

Best Questions to Ask in an Interview

An interview is meant to be a two-way street. The hiring manager is interviewing you to determine whether you're the best fit for the job. At the same time, you could be asking questions to determine whether you would be happy in the position or with the company.

But once nerves take over, it's easy to forget your role. After all, you're meeting on the employer's schedule in an unfamiliar office. After listening to the interviewer's monologue about the company and role, you're asked a barrage of questions about your background and future plans – all while hoping that you're delivering the “right” answers.

By the time the employer asks if you have any questions, it's easy to be so drained and nervous you can only stammer out, “Nope.” However, not asking questions is passing up a chance to stand out from the competition. Before the interview, prepare a list of questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the company and interest in the position. Some good topics to cover include:

The Company

Asking questions about the employer show your interest in the company and that you are able to make intelligent conversation about the organization.

- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- How do you see the future for this industry?
- What do you consider to be your firm's most important assets?
- What can you tell me about your new product or plans for growth?
- How do you rate your competition?

The Position's History

Most managers' ears will perk up at questions like these because it signals that you care not just about being average or even good, but truly great. This is the question managers wish all their employees would ask. It will also provide insight into the company and potential for advancement.

- What happened to the last person who held this job?
- What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the last person who held this job?
- What types of skills do you NOT already have onboard that you're looking to fill with a new hire?

The Department

Asking about your department's work and role in the company can help you understand more about the company's culture and hierarchy. If the culture is formal and structured and you're happiest in a more relaxed environment; or if it's an aggressive, competitive environment and you are more low-key and reserved, this job might not be a good fit for you. It's important to know what you're signing up for.

- What is the overall structure of the company and how does your department fit the structure?
- What are the career paths in this department?
- What have been the department's successes in the last couple of years?
- How do you view your group/division/department?

The Job Responsibilities

These questions show that you're thinking beyond the interview – visualizing what it will be like to do the work itself. This is different from many candidates, who appear to be focused solely on getting the job offer without thinking about what will come after that. It also pays to gain a solid understanding of the position to avoid any confusion later on.

- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this job?
- What are the skills and attributes you value most for someone being hired for this position?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to within the company?
- Could you describe a typical day/week in this position? The typical client/customer I would be working with?

The Expectations

To determine how and when you will be evaluated it is recommended that you ask these questions. This shows the interviewer that you don't have blinders on with excitement about a new job; you recognize that every position has difficult elements and that you are being thoughtful about what it will take to succeed in the role.

- What are the most immediate challenges of the position that need to be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- How will I be evaluated at this company, and how often?

The Next Steps

Always wrap up with this question, so that when you go home you know what to expect next. That way, you won't be sitting around wondering when you'll hear something.

- What are the next steps in the interview process?