

# Ace that interview! Tough Questions, Great Answers



Nothing can trip you up during an interview like an unexpected or difficult question. Whether you're applying for an internship, trying to get into college, or interviewing for a new job, there are a few questions that might stump you - along with the kinds of answers interviewers like to hear.

## **“Tell me about yourself.”**

Be ready to describe what makes you special as an individual. “What I *don’t* want to hear is your life history,” explains Dennis B., Director of Admissions at a major university. “I don’t care how many siblings you have or where you were born. I want to know what makes you special. I want to see how well you project yourself, if you’re articulate, and to hear your reasons for applying to do this course of study.”

The same applies at a job interview. Be concise and give concrete examples. “The main thing you should know about me is that while I was in college, I had a side job retrieving lost data from computers. I set up and marketed the business myself. I had 80 customers in the first year.”

## **“What draws you to this line of work?”**

Know what you’re getting yourself into. “Publishing is a tough profession,” says Tracy P., Editorial Director at a publishing house in New York City. “Unfortunately, some people want to get into for the wrong reasons. Many candidates mention how much they love books and reading. However, that doesn’t necessarily mean that editing or the business side of publishing is a good profession for you. You might be better suited to teaching, for example. If someone doesn’t understand the profession, the chances are they won’t be a good fit for this type of work.” In other words, show that you understand what the job involves in your response to the question and give an example of how you have acquired the relevant skills. “One skill you need to work in publishing is attention to detail. I worked on the college magazine and edited articles ...”

### **“Tell me about a time you made a serious mistake. How did you handle it?”**

“Many of our candidates get hired right after graduation from college, before they’ve had a chance to get much work experience,” notes Anita M., head of recruiting at a Fortune 500 financial company. “The reason I ask this question is that it’s a tough question for everybody, and how a person answers is very revealing. It’s important that people admit when they’ve made a mistake, rather than blame others. What I’m saying is that I expect candidates to be honest, and look for signs that they’ve made a mistake.” Instead, try something along these lines. “One thing I did while I was working on a project in college was let down my team. I didn’t complete my part of the project on time. I apologized. I also explained to the professor it was my fault and asked for an extension. Then I made it up to my teammates by working all weekend to finish the project. It taught me how to manage my time and not leave things until the last minute.”

- **Remember:** Speak clearly and at a normal pace of conversation. Don’t rush your words because you’re nervous. Be calm and speak with confidence.

## *Reading Activity*

Read the article and answer the questions below.

1. What trips up some candidates during an interview, according to the article?  
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2. What mistake do some candidates make when they are asked to talk about themselves?  
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3. What two things do you need to tell an interviewer to show you’re right for the job??  
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4. Why is it revealing when candidates talk about mistakes they have made?  
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5. Which question do you think is the most difficult one to answer? Why?  
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