

Top Tips for Answering Interview Questions

Employers believe the best predictor of future behavior is recent past behavior. For example, do you know someone who is always late to class? What's the likelihood that she'll be late to class tomorrow?

That's the principle of "behavioral-based interviewing," a common interviewing technique. Interviewers want to get a picture of how you have behaved *recently* in a situation because it will help them determine how you'll behave in a similar situation on the job.

Answering these questions takes insight into what employers are looking for.

Prepare for the interview

Before going to an interview, look at the job description (if one is not available, use the job posting as a basis) and think about some of your most important milestones: projects, grades, presentations, and work experiences that make you proud. You'll use these milestones as examples when answering questions. Use your best examples to concisely tell the story to the interviewer.

In addition, there are some standard attributes that many companies look for, including:

- Strong communicator
- Adaptable/flexible
- Able to work in teams
- Self-directed/motivated
- Demonstrates honesty and integrity
- Goal-oriented
- Strong follow-through

Think through your activities and experiences, and identify those that you can use to show you have these attributes.

During the interview

The interviewer says: "Tell me about a time when you were a part of a difficult team and what you did to get the team back on track." Include the following in your answer:

- **Situation:** Explain the situation in detail. Was it a class team? What was the project? What was difficult about the project?
- **Action:** What did YOU do to pull the team together? What specific action did you take? Don't talk about what "we" did or "they" did. Talk about *your role* in the situation.
- **Outcome:** Discuss the outcome of the project or team. Did the team succeed? How did you know the team was successful?
- **Learning:** Sometimes you'll be asked about a situation in which you weren't successful. Talk specifically about what you learned, how you modified your behavior, and how you've incorporated this lesson into your routine.

Keep your answer focused on recent job-related experiences. Whenever possible, use examples from your internship, class work, professional association, or other degree-related experiences. Do not use personal or family examples, or examples from religious organizations.

Additional interview advice

- Make sure your response is clear and concise. Watch the interviewer's body language. If he/she seem uninterested, wrap up your answer.
- If you can't think of an answer, say so. Don't try to bluff your way through because the interviewer will know it.
- The best candidates are able to speak to everything on their resume.

Use your career services center to practice sample questions and participate in mock interview sessions.

Courtesy of the *National Association of Colleges and Employer*.