

Interviews

Employers only interview people if they think they're a realistic candidate, so use the opportunity to demonstrate that you have the

Strengthsbased interviews

Some large employers have switched from competencybased interviews to a strengths-based approach, believing this leads to responses that are less rehearsed, allowing them to get to know the candidate better.

What to expect

The aim of strengthsbased interviews is to find out what comes naturally to you, and what you do with ease and enthusiasm, rather than exploring merely what you are able to do. As such, you're more likely to

- x Memory aids such as written notes can make your answers sound seamless and informed if used well. Used poorly, your answers will sound unnatural and result in long pauses or rustling sounds.
- x You may not have visual clues to help decide whether you've said enough or too little; pause periodically and allow the interviewer to interject if they want to.

Good answers to common questions

Why do you want this job?

Your opportunity to talk about your motivation and enthusiasm for the role, industry and company... basically things other than the salary! It's also testing that you have a realistic understanding of the job and organisation the best answers will show how your skills and goals line up with these. Be as enthusiastic as you can, without going over the top.

Tell me about a situation where you had to manage multiple demanding deadlines. What was your approach?

This is one example of a competency based question. Preparation is key to answering these questions well, so plan ahead and identify examples you can use for the skills you may be asked about. Use the STARR (Situation, Task, Action, Result & Reflection) model outlined earlier to answer.

What is your biggest weakness?

You need to demonstrate self-awareness, although don't confess something that would majorly impact your performance in the role. Equally, avoid clichéd answers like "I'm a perfectionist." A minor weakness like being impatient or not being assertive enough is the right level, but it's also important to turn this into a positive by talking about what you do or could do overcome or manage this.

Tell me about yourself

Remembering that you are presenting yourself in the context of convincing the employer that you are a strong candidate for this role, give a brief summary including recent experiences, major achievements and a bit about your passions. Making sure what you say is all relevant to the role; the recruiter is looking for what you can bring to the company and if you are suitable for the job.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing our organisation at the moment?

Here, you can demonstrate your knowledge of the organisation and the sector they operate within. You might for example talk about how recent developments will affect the company. Prepare for these commercial awareness questions by reading industry news and networking with people already working in this area.

Can you tell me about a time you've worked effectively as part of a team?

Another competency based question. Make sure your answer is about what you did, rather than what the team as a whole did, although some information about this may provide relevant context. The recruiter will want to know what you contributed to the team.

How many pizzas are delivered in London each week?

Don't panic, you're not expected to get the answer right. Instead, this is testing how you approach and solve problems. You might start by estimating the population and how often the average person would order pizza and go from there. Show that you can keep your cool and talk them through a logical thought process.

When were you most engaged at university?

This is another strengths based question. Pick something you enjoyed because it allowed you to use your strengths, and then let your enthusiasm show. Use the STARR method to structure your answer, but make sure you explain why you found the task so engaging. For example, if it was during your dissertation, explain how you enjoyed researching and drawing conclusions from this.

Sample interview questions

General

- x Tell me about yourself.
- x What are your key strengths?
- x What are your weaknesses?
- x Tell me something about yourself that I wouldn't know from reading your application.

Motivation and values

- x Why do you want this job?
- x How does this job fit in with your long-term career plans?
- x What would be the main challenge you'd face if you got this job?
- x What does success mean to you?
- x Teamwork and interpersonal skills
- x Describe a situation where you had to deal with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
- x

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