

10 important interview questions engineers should prepare for

1) When did you start your job search? Have you been offered any positions?

What they're really asking:

This question is trying to establish whether there is any particular reason you aren't currently employed. Also, the company won't want to hire someone that has applied for a job simply because they are desperate to be employed.

How to answer:

Be relaxed and explain that you are looking for a company and role with the right fit, and that you are quite choosy when it comes to finding the 'right job'. You may then need to answer what you believe the 'right job' entails.

2) What do you enjoy most/least about engineering?

What they're really asking:

The interviewer is trying to gauge your general attitude towards work.

How to answer:

You should tailor this to the responsibilities of the role you are interviewing for and try to keep your answer centred on the positives.

3) Where do you see yourself ten years from now?

What they're really asking:

Your potential employer will want to be sure that you aren't going to move on to another job too soon.

How to answer:

You should research a career path that would flow from the position for which you are interviewing and ensure that you emphasise the intention to master the demands of that position first.

4) What would you consider to be your greatest success in using your skills to solve an engineering problem?

What they're really asking:

Your potential employer is trying to assess two things: how you approach explaining your achievements and how you apply your problem-solving abilities to overcome obstacles.

How to answer:

Draw upon a specific example – one that showcases your strengths as an engineer, such as the ability to think on your feet.

5) What new engineering specialty skills have you developed during the past year?

What they're really asking:

As an engineer, it's important to keep up to date with changes in the industry and technological advances. This question is designed to find out if you are proactive in procuring new knowledge or learning new skills.

How to answer:

Detail any particular skills that you developed whilst at university and describe how you obtained them. Finish up talking about your willingness to learn.

6) What do you get out of engineering that you couldn't get from any other kind of work?

What they're really asking:

The employer wants to gain an understanding of what motivates you to move forward in your career.

How to answer:

You could talk about one engineering achievement that you are especially proud of, or you could explain how day-to-day aspects of the work stimulate you. If it is the latter, you should again tailor this to the role for which you are interviewing.

7) On your last project assignment, what problems did you identify that had been previously overlooked?

What they're really asking:

Your potential employer will want to determine what you contribute to a team.

How to answer:

This is an ideal opportunity to depict several key qualities such as attention to detail, effective communication and creative thinking. You should come to the interview prepared with an example.

8) What was the workload like in your previous engineering department?

What they're really asking:

They want to establish your expectations and how you would handle a heavy workload.

How to answer:

It is imperative that you do not complain about the workload in your previous job, even if it was taxing. Illustrate your efficiency; explain how you manage your time and prioritise tasks.

9) What personal characteristics do you feel are necessary to be a successful engineer?

What they're really asking:

This question is really an assessment of your values. Your potential employer may be trying to get a feel for your character.

How to answer:

Choose three or four characteristics and expand on why you think they're important. You could also describe how a previous manager of yours displayed these qualities to good effect and how you learned from that example.

10) Describe an experience with a difficult client. How did you handle the situation?

What they're really asking:

They want to analyse your emotional stability and how you act under pressure, as well as how you treat clients.

How to answer:

Your answer should include: the way you listened to what the client had to say, confirmed an understanding of their concerns and subsequently took responsibility to resolve the situation by offering a solution, without going into too much detail about the specific complaint.

Best of luck with your job search!