

The 5 Questions Every Interview Asks

@hinumpy · Prep The Round Everyone Skips

The Method

I've interviewed at multiple big tech companies. After the first couple I started writing down every question I got, and the same five kept showing up.

Most people prep by grinding LeetCode and then walk into the behavioral round with nothing. That round is where the offer actually gets decided, and it's the one you can fully prepare for in a single evening.

How to use this: Don't memorize these answers. Write your own into the blanks using your real projects, say each one out loud once, and you're done. The goal is to sound prepared, not rehearsed.

The Answer Formula

Every one of these five questions is testing the same thing: can you tell a story that goes somewhere. So every answer uses the same three beats.

Formula: [The Setup] + [The Decision] + [The Result]

The Setup (2 sentences). What the situation was and what made it hard. This is context, not the story, so keep it short.

The Decision (3 to 4 sentences). What you chose to do and why. This is the part people skip and it is the only part they are grading. Say "I decided" or "I chose" out loud, it forces you into the right register.

The Result (1 to 2 sentences). What happened, with a number if you have one. If you have no number, say what you learned and what you did differently next time.

Target 60 to 90 seconds out loud. Anything past two minutes and you've lost them.

Question 1: Tell Me About Yourself

What they're really asking: "Give me a reason to keep listening." This is not an icebreaker. It sets the tone for the entire interview, and most people fumble it because they treat it as small talk.

The Structure

- Who you are right now: school, major, what you're into technically
- One thing you've built that proves it
- Why you're sitting in this specific interview

Fill This In

I'm a [year and major] at [school], and I'm most interested in [technical area].

Most recently I built [project], which [what it does or achieved]. That's what got me into [area].

I'm here because [company] is doing [specific thing], and that's the kind of problem I want to work on.

The mistake: Walking through your resume top to bottom in chronological order. They already have your resume. Pick the one thing that makes you interesting and lead with it.

Write this one out word for word. It's the only answer you'll give in every single interview you ever do.

Question 2: Walk Me Through A Project On Your Resume

What they're really asking: "Did you actually build this, or did you follow a tutorial." They're listening for decisions. A tutorial follower can describe what the project does. A builder can describe what they chose and what they rejected.

The Structure

- The problem in one sentence, plain English, no jargon
- Your stack and why you picked it over the alternative
- The hardest part and how you got through it
- The result, with a number

Fill This In

I built [project] because [the problem it solves].

I used [your choice] instead of [the alternative] because [reason].

The hardest part was [problem]. I tried [first attempt], which didn't work because [reason], so I ended up [solution].

It ended up [result, with a number].

The mistake: Describing features instead of decisions. "It has a login page and a dashboard" tells them nothing. "I chose X over Y because Z" tells them everything.

Pick ONE project and go deep. Know your own numbers cold before you walk in, and never state a number you haven't actually verified.

Question 3: Tell Me About A Time Something You Built Failed

What they're really asking: "Are you someone who can be wrong out loud." They're not looking for a disaster. They're checking whether you can name a mistake without hiding it or spiraling about it.

The Structure

- What broke, said plainly and without flinching
- What caused it, including your part in it
- What you did about it
- What you changed so it wouldn't happen again

Fill This In

I was building [project] and [what broke] broke.

It happened because I [honest cause].

I [what you did] to fix it.

Now I always [new habit] before I [step it applies to].

The mistake: The fake failure. "I cared too much about the details" is not a failure and they've heard it four hundred times. Use a real one: a model that overfit, a deploy you broke, a deadline you missed.

The ending is what makes this a good answer, not the size of the mistake. Spend most of your time on what you changed.

Question 4: Tell Me About A Time You Disagreed With Your Team

What they're really asking: "Are you going to be difficult to work with." That's the whole question. They want to know if you can hold a position without making it personal.

The Structure

- The disagreement, stated neutrally and fairly to the other person
- How you made your case: data, a prototype, a test, something concrete
- What you did once the decision got made

Fill This In

We were deciding whether to [decision]. I thought [your position], they thought [their position].

Instead of just arguing about it I [what you actually did], which showed [what it proved].

We ended up [outcome], and I [how you moved forward].

The mistake: Making the other person sound stupid. Even if they were wrong, describe their position like it was reasonable. The interviewer is imagining being the other person in your story.

You don't have to have won. "They had context I didn't, so we went their way and I learned X" is a strong answer.

Question 5: Why Us

What they're really asking: "Did you do fifteen minutes of homework." That's a low bar and most candidates still don't clear it. This is the cheapest question to win and the easiest one to lose.

The Structure

- Something specific and real about the company: a product, a team, a recent launch
- The honest link to something you've already done
- What you want to learn there

Fill This In

I've been following [specific thing] and what stood out to me was [detail].

That connects to [your project] I worked on, where I [what you did].

I want to learn [skill or area], and this is a team that actually does that.

The mistake: Praise that could apply to any company. "You're an innovative company with great culture" is a non-answer. Name one specific thing. One is enough.

Where to find your one specific thing: their engineering blog, a recent product launch, the actual job description, or the LinkedIn of the person interviewing you.

The Night-Before Checklist

Do this the night before, not the hour before.

- Write out all five answers in full sentences. Writing them is what makes them stick, not reading them
- Say each one out loud once, timed. If you're over two minutes, cut the setup
- Pick your ONE deep project and know its numbers cold
- Find your one specific thing about the company
- Write two questions to ask them at the end
- Re-read the job description and circle the words that show up more than once

Keep this document. Update the blanks every time you build something new, and you'll never start interview prep from scratch again.

One Last Thing

You are not going to sound perfect and you are not supposed to. The people who get offers aren't the ones with flawless answers, they're the ones who sound like they actually built something and can talk about it like a person.

You've built things. Go say so.

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