

Your next job awaits.

Questions for the First Interview

Congratulations on landing your first interview! A job offer is only a couple of interviews away, so the focus during your first interview is, unsurprisingly, landing the 2nd interview. The way we do this is by spending as much time as we can proving we are an interesting enough candidate to move on to the second round. Another way of saying this is that we will not focus on “What’s in this position for me” questions, and will heavy up on demonstrating that we have a positive attitude. There will be plenty of time to tactfully suss out what is ultimately in it for you, but this is not that time.

Think of the first interview as a high-level conversation. We are not going to generate an offer after a single interview, therefore we don’t need to get bogged down in the minutia of all of our accomplishments.

First interviews over the phone are usually shorter in nature. We will have 30-40 minutes to demonstrate that we are the right person to move to the second (usually in-person) round. We don’t want to waste time asking questions that should be asked in later rounds after we have proved we are a potential candidate.

Recruiters and hiring managers have a set of questions, to which you will need to formulate and deliver appropriate answers if you want to move to the second round. If the interviewers don’t get the answers they expect to hear, we can assume we won’t be moving forward. This is why it is a higher priority to make sure the hiring company’s questions are answered. Our questions are not a priority in this first conversation.

Questions to Ask

The following are some examples of good questions to ask. These questions are designed to develop a connection between the interviewer and the candidate, and create a response that is positive and upbeat. It’s best to avoid questions where the answer can potentially put the interviewer into an awkward position or on the defense. Some questions might make you look smart and well-researched (e.g., “I noticed while reading your 10Q that earnings took a bit of tumble last quarter – is that due to the slow sales in product X?”), but risk touching a nerve. Best to save these questions for later in the process, or don’t ask them at all. Remember, when it’s time for you to ask questions, it is usually at the end of the interview, and the interaction here will leave the final impression on the interviewer.

Example questions to ask:

- What do you like about working at Acme Publishing?
- What attracted you to Acme Publishing? Why did you join the company?
- What kinds of employees are successful at Acme Publishing?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the culture here?
- Are there any other questions I should be asking?

Below are a few questions we want to avoid. These signal we are more interested in “what’s in it for us” as candidates than proving we are the right candidate.

- Can you tell me about work-life balance?
- Can you tell me about your benefits?
- What the PTO policy like?
- What kind of training allowances do employees receive?
- What kind of career growth do you offer?
- How often do employees get paid?
- What vacation and holidays do employees receive?
- What parts of this job keep you up at night?
 - Note: We aren’t going to be able to solve this problem and will only potentially frustrate the interviewer.

Key Takeaway: Keep the conversation positive and focus on making sure that the interviewer walks away with the answers they need.