

Always have questions prepared for an employer that address what is most important to you to help you decide if this is the opportunity you want. Asking questions shows that you're interested in the job and how knowledgeable you are about the position and the industry.

Choose your questions carefully, depending on who's doing the interviewing. An excellent question for a recruiter might be inappropriate for an executive. And you don't want to ask your potential boss something that's best suited for a future coworker. Use their comments to develop questions.

Also, there are certain questions you should never ask early in the interview process -- no matter whom you're meeting. Don't ask about salary, vacation, 401(k) or anything else that might make you seem more interested in the compensation than the company.

The following are questions appropriate for every type of interviewer:

The Recruiter: The 'Big Picture' Person

It's the recruiter's job to identify strong candidates and guide them through the hiring process. This is the "big picture" person. They can give you an overview of the company and the department as a whole. (Save very specific questions about the job for the hiring manager.) The recruiter is also the best person to answer questions about the hiring process.

Some questions to ask the recruiter:

- How would you describe the company culture?
- What type of employees tend to excel at this company?
- Can you tell me more about the interview process?

The Hiring Manager: Your Future Boss

The hiring manager will likely supervise you if you get the job. They're the most knowledgeable people about the position and its requirements. You should direct specific questions about the job, its responsibilities and its challenges to them. You may also want to ask what kind of candidate they're seeking.

Some questions to ask the hiring manager:

- What are the most important skills for the job? How would you describe your ideal candidate?
- What's a common career path at the company for someone in this role?

The Executive: The Industry Expert

Senior managers and executives are most knowledgeable about the latest happenings in their industry. If you'll be working closely with an executive, you can ask them some specifics about the job. But you should focus most of your questions on the future of the company and the industry. This is your chance to show off your industry knowledge!

Some questions to ask a senior manager or executive:

Employer Questions

"Connecting Curriculum and Career"

How do you think this industry will change in the next five years?

What do you think gives this company an edge over its competitors?

What's the company's biggest challenge? How is it planning to meet that challenge?

The Coworker: The Straight-Talker

Some interviews will also include a meeting with a potential coworker -- the interviewer most likely to "tell it how it is." A potential colleague may be most candid about the job, its challenges and the work environment. However, don't expect inside information -- and certainly don't ask for it.

Some questions to ask a potential coworker:

What's a typical day like in the department?

How would you describe the work environment at the company?

What's the most enjoyable part of your job? What's the most challenging part?