

# Interview Questions You Can't Afford to Miss

While you'll never be able to plan for every question you may be asked by a potential employer, you can anticipate and rehearse answers to common interview questions. Here are three questions you can't afford to miss—and strategies to help you prepare.

## Question 1: What's Your Second Biggest Weakness?

Note: If you have presented an actual weakness for the first question, you most likely will not be asked this question. This is a question employers may ask as a follow-up to the "Describe one of your weaknesses for me" question.

Employers may ask you this question for one of two reasons:

1. To probe beyond your first weakness answer (which they anticipate was prepared in advance), and
2. If the first answer you provided was a strength disguised as a weakness; classic answers to this question include I'm a "perfectionist," or "I work too hard." (Note: These can also be actual weaknesses; it is often said that "any strength overextended can transform into a weakness.")

Answering questions on your biggest weakness is a delicate balance: you want to make sure that you provide candid information on areas that you could—or have improved—but you also don't want to run the risk of being eliminated from the game altogether. Therefore, make sure you don't present a weakness that is an integral function of the job to which you are applying.

## Question 2: Tell Me What You Know About Our Company.

While this may seem like an easy answer, you want to demonstrate that your understanding of what the company does, and how your position would align with the company's key mission if hired. If you have only researched the company website and taken press releases at face value, you may be taken out of the running.... in today's market, you ideally want to demonstrate that you are familiar with the company—as well as how the company and industry sector are affected by economic trends. The more you can participate in the dialogue on the company's current needs, the stronger your candidacy will be.

A great way to prepare for the what do you know about our company question—monitor Google News ([news.google.com](http://news.google.com)) and set up "News Alerts" by company name and industry function—that way, you can take a crash course in recent events. Other sources of information include industry and annual reports. Spend 20 minutes with a reference librarian at your closest library and you'll have great access to all of the information you need.

## Question 3: Do You Have Any Questions For Us?

Conventional wisdom is that this is the time in the interview when you can relax—it isn't. You need to show the employer that you've thought about the position and how you could apply your skills if hired. Do not ask about benefits or compensation; focus on your interest in the position and ask questions that demonstrate your high level of interest and knowledge of the potential opportunity.

A common question is "What are you looking for in a candidate?" Avoid this one. If you were not a potential finalist for the position, you would not be in the game. A better question is: "What are your biggest needs, and how does this position help you address these needs?"

Finally, remember that interviewing is a process of mutual selection—you are also picking an employer. Ask questions which will allow you to assess the work environment and whether it fits with your values. One of my favorite questions for a group interview is, "If I were hired into this position, what would my first priorities be, and how would I work with each of you on that to accomplish our objectives?" This question allows you to assess both the nature of the position and the level of interaction you could expect from others: in many organizations, employees serve on search committees together, but don't interact as frequently during their regular work.

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