

Interview Questions

Below is a list of questions that PhD-level interview candidates have been asked, sorted by question type.

Agenda Setting Questions:

These questions are broad 'opener' questions, and the best strategy is to respond with a summary of your academic training, professional skills and experience and interest in the position.

1. Can you walk me through your resume?
2. Why are you interested and why are you qualified for this position?
3. Tell us about you.
4. So, I see you are presently at UCSF.

Skills Key to the position Questions:

After agenda setting question, interviewers will focus on questions that help them understand if you have the required skills to do the job.

Research

1. Tell me about your current research. How did you design your project and what were your results? (if you are a postdoc), how did it build or expand on your graduate research.
2. Can you discuss your range of research experience? What about your technical skills?
3. Say that your research is not producing impressive results. What criteria do you use to determine if and how you should continue on a particular path of research?

Project Management

1. This position will require the successful candidate to develop research designs for small- and large-scale research projects. Can you tell me about a time you had to manage a project, from design and implementation to evaluation? How did you approach it, and what were challenges you had to overcome?
2. What example can you give me about a time you had to work independently?
3. Can you give me an example of when you had multiple tasks to do in a short period of time? How did you stay organized?
4. How do you handle short deadlines?

Interpersonal/Communication Skills

1. The successful candidate will be tasked with preparing technical memoranda and reports, preparing research reports intended for a wider audience, and communicating research results to clients and other external parties. What is your experience in these areas?
2. Can you specifically discuss a time you have had to share highly technical material in a clear manner to a non-technical audience?
3. science and to our corporate HQ managers who don't have a science background, do you think you can present to audiences with diverse science backgrounds?
4. Since you've been in science, at the bench, how do I know you'll be able to understand and interpret research findings at the clinical level?
5. Often not discussed openly, is the need to present/write our findings in a positive light, and not necessarily negative despite that the data may not be too exciting, How do you think you will adapt to this form of presenting?
6. I see you had significant presentation experience. Tell me what criteria you use to gauge whether or not you are giving an excellent presentation.
7. We often collaborate under strict deadlines. Describe a successfully collaboration on a written document. Did you face challenges and how did you address them?
8. How would you rate your writing skills on a scale of 1-10?
9. Tell me about a time you had a disagreement with a colleague or with a supervisor. How did you resolve it?

People Management

1. Supervising junior researchers is a key component of this position. Discuss your approach when managing the work of those you supervise.

2. Can you talk about your experience organizing and supervising the work of others in the conduct of research?
3. Have you ever had to teach another staff person a new software system or skill? How did you do it?
4. What do you find are the greatest challenges in managing people?

Fears/Curiosity Questions:

After determining that you could technically do the job, interviewing often try to tease out why you are interested in the position, and any barriers to you doing the position successfully.

1. Tell me about a time that you failed or faced a significant professional setback. How did you handle it?
2. How would you describe your weaknesses?
3. What type of work environments do you thrive in/what was your best work situation and why?
4. Now that you have heard about the position, what do you think will be most difficult for you if you are the selected candidate for this position?
5. Where do you see yourself in ten years?
6. Why are you not choosing to pursue an academic career?
7. Why are you specifically interested in working with our organization?
8. Imagine that you're in the lab, and have a breakthrough in your research, or garner some robust results. How do you respond?
9. Why are you choosing to leave academe? (if a non-bench position) – Why are you choosing to leave the bench?
10. How do I know you can effectively translate your skills from your PhD and post-doc studies to a corporate environment?
11. Academia is not as fast paced as the corporate world, and we have had to ask a number of PhDs to leave, how do you think you're different and do you think you can work in a fast paced environment?
12. What were your work hours like at your previous position? What is your take about working until 8 or 9PM? Midnight? All night?

Questions to ask interviewers

1. What qualities are you looking for in the successful candidate?
2. What qualities or skills do you think the selected candidate will have to possess to succeed in this job?
3. What do you think will be most challenging for the selected candidate in the first 6 months?
4. How does this position interact with your position?
5. What makes the organization a particularly good place to work?
6. Why did you choose to work in this organization – what is most rewarding?
7. How would you describe the culture, management style and organization here?
8. (To ask a direct supervisor) How would you describe your management style?
9. (To ask colleagues) How would you describe (the position's boss) management style?
10. Can you tell me more about the metrics used to assess the performance of someone in your position?
11. What are the checks and balances used to assure and monitor my growth at this organization.
12. Would you tell me more about your initial training program/period? Is there an endpoint? how long does it last?
13. Can you give me some insight into what my first two weeks would be like? 1st month? what would be expected of me during that time and what training can I expect if any?
14. Given that I am successful in the position, what opportunities will I have available for professional growth in your company?
15. Is there a general time frame for consideration of promotion?
16. Where have others that have started my position in your company gone?
17. Would you tell me about your background? How long have you been in the company, what did you do before?
18. What are the greatest challenges you have seen in your position and time with the company? What challenges do you face today?
19. What do you like best about your position?
20. What were your challenges when you first started (or first left academia)?
21. Before I leave, are there any concerns you may have about my experiences, skills, abilities, background that I can address? Or do you have any concerns about my ability to perform and succeed in your position that I can address before I leave?
22. What is the next step in the hiring process?