

INTERVIEWS:

HOW TO ANSWER 3 COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Takeaway Points

- When you respond to “Tell me about yourself,” skip any personal details that don’t support your job candidacy. They don’t want to know your life story; they want to see how well you can articulate your skills and qualifications.
- “Why should I hire you?” actually means “What can you do to help my business?”
- Research the employer’s culture, customers, and reputation so you can answer “Why do you want to work here?”

By: Team Pongo

Every interviewer has a different style and a different agenda, but certain interview questions are universal. Chances are you’re going to encounter the three questions highlighted in this article in more than one of your interviews, given that they provide insights every employer needs to know to make a good hiring decision:

1. **Tell me about yourself.**
2. **Why do you want to work here?**
3. **Why should I hire you?**

When you know what questions to expect in an interview, and you’re ready to answer them in a way that communicates your experience and value, you’ll be seen as a well prepared, confident, and likable candidate. And those qualities give you a much stronger chance of being the one who gets the job offer.

But here are two important things to keep in mind when you’re faced with any of these questions:

- **This is your would-be employer, not a new friend or neighbor.** Be yourself in the interview, but don’t reveal too much information about non-job-related topics. Try to relax and let your personality shine through. Just don’t get so comfortable that you start bashing past employers or colleagues. Keep things positive and professional.
- **An interviewer’s attention lags after a minute or two.** Long, rambling answers will cause your interviewer to tune you out. That’s why it’s important to plan and rehearse your answers. If you need more than a couple minutes to complete your response, consider stopping briefly to ask something like, “Is this the level of detail you’re looking for?” or “Am I on the right track?” The interviewer then has the chance to say, “Yes, keep going!” or “No, I’m actually more interested in hearing about...” This technique will help you refocus your thoughts and regain the interviewer’s attention.

With those tips in mind, here are guidelines and suggestions for answering these three common interview questions.

“Tell me about yourself.”

What they really want to know: How you developed the skills and qualifications you expressed on your resume, and how well you can articulate your value as a potential employee.

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DO talk about: Work history, skills, education (if you’re a recent graduate), areas of expertise, qualities that make you successful on the job, a passion you might have for the job or your chosen profession, and other details that help support your candidacy or likability (e.g., volunteer work, community involvement, people, or experiences you have in common with the interviewer).

DON’T talk about: Your childhood, age, marital status, family, politics, religion, lifestyle, unrelated hobbies, health problems, financial troubles, or any other detail that doesn’t support your qualifications for the job. You might share some personal details later, but for this question, keep the focus on your traits as an *employee*, not as a parent, stamp collector, or migraine sufferer.

A good answer to this question might include one or more phrases such as:

- When I found out about this opening via ____, I knew I had to apply. I know and respect your company, and my background seems exceptionally well suited to this role.
- I’ve been in the ____ field for ____ years, and I still enjoy the challenges it brings.
- I began my career as a ____ [job title] with ____ [company name/description] and since then I’ve developed expertise in ____, which I think will be very helpful in this role.
- Some of my major accomplishments include ____, ____, and ____, and if we determine I’m a good fit for this role, I’m sure I could achieve similar or better results for you.
- I’ve had a strong interest in this field for a long time. I’ve done a lot of research and learned as much as I can about it, and I’m eager to start contributing. I think my ____ skills could be particularly valuable to your team.
- After studying ____, I knew I wanted to go into the ____ field.
- I believe you know my friend and former colleague ____, who referred me.
- Outside of work, I like to stay involved in my community, so I volunteer at ____, and I’m always grateful for the chance to ... [relax with a book, hop on my bike, hit the beach, spend time with friends and family, etc.]

“Why do you want to work here?”

What they really want to know: How much you know about the business, and whether you truly understand and want *this* job at *this* company.

DO talk about: The employer’s good reputation, their product or service quality, business successes, corporate mission, community involvement, growth, or unique qualities.

DON’T talk about: The short commute, the fact that you really need the benefits, that

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Did you know?

Pongo's Interview Tips video program provides 12 how-to videos for every stage of the interview, plus printable checklists and interview guides.

you're hoping to learn the skills to start your own business, or that you're desperate for a job—*any* job.

A good answer to this question might include one or more phrases such as:

- I like the fact that you're involved in ____ [a particular trend or product or service line], because that seems to be the way this industry is heading.
- You're #1 in the business, and I love the challenge and incentive of finding new ways to build on past successes. – OR – You're not #1 yet, which provides an exciting challenge and incentive to work harder and be more innovative to surpass the competition.
- I respect your mission.
- I share your commitment to ____.
- Your record of ____ is impressive.

“Why should I hire you?”

What they really want to know: What makes you a good fit for the job, and how you see yourself contributing to their business.

DO talk about: Your specific achievements, accomplishments, and directly related experience, along with any unique strengths and passions. Explain the context, and give concrete examples or details to support the qualities you claim to have.

DON'T talk about: General workplace traits that every employee should have, with no supporting evidence. For instance, “Because I'm honest, hard-working, reliable, and organized.” is a standard – and really bad – answer that does nothing to differentiate you from any other candidate.

A good answer to this question might include one or more phrases such as:

- I have a unique combination of ____ and ____, which means I'll be able to ____.
- I excel in the kind of ____ working environment you've built here.
- I'm known among my coworkers as a great ____.
- ____ has always come easily to me / I'm particularly good at ____.
- I can see myself continually growing and developing my skills and knowledge to become even more valuable to the company in the coming years.
- This is my dream job. Someone else might have better credentials, but within a few months, I'll have those same credentials, plus the passion those others lack.

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Probably the top complaint among hiring managers, recruiters, and HR personnel is that so many job candidates arrive unprepared for their interviews. Don't make that mistake. Write out and practice answers ahead of time for common interview questions like these, as well as other questions you can reasonably anticipate. Be sure your answers fit with the company and job opening.

Use the downloadable worksheet on the next page to help prepare and practice your answers. Nothing will boost your confidence and performance more than knowing what you'll say when the interviewer asks you a question.

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Job Interview Question Preparation Form

Instructions: Write down the question you expect to be asked in a job interview. Next, write a response that sounds upbeat, confident, conversational, and professional. Then, read it aloud and edit as needed until you're pleased with the tone and length. Finally, practice, practice, practice (with a friend, if possible).

[For more information, see the Pongo *Learning Center* article, **How to Answer 3 Common Interview Questions.**]

Interview Question: _____

Your Response: _____

Length of Spoken Response: _____

Is your tone: Positive? Professional? Natural?

Interview Question: _____

Your Response: _____

Length of Spoken Response: _____

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