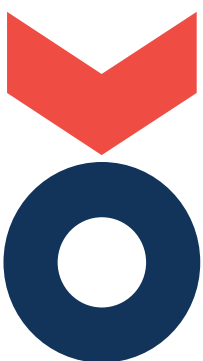


Interview questions

If it's been a while since you last went for an interview, or you'd like to brush up on your technique, this guide can help you. It takes you through common interview questions, how to use the STAR method to answer interview questions and also suggests things you could ask your prospective employer.

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OSCAR KILO

Common interview questions, and how best to answer them:

“Tell me about yourself.”

This question is one of the most traditional opening questions, partly because your interviewers want to get to know the real you and uncover how you cope in a stressful situation like an interview.

You're being given some freedom in how to answer this as it's an open question. Try to share relevant and specific information, and try not fall into the trap of sharing your whole life story.

Keep your answer short and try not to swerve off topic.

Your answer should be between two and four minutes long, and briefly mention your education, relevant skills, training, and experience.

“What are your weaknesses?”

Use this assessment question to turn your weaknesses in to a strength, or to show that you are working on improving yourself. Don't answer by saying that you have none, as we all have strengths and weaknesses, and one person may perceive what you believe may be a weakness as indeed a strength.

Sample Answer: Michael Cheary, Writer from Reed suggests the following sample answer to this assessment question.

“I used to find it difficult to work on simultaneous projects, preferring to finish on one task before starting another. However, since taking a time management course recently, I've learnt how to manage my

schedule more effectively, making it easier to multi-task when necessary.”

“Why should you get this job?”

This is a huge opportunity for you to really sell you, your skillsets and expertise during the interview. A well-rehearsed and prepared elevator pitch to demonstrate why you want the position and why you are the perfect candidate for the role is advised for this assessment question. It is recommended that use the job description and person specification to help you create this answer. Use these to 'sell' you back to them. The company have created a need so use their words and terminology to sell them back you. You need to position yourself as the perfect person to achieve the objectives they have specified and have the demonstrable skills and experience to deliver against their requirements.

Sample Answer: “From our conversation, you're looking to A' (or 'having a problem with A'). In the past I have demonstrated A, B and C (experience and your main strengths), which have really helped my current employer'.

“What are your salary expectations?”

It is recommended at interview to never discuss or bring up salary to the interviewer in the first instance. However, when researching and preparing for your interview always come with a broad benchmark range in your mind of what you are expecting to earn.

If you have applied for a role speculatively, you may not have not clear salary and package details. Research the Reed, Indeed,

Glassdoor or other websites for more information. Reed has its own salary checker webpage which is a very good place to start, which is [reed.co.uk/average-salary](https://www.reed.co.uk/average-salary).

Also research similar salary packages for individuals in the same profession or industry sector on job advertisements. As mentioned above it's never recommended at the early stages of the interview process to discuss package and salary or to begin negotiations, particularly at telephone, video, assessment centre stage or first stage interview. However, if the potential employer or interviewer brings it up, give your salary range, give a broad (but realistic) answer, for example, "I'm looking for a starting salary somewhere between £25,000 and £30,000".

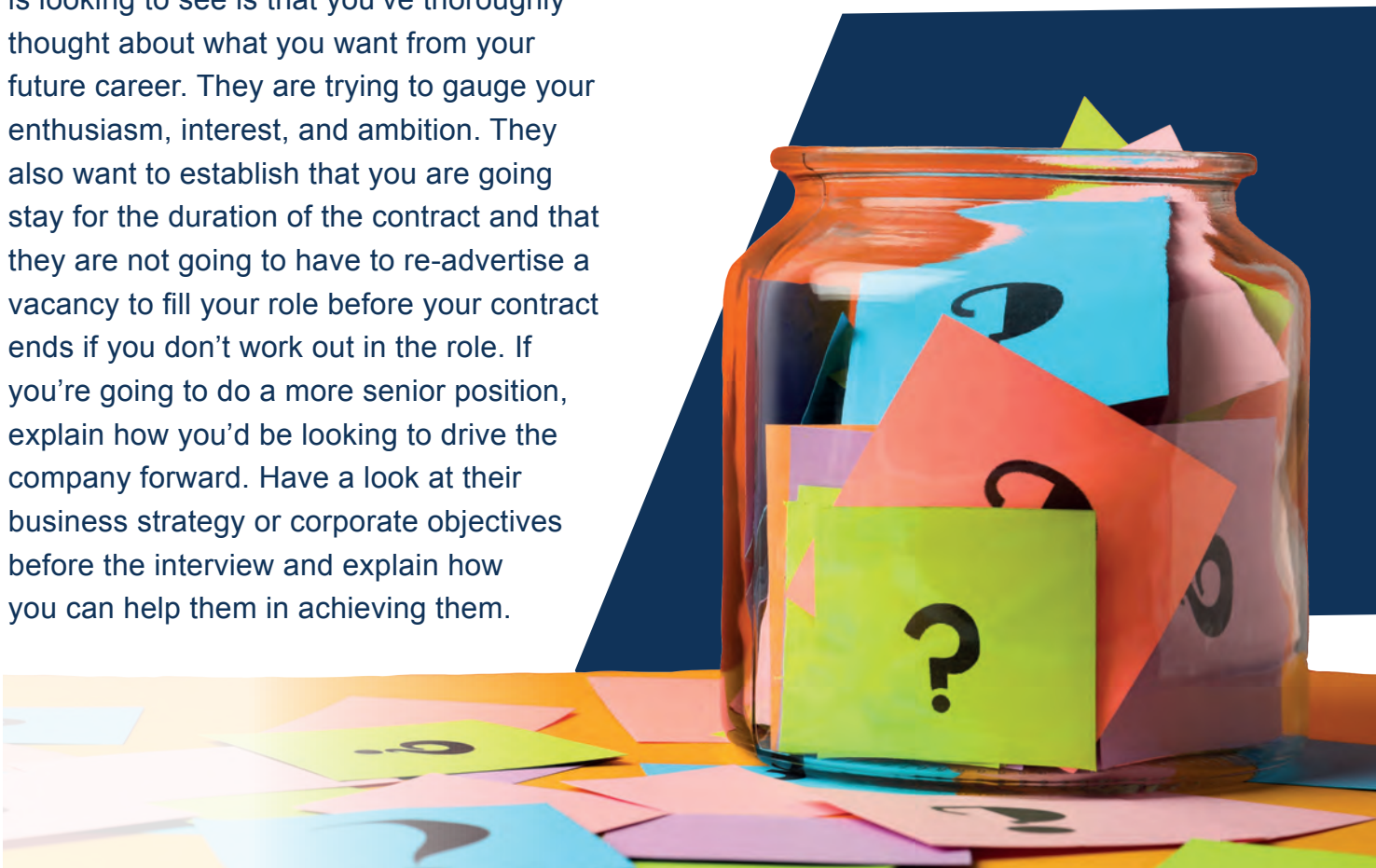
“Where do you see yourself in xx years' time?”

This assessment question is another classic interview question and what the interviewer is looking to see is that you've thoroughly thought about what you want from your future career. They are trying to gauge your enthusiasm, interest, and ambition. They also want to establish that you are going to stay for the duration of the contract and that they are not going to have to re-advertise a vacancy to fill your role before your contract ends if you don't work out in the role. If you're going to do a more senior position, explain how you'd be looking to drive the company forward. Have a look at their business strategy or corporate objectives before the interview and explain how you can help them in achieving them.

Be passionate about the industry. Fit your career goals around the organisation's objectives, demonstrate ambition and sell your strengths.

“Why did you leave your previous position?”

This is another classic interview assessment question that is used a lot to establish if you've got a growth plan, or are just looking for new opportunities. It is the interviewer's goal and intention to delve deeper than the explanation cited or not on your application form, or discussed in your CV. It's vital that you remain honest, so if you genuinely had no clear growth plan then saying career progression is a good enough reason to use in this instance. Avoid critiquing your earlier employment and previous employers.



STAR Method examples with sample answers

1. “Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership skills.”

Many employers are looking for people who can lead a team. Leadership is not the same as being a boss, as one inspires, the other rules in the workplace. Utilising the STAR method, the candidate clearly describes what happened, how they managed the situation and the outcome and what they learned from the experience.

Sample answer: Working in a search team, we were once tasked with utilising CAD. We did not have a good grasp of CAD, however we decided to do it anyway, making a few errors along the way. Our sergeant was not satisfied with the results. I decided to take responsibility for our team performance. I admitted that we tried our best, but explained given further training we could improve our skills if we were given another chance to complete the project.

Our sergeant was pleased that we as a team took responsibility and gave us another opportunity to work on the design. We received some training and we managed to complete the requirements to a good standard as a result.

2. “Tell me about a conflict you had with a work colleague and how you resolved it.”

This question has two parts to the answer. Describe the conflict, then demonstrate how you resolved it. As mentioned in the first question, make sure that you clearly explain the outcome.



Sample answer: One of my colleagues once felt that my way of handling a situation was incorrect. He was a more than a little abrupt when he gave me his/her opinion. I remained calm instead of getting angry. I politely asked him/her if they had a better idea. This resulted in good communication on the subject across the whole team. Then as a team it was decided that his/her idea was a better way of dealing with the task in hand and the outcome generated better results.

3. “Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your supervisor.”

Disagreements are extremely common in the workplace. You may be opposed to someone’s approach or their management style, however, that does not mean that there should be a bad atmosphere in the workplace. Describe an experience where you disagreed with your supervisor and explain what happened, then how you handled it and the outcome.

Sample answer: My inspector requested that I did something I felt uncomfortable with. I declined explaining that if I completed the task the way they had suggested there may be consequences both for me and for them. In policing we adhere to a very strong code of ethics. He/she continued to ask me to do this task and even hinted at disciplinary warnings which I was unhappy about. I reported the matter to my chief inspector who took the necessary action. He/she was given further training and I no longer was asked to participate and engage in this activity. My inspector apologised to me, realising after updated training their policy knowledge was out of date.

4. “How do you normally handle issues in the workplace?”

This behavioural question assesses your problem-solving skills. You should try to explain to the interviewer that you can handle challenges well under pressure without panicking. Then describe a situation where you had to employ good problem determination skills and how you handled the situation, what you did and the solutions you provided in the workplace.

Sample answer: I would describe myself as good at solving workplace problems, you have to be, in a policing environment. You encounter challenging situations on a daily basis and even if just for a few moments, I take time to reflect and think before responding to situations with some possible solutions. I enjoy being part of a team and if possible I like to get the views and opinions of the wider team. Being able to share in their experience is invaluable. After we have talked it through, we settle on the most appropriate action to take and implement these solutions as quickly as possible.

5. “Tell me about a time when you had to say no.”

Sometimes as an employee you must demonstrate assertiveness and say no to something that has been asked in the workplace. This assessment question is testing your boundaries and communication skills. This question is therefore testing your assertiveness, ability to draw boundaries, and communication skills.

Sample answer: I was approached by a work colleague who had been given several verbal warnings for coming into the workplace late. He/she asked me if I could provide them with an alibi. In policing you have to pride yourself on integrity and honesty, so I refused and said no.

My colleague was unfortunately disciplined as a result but did get the chance to explain a very challenging situation in their home life. Overall it was the best outcome.

6. “Explain to me a time where you motivated a fellow worker in the workplace.”

The interviewer is trying to uncover if you can work well with others in the workplace and whether you can motivate and bring the best out of your colleagues and co-workers.

Your ability to influence, motivate and encourage others will ensure that you are the right fit for the role.

Sample answer: One of my colleagues explained she was contemplating resigning her position when we were in the middle of a complex policing initiative. She felt she had lost her passion, and felt demotivated. She struggled to get up and come in to work, and needed a fresh challenge. I urged her to consider and reflect on all the achievements she had experienced in her career and shared some resources which I had found to be quite motivational. She continued with the project until it was completed, which was good for the team. Eventually she did leave policing to pursue her passions but she left on a high, full of enthusiasm for the future.



7. “Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult situation.”

The interviewer is trying to uncover how you handle challenges whenever they come up in your role. You need to consider for this example when you encountered a problem and how you dealt with it.

You can also demonstrate how you have grown from that experience and the lessons you learned because of the challenging situation.

Sample answer: In policing you have to face difficult situations on a daily basis. As a sergeant one of the things that historically has been challenging is when team numbers are depleted through sickness or mutual aid. As a result of the absence the rest of the team have to pick up a much higher workload. I sat down with the remaining team and we agreed how we were going to work together, agreeing a strategy to get our jobs done. We all agreed to divide the remaining workload between us both and work overtime until the team was back to full strength.

8. “Have you ever made a bad work decision?”

Bad decisions are easily made, however the best outcome from making a bad decision or making a mistake is learning from this decision so you can put it right should you need to repeat this process again.

How you handle bad decisions determines your value and worth as an employee to the business. Demonstrate that you are accountable for your mistakes, and you will obtain valuable insights from this experience.

Sample answer: On one occasion after a good 121 with one of my team, I forgot to perform a follow up welfare check, which is professional courtesy and which I had promised to do. My colleague was going through a very difficult time with their mental health. I apologised to my colleague for the lack of follow up. I now am so much more organised and I diary reminders to ensure that if I commit to something it gets done.

9. “How do you deal with pressure in the workplace?”

The interviewers want to discover some of your work strategies that help you maintain your demeanour and remain calm and organised in the workplace and deal with stress when under pressure.

Sample answer: From my experience of working in policing, I can work exceptionally well in pressured work environments and am good at remaining calm. Once I volunteered to work on a project which required a quick turnaround. The superintendent later changed the deadline to an even shorter timescale. It meant I had to work overtime and change my work schedule during this period to ensure that I completed the project within the timescales that were set. My line manager was really pleased with my work. During this project I created a new work template which increased productivity by almost double and management are going to roll out this solution across the project management team to save time on future projects.

10. “How do you keep yourself motivated with a repetitive work routine?”

Repetitive jobs can be extremely monotonous and can therefore cause demotivation. This assessment question is asked to explore your motivation strategies and your passion for your position.

Sample answer: In most roles there are elements which can be repetitive. Whenever I start to feel a little bored, I look for new ways to make my role more enjoyable in order to keep my motivation levels up and I take regular breaks in between tasks.

11. “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an angry customer.”

This is a common question in interviews that is usually asked to determine whether you have people skills. Can you stay professional when handling an angry customer?

Sample answer: As part of my role as police staff in the contact centre we do get a lot of irate calls, often because members of the public are concerned, worried or scared. One older customer approached me with an angry demeanour because they had not had a call back which had been promised. Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes can offer a very different perspective and that is exactly what I did. This member of the public was actually very worried about anti-social behaviour outside of their house, which can be very frightening.

I apologised and spoke to him/her in a very calm manner and explained how busy we had been on this particular day. After talking things through the customer agreed to a call back the following day. We ended the call on really good terms and they actually apologised to me for raising their voice.

12. “Give me an example of a time when you took the lead.”


Managers want employees who can take initiative when things become difficult or when colleagues and managers are tasked to work elsewhere across the business or during unusually busy periods. This is especially important for individuals in supervisory or managerial positions. Give an example of an experience where you volunteered and decided to lead a project to successful completion.

Sample answer: My neighbourhood team were once tasked with getting involved with a head office initiative. One of us was going to have to assume the role of project lead. Nobody wanted to do it, including me. I went home and reflected on it and decided to volunteer to take the lead and I thoroughly enjoyed it. We got some really positive feedback on our contribution to the initiative, guiding the project to its successful completion and achieving impressive results. It was good for me personally too as it made me realise that I actually enjoy leadership positions. It was the push I needed to put in for my sergeant exams.

13. “Tell me about a time when you didn’t achieve a career goal.”

The interviewer wants to know how well you can handle failure or disappointments. You can also mention what you learned and some of the things you may consider approaching in a different manner.

Sample answer: In 2021 I went for a job in another dept which would have been a step up. I didn’t get the job and felt very disappointed afterwards. I told myself that I was not good enough and that I should stay as I was. I shared my feelings with a colleague who I respected, they could not believe that I was thinking so negatively and they reminded me of all of my successes and the impact I had had on the department since I started. That conversation completely changed my thinking. I tried twice more to get to the next level. I didn’t give up. I didn’t beat myself up. I just kept my self-belief, did my preparation and knew I would get there eventually. In the August of that year, I was promoted into a new department. What started out as a disappointing year ended on a real high for me and has taught me a lot about perseverance and resilience.



Employer question samples

Is this post a new or existing one?

This question is a great way to get an idea of what's expected of you, which will hopefully lead to an even bigger discussion and get the employer talking whilst you remain in control of the interview process.

If it's a new post, then ask why it was created and what targets if any you may have as part of the remit of the role. If it is a new role, you can ask questions about current growth in the department or company, which may be a good sign for career progression opportunities. However it is wise to research the company so you should know the answers already to some of your questions.

If it's an existing position, ask the reason for the replacement, for example is the person being promoted to a new role in the company or is the person leaving to pursue an opportunity elsewhere? It may be the case the person is retiring or leaving for another reason. Asking questions is also a great way of demonstrating your interest and maintaining the control and flow of the interview. It is always a good sign if the interview is conversational and maintains an amiable and steady flow of backwards and forwards information between the interviewee and the employer.

How many people are in the team?

This is a great question to understand not just the numbers in the team but to give you an idea of the culture, team dynamic and whether it will suit your approach of working – it'll also give you an idea of who's in your

team in terms of their specific roles, and how they relate to your position. If you've talked about working well in a team in your CV, this can be a great way of demonstrating your capabilities. You can then elaborate and expand by providing examples of your work approach and how you interact with team members.

What would my day-to-day responsibilities be?

This is an excellent question to establish whether the role is right for you.

What does a typical day look like?

This question goes further than the question above as it gets the employer not only discussing the day to day responsibilities but also other details, such as when the department is most busy. This helps you get a better understanding of the duties and whether it sounds like something you may see yourself doing and enjoying. This way if you receive a job offer, you will have no surprises and will be able to consider honestly whether you would like to accept the role.

What promotion opportunities exist in the company?

Asking about career progression opportunities is vital at this juncture, if you are an ambitious candidate looking for opportunities to progress in your career, to ensure this is the right company for you. Listen to the company's long-term growth plans and compare against your own career path plan. It's also a wonderful way to demonstrate your desire to progress within the organisation. Most employers

are looking for employees that exhibit these type of leadership qualities, so showing these attributes early on is always a good sign.

Are there any training and career development opportunities?

This question is also another great one to ask about career development, progression and training opportunities within the business. Job satisfaction, personal development and training can often be just as important as a good salary and benefits package and, if you have a personal development plan, this is the perfect opportunity to discuss where you see your career going, and show how their organisation could fit in with your career goals and aspirations.

What are the company's growth plans?

This question really demonstrates your interest in the company, not just the industry. It will also give the employer the opportunity to explain the company's future growth plans, which is typically an exciting topic for the company to discuss to a potential candidate and it's something that not everyone will do, so it will give

you a chance to stand out against your competition. You can also add in pieces of information that you have researched, something that could help impress the interviewer by demonstrating that you've taken the time to find out a little more about the company prior to your interview.

How would you describe the ideal candidate?

It recommended that you ask this question as early on in the interview as you can, before you answer your own questions, as it will give you valuable information as to what they are looking for in terms of skillset, attributes and previous experience. You can then use these active words that they give to answer your questions to describe your own skills and experience.

When can I expect to hear from you?

This is the perfect way to end an interview. Not only does it show that you're keen, it's also good for your peace of mind. No-one wants to sit by the phone for a week, waiting for it to ring – especially if it turns out it's not going to for a minimum of two weeks because they have other interviews to do.





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