

1. Can you talk me through the employment section on your CV and then go on to talk about your current role and responsibilities?

To some this question might seem pointless and you might think 'she's got my details in front of her' and be tempted to say "it's all written on my CV". That's definitely the wrong answer. Here the interviewer is 'testing' your ability to communicate a clear, confident and succinct summary of your achievements and what you have done to date. Think of it as a great opportunity to 'sell' yourself and - from the interviewer's point of view - a chance for them to clarify details and check what you've been doing with your life. And yes, it is likely that they will have your CV in front of them so it's important that you know exactly what's written because they may go on to probe each point and achievement in more detail.

2. How would you describe yourself?

This question is asked in the majority of interviews so you should always be prepared for it. With that said it can be one of the most difficult questions to answer particularly for those who aren't used to talking about themselves. But if you've prepared an answer beforehand then it makes the task easier because you won't have to think on your feet. Bear in mind that the interviewer is assessing how well you could potentially fit into the team and culture of the organisation so make sure your answer is relevant. A good approach to this question is to list 10 words that describe you and see if there's any correlation with the job description and person spec (if you find there's little or no relevance then this might not be the job for you). The job might require someone who is able to work under pressure in which case you should say you're calm under pressure and able to deliver to deadlines. Give a real life example to punctuate your example. You could even talk about your weaknesses, but make sure that they are 'positive' weaknesses. For instance you can say that you are impatient with team members who cannot carry their own weight, or who cannot contribute sufficiently.

Preparation and practice is everything. Remember, if you hesitate about yourself, your interviewers will doubt whether you fit their bill of requirements. After all, if you don't know about you, who does?

3. Why did you choose this particular career path and decide to apply for this job?

The interviewer is trying to ascertain your reasons for pursuing a career in this area (whether that is as a records manager or legal librarian). They're also trying to find out what attracts you to the job and what your career needs are. Your response will then be analysed to see how your 'requirements' measure up to the needs of the organisation. 'Is there a synergy between your goals and ambitions and those of the organisation?' That's what the interviewer will be thinking.

Whether your answers match the employer's requirements will depend on whether you have a good understanding of the vocation. Research is paramount in being able to convey your knowledge and genuine interest to a potential employer. Uninformed applicants who

have not gathered the relevant information will find it difficult to provide the interviewer with adequate and persuasive answers.

4. What was the reason for leaving this job on your CV? Why have you decided to leave your current post?

This is another common question which will be asked at some stage of the interview process so have your answer prepared! Make sure you don't waffle and that you're direct and focus on the future. Under no circumstances should you speak badly of your previous/current employer. Besides being tactless the interviewer will be left wondering if you might bad-mouth his company or even worse, disclose sensitive information. Be as positive as possible and practice your answer so that you sound confident about your goals and aims for the future.

Suggestion: I'm really enjoying my work at x company and my latest appraisal suggested that I am performing well and am in line for a promotion in the future. But it is not likely that the business will grow for a year or two so I don't want to be coasting.

5. What interests you in our company?

Here the interviewer is testing the extent of your research so if you've not prepared adequately then it will be obvious. Gather your research from the organisation's website and see if you can find information on the department from corporate brochures and reliable media sources. If you find information that tallies with your own aspirations then it is important to say so. For example it might be the culture that attracts you or the company might be involved in specific projects or specialist areas that appeal to you. The interviewer wants to know that you're a 'good fit' and that your ambitions match those of the organisation and that you can add value to the department.

6. How would you react if a colleague criticises your work and how would you deal with that?

No one's perfect and listening to constructive comment from our peers is part of the learning process. Your future employer doesn't want someone who reacts over-sensitively to advice. So bear in mind that the interviewer is assessing your ability to listen and learn and is also trying to discover how manageable you will be and whether you can answer to authority. I'd suggest you say something like: 'It depends how the criticism is put to me and also how valid it is. But I always listen to constructive criticism and take it as feedback so that I can learn and improve. I like the idea of sharing thoughts and ideas with colleagues and sometimes what seems like a bad comment can turn out to be something useful.'

7. What is your biggest weakness?

It'd be easy to assume that this negative-sounding question has been asked to trip you up in order to reveal your deficiencies so that the interviewer can figure out if you're up to the job. Not so. Instead this question is designed to test your ability for self-analysis; the interviewer will be looking for a positive yet honest response. But rather than give a 'warts and all' answer focus your response on an area that doesn't have a major impact on your ability to do the job and/or an area that you are on your way to improving (not an area you've already improved, but one that is well on its way). You can also use positive weaknesses as mentioned earlier.

8. Tell me what you consider to be your best strength.

You should have already listed your top five or ten skills (whether hard or soft) prior to the interview so this is a great opportunity to 'sell' them to the interviewer. It's crucial that you study the job description and person specification so that you're aware of the demands of the job. This is because if team work is one of the job requirements and is one of your own strengths then it is imperative to give this as an answer and provide anecdotal yet succinct evidence of this.

9. Tell me what your ambitions are over the next 5 years.

To answer this question you will need to have taken some time to think about your career in the future. The interviewer wants to know if you have given this some thought and that you have a positive outlook, realistic ambition and a motivation to progress. You'd certainly grab their attention if you say that you'd like to be working within the organisation and have gained the respect of your colleagues. You might want to add that you would hopefully have learned enough to prepare you for a more senior role or promotion within the organisation.

10. What do you think about your current employer?

Be honest in your appraisal of your employer. However, you should not be too critical or go over the top with praise either. Use this opportunity to describe the skills you've gained. You should also state the terms - hopefully good - which you currently enjoy with your employer. So something along the lines of, "I very much enjoy my work with XYZ & Co. I'm on good terms with my boss and other members of my department and am a respected member of the team. I still have some great friends there too. The experience has been valuable for my career and I have learnt a lot during my time at the company - it was a very rewarding experience. I decided to leave because I wanted to move to a company with greater ambitions where I could continue to fulfil my career goals and learn new skills."

11. What salary do you expect be paid in your next job?

Negotiating your salary can seem daunting but it needn't be if you've done your research. The interviewer will expect that you know your own 'worth' and will look for a confident and assertive response. You should really know what salary range under offer before you get to interview stage (and where you fit on the scale). Let the interviewer know that you've done your homework by saying something along the lines of "I have researched what a current reasonable rate for this job would be and I know I'm well qualified and enthusiastic so would expect at least....."

12. Do you have any questions?

It's important that you prepare a few questions so that you're able to ask at least three or four when the time comes. If you don't ask any questions then the interviewer will question your level of interest in the role and company. Good questions empower you with knowledge on which you can base your final decision and help you manage your own expectations. Typical questions are;

- How do you envisage the role expanding?
- What is the typical career path for individuals in this company?
- What do you see as the strengths of this company?

- Do you have any reservations about my ability to do this job?
- When can I expect to hear from you?

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