Use these selected questions to set job interview strategy

To make interviewing job candidates for IT support positions a little easier, we've collected and categorized a number of interview questions submitted by TechRepublic members. You can use some of these questions as written but will need to modify others to match the job skill you are seeking. The questions you select or modify should be inserted into the accompanying Interview Questions Form to ensure that you uniformly and fairly compare candidates.

Our job interview questions fall into these categories:

- **Preparation** questions test what the candidate knows about your organization or the job you have advertised. Does the candidate meet the job's basic requirements?
- **Behavioral** questions encourage candidates to discuss at some length how they work, problems they have solved, and how they think.
- **Problem-solving** questions present candidates with a specific issue they need to resolve.
- **Big-picture** questions assess how the candidate views his or her role in your organization.
- **Off-the-wall** questions should be avoided.

Preparation questions

1. Tell me about your current job. What do you like about it? What do you dislike?
2. What operating system do you prefer and why? (The operating system is of minor importance, unless the job requires a thorough knowledge of it. Rather, this question probes general knowledge of operating systems and their relative merits.)
3. I know all these references are going to say nice things about you, or you wouldn't have listed them. Can you give me one that won't say good things about you? (You aren't going to call, but you want to see and hear is how they react.)
4. I would like to set up a second interview with our evening supervisor. Can you come back this evening at 7:00 P.M.? (How flexible is the candidate? How do they handle less-than-ideal situations? This question requires the possibility of a second interview with an evening supervisor.)
5. What do you know about our organization and what we do?

Behavioral questions

1. What's the biggest mistake you've made? How many people were affected by it? How did you find out about it? How did you recover and what did you learn?
2. Tell me about the most difficult IT problem you ever faced and how you handled it. In retrospect, would you handle it the same way now?
3. How do you stay informed about your profession? (This answer should go beyond daily duties. Do they have a test network at home? Do they read publications or visit IT Web sites?)
4. Tell me about your relationship with your current end users? (Is the candidate a people person? How does the candidate interact with others?)
5. Tell me about a time when you were working alone and needed to motivate yourself. What were the circumstances, and how did you do it?

Problem-solving questions

1. What precautions would you take before replacing a keyboard, hard drive, or network card? (This question should be altered to reflect the job description and skills.)
2. Ask the candidate to turn around so he or she can't see you. Then ask them to tell you how to tie your shoelaces using only vocal instructions. (Does the candidate ask if your shoes have shoelaces? Can they describe the process? This kind of question will help you test communications skills needed by help desk candidates who support remote users.)
3. Your network is experiencing periods of slow response, and you are asked to find a solution. What troubleshooting techniques would you use? Hardware or software solutions are okay, and budget is not an issue.
4. In many problem situations, it is tempting to jump to a conclusion in order to quickly build a solution. Describe a time when you resisted this temptation and thoroughly researched the problem before reaching a decision.
5. Write a paragraph explaining how DHCP (LANs, WANs, WEPs, whatever) works. (This question sounds like a technical question, but you will want to see how well the candidate communicates the technical information.)

Big-picture questions

1. What is the single most rewarding thing you have accomplished in your career, and why do you cite this above all your other accomplishments?
2. Describe for me a risk you have taken in your career and the results of the decision to take the risk. Would you do it again?
3. What role do you think computer support analysts should play in the company?
4. What special skills or knowledge can you bring to our organization? Why would this be valuable to us?
5. Within this organization or not, where do you see yourself, and your career, in five years?

Off-the-wall questions to avoid

You should avoid using off-the-wall questions during a job interview. Some of the TechRepublic members who submitted the following questions said they rejected the job offer when questions of this type were asked.

1. Why are manhole covers round? (This actually was the most popular "tough" question that TechRepublic members submitted. The answer should be that during removal or replacement, a round manhole cover cannot fall back into the hole.)
2. Would you like a piece of cake? (The candidate is given a piece of cake but no fork. The purpose, allegedly, is to see the composure and ingenuity displayed by the candidate.)
3. I'm going to sit here for 30 minutes and listen to you tell me about yourself. (The interviewer then starts a stopwatch, sits back, and stares at the candidate.)
4. Where is the paring knife in your kitchen at home? (Apparently, the interviewer is supposed to be able to tell something of the candidate's organizational skills, neatness, and ability to communicate.)
5. If you were a wild animal, what animal would you be?