

# Common Interview Questions for Computer Science & Innovation and Software Engineering Majors

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Interviewing with companies for software engineering positions, whether large or small, have a variety of approaches and timelines in the hiring process. Generally speaking, larger companies have a more formal interview process involving a selection committee who conducts phone interviews, having a video web chat online, and one or more site visits. Smaller companies may have a more streamlined approach resulting in a quick phone interview with their recruiter followed by an interview on site. Most of the questions you will be asked are geared towards your technological proficiency. Some will be inquiring about your personality and teamwork skills.

## ➤ What questions can I expect as a Software Engineering Major?

- Tell us a little about yourself.
- How do you anticipate using the skills/knowledge you've acquired in your internship in your classes next year?
- Software Engineering is a rigorous major. What has been your most challenging course so far?
- What insights would you share with your classmates about the SWE major?
- Give two examples of things you've done on the job or in school that demonstrate your willingness to work hard.
- What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?
- It is very important to build good relationships at work but sometimes it doesn't always work out. If you can, tell me about a time when you were not able to build a successful relationship with a difficult person.
- Describe how your position on a group project contributed to your team's goals. What are the team's goals/mission?
- Some people consider themselves to be "big picture people" and others are "detail oriented". Which are you? Give an example of a time when you displayed this.
- Describe the most significant written document, report or presentation which you had to complete.
- Describe a work situation in which you had to take a risk. What was the outcome?
- Has anyone ever asked you to do something unethical? What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you had to confront a peer, customer or colleague.
- Describe a time when you served as a project manager.
- In a current job task, tell me about the steps you go through to ensure your decisions are correct/effective.
- What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give an example.
- Give me an example of when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell us about a time when you took responsibility for an error and were held personally accountable.
- Do you have any questions for us?

## Common Interview Questions

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### Examples:

- Please tell me about yourself.
- What makes you interested in this position?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What do you consider your greatest strengths?
- What would former coworkers/professors/supervisors say about you if we called them as a reference?
- Why did you choose this field?
- How did your college experience prepare you for a career in this field?
- Describe the work environment that makes you thrive.

### More Examples:

- If you have ever dealt with difficult people, how did you manage conflict?
- What are your proven coping mechanisms in challenging times?
- If creative, where do you get your inspiration?
- Convince me you are the perfect match for our opening.
- What sort of pay do you expect to receive?
- How does your previous experience relate to the job we have open?
- How did you get along with your last boss?
- What is the hardest job you've ever held?
- Do you have any questions for us?

## Top 10 Things to Consider for the Interview

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- An interview is a conversation about what you can do for them; research the company and tailor your responses towards substantiating how your talents and personality match the position.
- Rehearse interview questions out loud with a friend, family member, or your Career Advisor.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes early, but enter the premises 8–10 minutes early.
- Bring copies of your resume and reference sheet with you to offer.
- Use professional language and avoid slang words such as “uh,” “um,” “you know,” and “like.”
- Body language should be professional: good posture, not slouched, good eye contact but not staring. Watch the nervous habits of twirling hair, tapping a foot, or drumming fingers.
- Smile. It'll help you ---and them--- relax!
- Be prepared to offer evidence through detailed examples of times and ways and situations you used certain technical applications, characteristics, or skills.
- Collect their business cards so you can follow up with a thank you card or e-mail.
- After the interview, take notes on everything you can remember and use the experience to further develop your interview techniques.

# Questions to Consider Asking the Interviewer

*Adapted from this great resource: "[Three Questions to Ask](#)" by Toni Bowers, 2009*

So many people are concerned with making a good impression during a job interview that they forget it's a two-way street. You're there not only to market yourself but to find out if the job and the company are a good fit for you. You should use the interview to ask questions for yourself. So what type of questions should you be asking? Here are a few:

## What's an average day like here?

The question may prompt the interviewer to go into great detail about the day-to-day workings of the company, which is great information to have. If you deem it appropriate, respond to their answer with an example of how their work environment suits your style of operation.

## How would you describe the culture here?

The interviewer may answer that it's pretty laid-back or it's all business, or there's a good mixture of gender and cultures. Of course, he may also lie through his teeth. But if you're any good at reading people, even that might be valuable.

## What qualities are you looking for in the person who fills this position?

You're looking for answers like "Someone who is good with details" or "Someone who can communicate technical issues to end-users," etc. If the answer is "Someone who doesn't mind skipping lunch or always being on call," then you have some solid information on which to base your decision about the job.

## Other questions to consider asking:

- What is the next step in the hiring process? Or, when might you make a hiring decision?
- What tools/applications/languages do you use?
- What is your history with student interns/employees?
- What typical projects or tasks do student interns work on?
- What makes a student intern successful? What traits are best suited for your company?
- How do the various members of the team work together—who is in charge? etc.
- How would successful performance in this position be measured?
- Is there much turn over in your company?
- What's the management style?
- Do entry-level employees get to travel to conferences? Is that a perk or are they on their own?
- What makes new college grads attractive; what should students be working on?

## Top 10 personal values employers seek in employees:

- Honesty/Integrity
- Adaptability/Flexibility
- Dedication/Tenacity
- Reliability/Responsibility
- Loyalty
- Positive Attitude/Motivation
- Professionalism
- Self-Confidence
- Self-Motivated
- Willingness to Learn

*Adapted from this great [resource](#):  
R.S.Hansen et al, 2010*

# How to Handle the Hardest Questions

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Now and then we find ourselves in interviews getting completely stumped or we mentally ‘kick’ ourselves for how we responded to a particular question after the interview. These things happen. We’re just people being people in what often feels to be a socially-awkward experience commonly referred to as an interview. So how do we make the most of responding to the hardest questions?

**We Practice.** Make a commitment to treat the interview process with the respect it deserves and you will find that after enough “on and off camera” attempts:

- Your confidence will grow
- Your responses will gain clarity and charm
- Your questions for the interviewer will mature
- And you’ll experience the awesome “feel good” moment after a successful interview

## ➤ Q and A: Tough Questions and Great Answers

Adapted from: *“Ten Tough Interview Questions and Ten Great Answers,” 2010 CollegeGrad.com*

### 1. **Tell me about yourself.**

What the hiring manager really wants is a quick, two- to three-minute snapshot of who you are and why you’re the best candidate for this position. Talk about what you’ve done to prepare yourself to be the very best candidate for the position. Use an example or two to back it up. Tell me about yourself does not mean tell me everything. Just tell me what makes you the best.

### 2. **Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How was it resolved?**

Note that if you say no, most interviewers will keep drilling deeper to find a conflict. Focus your answer on the behavioral process for resolving the conflict and working collaboratively. For example: Yes, I have had conflicts in the past. Never major ones, but there have been disagreements that needed to be resolved. I’ve found that when conflict occurs, it helps to fully understand the other person’s perspective, so I take time to listen to their point of view, then I seek to work out a collaborative solution. For example . . .

### 3. **What is your greatest weakness?**

Most career books tell you to select a strength and present it as a weakness. Such as: I work too much. I just work and work and work. Wrong. First of all, using a strength and presenting it as a weakness is deceiving. Second, it misses the point of the question.

You should select a weakness that you have been actively working to overcome. For example: I have had trouble in the past with planning and prioritization. However, I’m now taking steps to correct this. I just started using a pocket planner; then show them your planner and how you are using it. Talk about a true weakness and show what you are doing to overcome it.

In reviewing these responses, please remember that they are only to be viewed samples. Please do not rehearse them verbatim or adopt them as your own. They are meant to stir your creative juices and get you thinking about how to properly answer the broader range of questions that you will face.

# Preparing for an Interview

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The interview, whether in person, online, or over the phone, is the context where you communicate your full spectrum of skills as a candidate to an employer. Interviews give you the chance to describe how your talents and personality fit the needs of the position. Hiring managers and selection committees rely heavily on interview outcomes when deciding whether or not to extend an offer.

The keys to a successful interview are preparation, practice and presentation.

## ➤ Preparation:

Research your employer thoroughly, refine your resume, select [appropriate attire](#), create a list of questions to ask the employer, and get a good night's sleep (It's more important than you might think). Also be sure to familiarize yourself with the interview's location.

## ➤ Practice:

Set up a "mock interview" with Career Services, a friend, family member, or colleague, and browse our selection of [interview questions](#). Rehearsing your responses is a great way to boost your confidence and craft how you communicate your talents and personality.

## ➤ Presentation:

*When answering questions, remember the "3 P's"*

- **Ponder:** take a moment to reflect on why the employer has asked a question. This will help with framing your response and speak to the skill set, value, or ability being measured.
- **Prove:** if you say that you have developed excellent organizational skills give specific examples of situations where you demonstrated a high level of organization.
- **Project:** always be genuine and confident in responding to questions, asking questions, and meeting new people during the interview.

## Relevant Resources:

[Common Interview Questions](#)

[Questions to Consider Asking the Interviewer](#)

[How to Handle the Hardest Questions](#)

[Common Interview Questions for Software Engineering Majors](#)

[Advanced Interviewing Strategy: Situation–Action–Result \(SAR\)](#)

