

Example Interview Questions

Questions about yourself

- Tell me about yourself (the elevator pitch)
- Why did you choose your area of study?
- In what extra-curricular activities have you participated? Which did you enjoy most and why?
- What are your short –term and long–term career goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- In what type of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How would your previous employers describe you?

Questions about your skill sets

- Why should I hire you?
- How would you define leadership?
- How would you define the word “success”?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
- How has your postdoc experience prepared you for a career in XXX?
- What qualities do you think a successful manager would possess?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in an organization like ours?

Questions about your career path choice

- Why do you want this job?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
- Why did you choose XX university/company?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- Do you have a geographical preference?
- Are you willing to relocate? Travel?

Questions for people pursuing academic careers

- Why do you especially want to teach at Nameless College or University?
- How do you see yourself contributing to our department?
- What have you contributed to your field?
- What is your research about and how can it be applied? What are its implications? How is it relevant?
- What do you plan to work on next?
- What is the cutting edge in your field and how does your work extend it?
- Can you explain the value of your work to an educated layperson?
- What is your basic teaching philosophy?

- What courses would you like to teach if you had your choice? How would you teach them?
- Tell us how your research has influenced your teaching.
- In what ways have you been able to bring the insights of your research to your courses at the undergraduate level?
- We are a service-based state branch university with an enrollment of three zillion student credit hours per semester, most of them in the basic required courses. Everyone, therefore, teaches the service courses. How would you teach 101?
- Your degree is from Prestige Research University—what makes you think you would like to (or even would know how to) teach in a small liberal arts college?
- This is a publish or perish institution with very high standards for tenure review—what makes you think you would be able to earn tenure here?
- Are you connected? (If you were organizing a special symposium or mini-conference on your topic, which scholars could you pick up the phone to call?)
- How long do you really plan to stay?
- How does your family feel about moving to XXX? If your spouse/partner is not moving, how will you handle the separation?
- You've seen our mission statement. How would you see yourself contributing to our mission and campus atmosphere?
- What kinds of tools would be available in your lab for grad student use?
- In what areas do you think your work would uniquely contribute to this department?
- With whom in the department do you envision interacting the most? Outside the department?
- What meetings do you attend? What societies do you belong to?
- What do you envision as your ideal lab: # grads, undergrads, postdocs, techs, participation of grads who are not your own students?
- To what degree do you see integrating grad students into your research program?
- Is their work usually closely related to your research focus or is it fairly independent?
- How do you help grad students get started on a project?
- What's your perspective on grad student funding?
- How would you respond to a student who is floundering (early vs. late)?
- What types of mentoring have you experienced—and what would you do similarly or differently?
- What courses have you taught before?
- What do you see as the major challenges of teaching at a large (small) university?

Questions for switching to industry

- What experience do you have in this field?
- How have you prepared yourself to switch fields?
- How do your current skills apply to this position?
- Why are you leaving your current field? What did you like about it? What didn't you like? Why do you think you will like this field?

- Why aren't you applying for academic jobs?
- Most of your co-workers won't have Ph.D.'s, so how are you going to effectively communicate with them?
- You are used to working on your own project at the bench. How are you going to be able to work in a team environment?
- How did getting your Ph.D. prepare you for this job?
- What excites you about working in X industry?
- What could you bring to other companies?
- Why are you a good scientist?
- Are you an ethical scientist?
- How do you handle pressure?
- If I gave you XYZ cells and asked you XYZ questions—what experiments would you do?
- What would you do if your experiments didn't work?
- What challenges are you looking for in this position?

Behavioral fit questions

- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- How have you demonstrated initiative?
- Tell me about a time when you failed.
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it.
- Which two or three accomplishments have given you the greatest satisfaction?
- How have you motivated yourself to complete an assignment or task that you did not want to do?
- Think about a difficult boss, professor, or other person. What made him or her difficult? How did you successfully interact with this person?
- Think about a complex project or assignment you have been given. What approach did you take to complete it?
- Tell me about the riskiest decision you have made.
- Can you tell me about an occasion where you needed to work with a group to get a job done?
- Describe when you or a group you were part of were in danger of missing a deadline. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a person who did things very differently from you. How did you get the job done?
- Tell me about a situation when you had to learn something new in a short time.
- Can you tell me about a complex problem that you solved? Describe the process you utilized.
- Tell me about a challenge you successfully met.
- What leadership positions have you held? Describe your leadership style.

- Have you generated any new ideas or suggestions while at work?
- Tell me when you successfully persuaded others to do something or see your point of view.
- Give an example of when your persistence had the biggest payoff.
- Describe a situation where class assignments and work or personal activities conflicted. How did you prioritize? How did you manage your time?
- How have you most constructively dealt with disappointment and turned it into a learning experience?
- Describe a situation in which you effectively developed a solution to a problem by combining different perspectives or approaches.
- Tell me about a time when you led a team through a difficult or uncertain situation.
- Describe a time when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. What did you do?
- Give an example of a time when you had to quickly come to a decision
- Give me an example of an important goal you had to set and tell me about your progress in reaching that goal.
- Describe the most creative work –related project you have completed
- If selected for this position, can you describe your strategy for the first 90 days?
- How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly with the team?
- How long will it take for you to make a significant contribution?

Interview questions collected and adapted from various websites including:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2009/05/29/preparing-non-academic-interview>

<https://postdocs.cornell.edu/interviews-academic-positions>

<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/careerprep/jobsearch/interviewquestions.html>

<http://cheekyscientist.com/top-6-most-difficult-r-and-d-interview-questions-phds-should-know/>