

# Creative & Design Interview Questions & Answers

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## 1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

Give a brief summary of your professional persona. Include who you are, any education or experience you might have, and maybe a few snippets of information on your career thus far. You don't want to go into too much detail, just think of this as an introduction to who you are. You want to be friendly and open, with a focus on your accomplishments as a designer.

It's a good idea to hand over a business card at this point. Many people wait until the end of the job interview for this (if they have a business card at all), but it makes a better first impression if you offer your card during introductions. It not only shows you have a professional attitude, it actually gives your interviewer a first look at how you design (assuming, of course, that you design your own business cards.)

## 2. What are your strengths?

This is your chance to show off—but don't overdo it. Of course you want to showcase your best accomplishments as a designer, as well as the positive qualities that you can bring to the workplace. But that's where many people lose their focus—they forget about what's important to the company they're interviewing with. Frame your strengths in a way that they are relevant to your potential employer. Whenever possible, try to tailor your responses so that they match closely with what the company is looking for. For example, instead of just saying that you know InDesign, you might mention that you have plenty of experience designing multi-page materials if you're interviewing with a company that puts out a lot of brochures.

Avoid using clichés, like saying you're a “hard worker” or a “team player.” These are empty words unless you have examples to back up your claims—which you should. You want to sound impressive to potential employers, but you also have to present yourself in a way that makes you stand out over all the other candidates, who are likely just as “hard-working” and “team-playing” as you are.

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### 3. What are your weaknesses?

You know that lame thing where you try to make your “weaknesses” sound like a positive thing?

“Oh, I work too hard. I’m too much of a perfectionist. I’m too nice!”

Interviewers can see right through that act. When they ask about your weaknesses, they’re not trying to find out what’s bad about you, they’re trying to find out how you deal with your own shortcomings, and what steps you’ve taken to improve yourself as a designer. When you try to cover up your weaknesses, it demonstrates to the interviewer that, well, you try to hide your weaknesses instead of fixing them.

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Give a few relevant examples of your [greatest weaknesses](#), but also provide examples of ways in which you’ve tried to work on them. Once again, you should back up your claims. Suppose your biggest weakness is that you have difficulty managing your time. Instead of just saying it’s something you need to work on, mention how you got a new app for your phone that’s helping you better manage your time, or that you’ve started writing out a schedule before working each day.

### 4. What kind of design software are you familiar with?

When interviewers ask this question, they’re trying to find out if you’re able to use their in-house software, or how quickly you’d be able to learn if you’re unfamiliar with it. Obviously, your best-case scenario is to know ahead of time what kind of software they use. If you already know how to use their preferred software, this will be a pretty straightforward answer.

If you don’t know their software or you have no idea what they use, this can be a tricky question to answer. Tell them what you do know, and try to include any program you think they might use. If you use something that’s similar to another program, that can also be a big help and the interviewer might not always be able to make that connection, so be sure to do it for them. For example, if you use one of the many [Photoshop alternatives](#) out there, you probably understand the basics of Photoshop too.

Express a willingness to learn new programs—this is a good idea even if you’re familiar with their in-house software. You never know when the company might upgrade to new software, so designers who can make the switch without taking a long time to adjust are always favorable candidates. If you’ve ever had to learn new software for a job in the past, be sure to mention this in your interview.

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## 5. What is your graphic design process?

Since this can be a long, detailed answer, you’ll want to have prepared for it ahead of time so that you don’t trip over your words, accidentally omit details, or ramble on with too much information. Employers ask this question because they want to know how you do what you do, how long it’ll take you to do it and the kinds of roadblocks you are likely to run into along the way.

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Some designers are lucky to be able to just sit down and crank out an amazing design with barely any thought or planning, while other designers need to utilize a dozen different drafts and outlines to get their design finished.

Employers usually want you to be somewhere in between these two extremes. You should have a process that allows for revisions and critiques, but is also speedy enough that you’ll hit your deadlines without any problem. For some designers, this might mean actually sitting down and figuring out what your process is—but that’s okay. The more thought you give to the kind of designer you are, the more you’ll have to work with during your interview, and the easier it is to showcase yourself as the best candidate for the job.

## 6. What have you learned from your mistakes as a graphic designer?

We’ve all made blunders along the way. Employers are sympathetic to this fact, but they also want to work with designers who have learned from their mistakes and improved their craft because of it. Be prepared with examples from your career that demonstrate your ability to bounce back from a mistake—without making you look like a total doofus.

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Employers also want to see that you’ve learned from your mistakes—not just that you’ve learned to avoid making the same mistake again, but that you were able to adjust the way you work or

think. They want to know how this mistake has made you a better graphic designer, not merely that you were able to save face after the fact.

Perhaps making a mistake in a graphic design program inspired you to research and learn more about it, to not only prevent future mistakes but discover new ways to improve your craft. Employers see you as an investment, so you have to show them that you'll only get better with time, and that the longer they stick with you, the more value you'll demonstrate.

## 7. What are your graphic design career goals?

This is an interview minefield that can be tricky to cross, especially if your career goals don't necessarily include staying with a company for an extended period of time. You want to be honest, but you don't want to come off as someone who is simply using this job as a stepping stone to something bigger. Employers realize that their employees aren't always going to stay with the company for the entirety of their career, but they also want to work with people who are committed.

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Express your career goals as a designer in a way that makes you seem favorable to the employer. For example, saying that you want to eventually leave to work with bigger brands and hopefully gain larger recognition might sound like a good goal to strive for, but saying as much could hurt your chances of getting the job.

Instead you might say something like “One day, I want to create a logo that is as recognizable as the McDonald's golden arches.” You're telling the employer that you have lofty goals, but you're framing them in a way where the employer might be able to benefit from them. In the employer's mind, it might be their logo that you make into a nationally recognized icon.

It's important that you have goals. Saying that your career goal is to do the exact job you're interviewing for is just going to make you look desperate and directionless. The company you're interviewing with wants to expand and grow, and they want to work with designers who also want to expand and grow.

## 8. Why did you leave your last job?

This is not your own personal forum for airing out all of the grievances you had with your last employer, and doing so is not going to help you get the job. Instead, you want to remain professional and honest without coming across as someone who makes a lot of unnecessary problems. Put a positive spin on your reasoning as much as you can.

For example, money is a common reason why people leave their jobs, and it's not unreasonable to seek out new employment opportunities in order to increase your income level. However,

telling a potential employer that you left over money is going to signal to them that you might do the same thing to them one day, or that it'll be expensive to keep you. Instead, you can say that you felt there was no longer any room to grow at your last company, or that you were looking for new opportunities to advance your career.

In some cases, you'll be interviewing for a job without having actually left the last one. That's okay, but expect to answer a lot of questions about what you do at your current job, why you're thinking of leaving it and how long it'll take you to be able to start your new job.

If you work freelance, you may be asked questions about your current clients and whether working for them will create time conflicts or prevent you from hitting your deadlines.

If you were fired or let go from your last job, this might be an extremely stressful and difficult question for you to answer. Don't be too nervous if you were fired—after all, everybody loves a good comeback story. Just make sure to spin this answer into something positive that helps demonstrate your growth as a designer.

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For example, if you were let go from your last position because you weren't a good fit for your employer, it means you're ready to find a company which is better suited to your talents. If it was a personal problem, then outline the steps you've taken to correct that behavior and demonstrate your eagerness to get back in the game.

Above all else, stay positive and don't go into more detail than you need to in order to explain the situation. Don't point fingers or use this as an opportunity to badmouth your last boss. Just present the facts, show that you've grown from the experience, and move on to the next question. If the interviewer wants to know more, he or she will ask you follow-up questions.

## 9. What do you know about our company/brand?

Employers love it when employees take an interest in their company or brand, especially in the case of designers. After all, how can you design something that matches their brand's style if you don't know anything about them?

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Do your homework before the interview and try to come prepared with some idea of what the company is all about. You don't need to know *all* of the facts, but you should try to have an understanding of their overall message and philosophy, and why you are a good fit for them.

Employers are looking to work with designers who want to work with them, so if there's something about the company that you particularly like, now is the time to say so. Demonstrating that you share the same values as the brand helps you to look like the best candidate for the job.

If you can't find anything about the company, then this is your opportunity to learn more. Let the interviewer know that you tried to find information about the company, but were unable to. Then, ask them if they could fill you in on what you don't know. When the interviewer is done telling you about their company, reiterate your interest in the position based on your new knowledge of the company, and give some examples of why you fit in with their overall identity.

## 10. What have you done to improve your knowledge of graphic design?

Employers want to work with designers who are already good at what they do, but they also want designers who will continue to improve with time instead of stagnating. You didn't get to where you are by doing nothing, so talk about your experiences getting here.

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You'll want to provide your educational background, but also talk about some of the classes you took and why that made you a better graphic designer. Have you learned new software over the past few years? Have you tried your hand at designing a different type of media than you're used to? Do you spend time reading design books, blogs and forums? These are all great things to mention.

You might even want to pepper in some future ideas in your responses. If you have plans to take a class in the future or if there's a design book you've had your eye on, use this to demonstrate to the employer that you're still taking steps to improve yourself.

Like always, if you can tailor your responses to fit the particular job at hand, it will better your chances of becoming employed. For example, if you're interviewing for a [print design career](#), you'll want to talk about the ways you've improved yourself as a print designer instead of focusing on all the ways you've improved your digital work.

## 11. Can I see your portfolio?

This is the easiest question to answer, as there's really only one correct response—"Yes!" Once you've said that, of course, you have to actually have a portfolio ready to show and talk the employer through some of the pieces inside. This simple question usually comes with a lot of follow-up questions about how you created each piece, how long it took, what your design goals were and so on.

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The interviewer may or may not actually ask these follow-up questions, so be ready to give them the answers anyway. Before you show off each piece, you’ll want to give the interviewer an idea of what they’re about to see. You don’t need to go into great detail, just a sort of “teaser” statement about what’s coming up next. Something along the lines of, “This was a print campaign for a local brand where I was only allowed to use one ink color.”

Remember to start and end your portfolio with your best pieces. You might only have enough time to go into detail about one or two pieces, so you’ll want immediate access to your best work. Pad out the rest of the portfolio with three to five other pieces that you think best represent you as a designer.

If at all possible, try to fill your portfolio with works that are relevant to the job you’re applying for. If you’re going for a job designing print marketing, have plenty of examples of past print work. If you don’t have relevant examples, there’s no shame in creating some spec pieces just for the sake of adding them to your portfolio.

For designers just coming out of school, keep in mind that a professional portfolio is a little different than a school portfolio, and what works for one may not be great to include in the other. With a student portfolio, you’re trying to show that you understand the techniques you’ve learned while also expressing your artistic identity. With a professional portfolio, you want to show that your skills are marketable and appealing.

## 12. What kinds of print media have you worked with?

If you’re applying for a job designing print media, chances are the employer is going to want to know what kind of print you’ve worked with in the past. This also rings true for any design job, not just print—employers want to know how comfortable you are working in different mediums.

This is because employers want to know if they’re going to have to train you on anything down the line, which could be expensive on their behalf. So they want to see what you already know to gauge how much further you still need to go. Be sure to mention the types of media you’ve worked within, the equipment you’ve used and any formal training you might have received along the way.

If you can manage it, bring examples of your past print work for the employer to see. Since this is print we’re talking about, it makes an even bigger impression if you have actual, physical examples that the employer can touch, hold and possibly even keep for themselves. Check out our tips for designing a [unique print design portfolio](#) for more information.

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If you don't have much experience with print (or any medium you might be planning to work with), then you still need to find a way to impart your knowledge of the subject so employers know that you at least have something to bring to the table. For example, do some research on print design before the interview so you can at least say that you understand the basic concepts and limitations of working in the medium.

### **13. Can you tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure and how you overcame it?**

Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances can bring additional pressure to the job and employers want to make sure that the designers they work with aren't going to fall apart the minute the going gets tough. Questions like this tell the employer two things—not only how you handle pressure, but what constitutes a stressful situation in your book.

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Be ready to answer this with an anecdote or example from your life that shows you know how to keep cool under pressure. Stories about deadlines, editorial mandates or last-minute changes are good to include, because these are the kind of stresses that will naturally occur in the design field. Showing that you've already dealt with these kinds of stresses makes you a stronger, more experienced candidate.

### **14. What are some of your greatest accomplishments?**

If you have accolades, awards, academic achievements or other lofty accomplishments in your past, then this question is likely going to be easy for you to answer. This is your chance to blow them away with all the great stuff you've been able to accomplish in the design field so far.

However, many people may have difficulties answering this question for a number of different reasons. Maybe you don't feel as if you've accomplished much of anything, maybe you're actively working towards something big but haven't quite made it yet, or maybe your big life accomplishment has nothing to do with graphic design.

Remember why employers ask this question in the first place—they want to work with people who have ambition, because ambitious people tend to put in the work to accomplish their goals.



Employers also want to understand what inspires you; what do you consider an accomplishment in the first place?

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Your job in this scenario is to show them why your greatest accomplishments make you the best candidate for the job, even if they don't seem that great or have much to do with graphic design at first glance.

Tell a story about how you achieved this accomplishment and what obstacles you had to overcome to do so. Also, be sure to let the interviewer know why this accomplishment means so much to you. This way, no matter what your achievement might be, the interviewer knows more about what motivates you and how you utilize that motivation to get stuff done.

## **15. What qualities do you consider necessary for a good designer?**

Everybody has their own opinion on what makes a good designer, and your opinion on the subject can give potential employers some insight on how you operate. That's because the qualities you describe are going to be ones that you either already have or aspire to become better at.

It's best to go for a wide range of different qualities that show that you understand what it takes to be a successful designer. If you say something like “a good designer is creative, imaginative and has a unique sense of style,” you're going to come off as a bit single-minded. Saying something like “a good designer is creative, punctual and open to feedback” will make you seem like you understand everything that goes into the job.

But don't forget that the person interviewing you is likely going to hear a lot of the same thing from every designer they talk to. Come prepared with a few unique attributes to set yourself apart from the rest of those being considered for the job. Focus on unique attributes that relate back to your own personal experiences as a designer, and also tie into the job you're applying for. Surprise the interviewer with an answer that is well thought-out and one they haven't heard a dozen times before.

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## **16. What kind of design projects interest you?**

Liking your job has never been a requirement of employment, but good employers know that happy workers do better work—especially if they like the work they're doing. Every designer has his or her own specialty, something they like to do above all else. If what you like to do just happens to be the same job you're applying for, then you're in good shape.

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If you're afraid that your interests and the job you're applying for aren't the best match for one another, then try to find the best answer that is not only honest, but makes you the best candidate for the job. You could mention that you would like to work your way up into a position that would let you work on your favorite types of projects, if that's a possibility.

Or you could always aim for an answer that is a little broader. You could say that you like projects that allow you to work with a team, or that you like working on challenging projects that everybody else has given up on.

In the end, you want to answer as truthfully as possible, because it gives future employers a sense of what you're good at and where you might fit the best. You never know, you could go in for an interview for one job and leave with a different job you didn't even know was available.

## 17. How good are you about sticking to your deadlines?

Employers are looking for designers who can not only deliver results, but do so in a timely manner. Failing to meet your deadlines can cost your employer money or make them lose face to their customers, clients and business associates. If you are good about keeping up on your deadlines, you'll be good to go when it comes time to answer this question.

If sticking to your deadlines is something that you have a hard time with, then you need to at least show the interviewer that you respect deadlines and that you do whatever it takes to get your job done. Give examples of times when you weren't able to complete a task on deadline, and explain why you fell behind and how you rectified the situation. Did you ask for an extension ahead of time? Did you bring in another designer to help you with the work?

Keep in mind, there's no reason to punish yourself if you've missed the odd deadline here or there in the past. Potential employers want to know how you're going to handle *their* deadlines, so you can always turn a negative experience into something positive.

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Say you've missed deadlines in the past because of last minute editorial changes. You might answer the question by saying you're good at keeping deadlines so long as you have everything you need to do the job ahead of time. This way, you can answer the question positively and truthfully while also giving the employer some insight as to how you work best.

## **18. How long does it take for you to deliver the final product?**

Time is money, and the more time you take on a project, the more money it will cost your employers in the long run. However, this can be a problematic question to answer, because you also need to look out for your own interests. Many designers make the mistake of underselling how long it actually takes them to finish a project, which can create a whole heap of problems down the road.

After all, if you say it takes you one hour to do a project that actually takes three, your employer is going to hold you to that statement and you'll find yourself overwhelmed with deadlines you just can't meet. It's almost better in this instance to overestimate how much time you take, just to give yourself a buffer in case you're hit with a particularly difficult assignment. However, that can also be a dangerous game to play, because it may make you look less attractive than other candidates who can work faster than you.

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What's important here is to give the interviewer a sense of how you manage your time. If it takes you longer than others to get a job done, then you need to be able to show why that extra time makes for a better final product. Break down your workflow into blocks of time so they know exactly how you work and what you use your time for.

This way, if your estimation seems too high, the employer has more information to go on and it just might help your chances. For example, if you spend a lot of your work time coming up with ideas, it might not be an issue at your new job if some of those ideas will be provided for you by a creative director.

Plus, you may find that the employer has no idea how long the project should take and are legitimately asking you because they need to know what to expect. They may be just trying to figure out how to work you into their workflow based on their own timetable.

## **19. What do you think of our work/company?**

A job interview might give you the chance to step into the spotlight, but that doesn't mean you're going to be the only one in it. Employers love to hear you talk about their company and the work that they do just as much as you like to hear people say nice things about your design work.

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This is also a bit of a test to see if you've done your homework, so try to be prepared to answer this ahead of time. Again, if you don't know anything about the company and can't find out any info, this is a good chance to hear more about them.

Give your honest opinion, but avoid being too negative—after all, if you didn't like the company or the work that they do, why would you want to interview for the job in the first place? Constructive criticism is okay, but again, you want to frame it around why you're the best person for the job.

It's okay to impart that there is something missing within their organization—perhaps it's a void that only you can fill! But you don't want to come across as someone who is ready to start tearing everything down and doing it all your way.

Regardless of what you know or how you feel, you should have some nice things to say—even if it's just your initial impressions when you came in for the interview.

## **20. Would you consider yourself a team player?**

No matter if you're an in-house designer or working freelance from home, you are a part of something greater and you belong to a team of people all working towards the same goal. When employers ask this question, they're not looking for a simple “yes” or “no.” They're looking for some sort of indication as to where you fit in the team.

Are you the type of person who naturally ends up leading the team? Are you happy to just play whatever role is necessary on the team to get the job done? Are you the type of person who can always be counted on to put in the extra work to do last-minute tasks that pop up? These are the type of things that employers want to know.

If you're a bit of a lone wolf, it's okay to run without a pack, but you're going to have to make some sort of concessions to your future employers. If you work best alone, find some other way that you can contribute to the team. Suggest that you're happy to participate in planning and development meetings, or that you'll check in on a regular basis with your team through e-mail.

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Employers just want to make sure that everything will keep running smoothly if they hire you, and that you'll be able to get along and work effectively beside the people who already work there.

## 21. How do you handle criticism?

Let's be honest—artists and designers sometimes have a tendency to turn into divas when faced with criticism or editorial guidelines. It can be frustrating to work in a creative field and have outside factors hinder your creative expressions. But for a professional graphic designer, criticism is a part of the job; employers want to know that you'll be able to suck it up and make changes to your design when necessary.

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What's important here is to impart upon the interviewer that you can take direction, that you're open to the ideas of others, and that you understand how to work within a hierarchy. However, the interviewer might try to throw in different follow-up questions or add modifiers to test how you work when treated unfairly or when given bad criticism.

Answer in a way that's truthful, but that shows you can still be part of the team, even if you tend to be a little too argumentative and passionate about your work when faced with unjust criticism. Make sure the employer knows that you are open to critique and willing to listen.

## 22. Do you have any questions for me?

With all the pressure and anxiety of being under the microscope during a job interview, people often tend to forget that you're just as much interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. You should always come prepared with questions to ask at the end of the interview. Not only does this make you seem engaged and show your interest in the position, but it also gives you a chance to make sure this job is the right fit for you.

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Try to avoid bringing up questions about pay rates or vacation days unless you're in a position where you absolutely have to. Most employers don't like to discuss pay until a follow-up interview, so try to wait out these questions if you can.

Questions about the company, the people you'd be working with, and what the job itself entails are all good places to start. However, you'll want to find questions that make you seem engaged, not just going through the motions. Instead of just asking what their company is all about, inquire about the future of the company: where it's heading, what projects are coming up, and what the future means for the position you're applying for.

This is usually the last question asked at the interview, so you don't want to take up too much of the interviewer's time. Stick to about three to five questions if at all possible. It's a good idea to have these questions written down and to keep some paper and a pen with you during the interview, so that you can write down any questions that might come to you while you're talking.

## **Final Thoughts**

There's much more to a successful job interview than just knowing how to answer the most commonly asked questions. To make things easier for you, we've prepared some more tips that will help you prepare for everything else that comes with a job interview.