

Answering Questions

The more evidence you can give that you have the qualities they are looking for, the better your chances of success. Before the interview, think of as many examples of where you have used relevant skills effectively, and use them to illustrate your answers.

For example, if you are applying for a customer-facing role it's likely you will be asked about how you handle customer complaints. Which of the following answers sounds the most powerful?

- a) I'm really good at dealing with customers, including dealing with customer complaints;
- b) I try to listen to the customer and do what I can to help. For example, a customer came into the office last year who was very angry about the poor service he thought he had received. I invited him to sit down and tell me all about it. When he saw I was really listening he seemed to calm down, and I then apologised and offered him a £10 voucher. He seemed really happy and thanked me for listening.

Evidence might be in the form of examples, or it could come in the form of awards you have gained, or it could come in terms of endorsements from others. Whenever you have the opportunity, use evidence when answering questions at interview. Here are some examples:

Question: What is your approach to working in teams?

Answer: My manager says that I recognise the strengths in each member of the team and use them to complete projects effectively [endorsement]. Our team had to design a project around attracting young people, and I knew that a new member of our team runs a youth centre in her spare time, and suggested she lead on the project, which turned out to be a great success [example], and also increased her confidence.

Question: Would you say you are a creative thinker?

Answer: A pitch that I designed for a client recently won the Creative Design of the Year Award [recognition], and the organisation asks me to arrange team-building events as I come up with unusual ideas [endorsement] – for example, last year we designed and performed entertainment for autistic children in a local school [example].

The evidence does not have to be work-based, as long as you can demonstrate you have the quality required. For example:

Question: Are you a good leader?

Answer: In my spare time I am a volunteer for a local charity and my branch voted for me to be their new director [endorsement]. In that role we have increased fundraising by 58% and doubled the number of volunteers who work for us [example].

The key is in the preparation. Anticipate any questions that may be asked, and think of specific ways you can give evidence to support your claims. This is much more powerful than just answering with your opinion.