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2nd Edition

Answering Tough Interview Questions

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Rob Yeung, PhD

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by Rob Yeung

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Introduction



Congratulations! In picking up *Answering Tough Interview Questions For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, you're about to embark on a journey that transforms you into the kind of high-calibre candidate who has employers fighting to hire you. Perhaps you are on the lookout for your first job or trying to return to work. Maybe you are a seasoned executive trying to climb further up the corporate ladder of success. Or perhaps you've been foxed by tough interview questions in the past and simply want to know the secret to passing them with flying colours. Whatever your situation, this book is aimed at you.

While it's not rocket science, attending interviews can still be darned hard work. Interviewers use all manner of weird and wonderful questions and techniques designed to catch candidates out. And I should know – I've interviewed candidates on behalf of employers ranging from investment banks and insurance companies to IT companies and airlines. And I've travelled up and down the country, observing interviewers in organisations as diverse as advertising and media companies, bailiffs, funeral homes and private detective agencies.

Rest assured that the first edition of this book has already helped many thousands of people to ace their interviews. And with this updated second edition, you'll be able to answer just about any question that an interviewer might throw at you – anything from old favourites such as 'What are your weaknesses?' to newer questions about social media, for example.

Although everyone can get better at interviews, you need to invest a bit of hard work in making it happen. With that in mind, I assure you that absolutely anyone can improve their interview performance by leaps and bounds by understanding the rules of the interviewing game. Enjoy working your way through this book. And good luck in your next job interview!

About This Book

In this book, I pack in everything I've discovered over the years about what interviewers want to hear, plus lessons about the most common mistakes that candidates commit and, of course, advice on how to avoid them. But I've designed this book so that you can use it as a source of reference. You don't need to read it sequentially from Chapter 1 onwards.

You may find it most useful to start with Part I, though. These chapters cover topics such as how to research a company and then, after you land an interview, how to use your body language and tone of voice to make the best possible impact with what you actually talk about. I recommend that you at least skim through Chapter 2 on how to research a company, because probably the most important factor in succeeding at interviews is to tailor all your answers to what each particular set of interviewers is looking for.

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, I've made some assumptions about you:

- ✔ You want to improve on your interview performance in order to win over interviewers and secure a job. Perhaps you've been knocked back from a couple of interviews already or you've found interviews difficult in the past. Or maybe you just know that interviewers are getting pickier and asking increasingly difficult questions.
- ✔ You want bite-sized pieces of advice that explain what you need to say in order to impress an interviewer, along with examples to illustrate how to put that advice into practice in formulating a response.
- ✔ You'll read the example answers but are willing to put some effort into devising your own. After all, you may be a first-time job hunter or a seasoned executive looking for one last job before retirement, so not all the answers in this book can possibly apply to you.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you, all *For Dummies* books lay out key points of advice in an easy-to-use format. Look out for these icons throughout the book:



This icon points to useful ideas that help you to improve your interview performance.



The Remember icon highlights key information to bear in mind in order to impress the interviewers.



As you may have guessed, this icon is reserved for the bits of advice that you really, really need to take on board. Look out for these alerts and ignore them at your peril – it can cost you a job!



This icon highlights technical stuff that you don't necessarily need to understand. If pushed for time, you can simply skip over these points. However, I have included them just in case you want to understand a bit more about the theory behind interviewers' questions and techniques.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the material in the print or ebook you're reading right now, this product also comes with some access-anywhere extras on the web.

Go to www.dummies.com/extras/toughinterviewquestionsuk for free online bonus content about answering tough interview questions, including an extra Part of Tens chapter on creating your ideal career. Head to www.dummies.com/how-to/content/exposing-cover-letter-myths.html for a helpful article about creating a great covering letter for your CV. And for more free articles on job interviews, check out www.dummies.com/how-to/business-careers/Finding-a-Job/Job-Interviews.html.

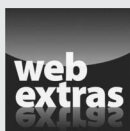
Where to Go from Here

This book is written so that you can jump to whatever topic most interests you. If, for example, you're trying to appear calmer and more confident in interviews, then make Chapter 3 your first port of call. If you need to prepare for competency-based interviews, then go straight to Chapter 9. Or if you want to find out more about explaining a change of career direction, then skip ahead to Chapter 11. Don't feel the need to stand on ceremony – skip ahead to the topics that grab your interest.

Whatever you decide to read first, remember that this book is packed with examples of how people answer tough interview questions. Make sure that you read the advice and devise your *own* answer to the question – otherwise a canny interviewer will see straight through you.

Part I

Getting Started with Answering Tough Interview Questions



For Dummies can help you get started with lots of subjects.
Go to www.dummies.com to learn more and do more with
For Dummies.

In this part...

- ✓ Discover the essential rules of succeeding in tough interviews.
- ✓ Consider exactly what interviewers are looking for and ensure that you demonstrate those skills.
- ✓ Do your research on the company and arrive prepared.
- ✓ Appear enthusiastic and committed by thinking about not only what you say but how you say it.

Chapter 1

Understanding the Interviewing Game

In This Chapter

- ▶ Realising what interviewers want from job candidates
- ▶ Understanding the skills and qualities sought by employers

The job market is increasingly competitive, and many interviewers are inundated with too many applications. In this chapter, I share with you the secrets of what interviewers are really looking for, and how to prepare the ammunition for your answers.



This book contains plenty of advice and loads of mock answers to tough interview questions. But simply reading through the book won't get you anywhere. What you need to do is figure out how *you* would answer different interview questions by using my answers for inspiration.

Recognising What Interviewers Are Looking For

At first glance, different job adverts seem to require a dazzling array of skills, experience and qualities. But in actuality, most employers are really looking for four basic factors to find the right person for the job. These four factors can be summarised as *the four Cs* of interviews:

- ✓ **Competence:** Interviewers look to recruit people who have the skills and personal qualities to do the job with minimal supervision.

- ✓ **Confidence:** Employers want to hire people who are at least reasonably composed and secure about themselves. They want people who can deal with new people and new situations without turning into a trembling wreck!
- ✓ **Commitment:** Interviewers want to give the job to someone who sticks at it. They want a self-motivated person who persists in the face of difficulties rather than gives up at the first sign of trouble.
- ✓ **Chemistry:** Interviewers want someone that they feel they can get on with. All employers feel they have a unique culture – and want to know that you can fit in with the rest of the team.

Demonstrate your competence and commitment by giving good answers to the many questions thrown at you. You can demonstrate confidence and create chemistry by using your tone of voice and body language to show that you're the kind of collected and likeable person who gets on with everyone. Be aware that the interviewers are not only evaluating *what* you say, but also *how* you say it. No matter what section of the book you turn to, be sure to keep the four Cs in mind.

Finding Out about Key Skills and Qualities

When interviewers say they're looking for 'competent' candidates, what exactly do they mean? Well, dozens of surveys have asked employers what they want from potential recruits. This section covers the top ten skills and personal qualities that employers look for. Parts II and III take you through how to answer these questions, but for now, make a mental note of these skills and then weigh up whether you possess them.

Interestingly, most of the surveys agree that these skills and characteristics tend to apply to employees at all levels of an organisation and across most industry sectors. So a high-street retailer looking for a shop assistant tends to want more or less the same skills and qualities as an international corporation looking for a senior manager – although obviously to differing degrees.

Communicating with people

Unless you are being hired to work in a sealed room with no contact with colleagues or customers (which I very much doubt!), you need to have good communication skills.

When discussing your communication skills with interviewers, think of examples of occasions when you:

- ✓ Listened to the needs of other people, such as colleagues or customers.
- ✓ Conveyed information to other people – perhaps speaking on a one-to-one basis or presenting to a group of people.
- ✓ Handled difficult situations, such as customer complaints, on the telephone.
- ✓ Used your written communication skills in preparing reports or documents for other people to read.

See Chapter 3 for more about communication skills.

Influencing others

Although communication skills are important, most employers want people who also have powers of persuasion – being able to win others over or change their minds. In preparing for your interviews, think of times when you have:

- ✓ Had a discussion with someone and helped him or her to see your point of view.
- ✓ Changed someone's mind.
- ✓ Persuaded someone to take a course of action that they were initially not in support of.



Persuasion skills are particularly prized when dealing with customers or clients – for example, in listening to their needs and then selling products or services to them.

See Chapters 4, 5 and 9 for more on influencing skills.

Analysing situations

Managers want to hire candidates who can research issues and assess situations. Make sure that you think about times when you:

- ✓ Gathered information about a topic or issue.
- ✓ Broke down a complex problem into a number of smaller issues.
- ✓ Weighed up the pros and cons of different options.

See Chapters 9 and 12 for more about analytical skills.

Solving problems and making decisions

Employers are looking for people who can assess situations and then work out the best course of action to take. Be ready to talk to interviewers about occasions when you:

- ✓ Made suggestions about how to tackle a problem.
- ✓ Initiated or participated in brainstorming sessions.
- ✓ Weighed up different options and chose a course of action to solve a problem or tackle an issue.

See Chapters 9 and 12 for more about problem-solving skills.

Demonstrating drive and determination

Organisations do not want to hire people who only work when given explicit instructions as to what to do; they want to hire candidates who are self-motivated and can demonstrate a bit of initiative. Think back to times when you:

- ✓ Suffered a setback or disappointment at work but got back on your feet and got on with a task.
- ✓ Had an original idea and used it to be more effective or productive at work.

- ✓ Overcame a difficulty or obstacle that was preventing you from achieving a goal.

Chapters 4, 5 and 9 contain more information on demonstrating drive and determination.

Teamworking with colleagues

Employers are constantly talking about the need for employees to work together more effectively as a team. Try to recall instances when you:

- ✓ Helped someone else in the team with their work or duties.
- ✓ Resolved conflict or disagreement between other team members.
- ✓ Provided a team member with a shoulder to cry on.



Effective teamworking is about putting the needs of the team above your own.

Chapters 5, 9 and 12 contain some examples of popular questions about teamworking.

Developing quickly

Employers want people who can develop quickly in the job, especially for entry-level jobs (including graduate entry roles). Managers don't want to hire people who need a lot of handholding! In preparing for interviews, try to think back to times when you:

- ✓ Became proficient at a task or duty more quickly than others expected.
- ✓ Gained knowledge about a topic or issue because of your hard work and dedication.
- ✓ Picked up a new skill with minimal supervision.

See Chapters 4, 6 and 9 for questions relating to your ability to pick up new skills and absorb information quickly.

Being flexible and adaptable

Employers want to hire people who are open-minded, accommodating and willing to help out when the need arises. Try to recall occasions when you:

- ✓ Offered to do overtime to help get a project or piece of work completed on time.
- ✓ Helped someone else even when it was not part of your job description.
- ✓ Changed your mind at work after listening to someone else's point of view.

Chapters 5 and 9 show examples of questions about how you may have demonstrated your flexibility and adaptability in different work situations.

Planning and organising

Employers are always on the lookout for candidates who can manage their own workload. In order to convince employers that you possess these skills, think about instances when you:

- ✓ Prioritised tasks to meet a tough deadline.
- ✓ Planned out and then completed a project.
- ✓ Organised other people to ensure that a piece of work got done.

Chapter 9 contains examples of typical questions about pieces of work you may have planned.

Being aware of the bigger picture

Employers complain that a lot of employees have a very narrow-minded view of their work. They don't see the bigger picture of what goes on outside of their team, department or organisation. Demonstrate that you are aware of the bigger picture by thinking back to occasions when you: