
Problem-solving interview questions

Use these sample problem-solving interview questions to discover how candidates approach complex situations and if they can provide effective solutions.

Why you should ask candidates problem-solving interview questions

Employees will face challenges in their job. Before you decide on your next hire, use your interview process to evaluate how candidates [approach difficult situations](#).

Problem-solving interview questions show how candidates:

- Approach complex issues
- Analyze data to understand the root of the problem
- Perform under stressful and unexpected situations
- React when their beliefs are challenged

Identify candidates who are results-oriented with interview questions that assess problem-solving skills. Look for analytical and spherical thinkers with the potential for technical problem solving. Potential hires who recognize a problem, or predict one could potentially occur, will stand out. Candidates should also demonstrate how they would fix the issue, and prevent it from occurring again.

These sample problem-solving [interview questions](#) apply to all positions, regardless of industry or seniority level. You can use the following questions to gauge your candidates' way of thinking in difficult situations:

Examples of problem-solving interview questions

- Describe a time you had to solve a problem without managerial input. How did you do it and what was the result?
- Give an example of a time you identified and fixed a problem before it became urgent.
- Tell me about a time you predicted a problem with a stakeholder. How did you prevent it from escalating?
- Describe a situation where you faced serious challenges in doing your job efficiently. What were the challenges, and how did you overcome them?
- Recall a time you successfully used crisis-management skills.
- A new project you're overseeing has great revenue potential, but could put the company in legal hot water. How would you handle this?
- How do you know when to solve a problem on your own or to ask for help?

Tips to assess problem-solving skills in interviews

- During your interviews, use hypothetical scenarios that are likely to occur on the job. It's best to avoid unrealistic problems that aren't relevant to your company.
- Examine how candidates approach a problem step-by-step: from identifying and analyzing the issue to comparing alternatives and choosing the most effective solution.
- Pay attention to candidates who provide innovative solutions. Creative minds can contribute fresh perspectives that add value to your company.
- When problems arise, employees should show commitment and a can-do attitude. Test candidates' problem-solving skills in past situations. If they were determined to find the best solution as soon as possible, they will be great hires.
- Most complex situations require a team effort. Candidates' previous experiences will show you how they collaborated with their colleagues to reach decisions and how comfortable they felt asking for help.
- If you're hiring for a technical role, ask questions relevant to the work your future hires will do. Technical problem-solving interview questions, like "How would you troubleshoot this X bug?" will reveal your candidates' hard skills and their ability to effectively address problems on the job.

Red flags

- **No answer.** If a candidate can't recall an example of a problem they faced in a previous position, that's a sign they may avoid dealing with difficult situations.
- **Canned answers.** A generic answer like "Once, I had to deal with a customer who complained about the pricing. I managed to calm them down and closed the deal," doesn't offer much insight about the candidate's thought process. Ask follow-up questions to get more details.
- **Focus on the problem, not the solution.** Identifying the problem is one thing, but finding the solution is more important. Candidates who focus too much on the problem may be too negative for the position.
- **Feeling stressed/uncomfortable.** It's normal to feel slightly uncomfortable when put on the spot. But, if candidates are so stressed they can't answer the question, that's an indicator they don't handle stressful situations well.
- **Superficial answers.** Candidates who choose the easy way out of a problem usually don't consider all aspects and limitations of the situation. Opt for candidates who analyze the data you've given them and ask for more information to better dig into the problem.
- **Cover up the problem or minimize its significance.** Unaddressed problems could quickly escalate into bigger issues. Employees who leave things for later mightn't be result-oriented or engaged in their jobs.