

Common behavioral questions

Behavioral interview questions are non-technical, focused on you, and 100% something you can prep for in advance. You actually have the answers already. We just need to find the right stories and polish them up a bit.

Here's your ultimate go-to guide for answering behavioral interview questions—including common behavioral questions you might hear and example answers.

What are behavioral interview questions?

Behavioral interview questions are questions or statements that ask job candidates to share examples of specific situations they've been in. Usually interviewers want to know about an experience where you had to use certain skills—[soft skills](#) especially—or had to navigate certain types of scenarios. (Read: It's the [“Tell me about a time when...” genre of questions.](#))

Why do interviewers ask behavioral questions?

Interviewers like these questions because it can help them get a more realistic and nuanced sense of how you work. It's a way for them to see what you're capable of accomplishing based on your *actual* past professional performance. Think about it: What would convince you of someone's ability to work on a team better—them saying they totally love working on a team or them telling a story that shows exactly how they worked on a team of five for several months to implement a website redesign for a major client?

30 common behavioral interview questions

As much as I wish I could tell you exactly which behavioral questions you'll get, I sadly cannot. But this list will give you an idea of the types of questions you might be asked. As you read through, think of stories you can share in response to each subset of questions—they can often be tweaked on the spot to answer any variation an interviewer might throw at you.

Teamwork questions

Almost any job requires you to work with others, so be prepared to talk about your experiences as part of a team. You'll want a story that illustrates your ability to work with others under challenging circumstances. Think resolving team conflicts, dealing with project constraints, or motivating others.

- Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.
- [Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict with a coworker. How did you handle that?](#)
- [Describe a time when you had to step up and demonstrate leadership skills.](#)
- [Tell me about a time you made a mistake and wish you'd handled a situation with a colleague differently.](#)
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?

Customer service questions

If you'd be working with clients, customers, or other external stakeholders in this role, definitely be ready for one or more of these. Be prepared with at least one story about a time you successfully represented your company or team and delivered exceptional customer service.

- Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?
- Give me an example of a time when you didn't meet a client's expectation. What happened, and how did you attempt to rectify the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you made sure a customer was pleased with your service.
- Describe a time when you had to interact with a difficult client or customer. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
- When you're working with a large number of customers, it's tricky to deliver excellent service to them all. How do you go about prioritizing your customers' needs

Adaptability questions

Times of turmoil are finally good for something! Think of a recent work crisis you successfully navigated. Even if the outcome didn't ideal, find a lesson or silver lining you took from the situation.

- [Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure at work or at school. What was going on, and how did you get through it?](#)
- Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?
- Tell me about settling into your last job. What did you do to learn the ropes?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to think on your feet.
- [Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with the situation?](#)

Time management questions

When an interviewer asks about [time management](#), get ready to talk about a specific instance when you had a few things in the air, prioritized, scheduled, organized, and completed everything—preferably before the deadline.

- Give me an example of a time you managed numerous responsibilities. How did you handle that?
- Describe a long-term project that you kept on track. How did you keep everything moving?
- Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?
- Tell me about a time an unexpected problem derailed your planning. How did you recover?

Communication questions

You use [communication skills](#) so regularly you'll probably have plenty of stories to choose from. Just remember to talk about your thought process or preparation.

- Tell me about a time when you had to rely on [written communication](#) to get your ideas across.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone at work to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were the resident technical expert. What did you do to make sure everyone was able to understand you?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to have a difficult conversation with a frustrated client or colleague. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.

Motivation and values questions

A lot of seemingly [random interview questions](#) are actually attempts to learn more about what motivates you. Your response would ideally address values and motivations directly even if the question didn't explicit ask about them.

- [Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment.](#)
- Describe a time when you saw a problem and took the initiative to correct it.
- Tell me about a time when you worked under either extremely close supervision or extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that?
- Give me an example of a time you were able to be creative with your work. What was exciting or difficult about it?

- Tell me about a time you were dissatisfied in your role. What could have been done to make it better?

How to answer behavioral questions

So how do you go about actually answering behavioral questions? It's actually pretty simple.

1. Quickly identify the hard or soft skill or quality the interviewer is trying to learn more about.
2. Choose a relevant story.
3. Share your story while emphasizing the details that speak to the relevant skills.
4. Sum up your answer with how you generally approach situations like the one the interviewer presented.

Example answers for top behavioral questions

Check out these example questions and answers to see our advice in action and get more specific tips on some of the most common behavioral questions.

1. Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?

Ah, the [conflict](#) question. It's as common as it is dreaded. Interviewers ask because they want to know how you'll handle the inevitable: disagreements in the workplace. But you might be nervous because it's hard to look good in a conflict even when you're not in the wrong. The key to getting through this one is to focus less on the problem and more on the process of finding the solution.

For example, you might say:

“Funnily enough, last year I was part of a committee that put together a training on conflict intervention in the workplace and the amount of pushback we got for requiring attendance really put our training to the test. There was

one senior staff member in particular who seemed adamant. It took some careful listening on my part to understand he felt like it wasn't the best use of his time given the workload he was juggling. I made sure to acknowledge his concern. And then rather than pointing out that he himself had voted for the entire staff to undergo this training, I focused on his direct objection and explained how the training was meant to improve not just the culture of the company, but also the efficiency at which we operated—and that the goal was for the training to make everyone's workload feel lighter. He did eventually attend and was there when I talked to the whole staff about identifying the root issue of a conflict and addressing that directly without bringing in other issues, which is how I aim to handle any disagreement in the workplace.”

2. Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?

Hiring managers want people who can take initiative and [solve problems](#). Many workplace problems boil down to a communication breakdown, which is what this question is getting at. Try not to get too bogged down in the nitty-gritty details of the story and make sure to finish with a clear lesson learned.

A good answer to this question might be:

“Back when I was just starting out as an assistant to a more senior recruiter, I once needed to book interview rooms for several different candidates with a few sessions each, all on the same day. The online system the company used to schedule conference rooms was straightforward enough, but the problem was that it allowed more senior people to bump me out of my reservations. I had to scramble to get them back. When I didn't get responses to my emails, I literally ran around the office to find the people who took my rooms and explain why I needed them. It was stressful at the time, but it all worked out in the end. Most were happy to move to a different room or time to make sure the interviews went smoothly. I also met a bunch of people and earned early on that talking to someone in person when possible can often move things along more quickly than an email can.”

3. Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?

A perfect answer to this question has an outstanding outcome and illustrates the process of getting to that result. But even if you only have a decent outcome to

point to instead of a stellar one, spelling out the steps you took will get you a strong answer.

For instance:

“One of the most important times to make a good impression on a client is before they’re officially a client. When the sales team pulls me into meetings with potential clients, I know we’re close to sealing the deal and I do my best to help that along. That’s probably why I was chosen to represent the research team when we did a final presentation for what would become our biggest client win of the year. I spoke with everyone on the sales team who had met with them previously to learn as much as possible about what they might care about. The thing I do that sets me apart is that I don’t try to treat all the clients the same. I try to address their specific questions and concerns so that they know I did my homework and that I care enough to not just give the cookie-cutter answers. In this case, having the data pulled and ready for every question they had made all the difference in building their confidence in our company.”

4. Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?

Interviewers want to know how you handle organizational change. Your story doesn’t necessarily need to be about some massive company reorg, it could even be about a new system for sharing files. The key is to make sure you clearly describe the steps you took to adapt and then generalizing your experience.

So you might say:

“This past year my manager left and the company was unable to fill her position for several months. This completely upended the way our team operated since she’d been the one who made sure we were all on the same page. After a couple of weeks of missed deadlines and miscommunications on the team, I sheepishly suggested we do a quick daily check-in. It took no more than 10 minutes a day, but it helped us get back to working efficiently again and really reduced the frustrations that had started brewing. It helped me understand that adapting to change requires understanding the gaps a change creates and thinking creatively about how to fill them.”

5. Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with the situation?

For broad questions like this, it can be helpful to narrow the scope a bit. For a [question about failure](#), you can do that by defining what it means to fail in your own words before sharing your example.

For example:

“As a team manager, I consider it a failure if I don’t know what’s going on with my staff and their work—basically if a problem catches me by surprise then I’ve failed somewhere along the way. Even if the outcome is ultimately fine, it means I’ve left a team member unsupported at some point. A recent example would be this training we do every year for new project managers. Because it’s an event that my team has run so many times, I didn’t think to check in and had no idea a scheduling conflict was brewing into a full-on turf war with another team. The resolution actually ended up being a quick and easy conversation at the leadership team meeting, but had I just asked about it sooner it would never have been a problem to begin with. I definitely learned my lesson about setting reminders to check in about major projects or events even if they’ve been done dozens of times before.”

6. Give me an example of a time you managed numerous responsibilities. How did you handle that?

Multitasking. [It’s impossible](#) and yet we’re all expected to do it. Your job is likely going to involve more than one responsibility and the hiring manager is going to want to know how you plan on juggling a number of tasks, projects, or deadlines. You could say:

“This is almost a cliché, but being part of an early-stage startup meant I wore a lot of different hats. One second I was recruiting, the next I’d be in front of potential clients, and then I’d be meeting with the cofounders about the product. Switching gears so quickly often felt like getting whiplash. I realized that it wasn’t necessarily the juggling that was the problem, it was the constant switching back and forth. I started chunking my work so I could spend several hours focused on similar tasks. One block for recruiting. One block for sales. One block for product. Once I figured out the secret to multitasking was to not multitask, it got a lot more manageable.”

7. Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way at work.

No matter your role, communication skills are critical and interviewers are going to keep asking related questions until they're sure yours are up to snuff. When asked about persuasion, emotional intelligence and [empathetic listening](#) can be good pieces of your communication skill set to emphasize.

A good answer could sound like:

“I once was tasked with pulling the plug on a project. Of course, this can be incredibly disappointing for those affected. Done poorly it could destroy a team’s morale. I can’t discuss the project too much, but suffice it to say that everyone on it worked really hard and it took some serious convincing for them to agree this was the right choice. Rather than letting the idea take hold that months of their work was being scrapped, I proactively shared with everyone all the ways their work would still be utilized by different parts of the company. It’s not what they had intended, but seeing that their work wasn’t wasted softened the blow and allowed me to share the hard truth that we wouldn’t be able to realize our original goals. Taking the time to consider what negative reaction they might have and making the effort to be empathetic allowed me to directly address their concerns and show them that this was the best way forward.”

8. Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.

You can probably predict whether or not you’ll get this question based on the [job description](#). If the job requires frequent [public speaking](#), be sure you have an example ready to go. For questions like this that have an “and why” part, make sure you give evidence for how you know you did a good job. In this case, an engaged audience is pretty good evidence you gave a strong presentation.

For instance:

“Presenting is something I’ve gotten better at over time. At my previous lab, I presented often at the weekly research meeting where we all kept each other up to date on the progress of our work. When I first started, I would just pick up where I left off last time and speak like I was talking to a room full of experts—which I was, but they weren’t necessarily experts in my specific project. It’s obvious in hindsight. The nature of research is that it’s inherently novel. I

started doing more in my presentations to give context, like a more compact version of a conference presentation. It was more work, but I could tell everyone was engaged based on the questions I got. They were more thoughtful and challenging and helped push my work forward. Now, whether I'm presenting formally or informally, I try my best to scaffold my conclusions with relevant context."

9. Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment.

This question can sometimes make people freeze up. Proudest? Like literally the thing I am proudest of ever? It's a lot. A more manageable way to think about it is that it's essentially a freebie to talk about anything. So, you can choose a story that showcases a relevant skill, passion, or experience you haven't been able to talk about yet or want to emphasize more and set it up as one of your proudest accomplishments! If you're applying for an entry-level role, feel free to talk about school accomplishments.

For example:

"There's a lot that I've done over the last few years at Major Telecom that I'm proud of, but one thing we haven't had a chance to talk too much about is my work in the parents employee resource group. As the company has become more family friendly, I've worked hard to guide the conversation as the co-lead of the parents ERG. This year, I spearheaded an effort to improve our flexible work policy, first writing a letter on behalf of the ERG to the leadership team and then later drafting a proposal which ultimately led to a better work environment and more flexible work for everyone, not just parents."

10. Tell me about a time when you worked under either extremely close supervision or extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that?

This question is getting at how you like to be managed, but it's phrased in a way that may tempt you to speak negatively of a previous employer. Stay focused and keep your response neutral to positive.

So, you could say:

“As an intern at Online Content Co., I felt like my every move required approval, which isn’t everyone’s cup of tea, but I really appreciated it back when I had no idea what I was doing. I actually credit the close supervision I got for helping me pick things up so quickly. After I officially joined the team as a staff writer though, it started to feel a bit restrictive. I thought once I “proved myself” it would get better, but after a few more months with no significant change a mentor helped me see that I wasn’t being proactive about communicating with my manager. Rather than going to my one-on-one meetings with nothing prepared and being peppered with questions, I started arriving with an update of all my ongoing work. All the same information got conveyed, but instead of feeling micromanaged, I felt empowered and it made all the difference in my experience.”

4 tips to prep for—and ace—a behavioral interview

I’m taking my own advice and concluding this article with a few general takeaways. If you remember nothing else, make sure you do the following when you’re getting ready for an interview:

1. Prepare a few stories based on the job description.

Maybe you’ll use them, maybe you won’t, but trust me that you’ll feel more prepared and less nervous if you’ve spent some time thinking about this. Scan the job description for anything that seems to be mentioned more than once or is otherwise emphasized—say, “takes initiative,” or, “works independently.” Then come up with some stories about those things!

2. Brush up on the STAR method.

Stories can get big and unwieldy, especially when we’re nervous. It’s important to keep your answer concise and relevant to the question. Using the [STAR interview method](#) can help you to craft job-landing responses to many interview questions that require a well-structured example story.

3. Wrap up your answers with a conclusion.

Some stories don't fit super neatly into the STAR method and that's fine. In any case, just make sure to wrap up your story with a nice summation so that the interviewer knows what they were supposed to learn from it. In other words, tell your story and then tell them what to think about it. "I did this to solve the problem, so in general, this is the process I use for solving problems."

4. Practice aloud before your real interview.

I've worked with thousands of job seekers and written hundreds of job search articles, and my advice on interviewing can pretty much be summed up with one word: practice. To be more specific, practice answering possible interview questions out loud. Do not memorize your answers. Just say them a few times. If you want to be fancy, do it in front of a mirror to get a better sense of how you're presenting yourself.

Brushing up on your [interview skills](#) in general will also help you to answer these questions with ease and sail through to the next round. So get those stories ready and—I'm going to say it one more time for good luck—practice!

(<https://www.themuse.com/advice/behavioral-interview-questions-answers-examples>)