

## **Interview Tips Series: Part 1 – How to Answer Common Interview Questions for Pharmacists**

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Interviewing is hard. There are a lot of subtle things you need to think about: Who am I interviewing with? Where do I need to be and when? How long is this interview going to be? What do I wear? Are they going to feed me lunch?

Perhaps one of the more obvious pieces you'll ask yourself is, "Which questions am I going to be asked?" With this, you also have to consider how you plan on answering each question and, maybe even more importantly, what the interviewer wants to hear. In Part 1 of our Interview Tips Series, we're going to go through some of the most common interview questions and question types that you need to prepare yourself for and share with you some perspective on what employers may be looking for with each example.

This article is not going to tell you *how* to answer any given question. Your answers should be your own. You shouldn't look at this (or any interview guide for that matter) as a template of the right or wrong responses to give. There are so many ways to answer every interview question, and, yes, some of them are more "correct" than others. Overall, though, you should think about how each question may fit a situation *you've* been in, an experience that *you've* had, or a skill or attribute *you'll* bring to the table.

Without further ado, here are some of the most common interview questions you should be prepared to answer when interviewing for a pharmacist position.

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

The most common of all interview questions. Employers are looking for a balance of professional and personal with this "simple" ice breaker question. You know it's coming no matter what role you're applying for, so prepare for it and let your personality shine.

### **Why did you choose to look for roles in this field?**

Interviewers, particularly in specialized fields, are looking for someone who is committed to their area of practice. Jobseekers who are looking for *any* job usually don't fit that bill. It's important to convey your reasons for how you ended up applying for roles in that field. Was it a particular mentor or faculty member who generated excitement about this area of practice? Was it an experience that you had in your previous job? Think about your story and share it openly and honestly with your interviewer.

### **Why did you choose to apply for this position?**

Sharing your reasons as to why you've applied for this role is as straightforward as it sounds. Your answer to this question should tell a (brief) backstory of how you ended up where you are, how this role will allow you to thrive and how the company will benefit from having you, and how it's going to help you achieve your and the company's strategic goals. Maybe it's not as straightforward as it sounds, but with a bit of practice you can capture all of that information in a concise manner and impress the interviewer with your response.

### **Why did you choose to apply with our company?**

Most of the time interviewees tend to be more interested in the job itself as opposed to the company they're applying with, but this question is your opportunity to share why the specific company you're applying to work for wasn't an afterthought. Do you share similar views with their mission, vision, and values? Have you heard good things from current employees? Are you excited to work with a company that is a healthcare trendsetter? Find your reasons why you'd be happy to work for this company and be ready to discuss them in detail.

### **Clinical Questions**

Certain positions, particularly clinical pharmacist roles and inpatient PGY-1 residency programs, may ask you clinical questions directly or may give you a clinical case where you will be asked to prioritize problem lists and suggest interventions for drug-related issues. There's no way to prepare for the variety of issues you can potentially be assessed on other than trusting the knowledge you've built up over time and brushing up on common disease states. Don't forget to look for the seven types of drug-related problems (Table 1).

**Table 1. Drug-Related Problems**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Unnecessary drug therapy</li><li>2. Additional drug therapy needed</li><li>3. Ineffective drug therapy</li><li>4. Dose too low</li><li>5. Dose too high</li><li>6. Adverse drug reaction</li><li>7. Non-compliance</li></ol>
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### **Situational Questions**

Interviewers will frequently ask questions that propose a hypothetical situation (e.g., "How would you approach a patient who always fills their medications three weeks late?") or require you to think back to a time you faced a certain problem (e.g., "Tell me about a time you spoke with a patient about the importance of medication adherence."). In both of these cases, interviewers are not looking for a correct answer so much as a specific response to how you would or how you have handled the situation in the past. Share stories, even with the hypothetical questions, because real-world examples are much more compelling and believable than discussing how you'd theoretically respond.

### **Either-Or Questions**

Interviewers will sometimes present you with two options and ask you to box yourself into one of those options (e.g., "Would you describe yourself as informal or formal in the workplace?"). Most times candidates don't perfectly fit into one of the two categories presented, so it's okay to lean one way with your answer, but also balance your response with a reason the other category also fits in certain circumstances.

### **Position-Specific Questions**

You should be prepared to answer questions specific to the area of practice you are applying for. For example, when interviewing for a community practice position, you'll likely receive questions regarding interactions with patients, achieving key performance metrics, working in a fast-paced environment with competing priorities, and working on a team. These questions may not apply or may be phrased differently for other pharmacist roles. As you prepare a list of questions you may be asked in an interview, think of how they may apply with the role you're interviewing for or how they may be altered to better fit that job description even if they don't necessarily fit on the surface.

### **What questions do you have for me?**

Just about every interview you ever participate in will end with this closing question. With this question, interviewers are looking for you to demonstrate your interest in the position. By asking questions to further your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the job, you can end the interview on a positive note.

There are three wrong responses to avoid when answering this question:

*"I don't have any questions right now."*

Do you even care? Do you really know everything there is to know about this job? Did the interviewer just waste their time interviewing someone who is so desperate that they don't care about the details of the job? Notably, if you asked questions during the interview in more of a conversation format, no further questions would be needed at this point.

*Asking a question that the interviewer has already answered*

Were you paying attention? Don't go into an interview with a prepared set of questions that you're so determined to ask that you forget how to have a conversation. If the interviewer mentioned something about the skills they're looking for in a candidate, for example, don't ask about it again later during the interview.

*Asking a question that can easily be answered with publicly available information*

Did you do your homework? If not, you should make sure you do that ahead of your next interview, because this interview may not go so well. If you have done your research ahead of time, asking a question that suggests that you haven't isn't the best strategy. Also, nothing is worse to an interviewer than when they can sense that you're asking a question just to ask a question.

### ***Can I ask about the benefits of the job?***

There are two competing thoughts on this. On one hand, the discussion surrounding pay and fringe benefits (anything compensation that is not monetary) should ideally take place when you receive the offer. On the other hand, it's better if you ask early on so you're not wasting anyone's time.

Of course, it depends on the situation. If you're in love with the job and it's going to be a step in the right direction toward achieving your long-term goals or if you'd be happy to take any job to get a paycheck for the time being, maybe you can afford to wait a bit longer before

asking about the pay and benefits. If you're on the fence about the role and the perks are going to tip the scales one way or another or if you have a competing offer from another prospective employer, then maybe it's better you ask sooner than later. My suggestion is to wait at least until the final round of interviews to ask if you'd prefer to know before you receive an offer.

In general, it's best to try to consider the intangibles (e.g., the responsibilities of the job, the opportunities for growth, the company culture, the people you work with, the person you report to, etc.) before clouding judgment with a larger paycheck or an easier schedule. If you hate going to work every day, making an extra \$20,000 each year isn't going to keep you in that job for too long.

### **Conclusion**

Now that you've gotten a good sense of what employers may be looking for with some of the most common interview questions and question types, you're ready to start compiling a list of questions and brainstorming your responses. Be sure to review the rest of the Interview Tips Series for help with these next steps!