Interview Questions

Section 1 General Question

Tell me about yourself.

Well. I grew up in China with my parents and older brother. My parents are both professors in the universities and my older brother now is a postdoctoral fellow at university of syracuse in NY. In 1993, I got my bachelor degree in automation control. Before graduation, as a unique undergraduate research assistant, I took part in the project of Computer Monitor and Control System of Aromatic Joint Unit and my responsibilities are modeling and operation optimization. Because of that project, I became interested in process control. So when I had an opportunity to selecting my supervisor for PhD degree, I chose the professor Fang, a famous process control expert. Throughout the period while I pursued my PhD degree, I have always maintained an excellent GPA. My doctoral work is focused on an industrial project of Modeling and On-line Optimization Control of the Large-scale Crude Distillation Unit. It is awarded 1997 SINONPEC Advanced Sci. and Tech. Award because its good prospects of bringing considerable profit. From Sept. 1997 to present, I am a postdoctoral fellow at U of Alberta. Under the guidance of Dr. Forbes, I am researching the RTO system design criterion and RTO algorithms to compensate the plant/model mismatch. In a word, I have some experiences on RTO development, research and implementation. I have always been interested in real industry position. That's why I am sitting here today.

What do you know about our company?

Why do you want to work for me?

First of all AspenTech is one of the most famous company in the area of process control. I am interested in process control and I would like to be part of some AspenTech's projects. Secondly, as a staff of consultant company rather than operation company, I will get lots of chances to find and identify new problems in industry. That is a great challenge for me. I would like to use my skill, knowledge and experience to solve these company problems. From that I can earn much valuable experiments and as a result, I will provide the best service to customs of AspenTech. Finally, I have some experiences on RTO development, research and implementation and I believe that I will become a contributor to AspenTech for RTO system design, test and implementation.

What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

As my resume indicates, I have sound theoretical background, appropriate knowledge and diverse research experiences on control and process optimization in process industry. I have finished two projects in china, in which I established a rigorous on-line model of crude distillation process using BP-SR combined algorithm; built an on-line optimizer to solve data reconciliation and process optimization problem; developed a soft-sensor for crude product quality using RBF neural networks. At last all these works are integrated a complete on-line optimization system, which has already been put into operation and

showed good results. Now my research work is focused on RTO system design and some progress have been made. So I am highly confident that these knowledge and experiences are transferable and will stand in good stead with me in working at AspenTech in the area of advanced control and RTO system design and implementation.
Also I have more experiences on doing projects in China. I think that Asia market, esp. China market become more and more important to AspenTech. I believe that I am helpful and valuable to develop that big market.

What about the job offered do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?

Of course I do find something attractive. You know during my academic career, I learned lots of theory and knowledge. I hope that I can put this knowledge into practice. That is what I really want to do. In AspenTech I will have opportunities to realize my dream. Also, I will encounter new problems everyday from different customs of AspenTech. It is a challenge for me to solve them. I think the success of any business depends on human resource. At AspenTech I will be able to work with some really talent people and I can learn a lot from them.
Least attractive?

Why should we hire you?

This position requires multivariable and model-based control and optimization combined with fundamental engineering knowledge. I think that I am qualified for these requirements because of my knowledge, experiences, abilities and skills.

What do you look for in a job?

The answer is opportunity. I am looking for the opportunity to use my skill and knowledge to provide the best service to customs. I am looking for the opportunity to learn more advance technologies from other talent people to enhance my experience.

Please give me your definition of this position?

Provide the best service to customs.

How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

Not long at all. What I need is only a brief period to adapt the environment and work style at AspenTech. After that I would be a contributor.

How long would you stay with us?

As long as the work is challenge and we both feel contributing and achieving. I can’t see any reason to consider leaving in the foreseeable future. I hope that I can consider my career from a long-term view.

Section 2 Experience and Management Questions

You may be overqulified for the position we have to offer.

What is your management style?

Are you a good manager? Give an example. Why do you feel you have top managerial potential?

What do you look for when you hire people?

Did you ever fire anyone? If so, what were the reasons and hoe did you handle it?

What do you see as the most difficult task in being a manger?

What is your biggest weakness as a manager?

Section 3 Industry Trend Questions

What important trends do you see in our industry?

First of all advanced process control system just like DMCPlus and RMPCT become mature and make great achievements in process industry. The APC maintain with high efficiency will become a new problem. Next RTO system has already been attracting considerable industry interest because the operation companies face intense economic pressure. Based on APC, RTO will optimize the process profit. Finally integration has become new hot point since concept of CIMS is introduced to process industry, which including the integration between information, management and control, the integration between modeling, control and optimization and so on.

Section 4 If You Are Leaving a Job

Why are you leaving your present job?

You know postdoctoral is not a real job in Canada. During the past one year I find that research works at university in North American are almost focussed on theory development. I understand that the theory is very important, but I prefer to do some practical industry projects, in which I will earn more industry experience. I believe those experiences are helpful and valuable for further research. My employment objective is a challenge industry position. I need some opportunity to put my skills and knowledge into practice, and at the same time find and solve the practical problem.

How do you feel about leaving all of your benefits?

My supervisor has deep insight on RTO system. I believe that he has a few pretty good ideas just like RTO system design criterion and interface between RTO and APC and so on. I learn a lot from him. But you know I will learn more from engineering practice.

Describe what you feel to be an ideal working environment.

In my opinion, an ideal working environment is a good team full of vigor, where everyone will get sufficient time for thinking, equal opportunity for communicating and friend cooperation with complete trust.

How would you evaluate your present firm (supervisor)?

Section 5 Quantifying Your Experience, Accomplishments

Section 6 Job Search Question

Why haven't you found a new position before now?

You know finding a job may be easy, but finding the right job is more difficult. I believe that AspenTech is my best choice. Also, before now I need more international work experience. In the past one year, I have learn how to adapt the working and living style in North America and how to acquire the information what I need. I think these two things are very important for me to qualify a new industry postion.

Had you though of leaving your present position before? If yes, what do you think held you there?

No.

What do you think of your boss?

Would you describe a situation in which your work was criticized?

What other types of jobs or companies are you considering?

Frankly speaking, I have sent my resume to Honeywell Hi-Spec Solution, Shell Co. R&D Department, Hyprotech and so on.

Section 7 Your Work Habits and Style

If I spoke with your previous boss, what would he say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Profound insight into Real-Time Optimization, I guess. In U of Alberta, I presented a new design metric to evaluate the performance of RTO system, meanwhile, I examined existing methods available in the literature for determining whether a given process model/model updating pair is appropriate for a specific RTO implementation. Before that I have some experiences on RTO implementation in SINOPEC Fujian Refinery. So I believe my knowledge and industry experience give him a favorable impression. Perhaps language may be my weakness. I am lack of practice to improving my spoken English. I guess this is a general problem to every new immigrant whose native language is not English. But in the past year, I make a great progress on it. I think my supervisor is proud of my improvement.

Can you work under pressures, deadlines, etc.?

To be honest, during the past five years, I usually face deadlines for submitting the paper to conference such as IEEE, IFAC and AIChE Meeting. I well work under pressures or deadlines and always get things well done. Of course, I always try to avoid this situation by well planing and organizing in advance. See reaching your goal within the limited time is exactely a real-time optimization problem, right? I like solve that problem.

How have you changed the nature of your job?

Do you prefer staff or line work? Why?

In your present position, what problems have you identified that had previously been overlooked?

It is plant/model mismatch. Actually I know that the plant/model mismatch is crucial to success of any RTO system. That is why we need model-update. But when I was working on that project in Fujian Refinery, I thought that the optimizer using updated model must get the plant optimum. But that is wrong. By researching profoundly, I realize that the steady-state model-based real-time optimization will not converge to the plant optimum unless the model and plant output deviations with respect to manipulated variables is exactly equal to each other.

How do you resolve conflict on a project team?

What was the most difficult decision you ever had to make?

It is true that we have to make some difficult decisions during our life. The most difficult one I had to make may be to decide whether go abroad or stay in China. When I got my PhD degree, it is easy for me to find a good job in China because of my education background. You know Tsinghua University is famed as MIT in China. At that time there were lots of attractive business opportunities because China market was becoming one of the biggest markets in the world. That is why I want to stay in China. However, considering my career goal from the long-term view, I decided to come here, North America, to enhance my international work experience because here is the birthplace of the most advanced technologies. I can learn a lots and face challenges. That is a kind of positive life. Being a member at AspenTech will help me to realize my career goal, and at the same time I will be helpful for AspenTech to develop the Market in China.

Section 8 Salary Question

How much are you looking for?

How much do you expect, if we offer this position to you?

What kind of salary are you worth?

Making money is an important thing to everyone, but it is not the most important thing to me. I believe that AspenTech will give me not only money but also opportunities and experiences. As I understand it, I believe AspenTech will provide a reasonable salary depending on job responsibility. My target range is $40,000 to $50,000 per year

Section 9 Personality Question

Do you generally speak to people before they speak to you?

I think it is a hard question to answer because it depends on different circumstance. For example, in a conference I would like to speak to people. It is a good chance to communicate ideas to each other.

What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended?

What is the toughest part of a job for you?

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Are you creative?

How would you describe your own personality?

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Are you a leader?

Sure, I am. I have been the president of Student Union in Tsinghua University.

What are your future goals?

What are your strong points?

What are your weak point?

Section 10 Your Career Goals

If you could start your career again, what would you do differently?

What career options do you have at the moment?

How would you describe the essence of success? According to your definition of success, how successful have you been so far?

1. What are your long range and short range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next 10 years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What do you REALLY want to do in life?
5. What are your long range career objectives?
6. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
7. What are the most important rewards you expect in your business career?
8. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
9. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
10. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
11. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
12. How would you describe yourself?
13. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
15. How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
16. Why should I hire you?
17. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in business?
18. How do you determine or evaluate success?
19. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
20. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
21. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
22. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
23. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
24. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
25. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
26. Why did you select your college or university?
27. What led you to choose your field of major study?
28. What college subjects did you like best? Why?
29. What college subjects did you like least? Why?
30. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
31. What changes would you make in your college or university?
32. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
33. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
34. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
35. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
36. How do you work under pressure?
37. In what part-time work are you interested? Why?
38. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
39. Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
40. What do you know about our company?
41. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
42. Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
43. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

44. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
45. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
46. Are you willing to travel?
47. Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
48. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
49. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
50. What have you learned from your mistakes?

What are the most important things you've learned in school?

- How to beat the system. As you know, my university has over 20,000 students. If you want to get anything done you have to know the right people, circumvent the rules a bit, that sort of thing. Of course I would never do anything illegal or unethical, but I have found that playing strictly by the rules is not always the fastest or best way to get things done.
- Being a philosophy major has taught me a lot about social justice and the role of the individual in society. I'm much more attuned to how certain groups—racial, sexual, religious, cultural—are marginalized and excluded from power. This knowledge has made me a much more tolerant person.
- Two things: time management and how to find information. Balancing a full course load and several extra-curricular activities—not to mention a social life—can be tricky, but if I've learned anything in these four years it's how to know how much time I have, how much time I need, and how to say no to those things that aren't necessary for me to do. I've also learned that it's impossible to know everything, so it's more important to be able to think creatively in order to figure out how and where to find the information I need.

Tell me what you know about our company.

- I know that you have the third largest market share in the softdrink industry and that one of your main goals right now is to enter the Eastern European market. Also, you have a reputation for being a good company to work for—you made it to last year's "Top 500 Employers" list. You've just experienced a change in senior management, and actually, one of the things I wanted to ask you about was how you see that change affecting the company in the near future.
- Well, one of the reasons I'm here today is to learn more about the company from an insider such as yourself.
- Of course you're one of the biggest names in the softdrink industry—you've been around for generations. And based on your marketing campaigns over the last few years I'd say you have a fun, youthful image and that you appeal to the under 40 crowd—although the diet products appeal more to women than to men.

What kind of position are you interested in?

- First I'd like to hear a bit more about the kinds of positions you have to offer.
- I'm looking for real hands-on management experience, something where I have the opportunity to upervise other people and to initiate and develop my own projects.
- I'm interested in a position that will allow me to learn this business inside and out, one that will allow me to develop the skills I need to move forward.

What skills do you want to learn or improve?

- Since this is my first job, I'm excited to learn everything I can about this field. I also want to learn as many management skills as possible.
- Although I have some knowledge of marketing research, I would like to improve my skills at interpreting marketing data—knowing the type of information to request and how to analyze the numbers.
- I would like to learn how to effectively manage people.

What was the last book you read?

- I just finished reading A Suitable Boy by Vikram Seth. It captured the social situation in India better than anything else I've read. Now when I think about India as an emerging financial market, I have a new perspective.
- I'm so glad you asked me that question. I've been reading a series of novels by Patrick O'Brian about a British sea captain and his best friend who's a surgeon during the Napoleonic wars. They're absolutely fascinating, a combination of meticulous historical fiction and social commentary. I've been recommending them to everyone I know.
- You know, as an political science major, I read so much for school that I only have time to read for myself during vacations. I did read Colin Powell's autobiography over winter break.

What do you do in your spare time?

- I'm very committed to being fit, and I go to the gym whenever I can, usually about five to six times a week.
- To tell you the truth, it's rare that I have a free moment, since, as you know, I work very long hours. Luckily, I love my profession. But when I do find myself with a free afternoon or weekend, I like to relax by reading and listening to music.
- I have a collection of model ships that I've built myself, and I like to work on them in the evenings or on rainy weekend afternoons. Also, for the last two years I've been volunteering at the local Children's hospital on Saturday mornings.(Great answer. Your pursuits are interesting and unique, and you show a long-time commitment to your interests and community.)

As an entry level employee a lot of the work you do will be very routine. How do you feel about that?

- I certainly don't expect to start my career at the top, and frankly, I welcome the opportunity to learn this business from the ground up. Of course, nobody wants to spend an entire career at the copy machine, but I expect that over time as my skills develop and I gain experience, my work will change to reflect my abilities.
- I don't mind routine tasks; in fact, I find they can be relaxing. I believe that there is no bad work, only bad attitudes.
- Actually, I don't think a large proportion of routine work would be appropriate for someone of my level of education and work experience.

How do you work under pressure?

- I thrive on pressure. I think it brings out the best in me.
- I work well under pressure; although I usually try to avoid getting into eleventh hour situations.
- Pressure makes me very anxious. I do my taxes in January.

Do you have any questions?

- You've gone over just about everything. I honestly can't think of another thing I need to know!

- How much growth potential is there in this job? (This is a good example of a final question. Others topics include: finding out why the job is open, what your initial responsibilities would be, the interviewer's background (how/why they came to be at the company, what they like about the company), and the company's competitors and future outlook.)
- Did I get the job?

Why do you think you would enjoy this kind of work?

- I know this job would be a real challenge and would allow me to grow professionally. Also, marketing has always been my main area of professional interest, so I'm excited about the opportunity to work in that field.
- Brand management appeals to me because it require a combination of creativity, strategic and analytic ability—all qualities that I feel I possess. Also, after interning last summer at Sellstuff Advertising Agency, I have a pretty good idea of what it's like to work toward the same goal but from another angle, and I know I enjoy the work. (This is the best answer: you clearly demonstrate how your particular skills and talents match the requirements of the job.)
- Right now I'm most concerned with finding a position that will challenge me and allow me to grow professionally. I'm a very positive person in general, and I know that if the environment is right, I will enjoy my work.

Why did you decide to go to graduate school?

- After spending three years working in the pharmaceuticals industry, I knew it wasn't for me. I thought grad school would be a wonderful opportunity to explore new fields and develop skills that I could apply to another industry.
- Grad school was a necessary step for me to take within my chosen field: art history. Without at least a masters, senior level positions would be closed to me. (This response shows that you know exactly what you want and where you're going, and it demonstrates a real need for a graduate degree: in this case you cannot rise to the top of the field without at least a masters.)
- I've always known that I wanted to go to business school. In a capitalist society, business is what makes the wheels turn, and my undergraduate degree in history and work experience did not give me the exposure I wanted to business concepts and practices. I think a basic understanding of business is essential to just about anyone in today's world.

What has been your most difficult experience?

- I recently broke up with my girlfriend of six years. We had been planning to get married and I was totally unprepared when she said she wanted to see other people. I was devastated for a while—in fact it's still painful to think about—but I learned that I can handle any setback, no matter how painful.
- I am currently a vice president of the Finance Club at school. Last semester I discovered that another vice president—who happens to be a good friend of mine—was embezzling funds from our club account. What a situation! I knew I had to confront my friend and the sooner I did it the better. When I confronted him, he first denied it, but I had brought proof with me, and when I showed him the paperwork he

finally admitted that he had taken the money. I told him that I wasn't going to pretend that nothing had happened and asked him how he thought he should proceed. He wanted to just return the money and go on, but I didn't think

- that was enough. I told him I thought he should resign from the club, confess and apologize to the president of the club. He agreed. I could have turned him in to the Dean, but I felt—as did the president of the club—that these steps were sufficient. (This example best demonstrates your ability to confront and resolve a difficult situation in a responsible manner.)
- Last summer I was working for a law firm and sharing responsibilities with another woman. Unfortunately this woman refused to pull her weight. She spent large portions of the day on the phone, took long lunch breaks and left early, while I stayed late to finish the work she hadn't done. I tried talking to her about it, but nothing seemed to work. Finally, I went to our boss. He said he had noticed the inequity and that he would take care of the situation, and he did. After the conversation with my boss, I noticed that my co-worker began doing her share of the work. I was pleased by the way things turned out, pleased that I had taken the initiative and that the situation had been resolved to my satisfaction.

How much money do you want to make in this job? (Assume your target range is $20,000-$25,000 per year.)

- As I understand it, the position would entail reporting directly to the executive editor, overseeing all aspect of book production from acquisition to publication, reviewing submissions, and acting as a liaison between authors and agents and the company. Am I missing anything? In that case, based on my track record and qualifications, what would be the salary range for the position? (In any discussion of salary your goal should be to find out as much as possible about the employer's expectations and target range before your divulge your own. In this answer you clearly articulate your responsibilities (making them sound as weighty as you can); you ask the employer if there are additional responsibilities that should be considered, and then you turn the question around to try to find out the employer's bargaining zone. Nice work.)
- Based on my qualifications and the market rate for this type of position, I'm looking for about $30,000 a year plus benefits.
- I'm looking to make between $23,000 and $28,000 per year.

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

- In your chair!
- In five years I see myself in a mid to senior level management position, with real responsibilities and projects of my own to develop.
- To be honest I think it's impossible to know now exactly where I'll be five years from now. As a recent graduate, I don't have enough experience—and thus enough information—to make that decision. Instead, my main goal is to move forward, to get ahead. In order to do that I need to develop skills and expertise in the areas that are essential to my company and the industry I work in. Once I've done that I can define my goals more narrowly.

What is your greatest weakness?

- Lack of experience. But if hard work and enthusiasm count for something, then I hope that won't be a weakness for long! (This is a bit of a non-answer, but it could work if you made it less cutesy, emphasizing your willingness to work hard and learn fast)
- I'm a perfectionist. I'm never satisfied with anything until I know it's the very best I can do, and I recognize that sometimes this tendency can slow things down.
- I used to be very disorganized. You know, the kind of person with every paper he owns spread on top of his desk. Eventually this got me into trouble—I missed a meeting because the slip of paper I wrote the details on got lost in the mess. I knew I had to make some changes, so I asked a very meticulous co-worker if she would help me organize my workspace. In just an hour we worked out a system that I still use today. I find now that not only am I more on top of things, but I work more efficiently, too. (This is the best response because you discuss a real weakness and show how you successfully acted to improve your self.)

You're driving along the Amalfi coast in a 1985 Ferrari GTO, which, as you know, has only two seats. You round a bend, and suddenly, out of nowhere appears your boss and a gorgeous (wo)man. What do you do?

- No question about it. I pick up my boss and call a cab for the (wo)man from my car phone-making a date for later, of course. It's more important to preserve an existing relationship than to risk it for a long shot.
- I'd give my boss my car (temporarily, of course), and stay behind with the (wo)man to enjoy the Italian countryside. That way everyone gets what they want.(Bravo. Your boss gets to drive your hot sports car and you get a hot date.)
- I'd pick up the (wo)man and send a limousine for my boss. It's important to keep one's personal life separate from work, and when I'm on vacation, I'm on vacation.

I'm getting a really negative feeling about you, can you tell me why that would be?

- I'm sorry. I'm not quite myself today-I'm just getting over a terrible flu. Ordinarily I'm much more lively.
- If you feel that way, why don't I just leave right now?
- Can you be more specific about your concerns? I'd be happy to address them.(The best answer to such a vague, seemingly irrational question. How can you possibly know why another person would respond to you in a negative way? Perhaps you remind him of his overbearing older brother; maybe she's just in a bad mood today. Only by exploring the interviewer's concerns more specifically can you engage in a meaningful discussion.)

If you are hired, how long will you stay with this company?

- As long as the work is challenging and I have the opportunity to learn and advance, I see no reason to consider leaving. How long do you believe that will be? (The caveat—as long as the work is challenging and I have the opportunity to learn and advance—is the most important part of your response. Since no one can see into the future, you shouldn't give a more specific response. Asking the employer how long that environment will continue is also a good idea; it suggests the idea of mutual responsibility for your ongoing commitment.)

- I certainly wouldn't consider leaving this, or any, job after less than one year. It takes that long to really assess a position.
- I would like to stay with your company as long as possible, and I don't anticipate leaving in the foreseeable future.

Tell me about both the positive and the negative aspects of your last job.

- I really enjoyed working for Aardvark Advertising during my last summer break. I was working on severely different projects that I found challenging, and I was able to work with some really talented people. I think I learned a lot from them. The downside was that I was only there for a short period of time so that I was unable to see some of my projects through to completion.(This is the best answer: You should say you liked your last job—even if you didn't. Also, negatives should be as neutral as possible.)
- Working for the museum was a great experience. I really liked the people I worked for and with, and I had a lot of interesting projects. Unfortunately, museums just can't pay what art galleries do.
- I had a lot of responsibilities and an opportunity to work in a supervisory role for the first time. Also, I was able to work on my own a good portion of the time, and I was given good guidance from my boss. But the commuting was getting to be too much for me and the building we were in was too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer.

Tell me about a time when you received criticism for your work or an idea.

- Last year I was a Teacher's Assistant for one of my history professors. One of my responsibilities was grading students' homework every week. There were about 150 students in the class and turning the homework around in six days wasn't always easy—especially since I had four classes of my own to worry about. Still, I managed to keep up until the end of the semester. I had three big papers to write and I just couldn't finish the homeworks that week. The professor was sympathetic, but he was also upset. He felt that since he had promised the students they would get their homeworks back within a week, my oversight made him look bad. I understood his point and apologized. And the next week I made sure to finish on time.
- Right after graduating from college I took a job as a secretary/receptionist at a footwear manufacturing company. Among other things, I typed all the correspondence for the president of the company. He would give me the letters handwritten and I would type them up. I noticed there were a lot of grammatical mistakes in his letters, so I corrected them. But when he saw the typed letters with my corrections he made me change them back to his version, and he told me never to make changes to his letters again. You have to understand, these were not minor mistakes. A typical letter read, “Dear Mr. So-and-So, It was real nice meeting together again with you yesterday at my office.” I recognized a futile situation; he was not going to change his mind. And besides, if the president of the company wants

his letters to read a certain way, that's his prerogative. So I accepted the criticism and stopped correcting his letters.

- I work as an editorial assistant at a book publishing house, and recently I came up with an idea for a new book: a book about the history and changing dynamics of the airline industry. I told my boss my idea and she thought it had merit, so at the next editorial board meeting I presented the concept to the board. Well, the other editors were not nearly as enthusiastic. They said that the airline industry had already been written about a lot and they didn't see enough of an audience for the book. After the meeting my boss and I discussed the board's reaction and my presentation skills and how they could be improved. Even though my idea was not well received, presenting it to the board and discussing it with my boss were valuable learning experiences. (This response demonstrates a willingness to accept criticism and to follow up and learn from the experience. It also shows that you are good at taking initiative.)

How did you feel about your last boss?

- I have a lot of respect for the work she does, and I learned great deal from her.(Yes, this is the best answer. When talking about a former or current employer, never say anything negative. It will only make you look bad. Instead, focus on their positive qualities (come on, even the worst bosses have positive qualities) and leave it at that.)
- I have to give him credit: He brings in a lot of money for the firm. While we didn't always get along, I'd say we had a mutually respectful relationship.
- To be honest, he wasn't the easiest person to work for, but I managed to find ways of dealing with it. I'm looking forward to having a much more professional relationship with my next employer.

I noticed you're wearing a wedding ring. Do you have any children?

- No I don't. But although my husband and I do plan to have a family in the future, I do not anticipate that doing so will affect my work in any way, other than the standard maternity leave, of course.
- Why do you ask?(This answer is best because it allows you to reframe the discussion around the real issues the interviewer is trying to address, such as whether you are geographically flexible, or whether you plan to stay with the firm for a reasonable length of time.)
- With all due respect, that's not a legal question. Is there something that concerns you about my being married or having children?

What have you done that shows initiative?

- This year I organized a group of co-workers to change the title system at our company. Our titles don't match the ones used by most of the other firms in the industry and make us sound like we're lower down on the ladder. Our supervisor recognizes the fact that six out of the eight people at my level will have to leave the firm to move up, so I thought he would be sympathetic to our request. After all, it's not like we were asking for raises! I drafted a memo that all eight of us signed and submitted it to the supervisor and to the president. A week later, our supervisor explained that he couldn't grant our request because it would require a company-wide overhaul —a process he didn't want to undertake. But, he did offer to speak with senior executives at other firms so that we would be viewed fairly. Since this outcome addressed our primary concern, we were flexible enough to accept this solution.

- I started a community service group at my school that works with other local organizations. We provide information to students so they can volunteer at soup kitchens, tutor inner-city children, perform at youth centers, and participate in community clean-up efforts. It’s taken a lot of time and effort, but it’s the most rewarding thing I’ve done at school. Last year students logged over 2,000 hours of community service.
- My department is one of the smallest at my school, and we often have trouble getting sufficient enrollment in our classes and classes get canceled. This is extremely frustrating to me so I went to see the Dean to talk about it. He expressed his commitment to the department and suggested we form a task force with the department head and a few other students to address the problem. In the year since, we’ve revamped the curriculum so that it’s more in line with student demand. As a result, classes are better attended and we have fewer cancellations.(This is the best response because it not only demonstrates initiative and results from your undertaking, it also shows how you identified a problem and took part in its solution.)

What is your greatest strength?

- I’m efficient and I know how to get things done.(This is a good, straightforward response. You know what you’re good at; you sound proud of it; and it’s a talent that’s valuable in any job.)
- That’s a hard question to answer. Probably my sense of loyalty.
- I’m a people person. I’m good at developing and maintaining relationships.

Tell me what about your experience makes you qualified for this job?

- Last summer I worked for a marketing firm that sells to the educational market. I have also worked for a catering company and for a travel agency. As you know I received my undergraduate degree in business with a marketing concentration, so I am sure I will be able to help your firm in those areas.
- In college I took two marketing courses and I wrote a marketing plan for Peacock books as a class project—they were also trying to reach the educational market. The research I did for the plan included in-depth interviews with several of the marketing staff at Peacock, and through that experience I gained a solid understanding of the industry.
- I understand you are trying to expand your reach into educational markets. I have worked covering sales to universities and secondary schools in your area, and I am certain my experience in this market can help you.(Ideally you want to show your interviewer that you know what will be asked of you and that you have some experience that applies directly to the job. This response accomplishes both of these goals.)

Why are manhole covers round?

- It's the only shape that prevents the lid from slipping into the hole.(Well done. A lid of any other shape would fall through the hole if shifted into certain positions. To

prove this theory, take a couple of pieces of toast and see how one would 'fall through' the other if it were turned on its side.)
- A round shape better accommodates a person's body.
- Actually, it was an aesthetic choice. During the late nineteenth century when manholes were first used, city planners chose the round design for its visual appeal.

How do you feel about working in groups? Do you tend to play a particular role?
- I enjoy working in groups. Although some projects may take a little longer when several people have to reach a consensus, I believe the result is always better when you can benefit from several peoples' ideas. I've found that when I work in groups I'm usually the person who makes sure the work gets finished—the detail person, the person who ties up all the loose ends and who sees the thing through.(Before answering this question, it's important to consider the type of job you're interviewing for. Obviously, if you're going to be alone in a room all day doing some type of individual research you don't want to convey the idea that you hate working alone. Conversely, if you're planning a career in management consultant where teamwork is everything, you don't want to come off as a hermit. This is the best answer because it shows a real understanding of the value of teamwork and of the role of the team member. Generally speaking, there are four types of roles people tend to play in groups: the leader or figurehead, the creative idea generator, the completer-finisher, and the analyser/interpreter. All of these roles are equally important and the best groups contain at least one member from each category.)
- I don't mind working in groups, but I find that I'm generally more productive working alone, or maybe one-on-one with a supervisor.
- I think teamwork is the most overrated management concept since the "Total Quality" movement! Innovative organizations need independent thinkers.

Tell me about yourself.
- Well, I grew up in Texas with my parents and two brothers, and I decided to go out of state for college so I could experience a new environment on my own. When I got to school I didn't know what I wanted to do after graduation, but after taking a lot of economics and political science courses, I determined that I'd like to work in government. That's what brings me here today.
- What would you like to know?(This is the best response. The question "Tell me about yourself" is far too open-ended to answer immediately. The interviewer may want to know about your career goals, your hobbies, your school activities, who knows? When you ask the interviewer what he/she wants to know, you allow him/her to focus the question so that you can provide the kind of information he/she wants to hear.)
- I've always been interested in government, especially after my summer internship in Washington. I'm particularly interested in legislation reform, how we can change the current system so that politicians can concentrate more on helping their constituents and less on running campaigns and returning favors. A sense of social responsibility and helping others is very important to me.