

Questions from Interviews

How should you prepare for job interviews? Below are a series of questions from real graduate job interviews. Think carefully about how you would answer them. Are any of the questions designed to trick you? For some questions you will need to give examples in order to justify your answer – what experiences can you draw upon from your academic life, your work experience and your extra-curricula activities with the Guild, for example, in order to do this?

Trick questions

- 'What do we have to do for you to take this post with us?'

Advice: This is more difficult than it sounds, as you have to demonstrate knowledge of their offices, work portfolio, and other relevant plus points.

- 'What puts you off working for this company?'
- 'Taking for granted that this is your first-choice firm, which is your second choice and why?'
- 'Put yourself in our position – what question would you ask to test an interviewee?'
- 'What do you think about working long hours?'

Advice: If you say 'I will really hate it,' they would immediately cross you off the list. But if you say 'That would be marvellous,' they will guess you are lying.

These kinds of questions aren't there to dredge the truth out of you. Rather, they are designed to find out how good you are at putting together an argument that is sensitive to the full range of issues involved.

About yourself

- 'What are your weaknesses?'
- 'Give five good points and five bad points about yourself.'
- 'Describe a recent event and how it motivated you.'
- 'What would you change about yourself?'
- 'What do you most regret?'
- 'Explain how you confronted problems faced during previous employment and whether you felt these problems were satisfactorily resolved.'
- 'What makes you laugh?'
- 'Which three events in the world at the moment make you the most angry and explain why?'

Market knowledge

- 'What in your opinion, is wrong, with this firm?'
- 'What do you see as the main challenges facing the teaching/social work/marketing profession in the next few years?'
- 'Where do you see this company/institution going over the short-term future?'

Describing things to aliens

If we were aliens, how would you explain...

- ice-cream
- The Stock Exchange
- cricket
- rugby

Advice: These questions test your ability to explain complicated or unusual things in lay terms, you need to be clear, reasoned and articulate.

The death theme

- 'When you die, what do you want written on your gravestone?'
- 'If money was no object, what thing would you most like to do before you die?'

Advice: These questions are for testing your self-awareness...

The dinner party thing

- 'You are having a dinner party or are stuck in a lift, with anyone you want, dead or alive, from the past or present. Who would it be and why?'

Advice: This seems to be a recurring favourite for many interview panels, so you may as well prepare yourself a list. Don't get too clever or obscure though. Your reasoning, as ever, will be more important than the choices themselves.

The hardest one of all

- 'Why do you want to be a teacher/social worker/actuary/museum curator/lawyer/biscuit maker?'

Advice: Many people find this the hardest questions of all to answer, perhaps you've never stopped to articulate it to yourself before. Perhaps you don't have a good reason. Whatever, you should be prepared for this one – it's hardly an unreasonable question, after all. Try to be honest too, or failing that, plausible.