

Closing Out an Interview with Good Questions

When the interview is about to come to a close it is very likely you will be asked “do you have any questions?” With this comes the even harder question you may pose to yourself, “what should I ask?” Having a few questions prepared beforehand will make this section of the interview a walk in the park. Here are a few tips to help you formulate high quality questions to ask your interviewer.

To Ask or Not to Ask?

It is always beneficial to avoid asking for information that was already mentioned during the interview, or about things that can easily be found on the organization’s website or in the job description. For example, try to avoid asking questions like “what are you looking for in a candidate?” or “what is the mission of your organization?” Asking questions like these may give the impression that you didn’t do much research into this position or organization before applying. It is however, ok to elaborate on these points. Instead, you may ask something more specific like “I see that there will be data analysis involved in this position, can you tell me more about the types of datasets I would be working with or the timeframe in which you expect analyses to be conducted?” This shows that you know what the job will entail and are interested in learning more.

Formulate your questions by thinking about what you are looking to get out of this position and what you want to know more about. An interview is just as much an opportunity for you to get to know the organization and evaluate if it’s a fit for you, as it is for them to explore if you are a fit for the organization. Ask yourself first, “what do I want to know more about to determine fit?”

To help you formulate questions, think about these categories:

Questions about the job

When it comes to the position itself, it is useful to think about questions that show you are thinking ahead about how you will prepare for the role and what experiences you already have that will make you successful. A question that captures this might be “what are the biggest challenges someone in this position would face?” or “what would my first three months in the position look like in terms of first priorities?”

Questions about training and professional development

Every employment experience is an opportunity for personal and professional growth. You may ask questions about what kind of training the company or organization will offer when you are onboarded, and what other training and learning opportunities might be available to you in the future. Think about what skills you are looking to gain from this position. A question like this might sound like “what would the onboarding and training for this position look like?”, “will there be opportunities for me to practice or develop X skillset?” or “How does the organization support professional growth and development of it’s staff over time?”

Questions about the interviewer and/or team

This type of question may be useful for a second round interview when you are typically being interviewed by a potential supervisor rather than an HR manager. Showing interest in the interviewer as a person and the team you will be working with is a great way to build rapport. An example of this might be “what got you interested in this field of work?” or “what would you like the future of this team to look like?” This is a great way to get to know more about your potential manager and their goals.

Questions about culture

Assessing an organization’s work culture by asking about how things are done, what the relationship between employees is like, and what the work-life balance is like will help you determine if this position is the right fit for you. This is an opportunity to ask some fun questions like “what is your favorite office tradition?” or “do you ever do joint events with other departments?” or even simply “how would you describe the work culture of the organization?” Since many organization’s and positions are remote now, it might also be useful to ask things like “how has the office been able to maintain a positive work environment and sense of community within the past year?”

Questions about Next Steps

Sometimes the interviewer may provide this information before you have the chance to ask. If they have not or if you would like to know more, asking this type of question is a great way to close this section of the interview. Preface your question by reinforcing your enthusiasm for the potential to take on this role by saying something like “I’m very excited about this opportunity and would look forward to continuing our conversation. What would the next steps in the hiring

process look like?” With this type of question, it is important not to assume you will be offered the position but still maintain confidence!

Responding to the Response

After the interviewer answers your question, thank the interviewer for their response and try to briefly follow-up with some background knowledge or skills you have that relate to what they just said and how you can fill any gaps in the organization they may have mentioned that they are looking to fill. You can still market yourself during this portion of the interview; it doesn't have to only be about asking questions.

When to Ask Your Questions

It is most common to ask your questions at the end of an interview, when prompted. However, some interviewers may express that they are hoping to have more of a back and forth less structured discussion. Depending on how structured the interview is, you may be able to ask a few questions along the way. Not only does this help take some of the stress off of the interviewer, but asking questions throughout can help build rapport between you and the interviewer by making the conversation more free flowing and seamless. Evaluate towards the beginning of the interview if the tone the interviewer is setting is more of a traditional interview structure, or if they would like to have more of a back-and forth discussion. If it is the latter, be mindful to not ask all of your questions before getting to the end of the interview! Make sure you have a few questions in your back pocket for the end. Also remember that it is likely you may not get through all of your questions depending on the amount of time left in the interview. Ask your more pressing questions first and remain conscious of the time. Check in with the interviewer if you are over time before asking any further questions. Overall, prepping 3 - 5 questions for the interview is a best practice.

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