

# Answering 6 Common Interview Questions

## Chapter

# 1

### Chapter Focus

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Answering interview questions

#### READING SKILL

Using context

#### BUILDING VOCABULARY

Understanding phrasal verbs



“Asking the right questions takes as much skill as giving the right answers.”

— Robert Half, American businessman

## Before You Read

- A. Connect with the topic.** Have you ever had a job or school interview? How did you prepare for it? What questions were you asked? If you haven't had an interview, what questions do you think an interviewer would ask?
- B. Pair Work.** Which of these common interview questions do you think would be the most difficult to answer? Check (✓) it. Then explain your answer to your partner.
- Why should we hire you?
  - Why do you want to work here?
  - What are your weaknesses?
  - What did you dislike about your last job?
  - Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- C. Preview the reading.** Look quickly over the article on pages 3–4 to complete the Previewing Chart below.

### Previewing Chart

1. Title of the reading: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Names of people and places in the reading. (List 3 more.)  
*Ohio* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Key words. (What words appear several times? List 5 more.)  
*question* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. Read the first sentence in each paragraph. What do you think the reading is probably about?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



## Reading Passage



### Answering 6 Common Interview Questions

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- 1 While you'll never be able to anticipate every question you might be asked in an interview, you can get a head start<sup>1</sup> by developing strong, concise answers to commonly used questions. Most interviewers will ask similar questions like these to gain knowledge about a candidate's abilities and qualifications and compatibility with<sup>2</sup> the job and the company.

#### 1. Tell me about yourself.

This is often the opening question in an interview. It's also one of the most difficult if you're not prepared. Remember, the interviewer does not want to hear about your hometown or your hobby.

- 10 This question calls for your one-minute commercial that summarizes your years of experience and skills and your personality in the context of the job for which you are interviewing. Get to the point and sell your professional self. Develop a few brief sentences that demonstrate you have what it takes<sup>3</sup> to do the job—experience, proven results, and desire to contribute.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. Why should we hire you?

- The key to answering any question about you versus your competition is using specifics. "Everybody is going to speak in generalities, so you need something that will make you stand out<sup>5</sup> a bit," said Linda, a teacher in Springfield, Ohio. Give real examples that show them you are best-suited for the job. Linda says she would point out her achievements and accomplishments throughout her career that are relevant<sup>6</sup> to the open position, as well as her experiences in dealing with different types of students and teaching situations. Pinpoint the qualities you have that are truly valuable to the company.

#### 3. Why do you want to work here? What do you know about our company?

- Peter, a physician in Indianapolis, said that research is important in answering these questions. "I would use this opportunity to show off what I know about the company and, more importantly, how I would fit in."



 Map page 161

Culture and  
Language Notes  
page 141

<sup>1</sup> **get a head start** get an early start that gives you an advantage

<sup>2</sup> **compatibility with** suitability for

<sup>3</sup> **you have what it takes** you have the skills and abilities

<sup>4</sup> **contribute** give time and effort

<sup>5</sup> **stand out** look better than everyone else

<sup>6</sup> **relevant** related; important

Susan, a vice president of **benefits** in Chicago, said that she would address issues and challenges in the company to demonstrate the depth of her knowledge. “I usually talk about **revenue**, numbers of employees, and also challenges in their type of business and how my experience relates to that,” she said. “I would point out things I have done in similar companies that could address their problems.”

#### 4. What are your weaknesses?

The secret to answering this question is using your weaknesses to your advantage. “I would turn my weaknesses into strengths,” said Tara, an **attorney**. “For example, if my weaknesses include my lack of patience, I would then state that, because of this, I have learned to take special measures<sup>7</sup> to ensure that I remain calm and attentive.” Just make sure that you do give a real answer to this question. None of us is without faults, so don’t pretend that you do not have weaknesses.

#### 5. What did you dislike about your last job? Why did you leave your last job?

You need to be cautious about these kinds of questions and make sure you do not end up sounding bitter.<sup>8</sup> “I would never talk down<sup>9</sup> about my former company, the boss, or my former co-workers,” Tara said.

You need to have a good understanding about the job for which you’re applying to turn this question into a positive one. It may be best to say that you really enjoyed many aspects of your job, then focus on how this new job will give you the opportunity to contribute more in a particular area that is key to the position.

#### 6. Where do you see yourself in five years?

An interviewer does not want to hear that your five-year aspiration is to be sailing in the Caribbean or working in a different industry. You need to talk about goals you have that relate to the job. This will demonstrate that you understand the industry and the company and are motivated to succeed there. Susan, the director of public relations at a major car rental company, said she would keep her answer specific to her field, such as stating that she sees herself as **vice president of corporate communications**.

Preparation is the key to answering any question with poise and confidence. Always keep in mind—whatever the question is—that the interviewer is trying to uncover if you are a good fit and can make a positive contribution to the job.



Word Count: 726

Reading Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Minutes)

Words per Minute: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Word Count/Reading Time)

<sup>7</sup> **take special measures** do specific things

<sup>8</sup> **bitter** resentful

<sup>9</sup> **talk down** say negative things



## After You Read

### Understanding the Text

#### A. Comprehension

For each item below, fill in the correct circle.

- 1. Identifying the Author's Purpose** The purpose of the article is to \_\_\_\_.
  - help job interviewers ask good questions
  - help people answer interview questions well
  - help people identify their job skills
  - show what happens at a job interview
- 2. Understanding Pronoun References** In line 7, the word *it* refers to \_\_\_\_.
  - an interview
  - your hometown
  - "Tell me about yourself."
  - the opening question in an interview
- 3. Scanning for Details** When you are asked to tell an interviewer about yourself, you should \_\_\_\_.
  - say everything you can think of about your background and interests
  - say a few things that show you can do the job
  - tell the interviewer you can do the job
  - summarize your hobbies and interests
- 4. Scanning for Details** If an interviewer asks about your weaknesses, you should \_\_\_\_.
  - identify a weakness and explain how you have learned to deal with it
  - say that you don't have any weaknesses
  - identify an imaginary weakness that isn't very important
  - describe all of your weaknesses in detail
- 5. Identifying the Author's Purpose** Why does the author quote different people in the article?
  - The author wants to add humor to the article.
  - The author wants to show what you shouldn't do at a job interview.
  - The author doesn't have enough experience to provide his own examples.
  - The author wants to use specific examples to support the main idea.

## B. Identifying Main Ideas and Details

Look back over the reading for details to support each main idea below. Write them in the chart. Several answers are possible.

Question	Main Idea	Details
1. Tell me about yourself.	You should summarize your skills and experience as they relate to the job.	<i>Don't talk about unrelated things.</i>
2. Why should we hire you?	You need to give specifics to show you are the best person for the job.	
3. Why do you want to work here? What do you know about our company?	Show what you know about the company and how you would fit in.	
4. What are your weaknesses?	Turn your weaknesses into strengths.	
5. What did you dislike about your last job?	Say something positive about your last job.	
6. Where do you see yourself in five years?	Talk about goals that relate to the company with which you are interviewing.	

## C. Consider the Issues

Work with a partner to answer the questions below.

- In the article on pages 3–4, the author recommends answering interview questions with specific rather than general answers. For each general answer below, think of a more specific answer.
  - I'm a good student.
  - I'm easy to work with.
  - My last boss liked my work.
- The author says that you should learn about a company before the interview. What are some ways you could do this?
- Which of the author's tips do you find the most helpful? Why?

## Building Vocabulary

### Understanding Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs have two or three parts: a verb + one or two other words like *down*, *up*, *off*, or *out*. A phrasal verb has a special meaning which is different from the meaning of the individual words. For example, in the sentence below, the phrasal verb *stand out* means *to be easy to notice*.

“Everybody is going to speak in generalities, so you need something that will make you **stand out** a bit,” said Linda.

You can find the meaning of a phrasal verb in a good dictionary.

- A. Scan the reading on pages 3–4 to find the missing word in each phrasal verb below. Then match each verb to a definition on the right.

Phrasal Verb	Meaning
1. stand <u>  out  </u> <u>  e  </u>	a. belong
2. talk _____	b. result in
3. show _____	c. display clearly
4. fit _____	d. say negative things about
5. end _____	e. be easy to notice

- B. Now use the correct form of a phrasal verb from the chart to complete each sentence below.

- After a lot of discussion about what to do, they \_\_\_\_\_ staying at home.
- When you move to a new school, it can take a long time to \_\_\_\_\_.
- It annoys me when someone \_\_\_\_\_ about my friends.
- A lot of people have tattoos today. Fifty years ago, people got tattoos because they wanted to \_\_\_\_\_. Now people get them because they want to fit in.
- People who are always \_\_\_\_\_ their expensive clothes can be very irritating.



# Reading Skill

## Using Context

When you are reading, it is important to use context (the surrounding words and ideas) to guess the meanings of unfamiliar words. You might not be able to guess the exact meaning of the word, but you can usually guess its general meaning.

You can often find an example in the context that explains the unfamiliar word. In the sentence below, the two underlined examples help to define the word *aspiration*.

An interviewer does not want to hear that your five-year **aspiration** is to be sailing in the Caribbean or working in a different industry.

There may also be contrasting information or an explanation in the context that helps you to understand an unfamiliar word, as in the sentences below.

The key to answering any question about you versus your competition is using **specifics**. “Everybody is going to speak in generalities, so you need something that will make you stand out a bit,” said Linda, a teacher in Springfield, Ohio. Give real examples that show them you are best-suited for the job.

## A. Analyze the Reading

Read these sentences and answer the questions below.

1. “While you’ll never be able to **anticipate** every question you might be asked in an interview, you can get a head start by developing strong, **concise** answers to commonly used questions.”
  - a. Is *anticipate* a verb, noun, or adjective?
  - b. What words in the sentence help you to understand the meaning of the word *anticipate*? What do you think *anticipate* means?
  - c. From the context, would you say that a *concise* answer is something good or bad?
  
2. “This question calls for your one-minute commercial that **summarizes** your years of experience and skills and your personality in the context of the job for which you are interviewing.”
  - a. Is *summarizes* a verb, noun, or adjective?
  - b. What words in the sentence help you to understand the meaning of *summarizes*?
  - c. What do you think the word *summarizes* means in this context?



## B. Apply the Reading Skill

Read the article below and use context to guess the missing words. (Many different words are possible.)

### Local Girl Among Finalists for Australian Dream Job

*by Jean Yueh*

In 2009, Clare Wang, a young interpreter from Taiwan, won a \_\_\_\_\_ (1) among the finalists for what has been \_\_\_\_\_ (2) “the best job in the world”—caretaker of an Australian tropical island. The application process started on January 9 and ended February 22. About 35,000 people, including dancers, scientists, chefs, and students from nearly 200 countries, applied for the \_\_\_\_\_ (3). Each applicant had to \_\_\_\_\_ (4) a video in English no more than one minute long to explain why he or she was the right person for the job.

Wang, a 30-year-old Chinese-English interpreter, said this was the first time she had campaigned on the Internet. “Usually, I do not take part in this kind of \_\_\_\_\_ (5),” she told a local newspaper, describing herself as a shy person. In her application video, the young woman used two puppets to \_\_\_\_\_ (6) her interpreting skills, as well as pictures of herself in leisure-time activities, to \_\_\_\_\_ (7) online voters she was an outdoor person. Wang ended her video by saying, “I’ve never been to the Great Barrier Reef, which makes me the perfect explorer.” She then \_\_\_\_\_ (8) that she would be “super curious,” as printed on the T-shirt she put on in front of the camera.



Now compare your answers with a partner. Are your words the same? Are they similar?

## Discussion & Writing

1. What are some things you probably shouldn't say at a university or job interview? Why?
2. In writing, describe one of your weaknesses. Remember to follow the author's suggestion by turning your weakness into something positive.

### Example

*I used to be a perfectionist about everything, but over the years I have learned that there are times when it is good to demand perfection and times when it is not. Now I am able to evaluate a task and decide how much time and effort to put into it. For important things, I push myself very hard. For less important things, I do what is necessary, but I know when to stop. Learning to do this has helped me in school and in my previous job.*

3. Work with a partner to roleplay a job interview. One person is the interviewer and the other is the interviewee. Follow the steps below.
  - Choose a job that sounds interesting to you and your partner and decide what abilities and qualifications are necessary for the job.
 

**Sample job:** an experienced architect for a large architecture firm

**Qualifications:** must have ten years experience working in a large company  
must be able to work as part of a team  
must have experience designing large office buildings
  - Use the chart you completed on page 6 as you roleplay the job interview.

### Words to Remember

#### NOUNS

achievements  
aspect  
challenges  
confidence  
contribution  
opportunity  
patience  
qualifications  
specifics  
weakness

#### VERBS

anticipate  
demonstrate  
end up  
fit in  
pretend  
relate  
show off  
stand out  
talk down

#### ADJECTIVES

bitter  
particular  
relevant