

LET'S PLAY 20 QUESTIONS

The 20 questions you are most likely to be asked during your interview
(adapted from the Napa, CA Employment Center)

Can you tell me something about yourself?

This is your golden opportunity to take some control of the interview and focus on what you want the interviewer to know. Tell about your interests and experience that would contribute to your performance on this job. Be prepared to speak for a minute about what makes you unique.

What type of position or you interested in?

Don't answer "Anything!" That says you are desperate, unmotivated and/or unfocused. Instead, describe the best job available to you in this interview. Don't just name the job title; tell the interviewer the functions you enjoy and do well. Note: If you're not yet ready for your ideal job or no one is offering it, decide whether the available job fits your planned steps to an ultimate goal. Show the interviewer that you are willing to plan, work hard and improve your skills.

Why do you want to work for our company?

Don't say, "I need a job." The more you want a specific job, the more pre-interview information you should get. Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is preferred: "You have a reputation for being a leader in this field" or "Your employees really seem to like working here."

What would you do if ...?

Acknowledge that you always follow company policy and procedures and would seek the advice of a supervisor if you were uncertain. Then proceed with your best answer to their example.

What jobs have you had? How did you get them? Why did you leave?

Don't lie or leave glaring gaps in your work history. Highlight your successes and explain the weak spots. Show how you've learned from your experiences. No matter how bad a previous job was, do not criticize; criticism will raise doubts about your fairness, patience and loyalty. Say your career potential was limited there or you had a difference of opinion.

Can you explain why you've been out of work so long?

You may have taken a leave for parenthood, education or training, or you might have pursued literary or artistic goals. State that you are now ready to pursue a challenging job.

Are you looking for full-time or part-time work?

A premature or inflexible response could cost you a job. Before answering, ask yourself three things: What do you PREFER, what are you WILLING to accept and what do you NEED. State which one you prefer but don't make it sound like a demand or limitation. Answer this one to reflect what the employee is looking for and remember that, no matter what your plans are, you can't tell the future.

How long do you expect to work for your company?

"As long as it's good for both of us." This response is honest, realistic and mutually beneficial. Never express that you're really interested in another employer or that you want to open your own business. Why should they invest in your training if you plan on not staying?

We have interviewed other candidates with more qualifications than you have. Why do you think we should hire you?

You are not in a position to comment on other candidates, but you can answer for your own qualifications and think your background, experience and interest equip you to handle the job well. The more specifically you can name your skills and experiences for the job, the more confident and convincing you'll sound. Beware of passing judgment on other candidates. Instead refer to the candidate you do know (**you**) and give some indication of what the employer will gain by hiring you.

What are your greatest strengths? What would you say is your weakest point?

Smile when they ask this one! Have a list for yourself of what you do best (strengths), such as hardworking, problem solver, specific skills, etc. Be prepared to offer an example in which you demonstrated that strength.

Make your weaknesses (areas that need improvement) into possible strengths: "One of my weaknesses is that I find it hard to delegate responsibility, so I frequently work after hours on my own to do the job myself." Whatever your weakness, be sure you include what you have done or are doing to improve it. Never admit to a real weakness. After all, you are selling a product – YOU.

How is your driving record? and/or Do you have a valid driver's license?

Unless you are applying for a position which requires driving, this question seems irrelevant, but sometimes it is a roundabout way to check out other problems (e.g. legal troubles, drinking habits, disabilities, etc.). Since your driving record is a matter of public record, don't lie about it but try to explain a problem as positively as you can: "I behaved irresponsibly in one phase of my life, but thankfully I've turned that around. My record has been clean for ___ years."

How long did it take you to get here today?

Employees may worry that you'll get to work on time every day. Be sure you have a transportation plan before the interview. If you have a car, stress its reliability, not the make or model. Try not to be dependent on others for transportation but, if it's necessary, stress that you have a dependable ride, know the bus schedule well, etc.

Are you willing to move where the company sends you?

You have to make the decision about whether the job or its location is more important to you and whether the compensation or long-term opportunities make it attractive to you even if it requires moving one day.

Do you have any serious illness or injury that would interfere with your ability to do this job?

This question is actually illegal. Employers are restricted to asking only “Can you perform the essential functions of this job with or without reasonable accommodation?” None of us would be applying for a job where the answer is “No.”

What do you expect as a starting salary?

You are trying to get the highest salary possible and the interviewer’s job is to hire the best person at the lowest salary possible. Employers almost always have a figure in mind – sometimes negotiable, sometimes not. NEVER make salary your first or only questions in an initial interview. You should research the position beforehand which includes knowing the salary or salary range when you walk into the interview. You must also know your own bottom range and where you can negotiate. It is acceptable to ask if a stated wage is “a negotiable salary.”

Find out what benefits are offered; they may make the starting salary more acceptable. You can add an average of 30% on to your wage for the value of benefits.

How do you feel about working with a younger/older supervisor?

State that you will do the best job possible for the company; you believe the supervisor is there to help and you do not consider age an important factor. You plan to be a supportive team member.

Will your former employer(s) give you a good reference?

Here’s another question you can use to your advantage. Remember, employers want to know how well you can do the job and how well you get along with people. Cover your bases by having three references who can speak to your abilities. Be sure you know what your references will say about you. Pick references who have known you for some time and are reasonably objective/believable. Coach your references if possible about things you particularly want them to point out. Offer references who can be contacted easily during normal business hours. Get specific permission from references before listing them.

How did you get along with your former boss and co-workers?

Never, never, NEVER bad-mouth a former employer or co-worker. New employers want to feel you can get along with others and that you are loyal.

Do you have children?

This is another illegal question, but you may choose to answer it. You may state nicely that you don’t mind answering but you’re wondering what its relevance is to the job.

Though risky, you could also choose to state strongly (but inoffensively if possible) that it's an illegal question and you don't have to answer it.

The employer's concern is probably that you might miss work because of lack of childcare or child illness. Volunteer information to ease these fears.

Do you have any questions for me?

Employers want employees who care about the good of the company. Find out information for your own good, but in a way that shows your interest, enthusiasm and commitment to the company and the job: "What qualifications are you looking for in the person you hire for this job? Where do you see the company in five years? What do you like about working here?" ALWAYS have a question for the interviewer or if you really can't think of anything, "You know, you've covered everything so well that I don't have any questions at this time. If I do, may I call you?"