

Accounts Payable Interview Questions



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Accounts payable staff handle invoice management, payment processing, record maintenance, and vendor relationships.
- Employers should review resumes carefully, focus on role-specific skills, and highlight company benefits.
- Look for accounting knowledge, attention to detail, software adaptability, and strong organizational abilities in candidates.
- Use prescreen questions and targeted interviews to assess qualifications, problem-solving, and prioritization skills.

Interviewing accounts payable professionals can be a stressful task, particularly when you're making a decision that will directly impact your business.

But there is a way to lessen some of that stress and that's by preparing a list of questions that can help better identify the best candidate for your business.

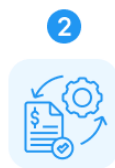
What Are the Four Main Tasks AP Candidates Should Understand?

The accounts payable staff is tasked with a variety of duties including the following:

■ The Four Main Tasks AP candidates Should Understand



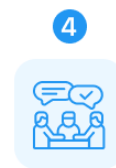
Invoice Management



Invoice Approval and Payment Processing



Maintain Accounts Payable Records



Manage Vendor and Supplier Relationships

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• Invoice Management

The accounts payable department is responsible for the proper management of invoices from receipt to payment.

This includes reviewing and verifying invoices for accuracy and authenticity, matching invoices with the appropriate purchase orders and shipping receipts, and pulling any exceptions for further investigation.

If you're using an automated AP application, much of this work including three-way matching and exception identification is completed automatically.

• Invoice Approval and Payment Processing

After an invoice has been reviewed, AP staff is responsible for routing the invoice to the appropriate party(s) for approval.

Once approved, the invoice is returned to the department, where it will be

entered into the accounting software application until it's paid.

Using automation, AP workflow is approved dramatically, with the invoice electronically routed to the appropriate parties for approval once reviewed, while OCR and machine learning will automatically enter the invoice data into the application in preparation for payment without any data entry necessary.

• **Maintain Accounts Payable Records**

Once an invoice has been paid, AP staff needs to match the payment notification or check stub with the invoice, where it will be filed in the vendor or supplier's file.

If you're using automation that offers document management capability, the invoice is electronically filed after payment, where it can be easily accessed via the cloud at any time.

• **Manage Vendor and Supplier Relationships**

Managing vendor and supplier relationships is one of the most important jobs that AP is responsible for.

Proper management includes regular communication, addressing any potential problems or issues immediately, and ensuring that invoices are paid on time.

Depending on the accounts payable processes in place at a business, the AP department may also be responsible for other tasks as well.

How Do I Prepare for an Accounts Payable Interview?

Everyone advises job candidates to prepare for an interview, but it's just as important that an employer spends time preparing for an interview as well.

Instead of just asking general questions, it can be helpful to prepare questions

based on the job description.

For instance, when interviewing an applicant for an accounts payable specialist position, instead of simply asking about their experience, focus your questions on a specific part of the job such as attention to detail or their ability to multi-task, or whether they possess problem-solving skills.

Here are some suggestions for preparing for an interview with a potential AP candidate.

■ How To Prepare for an Accounts Payable Interview



Review Their Resume Carefully Before The interview



Determine What Skills Are Most Important



Remember To Sell Your Company



Leave Enough Time for Questions

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• **Review Their Resume Carefully Before the Interview**

Resumes are designed to provide potential employers with a snapshot of the candidate's professional skills and schooling.

However, taking a few moments to study a resume can provide you with some additional information that can be helpful during your evaluation.

For instance, has the candidate stayed less than a year at most of their jobs? Is there schooling relevant to their experience?

Do they have an advanced degree but their resume only includes entry-level positions?

You can learn a lot about a person by really looking at their resume.

• **Determine What Skills Are Most Important and Focus on Those**

If it's vital that your next employee be comfortable working with accounting software or other applications, focus your questions on that topic.

If the ability to handle multiple responsibilities is important, ask your job candidate how they would handle multiple requests from supervisors and managers.

Make a note on the candidate's resume regarding any areas that are not clear or you would like additional information on so you remember to ask them during the interview process.

• **Remember To Sell Your Company**

While you're assessing a job candidate, the candidate is likely assessing the company.

An interview is a two-way street, and as much as you may wish to extend a job offer to a candidate, the candidate has to be excited about accepting the offer as well.

As the interviewer, it's your responsibility to communicate company policies and perks that are available to employees.

This can be anything from a four-day workweek to continuing education opportunities.

• **Leave Enough Time for Questions**

Your job candidate will likely have some questions as well, so be sure to schedule enough time so that you don't have to rush through the answers, or worse, not be able to answer the questions at all.

What Skills Should You Look for in a New Accounts Payable Hire?

The following represent some of the skills you should look for in an accounts payable candidate.

■ What Skills Should You Look for in a New Accounts Payable Hire



Accounting or Bookkeeping Knowledge



Organizational Skills



Communication Skills



Accounts Payable Experience



Comfortable With Multiple Software Applications



Attention to Detail

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- Accounting or Bookkeeping Knowledge
- Organizational Skills
- Communication Skills
- Accounts Payable Experience
- Comfortable With Multiple Software Applications
- Attention to Detail

What Are the Prescreen Questions for Accounts Payable?

Once you've narrowed down the list of candidates, instead of scheduling them for a complete interview, narrow the list further by asking some prescreening questions.

Some useful questions to ask during the prescreening process include:

What Are the Prescreen Questions For Accounts Payable?

- What software applications are you familiar with?
- Are you comfortable learning new software applications?
- What's your accounting background?
- What are your organizational skills?

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• **What Software Applications Are You Familiar With?**

The answer to this question can help you assess how much experience the candidate has with software.

If the candidate has QuickBooks experience but your business uses SAP, does that matter?

• **Are You Comfortable Learning New Software Applications?**

Things change including software applications.

If you're considering changing applications or making the transition to automation, it's vital that anyone you hire be comfortable with those changes.

• **What's Your Accounting Background?**

A candidate's understanding of basic bookkeeping or accounting principles including the difference between a debit and credit is essential, with the level of understanding needed dependent on the position.

While an AP clerk may only need a basic understanding of accounting to do their job adequately, if you're hiring for a senior or management position, your candidate must have a good understanding of accounting.

• **What Are Your Organizational Skills?**

AP can be a stressful job at times, with staff dealing with multiple invoices, vendor or supplier questions, getting invoices approved on time, and adhering to payment terms when processing payments.

An organized person will be able to deal with multiple tasks and requests while a candidate without the necessary skills to cope with this will not thrive in the position.

There may be other questions you may ask, but the purpose of the pre-interview is to determine whether the candidates qualify for a second interview.

These questions and the candidate's answers should provide all the information you need to make that determination.

What Are Some Common Accounts Payable Interview Questions and Answers for an Accounts Payable Position?

If you or your hiring manager have adequately screened your candidates, you can prepare for the second job interview by creating a more targeted list of questions, depending on the position that you're looking to fill.

The following is a list of potential questions and sample answers that can help you identify the best candidate for the position.

• **Accounts Payable Clerk**

1. What's Your Accounts Payable Experience?

Potential Answer: *"I have two years of AP experience where I was responsible for processing all vendor and supplier payments."*

This answer indicates that the person is knowledgeable in areas like invoice processing and would likely require minimum training.

2. Are You Comfortable Learning New Software?

Potential Answer: *"I'm very comfortable with new systems. In my previous role, I was involved in transitioning from one system to another."*

This answer gives you some insight into their level of comfort when making a change.

3. Are You Detail-Oriented?

Potential Answer: *"Yes. I can spot typos or other errors quickly, and I always double-check my work to eliminate any issues."*

This answer gives some reassurance that invoice exceptions will be recognized and handled immediately. It also gives some insight into the candidate's way of working.

4. You Just Received a Vendor Invoice. What Do You Do Next?

Potential Answer: *"First, I would review the invoice to make sure it's authentic. Once that's done, I would match the purchase order and shipping notification with the invoice, setting it to the side for further review if there are discrepancies."*

Next, I'd forward it to a manager for approval. Once it's approved, I'll enter the invoice into our accounting software."

When it's approved for payment, I'll print the checks and have the

manager sign them. Then I'll mail them out. Finally, I would file the paid invoice away in the vendor file."

This answer shows that the applicant understands the AP process thoroughly and would be able to be up and running as a productive employee quickly.

• **Accounts Payable Specialist**

An accounts payable specialist should be able to answer the same questions above, along with these:

1. **A Vendor Calls Complaining That They Haven't Received Their Check. What Do You Do?**

Potential Answer: *"I determine when the check was sent, and verify the mailing address with the vendor.*

Next, I would call the bank to make sure the check wasn't cashed. If it hasn't been.

I would place a stop payment on the check and reissue the vendor a new check, providing them with the check number and date.

If it looks like the check has been cashed, I would provide the vendor with the details on when it was deposited."

In this answer, the candidate has covered all the necessary bases for handling a missing payment.

2. **Are You Comfortable Creating Reports and Financial Statements?**

Potential Answer: *"I'm very comfortable with spreadsheet applications and often export data to Microsoft Excel to create reports.*

I'm also comfortable creating custom reports for management when needed."

This answer indicates that the candidate is comfortable using both Excel and the accounting application to handle financial reporting and other financial information.

3. Can You Prioritize Tasks?

Potential Answer: *“Yes, I’m aware of the potential deadlines and unless something urgent comes up that requires immediate attention, I prioritize tasks based on when they’re due.”*

Everybody wants things immediately.

Any candidate for AP specialist must be able to prioritize work according to due dates with few exceptions.

• Accounts Payable Manager

Along with answering the above questions, you’ll need to focus on the candidate’s management skills to see if they’re a fit for the position.

1. An AP Team Member Suspects Fraud in the Department. How Would You Go About Investigating It?

Potential Answer: *“I would address any evidence the employee has. If they only suspect, I would delve into why they suspect fraud and examine pertinent financial records.*

If I do find any suspicious transactions, I would address the issue with those responsible for processing the suspicious transactions.”

There are plenty of ways to address fraud allegations and it seems that this candidate is going about it the right way, choosing to investigate rather than immediately accuse.

2. How Would You Handle a Conflict Between Two

Team Members?

Potential Answer: *“I would speak to each employee individually to see what the underlying issue is.*

I would then arrange a meeting between the three of us to see if the team members can air their differences while finding a solution to the issue.”

While you have to hear out both sides, this answer indicates that the manager is ready to address the conflict head-on without taking sides.

3. What if the Conflict Was With a Vendor?

Potential Answer: *“If a staff member has an issue with a vendor, I would hear their view of the problem and then address the issue with vendor.*

After both sides have been heard, I would then work with the employee to see how we can resolve the conflict.”

Vendor relationships are important, but so are your employees.

This potential manager shows that that they understand that a positive relationship with a vendor is important, but so is the relationship with their employee.

Why Hiring the Right Person Matters

Hiring the right person for your business can be challenging, even more so when hiring for the accounts payable department.

Proximity to cash resources means not only do you want your employees to have the proper skills and knowledge, but it’s also vital that they be trustworthy as well.

Though it may be tempting to hire the first qualified candidate, taking your time with interviews and getting acquainted with the candidates helps ensure that the

person you hire to fill the accounts payable role is a good fit for both the company and the department for the long term.

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