

Job Interview Questions

20 uses for a brick

A lateral-thinking question sometimes asked at job interviews is to come up with novel uses for an everyday object, for example,

- Quick! Name as many uses for a brick as you can in one minute.^[1]
- Name five uses for a stapler, without the staples.^[2]

The task is actually not too difficult if one thinks logically about the properties of the object. One general approach is to split the possible uses into categories:

- Original uses
- Common uses
- Value
- Physical properties
- Decoration
- Components/material

Note that some categories may not be represented by a given object, so may be skipped. The following gives example thought processes for the brick (uses are enumerated with Arabic numerals) and stapler (enumerated with Roman numerals).

Original uses

Bricks are primarily designed for construction, such as in building a house. (1)

Though a stapler is designed to attach together sheets of paper or similar material, this use is inadmissible without staples. We shall skip this category for now.

Common uses

Some uses of a given object beyond its intended use are quite commonly observed:

Bricks are commonly used to line paths (2), support flowerpots (3) and hold apart planks to make a shelf (4).

Some staplers have projections to remove staples. (I)

Value

Most objects have some monetary value, so both brick and staple can be, for example, sold on eBay (5)(II) or bartered for something of equal value (6)(III).

Additionally, most objects have some educational value, for example, teaching children about their primary uses (7)(IV) or as case studies of product design (8)(V).

Physical properties

Every substantial object has mass. Depending on its weight and size, it may be used as a paperweight (9)(VI), doorstop (10)(VII) or keel for a model boat (11)(VIII), or thrown at a robber (12)(IX).

Objects that are strong enough can be used to hammer a nail (13)(X), pound cooking ingredients (14)(XI), tenderise meat (15)(XII) or stand on to reach something high up (16)(XIII). Some staplers also have a hinge, allowing them to be used to crack nuts (XIV) or turn bolts (XV).

Consider the surface properties of the object. For example, the shiny metal surfaces of the stapler could be used as a makeshift mirror, say, to check one's appearance (XVI), see around a corner (XVII) or signal for help (XVIII). On the contrary, the brick has rough surfaces on which to grind softer objects (17).

Many artificial objects have straight edges, useful for drawing straight lines (18)(XIX). Similarly, circular objects can be used to draw circles. Hard cylindrical objects may be used as rolling pins or rollers, whereas smooth hard flat surfaces can back flimsy paper on which to write.

Decoration

Almost anything can be used (modified, painted or otherwise) in a modern art project or simply as surreal decoration (19)(XX). In *World's Maddest Job Interview*, the panel even accepted the use of a brick as a hat.(20)^[3]

Components/material

Many objects can be taken apart. For instance, the stapler may have a spring which can be used to replace a matching broken one in a pen (XXI).

Finally, the object can be reduced to its constituent material. Bricks can be broken into chips to enhance drainage in a flower bed (21), or ground into dust to use as pigment for painting (22), while staplers can be molten down to steel and plastic, each with its innumerable uses.(XXII)

References

- ↑ Crazy job interview questions - Aug. 21, 2012 (<http://money.cnn.com/2012/08/21/pf/job-interview-questions/index.html>)
- ↑ Job interviewers ask oddball questions - Los Angeles Times (<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/19/business/la-fi-extreme-interviewing-questions-20120219>)
- ↑ World's Maddest Job Interview - World's Maddest Job Interview - Channel 4 (<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/worlds-maddest-job-interview/episode-guide/series-1/episode-1>)

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