

Instructional Design Interview Questions and How to Answer Them

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Instructional design interviews are predictable. Nearly every one asks some version of the same fifteen questions, which means you can prepare strong answers before you are ever in the hot seat. This guide gives you the questions, what the interviewer is really checking, and a structure for your answer. Fill in your own stories and you have your prep done.

Two structures that carry the whole interview

Prepare these two tools first. Almost every answer below uses one of them.

Your interview thesis statement

Your thesis statement is a 5 to 7 sentence summary of who you are, what you have done, and why you fit this role. Build it like this:

1. One or two sentences of background: your field, your years of experience, the kinds of audiences you have designed for.
2. Three words or phrases that capture how you fit the role. Pull them from the job description.
3. A sentence or two of evidence for each phrase.
4. A closing sentence that connects you to this specific company and its mission.

Write it out, say it out loud until it sounds like you, and you have your answer to "tell us about yourself" plus the spine of your cover letter and LinkedIn summary.

The STAR method

STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. Use it for every behavioral question ("tell me about a time when...").

Part	What to say	Rough share of your answer
Situation	The context: the org, the audience, the constraint	15%
Task	What you specifically were responsible for	15%
Action	The steps you took and why you took them	40%
Result	What changed, with a number if you have one	30%

The result is the part people skip and the part interviewers remember. "85% of drivers completed the training in the first week" beats "the client was happy" every time.

The core questions

1. Tell us about yourself.

This is your thesis statement. Do not recite your resume chronologically. Lead with your background in one breath, hit your three fit phrases with evidence, and close on why this company.

2. What is your design process?

Name a framework you actually use, then immediately ground it in a real project. "I typically start from the business goal and work backward, using action mapping when the goal is measurable and a more traditional objectives-based approach when it is not. On my last project, that looked like..." A process with no example sounds memorized. An example with no process sounds accidental. You want both.

3. What is your favorite learning experience you have created?

Pick the project with the best story about learner analysis, not the prettiest one. The strongest answers show you getting close to the audience: riding along with the truck drivers, shadowing the nurses, interviewing the new hires. If you are early in your career, a portfolio project works fine. Choose one where you made real design decisions and can explain them.

4. What is the most challenging project you have worked on?

The interviewer wants to watch you problem-solve. Structure it with STAR and spend your time on the Action: what made it hard, what you tried, what you changed course on. End with the result and one sentence on what you would do differently now.

5. Tell me about a time you failed. What did you learn?

Do not dodge this with a fake weakness. Pick a real miss: an assessment that confused learners, a course that shipped late, feedback you did not gather early enough. Then show the correction. The lesson should be specific ("I now pilot every assessment with three real learners before launch"), not generic ("I learned to communicate better").

6. How do you prioritize when multiple projects compete?

Show a system: a task list ordered by importance and urgency, a project tracker, proactive communication when deadlines collide. Give one example where shifting priorities or slow SMEs threatened a deadline and you still delivered.

7. How do you connect training to business goals?

This question separates instructional designers from content builders. Say that you start by asking stakeholders what business result they need and what people would have to do differently to get it. Then describe how you measured one project against that goal, even if the measure was simple. If you can cite a business number that moved, this becomes your best answer of the day.

8. How do you work with subject matter experts?

Interviewers ask because difficult SME relationships sink projects. Good answers include: doing your homework before the first meeting so you ask informed questions, respecting the SME's time with tight agendas, translating their expertise into plain language for learners, and getting sign-off in stages instead of one big review at the end.

9. Which tools and technologies do you use?

Match the stack in the job posting first, then add depth. A typical strong answer covers a rapid authoring tool (Articulate Storyline or Rise), a design tool (Figma or the Adobe suite), an LMS you have published to, and anything technical that sets you apart (xAPI, JavaScript, AI tools you use in your workflow). Be honest about levels. "I build custom interactions in Storyline daily; I can navigate Captivate but have not shipped with it" is a credible sentence.

10. How do you address accessibility in your designs?

Have specifics ready: alt text on meaningful images, captions and transcripts for audio and video, color contrast that meets WCAG, keyboard navigation, and screen-reader testing in your authoring tool. Mention a project where you designed for accessibility from the start rather than patching it at the end.

11. How do you measure whether a course worked?

Reference the Kirkpatrick levels without turning it into a lecture: reaction data is easy but weak, so you also look at assessment performance, behavior change on the job, and where possible a business metric. Describe the evaluation you actually ran on a real project and what you did with the data.

12. Where do learning theories show up in your work?

Do not recite definitions. Pick two or three you genuinely apply and name where they show up: cognitive load theory in how you chunk content and cut decoration, retrieval practice in your knowledge checks, Mayer's multimedia principles in how you pair narration with visuals, adult learning principles in how you frame relevance up front.

13. What questions do you have for us?

Always have questions. Good ones:

- What does the team look like, and where does this role fit in the process?
- How does the team decide what gets built? What does analysis look like here?
- What projects are coming up that I would work on first?
- How is the team's performance measured?
- What is the biggest challenge the person in this role will face in the first six months?

Preparing without over-rehearsing

- Write your thesis statement and six STAR stories that cover: a favorite project, a failure, a difficult SME, competing deadlines, a business result, and an accessibility or inclusion decision. Those six flex to cover nearly everything above.
- Say your answers out loud, ideally to another person, at least twice. Reading notes silently does not build the recall you need under pressure.

- Research the company: their product, their learners, anything public about their L&D team. Work one or two of those details into your answers.
 - Prepare your portfolio walkthrough. Assume you will be asked to share your screen and talk through one piece for five minutes: the problem, your decisions, the result.
 - Send a short, specific thank-you note the same day. Reference something real from the conversation.
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Have any questions? Email me at devlin@devlinpeck.com