure we tracked and discussed progress, milestones and mini goals through a mix of daily quick reviews and planned weekly meetings. I tried to be conscious of being approachable and open to new ways of doing things.*

*(Result) I would aim to achieve the results required for the task in terms of quality and deadline plus would also look to achieve progress in making a good working relationship with the coworker."*

Most hypothetical questions are based on situations where there is a challenge, problem or difficult decision to make – be careful to be positive and make sure the focus of your answer is the action.

## 8 Hypothetical Question Answer Structure (2)

When you *do not* have a situation from the past you want to use  
- create an answer about explaining what you think you would do.

Adapt the STAR method - answer hypothetically - using

"Given ..... (the situation) and the requirement to .....(the task)

I *would* ..... (actions) and I *would* expect to achieve ..... (the result)"

Adapt the STAR method

**SITUATION** Summarise the situation from the question – 15% of the answer

**TASK** Clarify what the task would be – 15% of the answer

**ACTION** Explain what action you would take – 55% of the answer

**RESULT** Explain what result you would try to achieve, how it would be measured and the value it would create – 15% of the answer

## 9 Hypothetical Question Answer Example (2)

*"What would you do if you had to work with a difficult coworker on a task?"*

*(Situation) "Given I would have to work with this coworker I would try to understand their personality and sensitivities plus be sensitive to them."*

*(Task) I would make a conscious effort to work well with them and possibly treat it as a challenge to build a really great working relationship."*

*(Action) At the start of the task I would arrange a meeting with the coworker to discuss the task, share understanding, expectations of each other, ideas and then agree a plan. I would make sure I am prepared for this meeting, start with clear questions, be ready to explain my views and look for win wins. I would be open, listen and receptive whilst also demonstrating my knowledge, views and defending them. Throughout the task I would make sure we would track and discuss progress, milestones and mini goals through either daily quick reviews and / or structured weekly meetings. I would also try to be more conscious of being approachable and open to new ways of doing things.*

*(Result) I would aim to achieve the results required for the task in terms of quality and deadline plus would also look to achieve progress in making a good working relationship with the coworker."*

Most hypothetical questions are based on situations where there is a challenge, problem or difficult decision to make – be careful to be positive and make sure the focus of your answer is on the action.

## Company & Business Sector Questions

Interviewers very often want to know what you know about their company and the business sector because they want to know;

- Have done your research and are you taking the application process seriously?
- Do you really understand the company's business model, its past and present strengths?
- Can you explain what has happened in the sector in the past 5 years, happening now and is likely to happen in the next 5 years?
- Are you able to explain the key factors affecting the sector plus demonstrate an insight into why changes are happening and how companies will adapt?

Most importantly please remember - Employers want to know whether you approach the process of applying to a new company in a professional way. Most potential employers will judge how you approach the interviews as an example of how you would approach working for them

## Preparation - Company SWOT Analysis

Conduct a SWOT analysis of the company you are trying to join. Research the answers using the company's website, industry publications, the news, generally on the internet and through your network. Be careful to use data and factual records rather than anecdotal reports and personal opinions.

The questions you are trying to answer are;

What are the Strengths of the company? These could be its finances, brands, products, people and processes for example.

What are the Weaknesses of the company? These could for example be the strength of competitors, bad reputation or unreliable products

What are the company's Opportunities – these can be specific to the company or the business sector they are in so for example could be a growing economy, new technology and social trends.

What Threats does the company face? - these can be specific to the company or the business sector they are in so for example could be an economic slowdown, new government laws and new competitors entering the market.

When preparing your answer consider the past, present and potential future as this shows a complete understanding of the company.

### Company SWOT Analysis Example

By identifying at least 3 points for each section of the analysis a candidate can develop a very clear overview of the company, it is unlikely that an interviewer will ask the candidate if they have completed a SWOT analysis but by going through this process the candidate should be ready to answer most company questions.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>Proximity and relationships with suppliers.</p> <p>No debt and positive cash flow.</p> <p>A USP that customers understand and remember.</p>	<p>All raw materials are shipped from other countries as shipping is affected by global conflicts.</p> <p>Currently a single customer accounts for 45% of all business.</p> <p>Some negative feedback on the current branding being out-dated.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>Potential investors are taking an interest in the business.</p> <p>Customers are growing rapidly and potentially expanding product requirements to cover other products the business can supply.</p> <p>Products are increasingly becoming more fashionable / relevant to more consumers – seen as on trend.</p>	<p>Risk of a recession is decreasing consumer spending.</p> <p>New foreign companies are actively trialing their concepts in the market.</p> <p>New technology is likely to be launched that competitors will likely adopt.</p>

### Questions that could be asked

- 1 "Please tell us, what do you know about our business?"
- 2 "In addition, what do you know about the history of our business?"
- 3 "What do you know about the culture and values of our business?"
- 4 "Please explain what you know about the vision, mission and purpose of our business?"
- 5 "In your opinion, what challenges and opportunities does our business face?"
- 6 "What do you think of the customer experience when they buy from us? Why do you think they choose us?"
- 7 "Please share what you know about our products and services?"
- 8 "How do you think we could improve any of our products and services?"
- 9 "In your opinion, who are the primary competitors of our organization? What is your assessment of them?"
- 10 "How do you think our business will have to change in the next 5-10 years? What opportunities are there?"

### Preparation - PESTEL Analysis of the Business Sector

Knowledge of the sector the company works in is important for every application and for more senior positions can be critical – demonstrating a professional level of understanding and being able to communicate it can give you a considerable advantage in the interview process.

Conduct a PESTEL analysis of the sector the company is within. Research the answers using the websites of industry analysts, industry publications, the news, generally on the internet and through your network. Be careful to use data and factual records rather than anecdotal reports and personal opinions.

Consider the Political, Economic, Social, Technology, Environmental and Legal aspects and trends within the business sector. When preparing your answer consider the past, present and potential future.

POLITICAL	ECONOMIC	SOCIOCULTURAL	TECHNOLOGICAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	LEGAL
<p>Political stability</p> <p>Pro-business government</p> <p>Stable employment law</p>	<p>Stable economy (tax, currency &amp; inflation)</p> <p>Interest rates low for 3 years</p>	<p>Many existing customers are older workers (50-65 years old)</p> <p>For 5 years 80% of customers are men in white collar jobs</p>	<p>Transition from website to app use started</p> <p>Very few opportunities for digitalization</p>	<p>Existing customers have no environmental expectations</p> <p>No regulations on materials used</p>	<p>Strong laws to defend intellectual property</p> <p>Consumer laws commonly not known</p>

By identifying at least 2 points for each section of the analysis a candidate can develop a very clear overview of the business sector, it is unlikely that an interviewer will ask the candidate if they have completed a PESTEL analysis but by going through this process you should be ready to answer most questions.

### Expectations of Interviewers on Company and Industry Questions

Please be aware the interviewer will expect you to be aware of anything that is on their corporate website, their B2C website and anything that comes up in google searches about them. If the company has been in the news recently, they might also ask specific questions that refer to current events. The interviewer will expect you to be aware of any common topics that come up in google searches about the industry.

#### Company Questions

*Always consider*

1. The company's history, current position and probable future.
2. The company's customers
3. The company's range of products and services.

#### Industry Questions

*Always consider*

1. The market the company has worked in, does work in and will work in.
2. Customers' expectations.
3. The products and services in the industry and how they have changed and will change in the future.

### Suggested answer length

90-125 words for more simplistic questions

150-200 words for more complex questions and more senior interviews

When giving a longer answer please make sure you start by paraphrasing the question, making your points clearly and then give a conclusion at the end.

### Checklist for Questions to Ask

#### *Do your research*

Know the Job description, company and what is going on in the business sector.

#### *Prepare*

You need to ask 1 or 2 questions; the interviewer will often cover 1 or 2 before you get the chance to ask so prepare 4 in advance.

#### *Appropriate and Relevant*

Make sure your questions are appropriate to the position and who is interviewing you.

#### *Interesting*

Ensure the question is interesting and ensure the answer is not available in the job description, on the web, in information provided by the company or the company's website.

#### *Positive*

Normally, you will be asked if you have any questions at the end of the interview, good questions make the interviewer can speak positively and the interview finishes with a positive feeling.

The quality of the questions you ask will often be a major part of the interviewer's assessment of your suitability – treat questions as an opportunity to demonstrate your approach and level of interest in the company.



## Questions to Ask HR Recruiters

Recruiters will often have limited knowledge of some aspects of the job so be careful to ask questions that the recruiter can realistically be expected to answer. There are some examples here – you can pause the presentation to consider them.

1. "Who does the role report to and can you tell me anything about that person?"
2. "What 3 specific things are the key to success in the role?"
3. "How long has this job been vacant and why?"
4. "Is somebody currently still in this role and do you know why the position has become available?"
5. "Is the company also considering internal candidates?"
6. "What is involved in the interview process and decision-making in the application process?"
7. "The advertisement states the salary is 'competitive.' What do you think the range is?"
8. "Have you placed anyone with this company before and if so what was their experience with this company?"

## Questions to Ask Hiring Managers

Here are a few questions you could ask – please be careful the answer has not been given in the interview or any information provided by the employer.

1. "What do you expect the successful applicant to achieve in the first 6 months and then also in the first year?"
2. "What's the greatest challenge for the person who gets the job?"
3. "What's the biggest opportunity for the candidate who gets the role?"
4. "What does success in this position look like?"
5. "Please can you describe the team that the successful candidate will join?"
6. "What type of person will work well as part of this team?"
7. "Why do you like working as part of this company?"



## Questions for Hiring Managers

The first step is to really understand the *opportunities* and *possibilities*;

Questions you need to ask yourself first

- Could this be the best and most suitable next step for your career?
- Is this the best company where you can build the next step in your career?
- Is this the best team to join and manager to report to?
- What specifically do you need to know from the interview process?
- What do you want from this position and how can you be sure it is available?

**Opportunities** - questions relating to the first year in the job.

Most hiring managers should be able to answer questions on what will happen in the first year and they are expected to use this opportunity to give a clear honest answer.

"What are some of the big challenges the person hired will need to address?"

"What are the key problems that need fixing?"

"How does the job fit with the company's goals and overall strategy?"

"What help does the team need on a day to day basis?"

"How do you like your employees to report in to you?"

"What changes do you see coming in the next year in this business sector, what are the threats and opportunities?" (Be ready the Hiring Manager will ask your opinion if you ask this)

During the interview the Hiring Manager will share details of current projects, tasks and goals, if you are confident, you can ask follow up questions on them as long as you demonstrate you have clearly listened and the question is appropriate.



***Possibilities*** - questions relating to the possible second and third years.

Some Hiring Managers (probably more senior) will be comfortable answering these clearly and with confidence whereas others will only answer generally, hypothetically or avoid answering.

Be ready to answer these if you are asking them or related questions.

"What do you think the market will be like in 3 years' time and how will your company have changed?"

"What political, technological, environmental and social factors do you think will become increasingly important to the business and sector?"

"Please can you explain what opportunities there are for training, mentoring and coaching in the company?"

"Once the work of the team is under control and delivering, are there any opportunities to get involved in additional projects and more responsibility?"

### Our Favourites

**To the Hiring Manager**

**"What advice would you give the successful applicant of their first day in the job?"**

**To HR Managers or recruiters of the company**

**"What advice would you give the successful applicant of their first day in the company?"**