
Situational interview questions

Looking for sample **situational interview questions** to ask candidates? Find situational questions for interviews, examples for managers, sales and customer service.

What is the purpose of situational interview questions?

Situational interview questions ask candidates to describe how they would react and address work-related scenarios. Unlike [behavioral interview questions](#), recruiters and hiring managers choose hypothetical situations that don't rely on candidates' past experiences.

When asking situational questions for interviews, your goal is to find how candidates would handle a problem that is likely to arise in your company. Some skills that you could assess using situational questions are:

- Interpersonal and collaborations skills (e.g. how do candidates handle conflict and manage difficult relationships with coworkers, managers and clients)
- Decision-making skills (e.g. how do candidates approach important strategic choices?)
- Problem-solving skills (e.g. can candidates come up with an effective/creative solution to a problem related to the role?)
- Organizational skills (e.g. how do candidates [prioritize](#) their work and respond when stressed?)
- Managerial skills (e.g. how do candidates balance the work of their direct reports and set achievable targets?)

Ask situational, or scenario, job interview questions to identify candidates with skills that match your requirements. Situational interview questions work particularly well for sales, manager and customer service roles. Most candidates claim on their resumes that they have a specific skillset. With situational questions, you have the chance to see how they use these skills to solve work-related problems.

You will also find this type of 'what would you do' interview question helpful to compare candidates and select those who [match your company culture](#). Not all people think and react in the same way. You should look for candidates who show professionalism, share your company's values and have fresh ideas that will contribute to your team.

Here are some sample situational interview questions you can ask candidates during your hiring process:

Examples of situational interview questions

- If our competitor, X, released a new product, Y, how would you advise our team to respond?
- If you discovered your supervisor was breaking the company's code of conduct, what would you do?
- If you had two important deadlines coming up, how would you prioritize your tasks?
- When you undertake multiple projects with tight deadlines, how do you stay on track?
- If you saw a key metric drop week over week, what would you do?

How to assess candidates' answers

- Start with writing down important skills for the position you're hiring. Then, ask questions that reflect these skills (e.g. situational interview questions for managers) to learn how your candidates use them on the job. Examples of situational interview question for customer service could be:
 - If you didn't know the answer to a customer's question, what would you do?
 - If an angry customer demanded to speak with your manager without specifying their problem, would you get them in touch?
- Situational interview questions use hypothetical scenarios, therefore it's hard to prepare the answers. For example, situational interview questions for sales might include scenarios like:
 - If you had to increase sales revenue by X% in Y months, where would you look for potential customers?
 - If your customer satisfaction rates were low, what steps would you take to turn them around?

Make sure you give your candidates enough time to think before answering your questions.

- In most cases, there is more than one right answer. Pay attention to candidates who give you unusual responses that show a creative way of thinking.
- When crafting your interview questions, make sure you describe realistic scenarios. The questions should challenge candidates, but should also relate to situations that are likely to happen.
- Beyond the solution that candidates present to you, pay attention to the way they approach problem solving in general. Their way of thinking can tell you a lot about their work style. Do they value feedback from coworkers? Are they collaborative and do they like to ask for help when they're unsure? Are they methodical or do they prefer more out-of-the-box solutions?
- Candidates may answer your situational questions based on similar problems they have already faced in another job. If they're used to a different working style, try to see how open they are to following guidelines. Let them present you a solution and then walk them through your way of working things out. You could ask them to compare these solutions and see if they're flexible about learning new methods.
- One situational interview question can open room for further discussion. For example, you

can point out 1-2 things of doubtful effectiveness from the candidate's answer or add some new facts in your scenario. You'll identify candidates who are open to criticism and demonstrate [adaptability](#).

Red flags

- **Off-topic answers.** Part of the assessment is to see how quickly candidates can think and come up with a satisfying solution. If candidates seem to derail from the original subject, that's a sign they struggle to stay focused or are trying to shoehorn prepared answers into the conversation.
- **The obvious answer.** Although situational interview questions are hard to prepare beforehand, some candidates may have previous experience with situational questions and use "canned" answers. If they are mostly focused on giving you the "right" answer, or the one that you'd expect, you can't really gauge their way of thinking.
- **Unrealistic answers.** Candidates want to make a good impression and showcase their skills, but their answers should be realistic. Pay attention to whether they take limitations into account and give you thoughtful, nuanced answers.
- **Lack of [core soft skills](#).** A great candidate, beyond knowledge and qualifications, should demonstrate employee morale, show empathy and be able to collaborate with different kinds of people. If candidates mention unprofessional behaviors, blame others or deny accountability, they are unlikely to foster strong work relationships.
- **No answer.** It's normal for candidates to get nervous during interviews, especially if they're challenged with situational questions. If they struggle answering your questions, they should ask for some clarifications or more details. Otherwise, if they don't answer at all, this could mean they can't easily identify problems and they don't seek out help.

Don't miss: [Best interview questions to ask candidates](#).