



SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Before you start an interview, make sure you have a clear picture of the criteria and standards of performance that will make or break the job, and limit your questions to those factors.

The categories below are common job requirements (in alphabetical order) and the types of questions you might use to judge whether candidates fit those qualifications. Adapt and tailor each set of questions to the specific job description you need to fill.

Warm-Up

What interested you in applying for this position?

Tell us a little about your work history.

Adaptability

Describe supervisors that you have found easiest to work with. What about the most difficult?

You've probably had this experience: You worked hard on something, only to be told to change priorities and do it some other way. How did you handle that?

What kinds of problems have you had in switching from one job to another?

Administrative/Management

What is important to you in a job?

Describe an important goal that you achieved in the past. What strategies did you use to achieve it?

What part of your work has given you the greatest feelings of achievement and satisfaction?

What are the most important administrative responsibilities you have taken on? How well did you like them?

How do you like to be managed? What are your expectations of your supervisor?

What are your expectations of your co-workers?

What is it like to work with you? How would your colleagues describe you?

Give me an example of a problem you faced on the job, and tell me how you solved it.

What makes working here interesting to you?

What parts of your work have you found the most frustrating or dissatisfying?

Analysis

What do you do to keep informed about possible work-related problems?

Describe a project or idea you originated. How did you know it was a good idea?

What kind of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me what you have devised.

Have you ever recognized a problem or opportunity before anyone else? What happened?

Describe a situation in which you were able to read another person effectively and guide your actions by your understanding of his/her individual needs or values.

Give me an example of a time when you had to analyze another person or situation carefully in order to be effective in guiding your action or decision.

Attention to Detail

Describe a situation in which you felt it necessary to be very attentive and vigilant to your environment.

Have you ever had an experience in which you were glad you had paid attention to some particular detail? Please describe it.

Communication Skills (Oral)

Give me an example of how you would explain a complicated procedure to someone who was new to the situation.

When, in the past, have you found it important to disagree with your boss? How did you approach her or him, and what was the result?

Can you tell me about a job experience in which you had to speak up and tell other people what you thought or felt?

Have you ever had to get a point across to different types of people? What approach did you take?

Have you ever given instructions to someone, and then learned they did it wrong? What happened?

Describe a situation where your work or idea was criticized. How did you handle it? What did you do about it?

Give an example of a time when you could not participate in a discussion or could not finish a task because you did not have enough information.

Give me an example of a time when you were able to communicate successfully with another person, even when that individual may not have personally liked you.

Describe a decision you made based largely on data you obtained by asking questions.

How do people react when you ask them questions? How well do they seem to understand what you want to know?

Can you give me an example of a time you had to sell a proposal to a group of your superiors or coworkers? How did you do and how did it help?

Communication Skills (Written)

What are some of the most important documents you have written? What kinds of problems did you have writing them? What kind of reception did they receive?

What is the most difficult writing assignment you have undertaken recently? What made it challenging? How did you handle it?

Have you ever written instructions to be followed by employees or customers? What did you do?

Recall an important report you had to prepare. How did you go about planning and organizing it?

To what kind of audience do you address most of your written work? What level of language do you use?

Have you ever had to write technical materials for lay people? Please give me an example.

Describe a time when you had to communicate information in a difficult or awkward work situation. How did you handle that situation?

Control

Describe the procedures you have used to keep track of things that require your attention.

What do you do to keep track of your subordinates' progress on delegated assignments?

What do you do when you find that a subordinate is not meeting your standards?

Decision-Making

Describe a work-related problem you had to face recently. What procedures did you use to deal with it?

Give me an example of a difficult decision you had to make at your last job. How did you solve it? What was your rationale for choosing this method rather than another solution?

Can you describe a work-related occasion when you felt you made up your mind too quickly? Too slowly?

Have you ever delayed a decision so you would have more time to think? Give me an example.

Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.

Delegation

Describe your normal methods of assigning work to subordinates.

Who is in charge while you are gone? How do you inform this person of the limits and responsibilities you expect him/her to observe?

Have you ever moved up to a position where you had to supervise former peers? How did you handle it?

Describe a project that required a major effort by many members of your staff. Who did you ask to participate? What qualities made you choose them? What assignments did they have?

You've probably had a situation in which you delegated a responsibility, but the work wasn't done as you expected. What caused it to happen? What would you do differently next time?

Diversity

Describe a work or community experience in which you worked with people from different backgrounds. What was most challenging about the experience? What was most rewarding?

Flexibility

Tell me about a time when you feel you were treated unfairly. What was the problem and how did you handle it?

Tell me about a time you had to surmount an obstacle to reach a goal. What was the problem, and what did you do about it?

Have you ever had an experience in which you failed to sell an idea or gain cooperation the first time, but succeeded later? What was the difference?

Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?

Independence

On what occasions did you feel you had to consult with your boss before proceeding with some action? When did you feel it was proper to act on your own?

Describe a work responsibility or project that required you to work independently. What were your responsibilities? What strategies did you use to coordinate the work? What methods did you use to prioritize your work? How did you enjoy that type of work?

Give me an example of a project or idea you've undertaken, even though you knew it would not be popular with some people. How did things work out?

What were the limits of authority in your previous job? Did you ever find it necessary to go beyond them?

It's possible, of course, to be loyal to your employer but still disagree with some rules and policies. Can you cite an example in your own experience?

Initiative

Tell me about a time your effort helped carry out some project or idea.

Describe a way you have improved the organization of a system or task at your present job.

What have you done to make your job easier or more rewarding?

Describe a situation in which you found you had a serious problem. What did you do to solve it?

Tell me about an idea you generated. What did you do? How did things work out?

What is the most challenging thing you have ever done?

Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.

Give me an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Describe the most creative work-related project you have completed.

Integrity

Give me an example of a time you found it necessary to make an exception to the rules in order to get something done.

Do you feel some rules should be obeyed more stringently than others? Give me some examples.

How strictly do you believe your coworkers normally follow the rules? Do you approve of their attitude?

Judgment

What was the best decision you ever made? What were the alternatives? How did you go about making it?

Tell me the same thing about the worst decision you made.

How about the hardest decision you ever made?

Tell me about a time when you tried to do something and failed. Would you have done anything different?

Tell me about a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with a very upset library user or coworker.

Describe the worst customer or coworker you have ever had and tell me how you dealt with him or her.

Leadership

Tell me about a time you had to gain the cooperation of a group over which you had little or no authority. What did you do? How effective were you?

Describe a situation in which you had to help a subordinate solve a problem or meet an objective. What did you do? How successful were you?

Describe a situation in which a subordinate had a performance or disciplinary problem. How did you handle it?

How have you motivated your employees when salary incentives were not available?

Give me an example of when you felt you were able to build motivation in your coworkers and subordinates.

Learning-Specific

What did you have to learn to be effective in your previous job? How long did it take? Which parts were the most challenging?

Have you ever had trouble learning a new machine or procedure? How did you deal with that situation?

How did you gain the technical knowledge you needed to do your job?

Listening Skills

Have you ever had an occasion when you misunderstood someone else's instructions? Why do you think that happened?

Tell me about an instance from your previous job when you had to rely on verbal information from someone else to get the job done.

How do you handle dissatisfied internal or external customers?

Organizational Cooperation

What did you do in your last job in order to be effective with your organization and planning? Be specific.

How did events in your department affect other parts of the organization?

Tell me about the problem you have had that would affect more than one department. How did you try to solve it?

What other departments have been most useful in providing information or helping with problems? Least useful?

Tell me about a situation where you were a member of a team. What was your role and how did it make the teamwork more effective?

Tell me about a specific occasion when you conformed to a policy even though you did not agree with it.

Persuasiveness

What do you consider the best idea you ever failed to sell? What do you think the problem was?

Describe a situation in which you were able to positively influence the actions of others in a desired direction.

Describe a work situation in which you effectively influenced the actions of others. What strategies did you use to communicate your point of view?

Planning/Time Management

Describe a typical workweek. How did you plan the week's activities? How well did the schedule work?

Tell me about an occasion when your schedule was upset by unforeseen circumstances. What did you do?

How do you determine which activities have top priorities on your time?

Describe a situation in which your department experienced a major backlog, or the threat of one. How did you deal with that problem?

How do you develop short-range plans for your organization? Long-range plans?

Describe a situation when you had to manage multiple priorities with limited time. How did you handle it? How did you decide what came first?

Resilience

Describe a situation in which you suffered a major disappointment. What did you do?

Stress Tolerance

What kinds of pressures do you feel in your job? How do you cope with them? What frustrates you the most?

What factors contribute to job stress? How do you deal with these?

Describe a situation in which you were under particularly great pressure. How did you deal with it? How successful were you?

Under what circumstances would you take work home?

Supervision

Please summarize your supervisory experience in previous positions in terms of the number of people you supervised and your level of responsibility (i.e. scheduling, payroll, training, coaching, performance management, etc.)

How would you describe your ability to provide or receive feedback about work performance?

What do you do to set an example for your employees?

How do you get people who do not want to work together to establish a common approach to a problem?

Training

What techniques or approaches have you found to be the most effective when training employees?

What techniques or approaches have you found to be the most effective in motivating employees?

Team Work

Describe a time when you worked with a group of people to complete a project. What was your role? What did you like or dislike about that experience?

What did you do in your last job to contribute toward a teamwork environment? Be specific.

Technical Ability

Give me an example of an especially difficult assignment or project. What was your role? What did you do?

It says on your application that you have operated a personal computer. Describe a typical project on that machine.

Describe the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you've completed.

How do you keep up with the changing technologies in the library field?

Technical/Professional Knowledge

What is the most significant written document, report, or presentation that you have completed? What made it an effective product?

How do you view the librarian's role in the academic community?

How do you keep up-to-date with changes in librarianship and in library technology?

What was the most creative work-related project that you have completed? What did you enjoy about the experience.

What do you think is the most important development in your field today? What impact do you think it will have?

How do you keep informed about what's happening in your field?

To what job-related organizations do you belong?

What job-related publications do you normally read?

Have you recently attended any conferences or seminars in your field? What did you get out of them?

Do you have a philosophy of public service? How would you characterize it?

How did you choose the library profession? What rewards does it hold for you?

Please tell me about a great idea you have witnessed in the field of librarianship recently. What impressed you about it?

Now that you've had a chance to look at the job description, please describe to me things that you have done which demonstrate your experience or ability to perform well in this job.

If a friend asked you what you would be doing in this job, what would you say?

Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to gain information needed to solve a problem; then tell me how you analyzed the information and came to a decision.

What professional goals do you still want to achieve?

Work Standards

How would you define a good job in your line of work?

What personal performance standards do you set for yourself? What have you done to meet them? What do you do if you find yourself falling short of a standard?

If you were going to evaluate your own performance, what factors would you consider most important?

Do you make extra efforts to meet deadlines? Describe what you have done to complete a project or report on time.

What are the important things your department has contributed to the organization in the last year?

Supervision

In your previous jobs, how have you dealt with chronically late employees?

How would you handle a performance problem with your best employee? Your worst employee?

Describe a situation in which one or more subordinates had roles in the decision-making process. How did you make use of their contributions?

What did you do to help your subordinates set performance objectives last year?

What have you done to make your subordinates' jobs easier or more rewarding?

What have you done to make your group work more smoothly and efficiently?

In your mind, what is the greatest thing that distinguishes a superior employee from someone who gives typical good performance?

What factors do you consider most important in judging a subordinate's performance?

Wrap-Up

What do you see as the biggest difficulty in this job? How would you minimize it?

What do you see as the biggest opportunity in this job? How would you maximize it?

What would you most like to accomplish if you had this job?

What do you see as the opportunities and challenges of this position?

How does this position fit into your career plans?

What skills or characteristics do you have that you feel would be especially useful if you were the successful candidate for this position?

Is there anything that surprised you about the interview? About the University?

Is there a question that we didn't ask for which you had prepared an answer or is there something you'd like us to know that perhaps we did not ask?