

You Ask the Questions

You did your homework before the job interview.

You put together a professional-looking appearance, memorized all your best career and educational highlights and brought plenty of copies of your résumé in a beautiful, leather-bound portfolio. Double-check again. Did you remember everything? Did you remember to compile a list of questions that you will ask the employer?

Interviewers audition you during the interview. Take advantage of the opportunity to turn the tables and ask them questions. Because good and bad employment fit goes both ways, it is essential that you use every chance you get to exert some control in the hiring process. It is an opportunity to become active and make sure this job will benefit your needs too. Dr. Barbara Moses states in her book, “What Next? The Complete Guide to Taking Control of Your Working Life,” “when you are a career activist, you expect good work as a right, not a privilege.” Finding good work takes work. Asking questions in an interview is one aspect of being a career activist. Many job seekers think that employers are just being nice and asking ceremoniously for their questions at the end of the interview. That is not true. Employers expect you to ask questions. Asking intelligent questions shows the interviewers that you are fully engaged in the process of finding—not just a job—but a good fit for you and the company.

Employers want to see if you researched the company and are willing to dig a little deeper to find the information that is important to your decision. The worst thing you can say is, “No. You have answered all of my questions.” You show, by asking appropriate questions that you are capable of independent thought and investigation.

Questions you can ask

What questions qualify as appropriate and intelligent? Ask only questions that have not yet been answered in other portions of the interview and questions that fit your needs. Do not just choose questions blindly from the list. You may bring a typed list of your questions to the interview for your reference. Some employers will answer all your prepared questions before you get to ask them. Be ready to pull questions from the items the employer discusses with you from the interview. You may have to make a note on paper so you don't forget. Just be quick about it, so as to not interrupt the attention you are giving the interviewer.

- What are the training procedures for new employees?
- Please describe the company culture/values.
- What management style do supervisors use?
- What are some detailed expectations of the person who takes this position?
- Why is this position vacant?
- May I call or email if I have any more questions about the hiring process and the job?
- Please describe the ideal employee for this job.
- Who will review my work, and how often?
- Please describe a typical week or day in the life of a [job title].
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- When do you expect to have a decision made, and how will you contact me?
- How will the merger with XYZ Company affect this department?
- What is the future of ABC Company?

Questions to avoid

Although you may truly want the answers to the following questions, they are not appropriate to ask in an interview. They are best asked after a job offer has been made and before you accept or decline the offer. Some of these questions could make you seem focused only on compensation, vacation and other items that are not as task-oriented as the employer wants you to be. Also, bringing up salary before a job offer has been made can damage your negotiating power down the road.

- How many paid holidays are offered?
- What is the salary range for this position?
- When can I use my vacation days?
- Is there an expense account available?
- Is overtime required?
- What does your company do?
- When will I get promoted?

Take the time to craft a list of effective questions for each interview. Doing so will contribute greatly to your job search success.