

Sample Interview Questions and Responses – Service Orientation Skills



Here are examples of behavioral questions that you (the interviewee) might be asked in an interview. These questions are designed to assess your **willingness to serve and help others**, particularly customers. The interviewer might not ask you these questions in exactly the same way, and you will not be asked all of these questions. In fact, you might only be asked one of these kinds of questions, or you might be asked none at all. But it is still good to practice responding to these kinds of questions.



You will also see examples of appropriate and inappropriate responses to these questions. These examples will help you create your *own* answers to these questions. For each question set, we have provided three levels of the question. These three levels are different in terms of complexity of the question, and complexity of the response.



- **Level 1:** Basic
- **Level 2:** Intermediate
- **Level 3:** Advanced



We recommend that you read and practice responding to the level that you are most comfortable with. If needed, ask someone (a teacher, parent, coach, therapist) to help you decide what level you should practice.



Questions that interviewers might ask to assess your service orientation skills:



SET #1	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 1	<i>"Describe a time where you helped someone. Who were they and what did you do to help them?"</i>	<p><i>"I helped a classmate out the other day in math class. He didn't understand the work. At the end of class, we were given time to start our homework. I used that time to explain to him how to solve these equations. That seemed to help a lot."</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This answer is on-topic, provides a positive example, and is a topic that employers would look highly upon.</p>	<p><i>"I helped my mother carry in groceries yesterday. She always carries in a few bags on her way in from the car and then puts them away while I carry in the rest."</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This is an example of helping someone. However, it would be better to provide a more impressive example. Carrying in the groceries is fairly minor, and while it is helpful, it would be better to give an example where you were a bigger help to someone. An example at school, work, or a volunteer job would also be good because it relates more so to work than household chores.</p>
Level 2	<i>"Describe a time where you went above and beyond to help someone else."</i>	<p><i>"My grandmother fell and broke her hip a few summers back. Since my parents work full-time and my grandfather passed away many years ago, we were going to hire someone to help take care of her. But my family could barely afford this. Since this happened during my summer vacation, I went to my grandmother's house every day for two months and helped her in every way that I could. We enjoyed our time together, and my family saved money."</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This is an example of someone being a great help to someone else. It shows kindness, compassion, and a willingness to step up and help.</p>	<p><i>"I don't know. I really can't think of a good example."</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? If you can't think of an answer right away, it is okay to pause briefly (20-30 seconds) to think about what you want to say before responding. This question would be particularly important to come up with a response because you want to show that you are a helpful person.</p>

SET #1	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 3	<i>“Describe a time where you put your own needs aside in order to help someone else undertake a task. How did you help them? What was the result?”</i>	<p><i>“During the weekend, I usually need time to relax after a long week, and also take care of a lot of things that I don’t have time to do during the week. However, my school really needed more people to help with their annual ‘Students Against Drunk Driving’ campaign. So, I volunteered all day on Saturday for 3 weekends in a row, distributing flyers and collecting student contracts and testimonials. I was glad that I helped out. The campaign was successful, and it even made the local news!”</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This response is appropriate because it shows that the interviewee is willing to sacrifice some of his own wants and needs in order to help others. He answered all three parts of the question. He chose to describe an important situation related to school and volunteer work. The interviewer would view this is a relevant topic.</p>	<p><i>“During the weekend, I usually need time to relax after a long week, and also take care of a lot of things that I don’t have time to do during the week. However, my school really needed more people to help with their annual ‘Students Against Drunk Driving’ campaign. So, I volunteered all day on Saturday for 3 weekends in a row, distributing flyers and collecting student contracts. To be honest, I won’t be doing anything like that again for a long time. But the campaign was successful, and it even made the local news.”</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This response starts off just fine. But the interviewee sounds negative and selfish when he says, “I won’t be doing anything like that again for a long time.” Even though he might truly feel this way, it is not a good idea to say it in an interview.</p>

SET #2	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 1	<i>"Have you done any volunteer work with school or any other organizations? What tasks did you do in that volunteer work?"</i>	<p><i>"I volunteered at a food donation center. My job was to stock the shelves of at the center, and when families came in, to create a bag of supplies for them. I also filed paperwork. It felt good to help others."</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This person explained where he volunteered and then described several responsibilities that he did - This was exactly what was asked of him. He stayed positive as he described the experience.</p>	<p><i>"In high school, we had to complete 50 hours of community service, or volunteer work, in order to graduate. I volunteered at a Head Start Preschool, which was not my first choice of volunteer placements. I didn't like being forced to do "volunteer" work."</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This response is negative. He should have focused on the positive parts about his volunteer experience instead.</p>
Level 2	<i>"If you could do any type of volunteer work, what would it be and why?"</i>	<p><i>"If I could do any type of volunteer work, it would probably be to work at a vet's office or at an animal shelter. I have always loved animals, and I feel that they deserve excellent care and training. It would be a great experience for me because I would learn a great deal more about the medical and behavioral needs of animals."</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This person responds to the question by clearly describing a volunteer experience that he would like to do. This shows that he is motivated to help and learn from others.</p>	<p><i>"If I could do any type of volunteer work, it would probably be to work in a library. I love to read books, read free magazines, surf the internet, and play computer games. I could do all of these things in the library. I would really enjoy that experience."</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? Even though the idea of volunteering in the library is a good one, his reasons behind <i>why</i> he wants to volunteer in the library are not appropriate. This will make the interviewer think that he just wants to be in a job where he can hang out, play, and do what he wants to do.</p>

SET #2	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 3	<i>“What is the best part about doing volunteer work? Or, if you have not done any volunteer work, what do you think would be the most rewarding aspect?”</i>	<p><i>“I’ve never done volunteer work, though I hope to in the future. I imagine that it would be very rewarding to make a difference and help people out in an organized way. I enjoy helping people in everyday life and in work, so I imagine I would really like that aspect of volunteer work.”</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? Even though the interviewee has not had volunteer experience, he still answered the question thoroughly and thoughtfully. His response was positive and to the point.</p>	<p><i>“You know, I really couldn’t say what the best part of volunteer work is. I think this answer would vary greatly depending on the person. One person may like the tasks they do there, another person may like getting the work experience, and another person may like helping others out. Therefore, it’s impossible to say what the best part is - it would depend on the person.”</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This person misunderstood the question, and answered the question too literally. The interviewer was asking about what the <i>interviewee</i> liked best about volunteer work, not the one thing that everyone in the world would agree on is the best part of volunteer work.</p>

SET #3	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 1	<i>“What do you do when you make someone (like a friend, teacher, parent, coach) angry?”</i>	<p><i>“I try to understand what I did that made them angry. I will talk to them or write them a message and try to work things out. If I did something wrong, I will try to apologize.”</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? This response is appropriate because it shows that the interviewee cares about the feelings of other people. It also shows that he tries to fix the situation by talking to the other person. And, it shows that he willing to apologize for his mistakes.</p>	<p><i>“Usually, if I make someone angry, it is because they made me angry first. We might work it out, but I am not going to apologize if they don’t.”</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This response is shows that the interviewee is not willing to accept any responsibility for his part of the problem. This might make the interviewer think that he is childish and inflexible.</p>
Level 2	<i>“Describe a time when someone was disappointed with you. How did you react?”</i>	<p><i>“Last year in my chess club, I told my club advisor that I would be willing to serve as the club secretary. However, I needed to change my plans because I had way too many other commitments and just did not think that I could take that position. I told my advisor right away, so he would have time to select someone else. I told him that I was sorry to disappoint him. I also tried to find someone else to be the club secretary. He did find someone else, so that is a good thing.”</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? The interviewee is honest and describes a time when he disappointed someone. He explains how he responded – he apologized to his advisor, and also tried to help him find someone to serve in that club position. This shows that the interviewee is willing to accept responsibility for his actions.</p>	<p><i>“In my old job, my boss told me that he was really disappointed in me for losing all of the red coded files. I don’t know what happened to them, and I felt bad because my boss was really upset about it.”</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? Even though the interviewee is being honest by telling about a mistake he made, it is not a good idea to talk about problems or mistakes from previous jobs. This will make the interviewer think that this person is likely to make big mistakes in this job too.</p>

SET #3	Sample question	 Appropriate response	 Inappropriate response
Level 3	<i>“Describe a situation where you made a mistake that negatively impacted someone else. How did you resolve the situation?”</i>	<p><i>“That’s a hard question....In one of my classes, I thought that I saw someone cheating on a major test. I thought that it was really unfair, and so I met with my professor in private and talked with her about it. I told her what I saw. It turned out later that this other student was not cheating after all. It was an honest mistake that I had made, but I still went and apologized to my professor for creating any problem.”</i></p> <p>Why appropriate? The interviewee describes a situation where he made a mistake that negatively impacted one of his fellow students. He makes sure to tell the interviewer that this was an honest mistake. When he realized his mistake, he made sure to apologize to the professor. This shows that he can accept responsibility for his mistakes, and will try to resolve the problem when he can.</p>	<p><i>“I had a girlfriend last year, and one time I went onto Facebook and wrote a really rude message on her ex-boyfriend’s wall. I thought she was getting back together with him behind my back, and I was really upset about it. It turns out that I was wrong. I tried to talk with her about it, and also sent her messages, but she was really mad. We pretty much broke up then.”</i></p> <p>Why inappropriate? This response is inappropriate because it is too personal! It is not a good idea to talk about personal relationships and relationship “drama” in an interview.</p>