

Welcome to your guide...

24 IRISH CIVIL SERVICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Q1. Tell me about yourself.

Sample Answer:

Thank you for inviting me to be interviewed for this Civil Service position today. Over the years, I have built extensive transferrable skills and qualities that I believe will enable me to excel within the Irish Civil Service. I am an excellent organiser and somebody who will always provide exceptional customer service. I am a creative problem solver, and I will always make decisions that are in the best interests of my employer. For example, in my previous role, my manager often praised me for seeking ways to help the company save money by streamlining processes and by ensuring I delivered value for money in all my daily tasks. I understand working for the Civil Service requires the ability to work alone and as part of a team, to communicate with clarity, to see the bigger picture, and to approach tasks and projects with enthusiasm and a commitment to public service. If you employ me in this position, I will be a supportive team member and I will act as a positive role model for the Irish Civil Service whilst embracing change with an open and positive attitude.

Q2. Why do you want to work for the Irish Civil Service?

Sample Answer:

I want to work for the Irish Civil Service for several reasons. Firstly, I want to work in an organisation that is positive about the future, embraces change, and that provides a supportive environment where people can reach their full potential. I am particularly attracted to the opportunities that the Civil Service offers, the friendly working environment, and the fact that I will get to collaborate with lots of different people in various departments to achieve a common goal. Although the benefits and the job security are appealing to me, the main attraction lies in the fact that I will get to serve the public and see the difference I am making in people's lives in the work that I undertake.

Q3. How can you contribute to the mission of the Irish Civil Service?

Sample Answer:

I can contribute by embracing change positively, by acting as a positive role model when dealing with members of the public, and by making sure I uphold the core values and principles expected of the people who work in the Irish Civil Service. To support the mission of the Civil Service I understand I must ensure all duties are carried out efficiently and effectively. This means making sure services are delivered on time and within a cost-effective manner. I must also ensure that the work I carry out is completed to support the Irish economy and help communities and local businesses to thrive.

Q4. Tell me about a time when you experienced conflict in a work situation.

Sample Answer:

I recall starting work in a previous role and a long-serving member of the team appeared to be dismissive of my suggestions and ideas during team meetings. I found this very frustrating because I genuinely wanted to get off to a good start and show the team what I was capable of. I considered what I needed to do and say to resolve the conflict and to get the outcome I wanted. I decided to speak to him in private immediately following one of the team meetings, and I asked him if I was doing anything to irritate him. I went on to give him several examples of where he had dismissed the perfectly good ideas I had put forward before explaining that I genuinely wanted to help the team and that I would appreciate his support. Just by mentioning how I was feeling had a positive impact on the situation, and from that day forward we became good friends at work and we ended up working closely together on various projects. Whenever I experience conflict I will always act maturely and professionally to try and resolve it quickly for the sake of the team.

Q5. How do you align with the Irish Civil Service values?

Sample Answer:

I understand the Irish Civil Service has several important core values that its staff must demonstrate in their daily working lives. The values are independence, integrity, impartiality, equality, fairness, and respect. The public expects all staff within the Civil Service to adhere

to the values and promote good working practices in all they do. I align with the values because I am passionate about serving the people of Ireland and making sure I always conduct myself with integrity, honesty, and transparency. I am the type of person that is passionate about equality and fairness and I believe at work people should be treated with respect and allowed to reach their full potential by working in an inclusive environment that is supportive and encouraging.

Q6. What's the biggest mistake you've ever made at work?

Sample Answer:

I recall, when I first started work many years ago, taking on a job that I wasn't suitably qualified for. It was a job in sales, and although I put my all into it, I wasn't cut out for that type of environment where I was required to call customers up to try and sell them products and services. I learned a tremendous amount from that experience, and before I ever apply for a job now, I always consider carefully the skills and qualities needed to perform to a high standard, and whether or not I can excel in the position. Although I rarely make mistakes at work, whenever I do, I will own up to it, I will analyse to see where I went wrong, and I will take positive action to make sure it never happens again.

Q7. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Sample Answer:

My strengths, I believe, are specifically aligned to a career in the Irish Civil Service. I am a supportive team worker and I will always focus on what I can do to contribute to an organisation's mission and goal. For example, in my previous job, I undertook several training courses that were designed to help me work smarter towards the company's vision. Other strengths include the fact that I am calm under pressure and I will take responsibility for completing all tasks on time and within budget. I recall in my previous job staying behind late each night for a week to help the company complete a difficult project for an important client. Finally, I am somebody who sees the value of change within an organisation, and I

will always try to save my employer money by working smarter and seeing what I can do to deliver cost-effective and efficient services. In respect of my weakness, this is the fact that I find it hard to say no to people. I am a people pleaser at heart but in the past, this has resulted in me taking on too many responsibilities when I didn't have the capacity to do so. Having said that, I am always open to learning and improving and I will listen to constructive feedback with an open mind and a positive attitude.

Q8. Describe your communication skills?

Sample Answer:

My communication skills, I believe are very strong. I understand it is essential to listen to people carefully whilst communicating, to understand their needs, to ascertain what it is people need from you, and then to ask questions to ensure the information you are receiving is useful and informative. Whenever I communicate in writing I will remember I am representing my employer and I will choose my words carefully. Finally, whenever I am communicating, I will use words and phrases that people can understand, and I will use facial expressions and a style of body language that makes them feel comfortable, respected, and reassured.

Q9. What are some of the current challenges facing the Irish economy?

Sample Answer:

Perhaps the biggest challenge right now is the post-Covid economic challenge. If I am successful in my application to join the Irish Civil Service I must ensure everything I do supports the economy and the people of Ireland to enable them to get back on their feet after the pandemic. I must also ensure the work I carry out is done with passion and is efficient and cost-effective in its delivery. Other challenges include ensuring there are sufficient affordable houses available for people within the community, and the challenge to the environment to reduce the impact of carbon emissions quickly and sustainably.

Q10. Tell me about a great leader you've worked under.

Sample Answer:

In my last role, I was fortunate to have an amazing manager. She was innovative, forward-thinking, and she took the time to provide everyone within the team support and the training and resources they needed to carry out their functions and responsibilities to the required standard. I particularly liked her because she was honest with everyone. If you were good, she would praise you. Conversely, if you had messed up, she would tell you, before teaching you how to not make the same mistakes again. She was also very good at explaining the benefits of change within an organisation and the different ways we, as a team, could support the change process.

Q11. Describe a time when you had to see the bigger picture at work.

Sample Answer:

I was working in a previous role and my manager came into the office to speak to the team. He explained that, because of the industry changes and trends we were experiencing, and how people were starting to shift their shopping habits online, we would all need to take on new responsibilities. Some people in the team were not very happy about this, but I encouraged them to view it from a different angle. I explained that, if we all embraced the changes positively, and we looked ahead to the future, we would not only get keep our jobs, but we would help the organization to adapt during these changing times. Eventually, everyone in the team agreed to embrace the new responsibilities that we all had, and the business continued to grow, thrive, and develop moving forward.

Q12. Tell me about a situation where you had to work in an environment you were unfamiliar with.

Sample Answer:

I was working in a small team in my previous job and a valued and talented member of the team went off sick at short notice. They were going to be off for at least two weeks, and so

my manager needed someone in the team to step up and take on their responsibilities. I volunteered to be that person, and I started by assessing their workload and the skills I would need to quickly develop to meet my objectives. I called up the member of staff who was off sick at home to ask them some questions about their work and whether they had any advice they could offer me. I then prioritised which tasks I needed to complete, and how I was going to approach them. By working methodically, and by carrying out some research to find out how to tackle each task competently, I was able to complete all of my work colleagues' tasks and projects to a good standard whilst they were off sick.

Q13. Tell me about a time when you provided excellent customer service.

Sample Answer:

A customer contacted our company by telephone because they wanted to order a product online. They were extremely nervous about using our online payment system and they were seeking reassurances. It was my task to explain the online payment process and to talk them through how to choose a product from our website and then make the secure payment. I asked the customer numerous questions to find out which product they needed. Once they had chosen the product, I explained how the online payment process worked and how their card details were 100% secure. I then spent a considerable amount of time walking them through the payment process. Once they had made the payment they thanked me for my time and I contacted them a couple of days later just to follow up and make sure they had received their product.

Q14. Have you ever had to embrace change at work?

Sample Answer:

Yes, I have and I do see change as a fundamental requirement if a business is to achieve its objectives. For example, a new manager took over the running of our department and she wanted to make numerous changes that some people in the team felt were unnecessary. However, because we had functioned a set way for a long period, I felt the

changes were a good thing. I listened to my new manager's proposed changes and I offered to help implement them. She gave me the task of creating new team guidelines that would define the way we would work moving forward. During the transition of change, I actively encouraged other team members to try and embrace the changes positively, and I explained how it would be a positive thing for us all to at least try the new methods of working. Six months after the changes were brought in, the team was performing better than ever, and the vast majority of people team felt the team was in a much stronger position than previously.

Q15. Tell me about a time when you supported your employer.

Sample Answer:

A situation occurred whereby our company website crashed at 3:30 pm on a Friday afternoon. This had potentially disastrous connotations because we were due to run an online sale over the weekend that was due to start at 9 am on Saturday. I volunteered to stay behind late that evening to help my manager try and find a solution to the problem and to get the website back up and running in time for the sale on Saturday. I started by calling around local IT companies but none of them were free to do the work at such short notice. I then used my initiative to find a solution to the problem by using the online outsourcing website UpWork.com. I was able to hire a freelance IT web developer from the website who managed to fix the problem by 6 pm that evening. By staying behind late, and by using my initiative, I was able to help the business avert a major problem.

Q16. Tell me about a time when you initiated change in a team or an organization.

Sample Answer:

I was working in a previous department and I had some spare time available one Friday afternoon. I'd had some concerns about the amount of paper and office supplies we were going through, and so I decided to carry out some research online to see if we could save money by ordering from a different supplier and also cutting down on usage. After a few

hours conducting research, I managed to find a much cheaper supplier for all of our office supplies, and whilst the minimum order quantities were higher, over the year I calculated we would save more than £1,000. I also managed to find an online invoicing system that we could use free of charge. At the time, we had been printing off hundreds of invoices each month and posting them out to our customers, so this was another positive change that would save the company time and money. At the end of that Friday afternoon, I put forward my proposals to my supervisor who agreed the changes would be a positive thing for both the office and the company. A few weeks later, the changes were implemented.

Q17. Tell me about a time when you received feedback from a manager or supervisor.

Sample Answer:

When I first started working in my previous role, my manager called me into her office a few weeks after starting to give me some constructive feedback. She said that whilst she was very pleased with my overall performance, she now wanted me to focus on dealing with more customers throughout the day. She went on to explain that she'd noticed I was spending a little too much time making polite conversation with the customers, and whilst it was important to provide great service, I needed to now speed up the process. I immediately took on board her comments and I went away and analysed my performance. I decided to ask a more experienced work colleague how he approached dealing with customers to increase efficiency. He gave me some great tips and pointers for dealing with customers and I successfully implemented these into my daily working practices.

Q18. Explain a situation where you came up with a solution to a challenging problem.

Sample Answer:

In a previous role, I noticed a significant number of customers were making the same complaint about one of our products. The complaint was based on the fact a large percentage of customers were finding the product difficult to operate once they received it. Nobody within the company had used their initiative to solve the recurring problem. Instead,

each customer service call agent was spending at least five minutes explaining to each customer how to use the product once they called in to complain. I decided to use my initiative to make a positive change in this situation. I created clear and concise instructions that could be placed in the box with each product that went out to our customers. I asked a few work colleagues to test the instructions, just to make sure they were clear. Once I had created the instructions, I gave them to my manager for approval. Following the action that I took, customer complaints about this product were eradicated.

Q19. Tell me about a time when you supported someone within a team to overcome a setback.

Sample Answer:

In a previous team, a work colleague of mine was overlooked for a promotion. She was quite upset about it because someone with less experience than her had won the promotion. She was talking about leaving the organisation, which concerned me because I felt this was a gut reaction and she wasn't looking at things with a clear head. So, I sat down and spoke to her to try and persuade her to change her mind, and to see things from a different perspective. I used an empathetic style of communication initially, to show that I understood how she was feeling. I then changed my style to a more positive tone by encouraging her to see how far she had come within the organisation, and that she should try and see the bigger picture in respect of what the organisation needed at this particular time. I went on to explain in a determined tone that her time would come for a promotion in the future and that the best way to approach this would be to knuckle down, to carry on performing to a high standard, and to show her manager that she thoroughly deserved the next one. By using several different styles of communication, I was able to convince my work colleague to look at the situation in a different light.

Q20. Describe a situation when you persuaded someone to see your point of view.

Sample Answer:

I was working in an office and another member of staff was about to order some office supplies. She was ordering the minimum quantity required, and I asked her if she felt it might be better to order a larger quantity to save money. She disagreed with me, and she said that she'd prefer to order less because this had a better impact on the environment. I explained to her that, by ordering less we would need to order again in the not too distant future, which would be more harmful to the environment, simply because the courier would need to come back time and time again to deliver the goods. By ordering a larger quantity, we would not only be saving money in the long term, because there were discounts to be had, but the courier would only need to do one trip. By explaining to her my thought process logically and clearly, she eventually came around to my way of thinking.

Q21. Tell me about a time when you had to manage a quality service.

Sample Answer:

In a previous role, it was my responsibility to work with other people in my team to provide excellent customer and client service. Part of our responsibilities included answering customer service telephone calls and we had strict guidelines we all needed to follow. I started by reading the guidelines carefully to make sure I had the necessary skills needed to do the job to a consistently high standard. Whilst dealing with each customer on the telephone, I would start with a welcome script and I would then ask them for details relating to their query or their complaint. I would then ask probing questions to get to the bottom of the issue as quickly as possible. At all times whilst on the telephone, I would monitor the time, and I would make sure the needs of the customer were met. If ever I needed to get back to the customer at a later date, I would ensure a reminder was placed on the system so that I never forgot. In my opinion, too many businesses fail to deliver on their promises when getting back to customers and I was keen for this not to happen. At the end of each call with the customer, I would ask them for feedback on the service they had received. This then allowed me to pass on any areas of suggested improvement to my manager, which she then assessed before implementing.

Q22. What was the last piece of professional development work you undertook?

Sample Answer:

I studied an online customer care course through the website Udemy.com. I wanted to brush up on my customer and client service skills before applying for this Civil Service job, and I learned some useful modern-day techniques for improving customer service. I see personal development as an important aspect of my role and would always take onboard feedback relating to my performance positively as I like to continually develop in my work.

Q23. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Sample Answer:

In five years, I see myself progressing within the Civil Service to the point where not only am I well-respected in the role, but I've also taken on further responsibilities and possibly progression. I believe that five years from now, I will have proven myself as an invaluable member of the Civil Service team. I would also take great pleasure in assisting the training and development of newer colleagues who occupy a similar role.

Q24. That's the end of your Civil Service interview. Do you have any questions for us?

Sample Answer:

Q. What would you need me to concentrate on in the first 30 days of starting in the role?

Q. What advice would you give to the successful candidate who wants to make a positive impression in the role and add value to the Civil Service?

Q. What's the culture like within the Civil Service? I've heard some positive things about it so I would be keen to learn more.

How to Use These Interview Questions and Answers:

These interview questions and answers are intended to guide you in your preparation for your job interview. These questions have been picked by the How2Become team because we believe that they are the best representative of what you will face in your interview.

The sample answers in this resource are collated from years of experience and research in the recruitment sector. The answers confidently display the appropriate qualities and competencies that the interviewer expects from successful candidates.

Read the sample answers carefully, and take note of what skills and competencies they demonstrate. You might notice that, when the question asks for examples, the answer uses the STAR method to construct the response:

Situation. Start off your response to the interview question by explaining what the 'situation' was and who was involved.

Task. Once you have detailed the situation, explain what the 'task' was, or what needed to be done.

Action. Now explain what 'action' you took, and what action others took. Also explain why you took this particular course of action.

Result. Explain to the panel what you would do differently if the same situation arose again. It is good to be reflective at the end of your responses. This demonstrates a level of maturity and it will also show the panel that you are willing to learn from every experience.

In order to get the best possible results, apply this system to your own examples and experiences in working life. These sample answers are intended to inspire you to create your own responses to the questions.

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