

Accounts Payable Interview Questions



Accounts payable (AP) is more important than ever in the modern marketplace. Businesses who want to compete effectively while keeping costs low and value creation high need to assemble strong teams with not just accounting acumen, but a grasp of existing and emerging technologies.

Building these teams begins with job interviews for accounts payable clerks and specialists. With the right accounts payable interview questions, you can identify job seekers with the skills and experience necessary to optimize your AP function for maximum value, accuracy, and efficiency.

Why Accounts Payable Interview Questions & Answers Matter

Working in tandem with the procurement function, the role of the accounts payable function has evolved from a cost-savings paradigm to one built on preserving and generating value for the organizations they support.

Today's accounts payable teams absolutely need to continue handling traditional AP tasks such as accurate and complete bookkeeping, processing of vendor invoices, and managing cash flow (along with accounts receivable). But with the growing influence of digital transformation on everything from internal compliance to profitability and competitive agility, accounts payable clerks and specialists are expected to have, or obtain, more technical know-how than ever before, including new methods for optimizing everyday tasks in order to support organizational goals.

These expectations also include a fundamental grasp of important concepts and technologies such as process optimization, workflow automation, artificial intelligence, and deep data analytics as essential tools of the trade for modern AP.

Adjusting your accounts payable interview questions to incorporate these expectations is essential in identifying candidates who have the right mix of skills, or the aptitude to develop them.

Questions 1 and 5 from the accounts payable interview list are a good place to start the interview for AP specialists; setting a baseline for education, technical prowess, and experience both with accounts payable workflows and modern software programs is especially useful, along with a demonstrated ability and willingness to expand their skillset as required.

Best Accounts Payable Clerk Interview Questions

As the team members in charge of bookkeeping as well as organizing accounts payable records and financial reporting, accounts payable clerks need a blend of financial expertise, technical proficiency, and industry knowledge to get the job done.

Aside from general education requirements (many clerk positions require a High School diploma or greater, although some industries have more stringent requirements that include a Bachelor's or even Master's of Science degree in accounting, finance, or business administration), accounts payable clerks need problem-solving skills and the technical and software literacy required to learn and use the tools that are defining accounts payable processes in the modern era.

Those who train on the job should demonstrate their eagerness and capacity to catch on quickly and put their new skills to work.

Consider these common interview questions and answers when assembling your interview materials for potential payable clerk job candidates.

1. What education, training, or direct experiences make you suitable to fill the role of accounts payable clerk?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- The candidate meets the educational requirements for the role.
- The candidate is willing to learn on the job.
- The candidate's mathematical, analytical, and organizational proficiencies.
- Direct previous experience as an accounts payable clerk and/or other relevant financial roles within an organization.

- Any additional certifications the candidate possesses.
- The candidate is a “team player” with a collaborative and communication-focused point of view and work style.
- The candidate’s commitment to absolute integrity in protecting financial information, performing all duties with total transparency and accuracy, and working to prevent fraud, theft, and maverick spend.

2. What is three-way matching and how is it used to verify vendor invoices?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- The candidate’s understanding of the importance of three-way matching to accurate financial records, cash flow management, and overall financial health.
- The candidate’s ability to compare the purchase order, receiving documents, and vendor invoice to confirm the validity of the invoice.

3. Have you ever encountered, and resolved, an invoice discrepancy?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- The candidate’s attention to detail and critical thinking skills.
 - A clear explanation of how they identified, researched, and resolved the discrepancy, including any software tools used.
 - The candidate’s point of view on why discrepancies matter and the importance of resolving them completely and quickly.
4. Please explain the circumstances in which a vendor would have a debit balance.

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- The candidate’s ability to explain:
 - What a debit balance is. (An amount owed.)

- What a debit balance indicates in AP. (Generally speaking, a vendor account has been overpaid.)
 - Probable corrective measures (The vendor either issues a credit on the next invoice or remits the balance back to the buyer immediately.)
5. What accounting software, office suites, procure-to-pay (P2P) solutions, enterprise resource planning (ERP) packages, etc. are you trained in or familiar with?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- A clear understanding of, and experience with, most or all of the software solutions used by your organization.
- The candidate's familiarity with both traditional techniques and paradigms and the technologies currently replacing legacy applications and manual, paper-based workflows, including:
 - Cloud-based, centralized data management
 - Process automation
 - Data analytics
 - Data-driven spend management, analysis, and forecasting
- How well the candidate understands important concepts in digital transformation, including continuous improvement, digitization, software as a service (SAAS), etc.
- The candidate's ability to use digital tools to support business continuity by performing their duties safely, securely, and accurately from home or another approved location when required, e.g. during a pandemic.
- The candidate's interest in, and willingness to pursue, additional training in order to conform to your organization's financial workflows and overall business process management requirements.

Best Interview Questions for AP Specialists

While they're expected to demonstrate financial expertise and skills as standard accounts payable clerks, accounts payable specialists focus—hence *specialist*—in making sure an organization's bills get paid correctly, completely, and on or before the due date. In this capacity, they must also engage in more direct vendor relationship management than standard AP clerks, as they will deal directly with suppliers in the course of everyday business as well as when resolving discrepancies.

The educational requirements for AP specialists are often more restrictive than for basic bookkeepers; candidates may be expected to hold a two-year degree at a minimum, and preference will likely be given to those with more advanced education or considerable direct experience in the role of AP specialist. In addition, these candidates should have strong familiarity and extensive experience with standard accounting software as well as industry-specific tools.

In fact, because today's AP specialists tend to operate almost exclusively in digital environments rather than with manual workflows and paper-based processes, candidates should have a much more robust understanding of, and experience with, emerging digital technologies and tools.

Questions 1 and 5 from the accounts payable interview list are a good place to start the interview for AP specialists; setting a baseline for education, technical prowess, and experience both with accounts payable workflows and modern software programs is especially useful, along with a demonstrated ability and willingness to expand their skillset as required.

When interviewing candidates for specialist roles, consider these questions as well:

1. Please describe your approach to task management.

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- Exceptional organizational, analytical, and communication skills.
- Specific strategies used to create and manage workflows.
- Software tools used.
- Concrete examples of the candidate's daily processes.

2. How would you handle an exception where records indicate the company has been underbilled by a supplier?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- Detailed understanding of standard record keeping protocols.
- A clear, collaborative, and communicative approach that prioritizes both financial accuracy and strong vendor relationships.
- Understanding of and adherence to company policy.
- Ability to identify challenges that require additional assistance.

3. Can you describe a particularly challenging circumstance or discrepancy, and how you solved it?

Answers Should Demonstrate:

- The candidate's technical acumen and familiarity with software tools.
- Creative problem solving skills balanced by critical thinking and adherence with policy where relevant.
- Both self-sufficiency and willingness to seek assistance where required.

AP Excellence Begins with Exceptional

Hires

The accounts payable clerks and specialists you hire will help form the foundation of your company's spend management, financial processes and reporting, and ability to manage working capital effectively.

Choosing candidates with strong communication and collaboration skills, as well as strong technical skills and an understanding of business critical technologies, will help your business pay its bills on time, achieve greater value through digital transformation, and ensure your company's financial health is strong enough to support all of its goals for growth and innovation.

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