



WAIV

86 Interview Questions & Answers

Part One: 1-34: Personal/General Questions

1. “Tell me about yourself.” (Or “How would you describe yourself?”)

Often described as a “stress” question – which either paralyzes job seekers into stunned silence or spurs an attack of the rambles – this is actually a splendid invitation to market yourself. You have the opportunity to showcase your qualifications for the job, and present a condensed history of your professional background. Present a unified pattern in broad brushstrokes which makes a strong case that you are ideal for the job in question – **in no more than two minutes, tops**. The interviewer can always ask you to elaborate more later.

This can be a “dream” question – but only if you’re prepared. It offers the opportunity to tell the most important things about yourself in an open-ended way you’d like. In your answer, start with where you are now in your career and give a summary of the qualifications that make you perfect for the job in question. For example: “I’m a history major with over 4 years of sports broadcasting experience. For KALX, I led a team that developed and delivered a weekly sports show which reached an audience of over 2,000.” Rehearse your two-minute pitch until it falls trippingly off your tongue and sounds convincing and spontaneous, not mechanical.

2. “What are your greatest strengths?”

Pick a couple of the key personality traits employers’ desire – drive, reliability, determination, or problem-solving skills, for example. But just saying “I’m very reliable,” or “I have lots of drive,” won’t convince anyone. Give **examples** from your jobs to demonstrate that you indeed have what you say you do.

3. “What is your greatest weakness?”

Don’t place your foot in your mouth and turn confessional here – being painfully honest about your faults won’t score you any points. The overused no-no is to turn a positive trait into a weakness (“I am a workaholic” or “I am motivated to the point of being driven”). A better answer: mention **a former weakness you have overcome**. For example you now possess excellent time management skills since earlier in your career you failed to allot enough time to sales calls and writing up sales reports. Another option: state candidly your analytical skills are weaker than your people skills.

4. “What are your most important accomplishments?”

Did you help your company make money, save money, save time or become more efficient in any way? Explain how. Be aware that most job accomplishments are achieved as part of a team or department, so don’t make it sound as though you single-handedly turned a situation around or executed a triumph by yourself unless you truly did. Interviewers usually can smell someone who takes credit for others’ work a mile away.

5. “Why did you pick Cal?”

The interviewer is looking for sound reasoning and judgment behind some of your choices, as well as the ability to articulate it. Don't act as though you went wherever the wind blew.

6. “Can you handle pressure?”

Of course saying “yes” will not convince anyone. **Explain** how you turned out a professional work product despite juggling many competing projects, or despite a short deadline, or whatever the specific pressure was. It's also recommended to note that you generally plan and manage your time well to avoid panic deadlines.

7. “How do you handle deadlines?”

Explain that you plan ahead for the materials and staff you need to handle a project, anticipate when certain steps need to be started and completed, and build in a time cushion to prevent last-minute panic.

8. “Why should I hire you?”

This offers an excellent opportunity to trumpet your two-minute pitch showing why you are the ideal person for the job. Summarize your qualifications and your positive personality traits – *matching each point of the interviewer's job description with what you offer*. Cite an example or two of how you can make a contribution to the job, based on your past job performance.

9. “Are you willing to relocate?”

If you want the job, the answer is “yes”. However, remember that you never have to make a decision about a job until an offer is made to you – and the job and/or the salary may be considerably reshaped by then.

10. “Do you think your grades accurately reflect your ability?”

If you have high grades, the answer obviously is yes. If you don't, say no, but describe other things which do demonstrate your ability – your part-time or full-time job during, your leadership role in extracurricular activities, your internship at a local radio or TV station, taking care of or financially supporting a sick parent, volunteer work at a local hospital once a week, etc. Do this without being defensive – grades matter very little to an employer after that first post-college job, since all he or she really wants is a good employee who will perform the job well and be manageable.

11. “What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?”

Disabuse the interviewer of the suspicion that generous salary, gigantic title, and corner office are your prime motivators. Explain that, to you, a job well-done is its own best reward since your own work and ethic demand it, but that kind words of appreciation from your boss are always welcome. Add that you, like everyone, look forward to regular salary reviews.

12. “What have you done that shows initiative?”

Think of something which demonstrates a take-charge attitude where you came up with an idea and acted on it for the greater good of everyone. The action you took should not have flouted rules and procedures. Perhaps you organized multiple tasks and deadlines for a major project you were working on?

Or you can cite the time you started a typing service for your fellow students' term papers and employed three students part-time or the time you traveled to Europe for two months alone, made all your own travel arrangements, and funded it through part-time jobs.

13. “If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?”

The interviewer is looking less for the “right” answer than for how you think, how you assess yourself, and what makes you tick to see if you are a good fit for the company. Show maturity, perspective, and sound reasoning in your answer, and mention only one thing or nothing. Perhaps you would have traveled the globe more, experienced different cultures, and met many different types of people. Or perhaps you are content, look forward to everyday with enthusiasm and vigor, have no regrets, and would have changed nothing.

14. “What did you learn in your college career?”

The interviewer is not as interested in the subject matter you learned as in if you developed some key personality traits necessary in the work world, such as disciplined work habits, reliability, initiative, etc. (He or she is hoping for proof you did not spend all your time partying and living off your parents’ money).

15. “Do you have plans to continue your education?”

If you do, make clear that it will be done nights or weekends, so it will not interfere with your job.

16. “How was your college education funded?”

Explain the proportion covered by a scholarship, part-time jobs, and loans. If you were responsible for 100% of your education, point it out – it never fails to impress. If DOR helped and if you don’t want to disclose your disability, leave it out.

17. “What are your hobbies?”

This sounds like a harmless question, but usually the interviewer is trying to sound out if you will be a good fit for the corporate culture. Solitary pursuits such as reading, running, and biking indicate you prefer to be alone; sports such as baseball, softball, basketball, etc. indicate you feel comfortable being part of a team.

18. “Can you take direction?”

Yes, you can, and you also welcome constructive criticism without feeling attacked because you understand you have a lot to learn from more experienced people in the company.

19. “Describe your ideal job”

Describe a job which matches the description of the job given you by the interviewer, which enables you to use your qualifications and skills to grow and make a contribution to the company.

20. “What was the last book (or movie) you read (or saw)? What did you think of it?”

Be sure you mention a book you have read or a movie you have seen, not just the “hot” item of the moment, in case you are asked questions about it. Pick one that stimulated your thinking and taught you something useful in the work world – in other words, not the latest action thriller or horror flick.

21. “Do you have any questions?”

The *wrong* answer is “no”, or an extended “ummm”. This generally means the interview is at an end, and so is your final opportunity to score some points. Demonstrate interest, enthusiasm, and knowledge about the company and its product or service one last time. If you can, ask at least one insightful question pegged to something you read in the business press or a trade magazine – why the company is succeeding with a new strategy or more details about expansion in the division where you are interviewing. Be savvy and encourage the interviewer to talk about a subject he or she is expert on – which often means you’ll be regarded as an excellent

conversationalist. Questions about salary, benefits, or vacation are out of line here. Wait for the job offer – without which you have no negotiating chip.

22. “What are the reasons for your success?”

Offer general reasons, back them up with an example or two from your jobs, and mention the help from colleagues or managers – teamwork again – to avoid coming across like an egomaniac. Perhaps you have a great deal of drive, welcome mastering new skills, have indefatigable energy – you never leave the office before making one more phone call or writing one more letter, and have been lucky enough to have worked with exceptionally talented managers and staff.

23. “What are some of your pet peeves?”

Name some things which bother any hard-working employee – colleagues who do their work incompetently, are clock-watchers, are often absent forcing others to do their work, and complain about their lack of promotions or raises. Don't indicate in any way that such peccadilloes cause you to lose your temper, and don't give examples of previous coworkers or supervisors!

22. “Are you a risk taker?”

The interviewer wants to know if you take prudent risks backed by knowledge, good judgment and consultation with your boss – or if you are the type who flies off the handle and is apt to make a fool out of yourself and the company. Before you answer, ask what sort of risk the interviewer has in mind. This way, you have a better idea of how to frame your answer to describe how you evaluate a risk.

23. “Which of your skills can stand improvement at this time?”

This is a clever way to get you into admitting your weaknesses. Say instead, that from the interviewer's description you seem to have all the necessary skills and qualifications for the job, but that since one or two areas are crucial, you believe in constantly updating and polishing your skills to do the best possible job. You're trying to make a diamond shine brighter, not confess to only being a rhinestone.

24. “What was the hardest decision you ever had to make, and how did you handle it?”

A major decision, such as radically reshaping strategy to help an ailing project (which, of course, succeeded), your rationale, and how you carried it out is needed here. No need to confess any agonizing choices...while they may have been your most difficult decisions, avoid the trap some job-seekers fall into when faced with a friendly, you-can-tell-me tone from an interviewer.

25. “Who (or what) has been a major influence on your life?”

Who or what is less important than a sound rationale backing up why this made you into what you are today – a holder of key personality traits, such as integrity, determination, initiative, that are valuable to employers. Think carefully about your formative influences – parent, teacher, coach, minister – and offer self-assessment which is on target.

26. “What do you worry about?”

Don't open a window into your psyche and reveal what you truly worry about at 3:00 a.m. Stick to things that are job-related and expected of a hard-working employee – what the competition is doing, deadlines, team members who are not pulling their weight, winning that new piece of business you've been eyeing – but note you aim to solve the situation, not just stew about it.

27. “Why do you want to switch from the public to the private sector?”

While you have learned a great deal working for the government – specify what – you welcome the opportunity to work in an atmosphere where attention is paid to the bottom line, and where individual effort and decision-making is both expected and rewarded.

28. “Are you a self-starter?”

If you say “yes” and stop dead, you aren’t. Use this question as an opportunity to sell yourself and you’re proactive to your jobs. You know what to do, and you go ahead and do it, without relying on constant direction and feedback from your manager. Offer the same examples as for “What have you done that shows initiative?”

29. “How have you benefited from your disappointments?”

No need to site specific disappointments which saddened or demoralized you, unless you are asked – just give a general list of how you are a better person as a result. You analyzed these events to uncover the kernel which caused them, you know now how you would act differently at various points if the same situation arose, and you remember the lessons learned so they can be applied to new situations.

30. “How do you plan your time?”

Show an organized, prioritized approach – the interviewer dislikes visions of people who jump in an unfocused manner from one task to another, often missing out on major priorities. For example, perhaps you only return phone calls from mid-afternoon on, saving the rest of the day for client meetings, staff contact, thinking, and writing. You read correspondence and trade magazines after 5:00 P.M., and never leave before writing a “do list” for tomorrow. This way, you’re ready to hit the ground running each morning.

31. “Can we check your references?”

If you want a job offer, the answer is “yes”. But if you are currently working, protect yourself – say you will be happy to provide references from current and former employers at the time a job offer is extended. Add that you want these references to be checked after you have accepted a written job offer and resigned from your current company. You want to avoid the horror of having your current employer, who is not even aware you are job-hunting, being called for a reference, then failing to receive a job-offer – and perhaps being terminated by your irate employer. (It happens.)

32. “How do you handle rejection?”

For jobs in sales, public relations, and similar fields, rejection is a part of life. Answer that you do not take it personally and let it get you down; you forge ahead and make more phone calls or customer sales calls, since you realize the field is a numbers game with a high ratio of failures to successes.

Part Two: 35-41: Work History

33. “What don’t you like about your current (previous) employer?”

You like everything about your current or previous employer. Don’t let words like personality conflict, outmoded business practices, unfair promotion systems, and other forms of criticism escape your lips. Interviewers assume, rightly or wrongly, that if you badmouth one employer, you will badmouth the next. A company does not willingly hire someone who is a potential troublemaker. Save your job horror stories for friends and relatives. At your interview, say you learned a tremendous amount from your last employer and the

experience was indispensable for your career. You highly respect the professionalism and judgment of your boss, and so on.

34. “How long have you been looking for a job?”

Not to worry if you already hold a job. Your answer: You are now seeking a job that will challenge you at this stage of your career and a company that will provide opportunities for career growth.

If, however, you are unemployed, be very careful how you answer. A flat “year and a half” or “two years” will not exactly draw job offers in droves. If you have been doing constructive activities in the meantime – such as helping out in your son’s business, learning a new skill, studying for your broker’s license, consulting, or chairing the fundraising committee of your favorite charity – by all means say so. Subtract this time from the time you have been unemployed, so that the time you have been actively looking for a job full-time is much shorter.

Avoid sounding defensive or chastened if you are unemployed. Interviewers want people who are “hot commodities,” so act like the desirable candidate you are. Note that you have weighed other job offers in the meantime, but that you are being particular about the job and environment you choose so you can be challenged. Remember, *how* you answer an interview question is often as important as the content of what you say.

35. “What do you know about our company?”

Sound informed about the company’s products or services, growth areas, future plans, etc. – in other words, the sort of information you learned when you researched the company, as discussed in Chapter 1. Positives only, please – don’t remind the interviewer of the failure of the introduction of Product X or how much stock prices have fallen since the recent government investigation. You have no business being in a job interview if you have not prepared yourself to discuss the company and its prospects.

36. “Which jobs (or duties) have you enjoyed most?”

Your answer should be jobs or duties which enabled you to showcase some of the key personality traits employers’ desire and which, ideally, resemble the job you are presently interviewing for.

37. “Which jobs (or duties) have you enjoyed least?”

It doesn’t speak well for you to admit to holding jobs that were dead-end or stultifyingly dull. The interviewer will wonder why you stayed. Try to find something the job taught you, or how it helped you develop one of the key personality traits employers desire.

38. “How do you get along with your current (former) boss?”

You get along fine with your current or former boss, and you respect his or her ability, judgment, and professionalism. Take the high road on this. Your boss may be an ogre who rules with an iron hand, but intimations of this should never pass your lips.

39. “How do you deal with people with different backgrounds and value systems from your own?”

You try to cooperate and get along with everyone to achieve the goals of the department and company as a whole. You enjoy working with different types of people as you learn new things and believe “variety is the spice of life.”

Part Three: 41-47 : Salary

40. “What salary are you looking for (or what is your salary requirement)?”

Try to buy time, and throw the question back into the interviewer’s court. It’s foolish to name a figure, and either cause the interviewer to chuckle inwardly at the absurdly cheap hire you are, or throw yourself out of the ring by asking for too much money. This is a game where whoever names a figure first, loses. First, list all the duties of the job according to the description you have been given to make sure you and the interviewer are on the same wavelength.

Then, ask what salary range he or she is allowed to offer for the job, or what salary range your skills are worth. Hopefully, you will hear a range straight from the interviewer’s lips, from which you can negotiate. If all else fails – his or her lips are sealed – counter with a range, not a fixed figure, you are comfortable with.

41. “That’s a little high for us. Can you come down a little?”

Don’t give in yet! – throw the ball back. Ask the interviewer what he or she envisions as the salary range, and negotiate with that range in mind. You instantly weaken your negotiating position if you cave in after five seconds and lower your figure.

42. “How much money are you worth?”

Similar to asking the salary you want, this also demands you offer proof to back it up. Demonstrate an awareness of the market rate for the job based upon your skills and experience, and a confidence that your qualifications match the job requirements point by point when you name a range you are comfortable with.

43. “What salary are you making now?”

Since employers display a distressing propensity to take your current salary into consideration when making a salary offer – generally offering about 10-15 percent more, if you are making market rates – answer this question with a great deal of care. Throw the ball back in the interviewer’s court if you can, when you are making a below-market or above-market range for the job to provoke the interviewer into figure: instead express interest in the job and confidence in reaching agreement. You should probably only baldly mention your current salary if you are making the market rate.

44. “What salary do you expect to earn five years (or three years, etc.) from now?”

Of course, you don’t even know what position you’ll be holding at this point – or if you’ll still be at the company. Ask the interviewer what would be a reasonable salary to expect for someone with your skills and background. If pressed, cite a range, based upon market rates, and career path to back it up. It’s best to be vague “at that point I’ll have six years of experience as an account supervisor in the pharmaceutical area” and avoid job titles.

45. “You’ve been stuck in the same position at basically the same salary for the past five years at your current (or former) employer. Why?”

Ouch. If you’ve inadvertently disclosed this, you must deal with it. Explain that opportunities for advancement were very limited at your company, and that other employees with more seniority were ahead of you. If the last promotion in your division was a long time ago, cite the date. Add quickly that you are eager to assume more responsibility and have the skills and talent to do so – which is why you are interviewing at this firm today.

Part Four: 48-60: Teamwork and Leadership

46. “Have you ever had a problem in dealing with other people?”

Your answer is no, you have always tried to be a team player and cooperate with others for the good of the company.

47. “What kinds of people do you prefer to work with?”

People who are hard-working, honest, enthusiastic, and take pride in their work – in other words, people who share some of the key personality traits employers’ desire.

48. “What kinds of people do you find it difficult to work with?”

People who possess the opposite of these traits – who lack a work ethic, are dishonest, are malcontents who complain incessantly, who don’t pull together in a team effort.

49. “Can you tell me about your management style?”

Your answer should involve the following: you motivate your staff by praise, rewards, and setting a good example; you treat them with respect, inviting their suggestions; you empower them to take on tasks of greater responsibility, and make them feel part of a team where everyone is pulling together; and you explain the long-term as well as the short-term goals of the work being done.

50. “When do expect to be promoted?”

The wrong answer is to name a specific time – like six months, a year, or three years- which brands you as cocky and arrogant. To be safe, answer that you expect to grow steadily in skills and experience so you will be ready when an opportunity is ripe in the company, and you are sure your performance will merit a promotion over time since you always try to do the best possible job you can.

51. “Why do you want to get into this field (or get this job)?”

It never fails to astonish and irritate interviewers when candidates cannot respond. Your answer should display some insight about how the industry works or what the job really entails day to day. It should convey that you have thought about what you want. There are no “best” answers for different jobs, but you should beware of tired, meaningless clichés like “I just love people,” or “I love to travel.” Interviewers want to separate dreamers from doers.

52. “What are your career goals and how do you plan to achieve them?”

You want to go as far as your skills and talents will take you, want to serve the community in the areas where you can be most useful, and meet all the challenges that arise so you can become the professional you aspire to be. Avoid annoying statements like “I want to be president of the firm someday,” or “I really want your job”: they don’t convey ambition and drive, but arrogance and egocentricity.

53. “Do you prefer working with others or alone?”

Before you answer, be sure you know what type of person the company is seeking for the job in question, either from your own research or from asking the interviewer. Be aware, however, that the vast majority of firms operate in a team environment, and that interpersonal skills are considered important even for most technical, writing, and other positions. If you truly want to work alone, consider self-employment – even then, you will deal with clients, suppliers, and so on. A safe answer: You prefer to work as part of a team, but can work alone as necessary since you don’t require constant feedback and direction.

54. “How do you operate as a team player?”

You realize that everyone on the team has an important and interdependent role to play, you listen to their opinions with respect, you try to get along with everyone for the greater good of the company, and you do your job in a manner that helps the team operate smoothly and productively.

55. “What are you looking for in your next job?”

Couch what you seek in terms of what you can offer the employer, not what the employer can offer you, such as glamour, travel, etc. For example, “I am seeking a company where I can apply my proven ability to tap underutilized markets and motivate sales staff, and grow as much as I can professionally. When I was at ABC Company, I...”

56. “How long would you stay with our company?”

The best answer is that you are very interested in the company and intend to stay as long as you are facing challenges and growing as a professional. If you have a stable work history marked by long periods at various companies, point this out. If not, emphasize that this is the company you want to settle down with. Ask about which specific projects you can get involved with immediately.

57. “What is your next career step?”

Your next step matches the description of the job the interviewer has given you perfectly, and you are eager to make a contribution based on your proven ability in (sales, supervision, quality control, copywriting, etc.). Show how this next step will benefit the company (and you only incidentally).

58. “Why do you want to change careers at this point in your life?”

While you have enjoyed your former career, you have always had an innate talent and hankering for this field, regularly read its trade magazines as a hobby, and are ready and eager to make a change and “go for it.”

Part Five: 61-86: Future Goals and Career Path

59. “Where do you expect to be in five (three) years?”

A question that’s become more rare in today’s fast-paced, downsized world, but sometimes still asked. You doubtless don’t know where you will be in five years – and the interviewer probably doesn’t know where he or she will be, either. However, to be on the safe side, say you expect to be with the same company in the area where your skills and talents can serve the firm the most, in a position of greater responsibility. If you can identify the area which is the fastest-growing – from your research or from what the interviewer has told you – say so.

It’s also alright to say that while you cannot predict specifics, you hope to take advantage of opportunities and growth areas as they arise, and let your skills and talents take you as far as they can. It’s best not to name a specific job title, but to concentrate on the work itself. Promotability in a firm depends on some factors beyond your control, such as a willing boss or employees with more seniority than you. Above all, don’t be like the woman who, unenthused about the job she was applying for – her first love was the music industry – spontaneously replied, “Not here.”

60. “Since you were in the same job for such a long time, you’ve probably grown very comfortable in it – maybe a bit stale. How would you cope with a new job in a company such as ours?”

You welcome new challenges and the opportunity for more professional growth, which is why you are ready to move on. You’ve learned a great deal and hope to make a contribution based on what you’ve learned. You are eager to learn new things and would like to hear more about the challenges you would face in this job.

61. “What do you like least about this job?”

Pick something very minor and unconnected to the main goals dear to the company’s heart – making money, saving money, or saving time. Doing those expense reports, updating press lists, taking calls from vendors pitching their services – all are acceptable.

62. “I’m not sure you have the right qualifications (or are suitable) for this position.”

Not to worry – it’s not as bad as it sounds. The interviewer may simply be saying “sell me.” Even if the interviewer isn’t, act innocently as though he or she is. Don’t react as if this is a kiss-off, with shock or discomfiture; and don’t be argumentative. Inquire calmly if he or she is concerned about any particular area. Then, mildly but *firmly* reassure the interviewer of the strength of your skills in this area – give an example or two – or, concede that while this area is not your strong point, similar skills, extensive experience, and personality traits you possess more than compensate for the lack. You have always been a quick study, unafraid of new challenges, and your rapid promotions in your previous jobs demonstrate this, for example. If you are a career-changer or have performed a similar job in a different setting, emphasize the transferability of these skills. The interviewer, you see, is looking not only for a substantive answer but for confidence and grace under pressure, as well as your astuteness in hearing the true message behind this statement. Don’t disappoint.

63. “You are reentering the labor market after an absence of 15 years. Why do you think you can do the job?”

Emphasize how your skills and accomplishments in volunteer work for charities, schools, churches, or synagogues, non-paid work experience in helping out relatives’ businesses, managing and budgeting your household’s finances, and hobbies are transferable to the job. Also explain which key personality traits you will bring to the job.

64. “How soon can you start?”

Two weeks’ notice is generally expected as the minimum in giving notice to your current employer and making sure your workload is covered. In cases where you have been at the firm for many years, you may want to give more notice.

65. “What do you like most about this job?”

Answer this only after you have ascertained the main problem the interviewer wants solved in this job. If you are uncertain, ask to clarify the projects which need immediate attention, the overall mission of the division at present, etc. Then say you are eager to tackle this challenge, and explain why you are well suited in terms of qualifications and key personality traits to do so.

66. “Who do you see as our company’s competition, and why?”

You have learned the answer to this question from your pre-interview research on the company, which included reading the business press and trade magazines. Name a few firms that offer similar products or services, and what differentiates them from this company – price, quality, availability, marketing strategy, etc.

67. “How is our company superior to others in its field?”

From your research, you should be able to cite a few areas where this company shines.

68. “How do you keep abreast of new developments in your field?”

You regularly read trade magazines and the business press, and attend trade association meetings and an occasional seminar or conference. Perhaps you have also used your company’s tuition reimbursement program to take classes to brush up on skills or learn new ones.

69. “How do rate your career progress to date?”

Show a healthy sense of self-respect and note that while you are proud of your accomplishments and have learned a great deal about the industry within the specific sphere of your jobs, the best is yet to come.

70. “What aspects of your job do you rate as most important?”

Prioritize which of your duties most impact your company’s bottom line, i.e., which make money, save time, or increase efficiency. Show that you are not missing the forest for the trees and are not wasting precious time and effort on inessentials.

71. “What personality traits do you think are necessary to succeed in this field?”

Cite some of the key personality traits we have discussed all along, highlighting those which may be especially important in your chosen field, based on your own research or hints from the interviewer.

72. “Describe your current job responsibilities.”

List your duties, but with an eye to how they fit into the mission of the company as a whole. An employer does not want someone with tunnel vision, who sees his or her job as the be-all and end-all, but a person with a sense of interrelatedness who functions as part of a team.

73. “How many hours a week do you work?”

Since workaholicism is a virtue, not a vice, in today’s lean and mean companies, the more hours you can cite, the better. However, say that you also try to plan and manage your time so you are as productive as possible, just in case the company believes long hours denote poor time management and an inability to delegate.

74. “How would you do this job differently from other people?”

Demonstrate that your mix of skills and key personality traits is a winning combination which will do a bang-up job. If you are not aware of all the challenges the job presents, ask; and then, explain a creative approach to handling at least one of them.

75. “Are you willing to take a drug test as a condition of employment?”

The only answer is “yes” if you are at all interested in getting a job offer. Drug testing has become very common today as employers try to screen out prospective employees who are drug abusers.

Before a test is actually administered, a company should give you a form to sign authorizing your permission, which should name all the prescription and over-the-counter drugs and foods believed to cross-react with the test. List all the drugs and medications you have taken in recent weeks, as well as the foods named on the form.

It may surprise you to learn that many substances, such as cold medications, ibuprofen, tranquilizers, and even poppy-seed bagels, can cause positive results on drug tests and thus unfairly brand you as a drug user. If you are not offered a form to sign that lists these substances, say politely that while you are willing to be tested, you would like to know which substance can cross-react with the test because you are familiar with articles on this subject. If the firm does not give you a list, weigh the risk of the test and your interest in a job offer – perhaps you can suggest that your family doctor conduct the test.

76. “How do you feel about working overtime?”

You understand there are times when a company expects employees to pitch in with extra effort and extra hours, and this is fine with you. The interviewer wants to find out if you are a 9-to-5 clock-watcher, so cite an example from a past job where you expended extra hours to get a project completed.

77. “Describe a difficult situation at work and how you handled it.”

While the interviewer wants to probe your problem-solving skills, you have the chance to demonstrate some of the key personality traits employers’ desire as well, such as listening skills, initiative, determination, etc. For example: As a supervisor with a difficult client, I listened to the demands of the client and my staff, suggested compromises where needed, and implemented new suggestions.

78. “Why have you changed jobs several times in the past few years?”

A charge of job-hopping is much less serious today than it used to be, since the days of lifetime employment are over. However, emphasize that you learned something in every job, which you can now bring to your new company. This may take some persuasion, but convince the interviewer you have been moving steadily toward more professional growth and greater responsibility, and that you firmly believe the position you are interviewing for offers the challenges you require. Point out that you have also developed flexibility in adapting to different work environments – a real plus in today’s world and a trait that someone mired in the same company for a decade or more may not possess.

79. “Since you’ve job-hopped a lot in the past few years, isn’t it possible you will be bored working here?”

No – because this job offers you the challenges you’ve been seeking your entire life. Elaborate a bit on why these challenges intrigue you and how you plan to handle them, to deflect attention from your job-hopping past and direct it toward your soon-to-be settled and stable present with this company.

79. “Why were you fired?”

Of course, this question comes not because you volunteered this information, but because the interviewer is aware you have been fired. If your job was one of hundreds of thousands eliminated through downsizing – a very common occurrence today – point this out, as it removes most of the onus from you. If your former company has high turnover figures, either resignations or firings, cite these figures, since this shows your leaving was not an isolated incident. If you were fired for cause, present the facts in the most positive light possible and state that the problem has been rectified. Perhaps a former boss, or former client, is willing to say good words about your performance. State who will be happy to give references. Whatever you do, don’t badmouth your employer for firing you, and don’t act defensive and discouraged – this will make it tougher, not easier, to find another position.

80. “Can you sell me on our product (or service or concept)?”

It’s not as difficult as it sounds to do a sales presentation for a company’s product or services. You should already be prepared because of the research you did before the interview. Calmly and confidently, act as if you are on a sales call: enumerate the major selling features, note if the product or service is unique in any way, and

how it differs from its competition. The interviewer is looking for sales ability, good communication skills, and the ability to think quickly under pressure.

81. “Why did you leave your last job (or want to leave your current job)?”

Cite one of the few acceptable reasons: you wanted greater responsibility, more challenge, a higher salary, larger company for specialization (or smaller company for opportunity), or more job security. If you are a career-changer, explain that you enjoyed your previous career, but have always wanted to work in this field and finally decided to go for it.

82. “What are some mistakes you’ve made in previous jobs?”

Uh-oh – You’re being invited to tell tales against yourself. Whatever you admit to, make sure it’s fairly innocuous and didn’t involve losing money or time for your company. Be quick to explain what you learned from a past mistake and how you rectified things. For example, perhaps you didn’t document your activities or keep your boss up to date as much as you should have, making it difficult for others to fill in when you were out sick or on vacation. But once you were admonished as to how this inconveniences your co-workers, you now keep one of the most thorough paper trails in your firm.

83. “What have you learned from your mistakes in your jobs?”

You should have stated what you learned in your answer to the previous question, to deflect this one. Show that you benefit from constructive criticism and do not take it personally, and that you have acquired one of the key personality traits employers desire (team player, initiative, determination, etc.)

84. “Where else are you applying for a job?”

It’s okay to admit to interviewing at other firms, but don’t say where. If pressed, politely decline to say. While it’s alright to convey the idea you are wanted, it’s a bad idea to get into a sparring match dropping names of other firms, positions, and salary. Don’t communicate the impression that this job is a fall-back or that your first choice lies elsewhere. Above all, if you are seeking a different type of job elsewhere – or in a different industry altogether – do not admit it. You may be covering all your bases in a tough economy, but it will only alarm the interviewer to know you are considering jobs in widely divergent fields.