

Curveball Questions

Final and second/third stage interviews are notoriously difficult to prepare for and gauge, especially once you may have already completed many rounds of interviews. It is becoming increasingly common for interviewers to throw in some unusual 'curveball questions' during this final stage of interview. Interviewers are seeking to understand better how the candidate thinks and what they value.

These 'curveball questions' are used for a variety of reasons. The interviewer wants to assess: if you can think on your feet; if you can think creatively and possibly demonstrate a sense of humour or, equally, to put you off your stride, thus testing your ability to think and react under pressure.

All 'curveball' questions must be answered in a way that highlights the skills, knowledge, abilities, and attributes that you can bring to the job. To be able to impress someone when asked a 'curveball' interview question, have an answer ready that you have thought about in advance. Go into the interview knowing that, despite your preparation, questions that you have not anticipated may be still thrown at you. Take your time and keep in mind that what is most important is probably not the actual answer you give, but how well you maintain your composure and how clearly you explain your reasoning. Don't be afraid to unleash a little creativity or humour in the process!

There's just no way to predict in advance exactly which questions you'll encounter in an interview. But in truth, you don't have to be able to see into the future to answer even the toughest interview questions effectively and persuasively.

The key is to plan your answer strategy, by developing a game plan and use this formula as the basis for your answers throughout the interview.

Choose a few main selling points that you want to emphasize throughout the interview, and subtly weave these themes into your answers. This kind of consistency and message discipline will impress the interviewer and drive home your top qualities, skills, experience and qualifications. In addition, having a few key concepts you want to reinforce will help you narrow down and focus your answers.

It's up to you to craft the unique message you want to convey in the interview, as well as to develop the answer strategies you'll use to achieve that goal.

Whimsical Questions

**If you were an animal, what would you be? Or
Which animal best describes you?**

Both these questions are used to give an interviewer insight into how a person perceives themselves.

There are obviously no right answers to questions like these, but this is your chance to be creative and really impress with your inventiveness. It's all about analysing and clearly expressing your thought processes that enable the interviewer to assess how you handle being put on the spot.

It is important to try to tailor your answer to reflect your best attributes and qualities that are desirable for the specific job. Consider some of the following:

- **Fox** – Clever, but with a hint of dishonesty
- **Dog** – Loyalty and friendliness of man's best friend; do not bite unless they are backed into a corner
- **Tiger** – Intelligent, street smart
- **Lion** – Bossy and lazy, but an incredible fighter, puts themselves above all others, likes asserting authority
- **Elephant** – Leader, unstoppable, great memory
- **Monkey** – Intelligent, nimble
- **Ant** – Hard worker
- **Cockroach** – Usually an unwelcomed visitor, however, a superb survivor, very adaptable and resourceful
- **Dolphin** – Very Intelligent, everybody loves dolphins
- **Butterfly** – Always in one stage or another of development, waiting for your day to fly
- **Gorilla** – Gentle, vegetarian, good parent, provoke at your own peril
- **Chameleon** – Blends in well, not one to stand out, very sneaky
- **Owl** – Very wise, very good at seeing the big picture, very good at getting what it wants
- **Jellyfish** – Beautiful to look at but deadly to touch, handle with extreme caution or pay a heavy price
- **Dove** – A peacemaker, always looking for the non-violent solution
- **Ox** – Solid work ethic
- **Beaver** – Industrious
- **Chimp** – Highly intelligent and sociable
- **Eagle** – Acute eyesight to see the smallest mistake, while always keeping an eye on the bigger picture

Generally bad animals, the ones you may want to avoid (at least for this question) include:

- **Snake** – Sneaky and dishonest
- **Whale** – Bloated
- **Sloth** – Lazy
- **Turtle** – Too laid back, unable to strike fast even when necessary

If you were a fruit which fruit would you be?

When it comes to fruit, almost anything will do as long as you can give a good reason for it. You can choose a fruit that goes well in fruit salad to show that you're a team player and get along with others; apples can be juiced, baked, or eaten on their own or in fruit salad. Like this, they show that you are versatile and can perform well in different situations, on your own or in a team. And if an apple a day keeps the doctor away, you can be just as reliable and will be a healthy asset to the organisation. A banana is versatile, transportable and has substance and a thick skin to show that you are not put off by setbacks and can grow and develop all year round. A passion fruit is a hardy fruit that grows well in higher altitudes showing that you thrive under pressure, can take criticism and are also very passionate about what you do.

Or for something a bit different, how about a tomato, which crosses the line between fruit and vegetable, is highly versatile and can be eaten raw or cooked – all demonstrating flexibility and transferability of skills?

If you could have any super-hero power, what would it be?

In the super-hero power example, do you focus on qualities such as “wealth, status, or power” or does the answer suggest a more nuanced world view reflecting values such as “the ability to sense others’ needs,” “the capacity to analyse complex situations,” or “an incredible memory.” Always tailor your answer to reflect the qualities required in the position that you are interviewing for.

If you were a colour what colour would you be and why? Or You're a new addition to the crayon box, what colour would you be and why?

You should approach this question, as well as any question asking you to pick a colour or other object to represent you, as a way for the employer to gain an insight into your personality. Tailor your answer to the job you are applying for, and the more creative you are, the better. If you're applying for a job in a stressful, competitive industry, then a good colour could be blue: it implies that you keep your cool, calm and composed and never lose your head in high-pressure situations. Choose colours that highlight your best qualities and make sure you justify why you chose that colour. Using colours that have warm and friendly connotations are great, but don't be afraid to pick colours that are unusual – remember there are many shades to the colour wheel.

For example, you could say that you would be a darker shade of charcoal grey because you're an efficient and quiet worker, a warm person (because darker colours absorb heat from the sun while lighter colours deflect heat), and you think grey is a chic, understated colour that can complement other colours.

Other Examples of Whimsical Questions:

- **If you were to win £1 million, what would you do with the money?**
- **How lucky are you and why?**
- **If you were a household item, what would you be?**
- **What kind of tree would you like to be?**
- **What's the colour of money?**
- **If you were a box of cereal, what would you be and why?**

Puzzle Questions

These seek to test problem-solving abilities. Questions such as “Why are manhole covers round?” fall into this category. The essence of the question is for the interviewer to understand your thought process. The actual answer matters less than the how you reached your conclusion. “Never give an answer to this type of question without a coherent explanation.”

Why are manhole covers round?

- Manhole covers are round so that they would never fall through the manhole. Since there’s a lip around the inside of the manhole that the cover rests on,; this effectively makes the diameter of the manhole an inch or so less than that of the cover, therefore the manhole cover can never fall through by accident.
- Manhole covers are heavy so a circular shape can be manoeuvred more easily by being rolled.
- A round manhole cover is easier to install since you do not need to line up the corners.

If you were a brick in a wall which brick would you be and why?

Here are some brick laying tips to consider when formulating a response to this question:

- The first brick laid at the corner of a wall determines the position of every other brick in that wall.
- One brick laid with too large of a head joint, or not being level or plumb can effect rows of brick beside and above it.
- A soldier course of brick provides visual interest to an otherwise monotonous wall.
- Bricks are made of natural clay fired in a kiln; close up each brick has a slightly different design , texture, shape, and colour patterns, though all have almost exactly the same basic dimensions, though these can also vary.
- The keystone, or last brick placed in an arch helps support all the weight above the arch (which equally distributes that weight to the ground). Every brick in the arch shares the load equally.

What was your best McGuyver moment?

- **Answer:** Name a time when you creatively solved a problem. It's a creative way of asking how you've solved a work problem that required you to think outside the box, or come up with a not-obvious solution.

Tell me how you would determine how many house painters there are in the United States?

- This type of problem is known as a “Fermi” problem.
- Say there are 120 million houses, they get painted every 10 years, and one person paints 40 houses per year (remember interiors take less time).

- So 12,000,000 houses get painted every year / 40 houses = roughly 300,000 US house painters

How would you fit a giraffe into a fridge?

In order to answer this question, you must ask the interviewer to provide further detail, for example, how big is the giraffe? How big is the fridge? Are we in a country where killing a giraffe is legal or not?

Demonstrating that you need facts and truths before jumping to a conclusion, is what the interviewer is testing.

How many times a day does a clock's hands overlap?

22 times

AM	PM
12:00	12:00
1:05	1:05
2:11	2:11
3:16	3:16
4:22	4:22
5:27	5:27
6:33	6:33
7:38	7:38
8:44	8:44
9:49	9:49
10:55	10:55

Explain a database in three sentences to your eight-year-old nephew.

This question tests your ability to communicate complex ideas in simple language. For example, a database is a machine that remembers lots of information about lots of things. People use them to help them remember and recall that information.

Other Examples of Puzzle Questions:

- How to measure 9 minutes using only a 4-minute and 7-minute hourglass?
- How many footballs can fit in a London bus?
- How many piano tuners are there in the entire World?
- If the probability of observing a car in 30 minutes on a highway is 0.95, what is the probability of observing a car in 10 minutes (assuming constant default probability)?
- What is the probability of breaking a stick into 3 pieces and forming a triangle?
- How many lines can be drawn in a 2D plane such that they are equidistant from 3 non-collinear points?
- Imagine you have a closet full of shirts. It's very hard to find a shirt. So what can you do to organize your shirts for easy retrieval?

Stress Inducing Questions

There are, in fact, questions whose primary purpose is to put the interviewee on the spot.

Questions like, “What would you say if I told you that this interview is going terribly?” fall into this category. Rather than react, treat these questions as hypotheticals. Calmly tell the interviewer that you would be disappointed if that was correct, because you would really like the position and you believe you are well qualified.

Other Curveball Questions

- **If you were a pizza delivery man, how would you benefit from scissors?**
- **Are you more of a hunter or a gatherer?**
- **If you were on an island and could only bring three things, what would you bring?**
- **What is your least favourite thing about humanity?**
- **How honest are you?**
- **Why is a tennis ball fuzzy?**
- **If you were 80 years old, what would you tell your children?**
- **How does the Internet work?**
- **If there was a movie produced about your life, who would play you and why?**
- **What was the last gift you gave someone?**
- **What is the funniest thing that has happened to you recently?**
- **If you had the opportunity, what historical figure would you invite to dinner?**

Challenging Interview Questions

Tell Me One Thing You Would Change About Your Last Job

Beware of making any disparaging comments about former employers, as this will reflect badly on you. But an additional trouble point in answering this query is showing yourself to be someone who can't vocalize their problems as they arise. Why didn't you correct the issue at the time? Be prepared with an answer that doesn't criticize a former employer or paint you in an unflattering light. Outdated technology?

What Would The Person Who Likes You Least In The World Say About You?

Highlight an aspect of your personality that could initially seem negative, but is ultimately a positive. An example? Impatience. Used incorrectly this can be bad in a workplace. But stressing timeliness and always driving home deadlines can build your esteem as a leader.

Tell Me About A Time When Old Solutions Didn't Work

The interviewer is trying to identify how knowledgeable you are in today's work place and what new creative ideas you possess to solve problems.

What's The Biggest Risk You've Ever Taken?

Some roles require a high degree of tenacity and resilience. Providing examples of your willingness to take risks shows both your ability to fail and rebound, but also your ability to take risky or controversial moves that succeed.

Have You Ever Had A Manager Challenge A Decision?

Interviewers are looking for an answer that shows humility and for you to display the ability to take direction. The anecdote should be compelling, but it's the lesson learned, not the situation, that is the crucial element to this answer.

Describe A Time When Your Team Did Not Agree

Questions pertaining to difficulties in the past are a way for employers to anticipate your future behaviour, by understanding how you behaved in the past and what you have learned. Clarify the situation succinctly and explain what specific action you took to come to a consensus with the group. Then describe the result of that action.