



Interview Preparation

Guide + Interview
Questions and
Answers

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Interview Overview

Interviewers are continually reviewing and improving their interview process including which questions they ask but their primary goal is to discover more about you - to see the real you behind the CV. Use the interview forum below to chat about interviews with other people and get answers from our experts.

Bear in mind that most people involved in interviewing are either passionate about their company or have a lot of experience at the company. The company is looking to make sure that you have the skills required, have some common sense, the ability to learn and most of all passion in what you do and ideally in what *they* do.

They also want to know that you'll fit in - that you'll be able to work with others, that you understand yourself and thus have the ability to understand those around you. After all of that, they then want to measure levels of various traits such as focus, communication skills, team-working skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, conflict-resolution skills, creativity, time-management and planning skills *amongst others!*

The important thing to remember here about skill-levels is that it's impossible for everyone to have high levels of each, but in your interview you should aim to demonstrate how you capitalise on your strengths and minimise your weaknesses. You can minimise your weaknesses through training, past experience, team-work (i.e. getting your colleagues to help in areas you are weak), and just generally being more self-aware. The more self-aware you are, the more you'll be aware not only of your own strengths & weaknesses but also those of others around you. This will make you more attractive to employers.

Interview Preparation Guide

If you've managed to succeed at getting an interview you're well on your way to getting a job. You've passed the agency keyword filtering, you've made it past HR filtering, you've even passed the specialists cursory examination of your CV. Now it's time for the real stuff.

- Many interviewers don't decide YES straight away, but they often do decide NO quickly if something doesn't click.
- If the interview is going well, the interviewer will be thinking YES in their head. This is great, but be aware that this can turn into a NO - e.g. if they discover that you lied about something considerable on your CV. This does not happen the other way around - they never think NO and then turn that into a YES based on anything else you say.
- Commonly, interviewers have signals they give each other if the interview has turned into a NO so that they can finish the interview quickly and save themselves time.
- Be prepared to answer at depth about everything you have put on your CV.
- Talk favourably about your previous employers.
- Demonstrate passion for your chosen career.
- Show that you understand yourself - What are your biggest strengths? What are your biggest weaknesses? How do you work with others? Understand that your strengths are commonly linked to your weaknesses - this is useful when it comes to turning weaknesses into strengths e.g. if your weakness is the administration side of things it will be likely that your strengths are in keeping focused on the core of the problem at hand. Demonstrating with examples from previous positions how you understand this and how working together with others in a team you overcome your weaknesses and accentuate your strengths to the benefit of your prior employers will be a big plus in your interview.
- Provide evidence for how you are continually learning. If you are lacking in a particular skill they are looking for then use an example of another skill which you are now proficient in and how you learned that skill quickly from team mates.
- When they ask you about your weaknesses don't ever say "I'm a perfectionist" or "I work too hard". I've read on other sites people suggesting this but it's not a good idea - what it demonstrates to the interviewer is a lack of understanding of yourself and how you work with other team-mates.
- Try and highlight your strengths and demonstrate how you've overcome your personality weaknesses successfully in similar positions in the past as early as you can. The more interviews your interviewers perform the more they will get a feel for people and what strengths and weaknesses they likely have. e.g. if you come across as quiet, this could be considered a weakness for the role and you should quickly demonstrate how in fact you choose your words carefully and prefer to write things down in a careful and considered way. Use an example to demonstrate how this has been beneficial in the past in team situations involving other more vocal employees.
- Remember what the employer is looking for - likely a selection of the following: key skills for the role, a willingness to learn, the ability to focus, team-working skills, passion and an understanding of

yourself so you can work well with your manager or other managers. This last - an understanding of yourself - is what often translates into *potential*.

- Ask two or three good questions about the company or the role. You should have some left over from your company selection preparation or some may crop up in the interview itself.
- Try and wear clothes one level up from what you will be expected to wear to work on a daily basis.

Common Interview Questions

Most interviews will include some of the questions below so make sure you are ready for them by rehearsing your answers.

Why do you want to leave your current job?

It may be true that the real reason is money motivation but this should not be your answer. You should think of how the environment and challenges will differ in the new job compared to your old one and discuss that. Talk about what new challenges you are looking for, what you want to learn, what additional responsibilities you are looking for and how this fits in with your overall career plan.

What's the biggest challenge you've ever faced?

This question is a chance to highlight to an employer how you learn and adapt. Choose a difficult situation from your past work or education experience that you found tough *but that you managed to overcome*. Be prepared to elaborate on how you overcame the challenge and take the opportunity to highlight how this challenge ended up benefiting your previous employer.

What's your biggest achievement?

This interview question gives you another chance to talk about how you helped your previous employer in some way. You should ideally talk about an achievement which involved making customers happier, saving your company time or money and had tight timescales or other tight constraints. If you have no prior work experience, talk about a project of your own that you have worked on - either educational or team/sports based. You want to try and demonstrate initiative, leadership and passion in your answer.

What's your biggest strength?

You're almost certainly going to be asked this so it's important to know what your real strengths are. You can discuss skills based strengths if you like but employers are normally more keen to see how you would operate in unfamiliar situations where you don't have sector-based skills to fall back on. [Take our psychometric test](#) and produce the strengths and limitations report.

Ideally, paint a picture of a situation where you had a chance to use your strength to a previous employers advantage - again, think of how you used your strength to save your employer time or money or make their customers happy.

What's your biggest weakness?

This question will normally follow on from the strength-based question. Do not answer with "I'm a perfectionist" or "I work too hard" - these answers are transparent and you've just missed an opportunity to impress. The interviewer wants to know how self-aware you are, that you are aware

of your weaknesses and that you actively work to improve. [Take our psychometric test](#) and look at the strengths & limitations report - notice how your limitations are quite strongly linked to your strengths - i.e. if it wasn't for a particular weakness you wouldn't have a particular strength. When discussing your weakness, try and turn it around into your strength and illustrate what steps you have taken in the past to improve your weakness. You can also use this opportunity to demonstrate your team-working skills - perhaps someone else in the team didn't have this weakness and you were able to work together to produce a favourable outcome for your company.

Why do you want this job?

Hopefully you've done your research and chosen your new employer for all the right reasons. Chat about the challenges you expect to be given in your new role, how it fits in with your career path, how you are looking for the valuable experience this new role will provide. Most of all, take the opportunity this question provides to show the employer how much *passion* you have for this role. Passion impresses every employer. If you have done anything outside of work which can be related to your new role at all then you should discuss this too to provide evidence of your passion for the role.

Where do you want to be in 3 or 5 years' time?

This question sounds like a trap but it's really not - the employer wants to know that you're not randomly going from job to job and that you have an overall plan for your career. Your best answer is probably to choose a follow-on role from the one you're applying for at this company and chat about what experience and skills/knowledge you'll need to get a position like that in 3 to 5 years time. This shows overall career ambition, research and knowledge of the role and the willingness to learn and improve.

Why should we hire you?

Be passionate - discuss how the role makes use of your strengths and experience and talk about a particular part of the role you are passionate about. Don't be afraid to talk about the parts of the role you are weak in - you want the role because of your strengths in the other areas and the chance you'll get to learn and improve in these weaker areas. Big up the company too - if you know anyone who works there, name-drop them at this point by saying how highly they talk of the company and how you would love to work in a similar atmosphere. If there is something in the company's workplace that they are particularly proud of (Top 100 company in Times 100 for example) then highlight a couple of reasons from their entry in that list.

How do you handle pressure?

Our comprehensive overview report provides a section about how you react under pressure so [take our psychometric test](#) and produce that report so that you are a little more aware of how you

respond under pressure. Your ideal answer here should touch on the truth but include some words about how you stay calm, try and pinpoint the direction you should be heading in to solve the pressing problem, get others involved if need be, and focus on what needs to be done to solve the problem. You should think in relation to the job role and what they are looking for in the successful candidate - would they want you to slow down and become more deliberate and accurate under pressure or would they want you to drop everything else you're doing to focus on the one important problem? It's such an open question that the most honest answer will always be - "it depends". Feel free to use this answer and then ask them questions about what kind of pressure they are talking about - is it time pressure, pressure to be more accurate, pressure to sell more, or some other kind of pressure? You should then be able to frame your answer accordingly.

Top Interview Questions

Here's a quick run-down of the top interview questions you are likely to be asked in any interview. These top interview questions are not limited by sector and tend to be asked at most interviews.

1. Tell us about your most relevant experience for this role
2. What is your proudest achievement so far?
3. What is the most difficult situation you have had to face and how did you overcome it?
4. Why do you want to work here (or in this role)?
5. Why should we hire you?
6. Describe a situation where you didn't get along with someone
7. What is your biggest strength?
8. What is your biggest weakness?
9. Why do you want to leave your current job?
10. Where do you want to be in 3 or 5 years' time?

More top interview questions

There are other top interview questions that employers may ask which you can consider rehearsing:

- What would be your top priority in this role?
- Do you have any questions for us?
- What do you think of your previous boss?
- Tell me a little bit about yourself
- Tell me what you know about this company
- What would your co-workers say about you?
- What would your worst enemy say about you?
- How do you perform under pressure?
- Do you prefer working alone or in groups?
- Tell me about an issue you've had with a previous boss?

To learn more about yourself, take our DISC assessment test - you get a strengths and weaknesses report which is ideal preparation for your interview. We also have tons more top interview questions and career guides - try using the search box at the top of every page.

Manager Interview Questions and Answers

How long have you worked as a manager?

This question gives you a little latitude since you don't just have to say the amount of time when your title has included the word 'manager'. Think back to before you were a manager and all the different skills you picked up which allowed you to move into management, e.g. as a mentor or managing peers. The interviewer wants to know the answer to the question but they have also given you a chance to show how long you have been learning your management skills - try to demonstrate how you've always had passion for this role even before you were actually a manager. Use examples from outside of the workplace if you have to.

Describe your management style

You should already know what your preferred management style is (if you don't, take our psychometric test, there is a 'management assessment report in there which will help). Take this chance to describe how effective your particular style of management has been in the past. Are you a direct manager instructing people what to do all the time or a leader who manages by example? Are you democratic or autocratic? You can get more information on management styles here - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management_styles

What makes a good manager? Which skills are most important?

The answer here can differ per person but there are some commonalities which you should know about already if you're good at your job. A good manager is great at communicating with their team, knows how to motivate them, delegates effectively, can communicate effectively (including minimally) with their boss, understands the needs of the business, is constantly trying to improve themselves and their team, is self-aware and aware of the strengths & weaknesses of their team members amongst many other traits. If you need more help with this answer, look at your 'management assessment' report or check out this useful site - <http://www.mas.org.uk/management-advisory-service/what-makes-a-good-manager.html>

Tell me how others would describe your management style

Be honest - if you're not self-aware, become more self-aware before your interview. Think back hard to any feedback or signs you've had from employees in your previous teams and try and honestly assess what how others would describe your management style. Think not only of the people you manage, but also your fellow managers and your bosses. If you are uncertain, it would be a good idea to ask a fellow manager who you are friendly with. The interviewer is looking for a couple of things with this question - they want to see how self aware you are but they also want to see how concerned with popularity you are. It can be difficult being a manager and sometimes you have to be hard on your team and the interviewer needs to know that you're capable of being firm but

fair. Consult any of the 8 psychometric reports to increase your self-awareness to assist with this question.

How do you motivate your team?

Do you crack the whip or do you dangle carrots? Do you direct or do you lead? Do you foster open communication or do you get people just to get on with the job as they're told? Do you doll out responsibility and praise? Do you listen to your team? There's no real right or wrong answer here so long as you've had real success with your approach in the past. Evidence you can cite includes low staff turnover, low sickness rates and beating deadlines for past projects and you should take the chance this question provides to provide this concrete evidence using examples and also show your prospective employer how flexible you are as a manager.

How do you communicate with your team?

Written, verbal, email communication, team meetings, daily stand-ups, lunches, one to one meetings, team blog, ... the varieties of communication are endless. Your interviewer wants to know that you exercise the various forms of communication but also that you know how to adjust your communication style to the preferred mode of communication of your team member. Some people prefer written instructions, some prefer verbal, some prefer just direction then to be left to get on with it, some need more detail - your interviewer needs to see that you understand this in order to be able to hire you. This requires awareness of others which comes naturally after self-awareness. Again, increase your self-awareness by studying the 8 psychometric reports - particularly the How To Manage report.

How do you handle pressure placed on your team?

Everyone responds to pressure differently. Some people speed up and start missing the details although often to the benefit of getting the main piece of work done whilst others slow down and become more deliberate. Your answer to this question should probably start with 'It depends...' since how you handle the pressure will depend on the *type* of pressure that is being placed on your team. Are you being pressured to deliver more quickly, to become more accurate, to deliver better results, to sell more or what? Feel free to ask questions back at your interviewer to clarify the question and you should find the answer becomes obvious with this one.

How do you get your team focused and organised?

The interviewer is going to be expecting something to do with goal setting and regular review here. They will NOT be looking for micro-management! Ideally you can make use of team-members who have organisational skills to assist you, set short and long term goals, remove distractions from the team and speak to them with a consistent message about what the team is doing and their role in helping the team achieve that goal.

Have you ever had to fire someone and how did you deal with it?

It happens sooner or later to every manager. If you've personally never had to fire someone you should instead talk about a situation where you had to discipline a member of your team and how with regular reviews you managed to avoid the need to fire this person. For some personality types firing people is actually pretty easy, for others it can be emotional and even traumatic. There's no right or wrong way to be here, so just be honest but make it clear that you got the job done and explain how you dealt with the aftermath with the rest of your team.

Describe a situation where your management style has been challenged

This is a tricky one - probably the best approach here would be to think of a time that a peer challenged or commented on your management style. A good answer would be to describe how you could see the person's point of view and explain how you asked for more feedback and incorporated some of their recommendations into your management style. The interviewer isn't looking to see who's right or wrong here, they're looking to see that you can take criticism, learn from it and adapt.

Give an example of a successful project or role in which you were the manager

This is a big chance to sell yourself - think in terms of business success and before your interview think of a few examples in the past you can call upon. You want to be talking here about how you saved the company money, made them more money, made their customers happier or beat deadlines. You should frame your answer by relating it to your own management style and show the employer how it was because of *your particular style of management* that your previous employer benefited.

Give an example of a failed project or role in which you were the manager

Ouch. Tough question, but still a chance to impress by showing how you learned from your mistakes. Identify, using specific examples, what you did wrong as a manager and what you learned and have subsequently integrated into your management style to hopefully avoid these failures happening ever again. The failure could be anything - losing a key member of the team, missing a deadline, being over costs, requiring more people than you originally thought, anything really. Probably surprisingly, one of the best answers here would be admitting a project failure where you had to cut your losses and abandon the project. It takes real guts, self awareness, introspection and confidence to go to your boss and tell them that this project is not going to work. Remember, most interviewers will be aware that managers learn more from their mistakes than their successes so this gives you a chance to talk about key learnings you've had in your managerial career.

Give an example of how you dealt with an underperforming employee

This depends on your management style again but no employer wants underperforming employees so they need to know you know how to handle it. You can also demonstrate here how you

understand the impact that an underperforming employee has on the good employees around them as well as the weighing up you have to do against the negative impact disciplining and then firing the employee is going to have. Underperforming employees pull down the rest of the team with good members of your team covering for them and therefore getting less of their own work done.

Give an example of how you handled an employee who was excelling at everything they did

Did you keep them in the team or promote them (or recommend them for promotion)? Did you give them more responsibility? Did you chat to them about their future and ensure you kept them motivated? Did you use them to mentor others? How did you achieve all of this without impacting their productivity?

Give an example of where you had to manage change

People handle change differently - some hate it some love it but as their manager were you aware of the differences? In change, communication is key so make sure you elaborate on your communication methods before, during and after the change.

How do you review performance?

The tools you used may have been dictated by your previous employers but you should also take the chance here to show your interviewer how you knew each of your team members personally. They will want to know that you have knowledge and practice of the various performance review tools but also that you are fair, impartial and honest. You could take a specific example here of one of your employees who was mediocre and demonstrate how you used the review process to help them identify their own areas of improvement and how you then helped this improvement come about.

Here are some more management interview questions for you to consider:

- How do you delegate tasks to your team members?
- How do you train, coach and improve your team?
- Describe the most difficult management decision you've had to make in the past
- What's the biggest misconception others have had about you as a manager?
- What is your biggest weakness as a manager?
- What is your biggest strength as a manager?
- How do you go about improving yourself as a manager?

Remember, we have psychometrics at Matiogi and you should use these to become as self-aware as possible prior to your interview. Managers should use the 'Overview' report, the 'Management Assessment' report, the 'Strengths and Limitations' report and the 'How to Manage' reports.