



Ten of the Classics

These are the old faithfuls, the questions that turn up time and again – not usually all of them at once, but usually at least a couple in every interview. That's because they're good questions: they're good at getting information from you and, if you're prepared, you can be ready to use them to get your message across.

The Question	Some tips on answering it...	What not to say
<i>Tell us about yourself.</i>	Your opportunity to home in on your skills and experience. Your answer should be almost word perfectly prepared. Keep it brief, friendly and professional, not personal.	<i>"Hey, enough about me. Let's talk about you"</i>
<i>What is your greatest strength?</i>	It's not about your strengths. It's about their needs. From your USPs, choose something that you think is at the core of what they're after. Don't just say it. Demonstrate it. You prove your point and avoid sounding arrogant.	<i>"My modesty."</i>
<i>What is your greatest weakness?</i>	Some like to say something that's not a real weakness (eg. perfectionist, I work too hard), but they're fooling no one. If you give a weakness at all, talk about how you've addressed it and, ideally, overcome it. It's not wrong to say you don't know of any serious weakness and, if you did, you'd try to correct it.	<i>"My rubber fetish." (However, it's not a bad idea to give an answer that's irrelevant to the job.)</i>
<i>Why did you apply for this job?</i>	This is a chance to talk about your passion for the role and for the company and about how your skill set matches up with the job description (give examples). You can also say how it fits with your ambitions.	<i>"I was desperate."</i>
<i>Why should we hire you?</i>	The interviewer is asking you to sell yourself. Take the opportunity. Relate what you can offer to what they need (see their job description) and differentiate yourself, by talking about USPs and enthusiasm.	<i>"I already told you: I'm desperate."</i>
<i>What motivates you?</i>	Rely on the truth, but make it relevant to the job: what you'd be doing, the company's aims, the working environment. As always, use examples from your experience. If 'money' is the honest answer, you might try phrasing it as 'commercial success'.	<i>"If you find I'm not motivated, you could always try paying me more."</i>
<i>What is your greatest achievement?</i>	Don't be modest. Give your example, say what you did and describe the outcome. Try to pick something recent and relevant to the job you're being interviewed for. Ideally, it should have created real value.	<i>"My mum says I was a very early walker."</i>
<i>Where would you like to see yourself in 5-10 years' time?</i>	They want to know about your ambitions, how this job fits into them, and if you plan to stay in the job and in the company. Having an answer is important. It should show ambition, loyalty and realism. It's fine if this job is a stepping stone, but you should want to take time to learn everything before moving on.	<i>"In a mirror."</i>
<i>Why do you want to work here?</i>	It's essential to do research into the company to prepare for interview and this is your chance to show you've done your homework. Don't be sycophantic, but show that you respect them. Return to your USPs: say how you think they fit with the business's aims or culture, but also bring something different.	<i>"Well, the receptionist is fit for a start."</i>
<i>What are your salary expectations?</i>	Most jobs have fixed salaries on the advert, but if not, you should know your price. It should be based on research about similar roles, not your impulse. If research shows X is about right, say you'd hope for "between X and (X+15%), depending on the whole package". That leaves wiggle room either way.	<i>"I won't take a penny less than £50,000 a year."</i>

Ten of the Weirdest (just for fun)

These are some genuine interview questions. In most cases, there's no right answer, they just want to see how your mind works. Often they're testing your problem-solving skills, your creativity or your communication skills. There's no need to prepare for these specific questions, just be ready to think on your feet and always keep in mind what they're trying to find out about you. How can you use the question as an opportunity to tell them what you want them to know about you?

The Question	Who asked it?	Some tips on answering it...
You have a bucket of jelly beans. Some are red, some blue and some green. With your eyes closed, pick out two of the same colour. How many do you have to grab to be sure you have two the same?	Microsoft	As it happens, there is a correct answer to this. It's 4 – even if you haven't paired up your colours by the third one, there's no fourth colour available for the fourth bean.
If you were a biscuit, what sort would you be?	Hewlett Packard	They're asking how you see yourself. But they also want to see creativity, possibly even humour. Choose a biscuit and say why you chose that by talking about qualities they're looking for.
If you were shrunk to the size of a pencil and put in a blender, how would you get out?	Goldman Sachs	With questions like this, you need to think 'outside the box'. If they're allowed to shrink you for the question, why can't you say, for example, "I'd reverse the shrinking process". Failing that, treat it like weighing an elephant (see below).
You are stranded on a desert island. You have 60 seconds to choose people of ten professions to come with you. Who do you choose? Go.	Google	They're trying to see how you work under pressure. Can you think on your feet? Can you be practical? Will you maintain a sense of humour?
Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 how weird you are.	Capital One	Another one about how you perceive yourself. Steer clear of either end of the spectrum. They're more interested in why you pick your answer than what exactly it is.
Sell me an invisible pen.	Procter & Gamble	Do you understand the principles of selling? Use the golden rules: know your market, know your market's needs, know your product. You'd ask about the interviewers' pen needs. Now relate those needs to the USP of your pen, ie. its invisibility.
How do you weigh an elephant without using a scale?	IBM	Lateral thinking and problem-solving on your feet. Don't worry too much about the practicality of your solution or having something you really could go out and do. They've asked you to weigh an elephant, for chrissakes!
If Germans were the tallest people in the world, how would you prove it?	Zappos	Again, it's not about the answer. It's about your approach. Are you methodical, logical and creative?
What would you do if you just inherited a pizzeria from your uncle?	Volkswagen	This is really out there. Do they want to know about your motivations? Your problem-solving? Your business acumen? Pick one that you want to talk about and make your answer about that.)
Just entertain me for five minutes, I'm not going to talk.	Acosta	Another one about thinking on your feet, but also about presentation skills. There's a lot you can't control, so get in your comfort zone with what you can. In this case, talk about something you know enough about to sound enthusiastic and keep going.

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