

Best Questions to Ask During & After the Interview

The interview is almost over and you are happy because you feel that you have done well. Now it's your turn. At the end of the interview, most interviewers will offer you an opportunity to ask questions. The questions that you decide to ask provide additional information about you as well as information that may not have come up during the interview. This is also a good time to clear up any misunderstandings about the job or the company. In fact, interviewers expect you to ask questions.

What if you don't have any questions? If you say: "No, I don't have any questions," your response does two things:

- 1) It immediately ends the interview.
- 2) It causes the interviewer to wonder why you don't have any questions. He or she may misinterpret your lack of questions as a lack of interest. Your goal is to ask intelligent questions that demonstrate your interest as well as your ability to analyze the situation. However, you don't want to ask a question about something already covered in the interview, unless it is a matter of clarification.

On the other hand, it's possible that the interview was so thorough that nothing was left uncovered. It's also possible that you may be so desperate for a job that you hesitate to ask anything for fear of asking the wrong question. Another possibility is that you failed to give your complete attention to the interview and now you hesitate to ask questions because you are unsure whether the interviewer may have already covered the subject.

The following sample questions represent thoughtful and legitimate inquiries for information. Prepare your list of questions and take them with you.

Questions about the company

With these questions you will be assessing the company and the department. Every company has a culture and there is also a culture within that culture. The questions you ask will help you to determine the company's philosophy, the culture and much more. Before you accept a job offer you will want to know as much as you can about the work environment. And if you are thinking about "force-fitting" yourself into a company that does not seem like a good place for you, you are better off moving on.

How would you describe this company's management style?

What percentage of job vacancies are filled from within?

What is the turnover rate here?

What position does the company have in the industry?

Is the company the market leader, in the middle of the pack?

What companies are the major competitors?

From your perspective, what are the strengths and weaknesses of this company?

What does it take to succeed in this company?

Questions about the position/job duties

Your questions about the position are extremely important because they will help you get a better understanding of specific job responsibilities, expectations, goals, how you will be evaluated and more. Don't take any shortcuts with questions. Prepare a list in advance, take them with you and don't hesitate to ask.

Why is this position open?

May I see a job description?

What are the short term and long term goals for this position?

What kind of authority does this position have?

What decisions can be made immediately without having to ask permission or get committee approval?

What kind of training opportunities do you offer for possible advancement?

How often is this position evaluated and how long from hire date until the first evaluation?

How is regular feedback delivered on performance during this period?

What are the three most important goals you have set for this position for the next twelve months?

What opportunity for growth does this position (or, the company) offer?

How much travel is involved?

Questions for the boss about the boss

If at the end of the interview your prospective boss gives you the opportunity to ask questions, you may want to ask questions that will help you learn more about him or her. The more you know, the easier it will be for you to make an informed decision should you be offered the job.

What would it be like to work for you?

What would your direct reports say about you?

Why do you think you and I would work well together?

What do you like the most about working here?

If you could change one thing about this company, what would you change?

Upon what criteria will you base your hiring decision?

What not to ask

You typically will not ask about salary, benefits, raises, paid time off, perks, etc. unless you receive a job offer at the end of the interview. Your goal is to sell yourself to the point that the interviewer is so excited about you that no one else will do. Once you get to this point, you have some negotiating power. The exception to discussing salary would be if you suspect that the compensation will be well below your salary expectations.

There is no point in wasting their time or yours. In that case, you may as well get the cards on the table. Keep in mind that you don't want to ask about compensation if there is any chance that the company may be able to meet your salary requirements. Oftentimes, the interviewer will ask you what you are looking for in terms of compensation up front to eliminate candidates who are outside the job range.

Final questions

When you get to the end of the interview you will want to find out what happens next. With these last questions you also leave the door open for initiating future contact with the person or people who interviewed you.

Consider the following questions:

What's the next step and when may I expect to hear from you?

If I don't hear from you by a week from today, may I call you?

How many people will you be interviewing?

When do you plan to make a decision?

Ask the last question only if you feel comfortable doing so. Sometimes a unique rapport is built during the interview and you could ask that question without feeling like you are getting out of line. And if you ask, most interviewers will answer you. The answer to this question may give you an emotional boost, especially if you are told that you are one of two finalists.

When to ask which questions

Obviously, some of these questions would be appropriate after a first interview. Others should be left unsaid until the second or third interview.

You also might want to ask the interviewer how many interviews you can expect. You will then have an idea of when it would be appropriate to ask each of your questions. If you are told there will be two to three interviews as part of their interviewing process, your first questions should then be general in nature. If there will only be one interview, which would be unusual, you need to ask all of the questions that are important to you. In addition, the questions that you ask of a human resources representative may be different than those asked of the hiring manager. You will need a certain amount of rapport with the interviewer and confidence that you are a final candidate before you get into some of these questions. Use your own good judgment in deciding what to ask and when.

In conclusion, prepare to ask questions so that when you are asked if you have any questions you impress the interviewer with what you ask. Here's a true story. When an executive level candidate was asked if he had any questions he replied: "Not really, but if I get the job where do I park?" He lost the job opportunity based solely on his only question. You can do much better by deciding in advance what you would like to know and why.