

Wild Card Interview Questions



While many interview questions can be predicted, some come out of the blue: 'How far is the Sun from the Earth? Name five uses for a stapler without staples.'

Interviewers ask wild-card questions for a number of reasons: to spice things up; to reveal your 'true' personality; or test how you respond under pressure. Interview questions should be designed to find out if you can do the job but off-the-wall questions feel very unpredictable and can easily wrong-foot you.

I'm not talking about questions that probe your strengths and weaknesses. They can be difficult but not unexpected and you should prepare strong answers. Equally, if the job requires quick mental arithmetic, watch out for questions such as: 'How many light bulbs are in this building?' or 'How many pints of milk would you need to fill this room?' Remember, if you're asked to make calculations under pressure, it's the thought process that counts and an intelligent approximation is often acceptable.

Some interviewers ask wacky questions to push your buttons: 'If you were a song, what song would you be?' or 'What's in your refrigerator at home?' These questions seem unrelated to the world of work but they test lateral thinking, such as: 'What three things would you take to Mars?'

Respond with good humor. Don't get offended, flustered or freeze like a rabbit in the headlights. These questions are playful and can bring out your personality. So don't get too wrapped up in the question. A relaxed response works best, showing you find the question entertaining. Play for time: 'Wow. Great question. While I'm digging around, tell me – how do people usually answer?'

You may be asked 'what if' questions which are entirely work-related. If you were applying for a hotel receptionist job, you might have to say how you would handle an angry customer who refuses to pay his bill. One candidate for a technical job was asked: 'If I put you in a sealed room with a phone that had no dial tone, how would you fix it?'

Some wild card questions probe matching skills, for example: 'Sell me this pencil' might be relevant to a sales job, particularly if it involves thinking on your feet. One sales technique is to quickly get the interviewer to say 'yes' as many times as possible; yes to the need for a pencil, yes to the fact that this pencil is both useful and attractive and yes to your proposition that it is excellent value for money. Play it tongue-in-cheek – but play to win.

The following questions have been used recently in job interviews around the country. Some of the questions have tips given to help you understand what the job interviewer is looking for with the question.

1. If you were a tree (or animal) what kind of tree (animal) would you be?
2. You are invited to a large party. When you arrive, the room where the party is being held is already over half full of people. How do they react to you when you enter the room?
3. Why are manhole covers round?
4. What is your favorite drink?
5. What would I find in your refrigerator right now?
6. What is the last book you read?
7. If you could trade places with any other person for a week, famous or not famous, living or dead, real or fictional, who would it be?
8. What is your favorite quote?
9. Would Gandhi have made a good software engineer?
10. How would you explain a database in three sentences to a child?
11. How many light bulbs are in this building?
12. You are on a game show. There are three doors. Behind one of them is a prize; the other two have coal. The host knows which door holds the prize. You choose door #1. Before it is opened, the host opens door #3 and reveals a lump of coal. You have the choice to stick with the door you chose originally or switch to door #2. What do you do?
13. If Hollywood made a movie about your life, who would you like to play you?
14. If you could be a superhero, what would you want your superpowers to be?
15. If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title should be?
16. If you had only six months left to live, what would you do with the time?
17. What did you want to be when you were eight years old?
18. If you could be an M&M, what color would you be?
19. If you won \$20 million in the lottery, what would you do with the money?
20. Which three things would you save from a fire in your house?
21. If both a taxi and a limo were priced the exact same, which one would you choose?
22. In a perfect world, how would people communicate?
23. Who do you like best, you mom or dad?
24. What kind of people do you dislike?
25. What makes you angry?
26. How many close friends do you have?
27. What's the most important part of the sandwich? [Subway]

