

GUIDELINES FOR ASKING QUESTIONS IN AN INTERVIEW

Instructor Notes

(Adapted from *Cultivating True Livelihood: Work in the 21st Century*)

Is it really appropriate to ask the employer questions in an interview?

Absolutely yes! You and the interviewer are meeting to determine whether or not you are a good fit, perhaps the best fit, for the job the company wants to fill. You are also meeting to determine whether or not this employer, this company and/or this particular opportunity is right for you. It is only fitting that each of you would have a list of questions. The questions you ask will tell the employer a lot about you, so they are a critical part of the interview.

What do the questions I ask tell the employer about me?

It is said that you know a lot more about a person by their questions than their answers. What does an employer know about you by the questions you ask in an interview?

1. How well you understand what the job is about;
 2. What is important to you, what your values are, and what your expectations are;
 3. How much research you did about the company;
 4. How seriously you are thinking about the job;
 5. Your degree of common sense and intellectual curiosity;
 6. Your energy level and communication skills; and,
 7. How prepared you are.
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What questions should I ask?

Here are some guidelines to consider when developing your questions:

1. Ask about things you care about. Choose questions whose answers will truly be meaningful to you in considering the job.
2. Ask questions that are worthy of the interviewer's time. Do not ask a question whose answer can be found in an obvious place (in a job description, on their website, etc.)
3. Ask questions that do not raise barriers in the employer's mind about your being able and willing to do the job. A question like "Do you require people to work overtime?" will only put concern in the employer's mind about your willingness to work overtime.
4. Ask questions that reflect your values in a work setting. For example, "How might I be able to use my writing abilities in this position?" or "Is there opportunity for employees to share ideas and strategies that are working for them?" are questions that reflect your values.
5. Throughout the interview, you are negotiating the job with the employer. Ask questions that allow you to learn more about how you can uniquely contribute to employer's workplace.
6. Before the interview, identify what you really need and want most in a position and in an employer. Ask questions to help you determine whether or not you want to hire this company as your employer.

What questions should *not* be asked during an interview?

In general, it is not wise to raise any questions regarding pay and benefits during an interview. No one has offered you a job yet, so this question is premature. It is not information you really need to know yet.

Also avoid questions regarding conditions of employment that impose a barrier to your getting the offer. Some examples are starting date, flex time, travel and relocation. These questions don't say anything about what you have to offer the employer. They do not improve your chances of getting the offer.

When should I ask my questions?

In most interviews, you will be invited to ask questions in the last five or ten minutes of the meeting. There is no need, however, to wait until the end of the interview. You can ask a question at any time if it relates to the discussion taking place. For example, if you are answering a question about your ability to work with the public, it would be perfectly appropriate to end your answer with a question: "What percentage of my time on the job will I have an opportunity to interact with customers?"

Should I have my questions written out?

Yes! Having your questions written out shows you are prepared. They will also help you express your thoughts. Carry your list of questions with you to the interview in a work portfolio. If you want to refer to your notes, simply say, "I have written down a number of questions. Would you mind if I refer to my notes?" You don't want to read your questions word for word, but you want to be able to trigger your memory.

What do I do with the information I obtained from each question?

Pay attention to how the interviewer responds and reacts to your questions. Jot down some notes after the interview. Ask yourself:

- ★ What did I learn from the response? If I have a follow-up interview, do I want to pursue this issue?
- ★ Is there some way I should be responding to address this issue in my follow-up to this interview?
- ★ How do I feel about this company/employer/job given the answers to my questions?

Questions you might ask in an interview:

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| 1. When would the position begin? | 7. How often are job reviews held? |
| 2. How would I spend my time in a typical day? | 8. How do current employees advance? |
| 3. What skills and qualities would an ideal candidate have? | 9. What is the next step in the process? |
| 4. What would be my greatest challenge? | 10. What training programs are available within the company? |
| 5. To whom would I report? | 11. What do you like best about your job/company? |
| 6. How will my performance be evaluated? | 12. Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects? |