

# ACING AN INTERVIEW AND ANSWERING TRICKY QUESTIONS

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If it hasn't happened to you when interviewing for internships or summer jobs, it is bound to happen soon ... you're going to get hit with tricky interview questions. We've all heard the horror stories: people caught off guard during a great interview with a question like, "If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?" A very common interview fear is sitting there at a loss for words. So why *do* interviewers ask such tricky questions? And how can you avoid muttering "Ummm" and "Ahhh" when they do?

Outlined in this article are five simple steps for acing an interview and suggestions for answering those tough questions.

**1. Calm down and don't get flustered.** Interviewers ask tough or silly questions to see how you'll react. They really don't care if you like cats or dogs or even elephants! They're trying to see if they can catch you off guard or fluster you; to see how you handle unexpected situations in the workplace.

**2. Take a second to compose yourself and don't speak too soon.** For any question you are asked, you can say "I need a moment to think about it." When you do answer, you can say something along the lines of, "I like horses. They're sturdy and they're quick! I feel that I would be a dependable, stable employee who can work in a fast paced environment." That will definitely do the trick.

Never in your job will you have to "be an animal" so it's not a relevant question — make it relevant. Relate your answer back to the job and your work ethic. Fortunately, questions like these aren't as common as some other tricky questions.

A very common style of interviewing is through behavioral based questions. They force you to



give a real life example while thinking on the spot — you really have to dig deeper to give a good answer. The interviewer will give you a situation like: "Tell me about a time, in a work setting, where you had to take a strong stand for something you believe in." Then you will be asked what the specific situation was, why it was so important to you, how you took a stand, and what the results or consequences were.

This can be a very difficult and complex question to answer. Make sure you answer all of the parts of the question and don't be afraid to ask the interviewer if you answered all of the points at the end of your response just to be sure.

**3. Be honest and not negative.** If you are asked about a difficult situation, whether you were "right" or "wrong" in the situation, you can put a positive spin on it. You can talk about issues you had with a previous job, but do not beat on it. That would send up red flags — interviewers do not want to hire someone who, down the road, might be in a similar position saying the same thing about their company.

The bottom line is, employers want to know if you:

- Can communicate effectively.
- Can apply technical skills and knowledge of concepts to solve real problems.
- Are innovative and resourceful.
- Are self-confident but not arrogant.
- Are aware of your strengths AND weaknesses.
- Have integrity.
- Will embrace change.
- Can welcome feedback.
- Work well in a group setting as well as individually.
- Are proactive in problem solving.
- Want to learn and improve.

In knowing that these are the things employers want in a candidate, you can be confident and assured before you go into your interview, which will lead to easy communication and professionalism.

**4. From the earlier research you did on the company in preparation for your interview, demonstrate how your values and what the organization stands for align.** Show your interviewers that you would be a good fit because you stand for the same things, you have interest in

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the company and you are eager to learn more!

**5. Now for the final step:** At the end of your interview, summarize what you have gone over. Show the employer why there could be a mutual benefit of you being hired for the position — you would be a great addition to their company! Tell them that you look forward to a potential job offer, and thank them for their time. And remember: follow up with a thank you note or email!

### **A FEW TRICKY QUESTIONS WITH SUGGESTED ANSWERS**

**“What have you done to prepare yourself for a job of this type?”**

- This question can be tricky for recent grads because your work experience will be limited. What if you worked in agronomy every summer and are now using your ag business degree to compete for an account manager trainee position at a large bank?
- Be honest, tell them “I have not had a role like this in any of my past employment opportunities. However, I enjoy working with clients, I am proficient with computers, I maintain personal budgets for myself, and from the research I have gathered on the company I think I fit well with your values and you fit well with mine.”

**“Tell me about a time when you succeeded in getting someone to go along with something he or she was originally opposed to doing. How did you go about influencing this person?”**

- FYI: this is not the time to tell the story about how you got your younger sibling to do something silly for the entertainment of you and your friends!
- Your interviewer wants to hear about a time when you were excited about a project at work or school and that you convinced others that it would be good to start up or work on; something that turned out well. Once again, this can be tough for new graduates without much work experience.
- You can talk about group work in class and how you led the team in

a direction that enabled you to get a great grade.

- The interviewers want to know about when you used your initiative and leadership qualities to make a positive impact.

**“Tell me about a time that you had difficulty with a particular task or project because you lacked the necessary skills.”**

- This is tough; no one wants to admit they have weaknesses or don’t possess all the skills necessary to do their job properly. But there is nothing wrong with being humble and admitting where you need improvement yet stating that you would love to learn more and do better.

to have remembered.

**“Is work the most important thing in your life?”**

- You may think that your interviewer wants you to automatically say “yes.” But if work really is the most important thing in your life you may not be the candidate that they’re searching for.
- They will want a dedicated employee who loves what they do. However, they will also want a well-rounded individual who knows how to prioritize, who is socialized, and who has various interests.
- Work is important, but this is a leading question. They want to be



- This is where being self-confident but not arrogant comes in. Employers will appreciate the honesty in your answer, as well as the initiative you are willing to take to do better.

**“Describe yourself in one word.”**

- This is short and to the point. But there are so many good qualities about yourself that you want to highlight, so much you want to say.
- In advertising, the shorter the message the longer it sticks. So, above everything else you say in your interview, what do you want to stick most about you? This one word could define you to your interviewers.
- Take a minute, think about it, and give an answer that you would like

sure you’ll be a good fit with the company and its current employees.

- Tell them you are a dedicated employee and that you’d love to work for their company, but be honest, tell them what else is important to you as well.

So when you are interviewing for that dream job, just relax. Do some research before-hand, get a good rest the night before, put your best clothes on, and ace that interview! Remember to stay positive, be honest, and give yourself time to think before answering those tricky questions!