

Researchers –

Sample Interview Questions – Beyond Academia

Interviews vary widely across sectors, organisations and roles. Always look carefully at the person specification and job description, do your research and seek advice from within your network wherever possible as well as from Careers. The following questions are neither exhaustive nor predictive of the questions you may face but should help you to practice and start thinking of areas to prepare before your interview.

Openers

Why have you applied for this position?

Tell me about yourself.

What particular strengths and skills will you bring to this role?

What do you know about our organisation?

How have you prepared for this interview?

Questions about your research experience – positive and negative perceptions

Why did you decide to do a PhD?

How is your research related to the work we do?

What skills did you gain from your research that will benefit our organisation / this role?

We haven't had a PhD work for us before – what will you bring that other people don't?

Why did you decide to leave academia?

What do you see as the main differences between academic research and working in a more commercial environment?

Competency-based

Tell me about how you work in teams. Can you give an example where your ability to work effectively as part of a team was essential to achieving a positive outcome?

Tell me about a problem you encountered and how you went about solving it. What would you do differently with hindsight?

Tell me about a time when you had to communicate persuasively to bring someone round to your point of view. How did you go about it?

What strategies do you have for balancing competing work demands and ensuring you meet deadlines? Can you tell me about a time when you have done this successfully?

Tell me about a time when you have had a difficulty or conflict in working with someone. How did you go about resolving it?

What factors are involved in successful project management? Can you illustrate how you have put these into practice in projects you have managed?

Technical

These will obviously relate to the specific technical knowledge and skills needed for the role. The following give you some idea of the differing styles of questions in this category:

How do you calculate VaR (Value at Risk)?

What are your views on the implementation and content of the new anti-terrorism laws?

Can you explain this engineering drawing / component to me?

Talk me through your experience with CAD. What other design software do you use?

What elements of a clutch are most likely to fail during a race?

Scenario-based / hypothetical

What would you do if a team-member you had delegated a piece of work to failed to complete it on time?

What would you do if a client became angry and started to complain about one of your colleagues?

What would you do if an external speaker failed to turn up for an event you were organizing?

Commercial / sector-awareness

How do you keep up to date with our sector?

What are the key issues likely to affect our business / organization in the next 3 years?

Who are our nearest competitors and what could we learn from them?

What recent legislation is most likely to impact on the work we do? If you could introduce one piece of new legislation what would it be?

Strength-based

(These focus on what you prefer doing – your strengths – rather than just what you *can* do.)

Do you prefer starting or finishing a task?

What energises you? What gets you out of bed in the morning?

What gets done on your to-do list? What tasks stay on the do-list longest?

Tell me about someone you really admire and why.

Reflective

What is the biggest mistake you've made / difficulty you've overcome in life?

What is your greatest weakness / development need?

What is the best manager you've ever had? What management style do you prefer?

How do you handle criticism? Tell me about when you've learnt from constructive feedback.

Career goals and priorities

What will your priorities be for the first 6 months in post?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

What other companies have you applied to?

* There is a host of further interview questions and advice in the '**Resources**' section of our website, where you can also access '**Interview 360**' to practice answering questions, receive feedback and get advice on what employers are looking for in common interview questions.

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