AICPA

THE ACCOUNTING INTERVIEW PLAYBOOK

Preparing for an interview can feel overwhelming, especially when you're unsure what questions you'll face.

This interview playbook breaks down common interview questions, explains why employers ask them, and gives you practical strategies to respond with confidence and professionalism.

Let's walk through each major section of an accounting interview and how to master it.



WARM-UP

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS



COMMON QUESTIONS

- How are you doing today?
- Tell me about yourself and what led you to pursue accounting.

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

These opening questions help interviewers:

- Build rapport
- Assess interpersonal skills
- Get a quick overview of your goals and motivation

HOW TO ANSWER

Structure your response around your:

- Present: What you're doing now (your major, internship, or focus)
- Past: Experiences that led you to accounting
- Future: Your career goals and reason for interest in the role

SECTION 1 FIRM INTEREST AND FIT



COMMON QUESTIONS

- Why did you decide to apply here?
- As you were researching our organization, what stood out to you?

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

Employers want to know if you:

- Took time to research the organization
- Understand their values and services
- See yourself fitting into their culture

HOW TO ANSWER

Be specific. Reference:

- The firm's specialties
- Community involvement
- Training programs
- Company culture

PRO TIP

Then connect the firm's mission to your goals. Avoid generic responses like, "You're a great company." Instead, show genuine interest.

SECTION 2 EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND



COMMON QUESTIONS

- Tell me about your academic experience.
- Can you describe a team project that didn't go as planned?

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

These questions help interviewers assess:

- How you handle challenges
- Communication and teamwork skills
- Conflict resolution abilities

HOW TO ANSWER

For behavioral questions, structure your answer using the STAR method:

S **T** **A** **R**

SITUATION – Set the context
TASK – Explain your role
ACTION – Describe what you did
RESULT – Share the outcome

"In my cost accounting class, our group struggled to meet deadlines. I organized weekly check-ins and redistributed tasks. As a result, we submitted the project on time and earned an A."

Frame challenges as growth opportunities rather than failures.

SECTION 3 PROFESSIONAL SKILLS



COMMON SCENARIOS

- Tell me about a time you stepped up to lead.
- Describe when you took initiative to solve a problem.

WHY THESE SCENARIOS ARE POSED

Employers are looking for:

- Initiative
- Accountability
- Leadership potential
- Problem-solving ability

HOW TO ANSWER

Prepare examples that show:

- You noticed an issue
- You took responsibility
- You followed through
- You learned something

PRO TIP

These stories don't have to come from paid jobs. Class projects, volunteer work, team sports, and student organizations all count.

SECTION 4 WORKPLACE SCENARIOS



COMMON QUESTIONS

- What would you do if fixing an error delays the deadline?
- How do you manage stress when work becomes overwhelming?

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

Interviewers want to evaluate:

- Integrity
- Communication skills
- Time management skills
- Stress management strategies

HOW TO ANSWER

When demonstrating how you handle mistakes, show honesty and professionalism. Here's an example of what to include in the response:

- Acknowledge the issue
- Propose solutions
- Communicate with your supervisor
- Prioritize accuracy

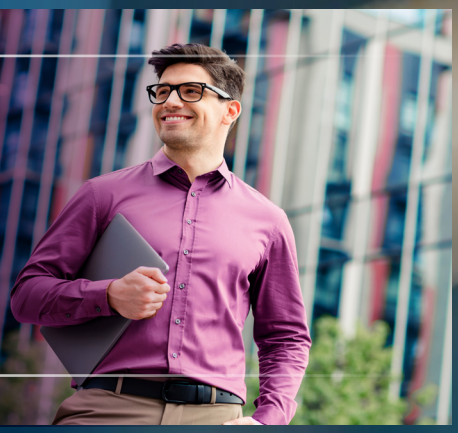
NEVER SUGGEST HIDING MISTAKES

When discussing how you manage stress, avoid saying, "I never get stressed." Instead, highlight some ways you cope, such as:

- Prioritizing tasks
- Asking for help
- Using productivity tools
- Using checklists
- Taking organized breaks

This shows maturity and self-awareness.

SECTION 5 STRENGTHS AND GROWTH



COMMON QUESTIONS

- What school, work, or extracurricular activities have led to your personal development, and how?
- What strengths would you bring to our firm, and what professional growth goals are you focusing on right now?

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

Employers want to know:

- What you contribute
- How well rounded you are
- If you're self-aware and committed to growth

HOW TO ANSWER

Connect your strengths to accounting, such as:

- Attention to detail
- Reliability
- Organization
- Analytical thinking

PRO TIP

Choose a real skill you're improving and explain how.

Example: "I'm improving my public speaking by joining study groups and volunteering to present."

SECTION 6 CAREER GOALS



COMMON QUESTIONS

- Where do you see yourself in three to five years?
- Have you considered becoming a CPA?

WHY THESE QUESTIONS ARE ASKED

Employers are seeking candidates who:

- Are committed to the profession
- Have long-term goals
- See growth within the organization

HOW TO ANSWER

- If you plan to pursue CPA licensure, mention it. This demonstrates seriousness and ambition.
- Share a realistic vision that aligns with the role.

Example: "In three to five years, I hope to have passed the CPA Exam and begin taking on more responsibility in audit engagements. This role will help me build the foundation I need to get there."

CLOSING

THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG CLOSING



The interview doesn't end when the last question is asked. You'll likely have a chance to ask questions and showcase more of your knowledge and personality.

Prepare questions such as:

- "What does success look like in this role?"
- "How does the firm support professional development?"
- "What opportunities exist for growth within the company?"
- "Based on the information I've shared, do you think I would be a good fit for this role?"

Use the closing to:

- Reinforce your interest
- Highlight a final strength
- Ask thoughtful questions

PRO TIP

Thoughtful questions help you stand out and show genuine engagement.

GENERAL TIPS

GENERAL TIPS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS



KEEP THESE BEST PRACTICES IN MIND:

- Be authentic and professional
- Practice answers in advance
- Prepare multiple examples
- Show accountability and initiative
- Connect your skills to accounting
- Be clear about your goals
- Research every employer
- Dress appropriately
- Arrive early and prepared
- Pause before you answer
- Send a thank-you note or email

NOTES



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