

Interviews

Preparing for Interviews

Interviews are a two-way exchange of information. Obviously, the interviewer is trying to find out about you but you are also sizing them up, forming an impression of what it would be like to work for them and deciding whether you would like to join them. Given this two-way exchange, you must be clear about what you want to get out of the interview and how you can influence what the interviewers learns about you.

The interviewer's agenda is to:

- Get a clear picture of your experience and capabilities
- Hear examples of how you have worked in the past
- Get an accurate idea of how you match their needs
- Compare you with other good candidates
- Consider how you will fit into the team

So your agenda should be to:

- Present compelling evidence of your experience, skills, knowledge and your ability to deliver
- Reveal your personality and style and your ability to work well with others
- Assess how the organisation meets your needs on job content, working environment, culture, style and career prospects
- Get the organisation excited about employing you

At interviews, people will be looking at your competence (have you got the knowledge, experience and skills to do the job?) and your attitude (does your work style fit the organisation and the people you would be working with?). At the first interview, evaluating your competence is their main agenda, although they may start to form an opinion on compatibility. In follow-up interviews, your compatibility is more likely to be a more important concern.



Research

You will need to be well prepared and fully briefed on the organisation you are visiting:

- Check the job details
- Check the advertisement
- Check the job description
- Check the person specification
- If a recruitment consultant is involved, get all the background information you can before your interview with the client company or:
 - Internet
 - Literature
 - Newspapers/journals

Confirm your attendance

When you are invited to an interview, confirm your attendance in writing or by phone. A phone call gives you the opportunity to find out more about the interview, which will help with your preparations.

When you ring, you can check:

- The names and job titles of the interviewers
- The length and type of interview (e.g. panel, one-to-one, tests)
- The location (larger organisations often have several premises)
- Transport and parking arrangements

Attending The Interview

The Key To Success Is Plan – Prepare – Perform

Plan

Read about the company before your interview; gain as much knowledge about the organisation, its product, culture and environment as possible. You can almost guarantee that you will be asked the question “What do you know about our organisation?”. The more you can tell them, the more interest you are showing in the role and the company by taking the time to do your research.



Read the job description thoroughly – know as much as you can about the position. If there are things that you are unsure about, write a list of questions to ask during your interview to clarify the grey areas. It is also important to have a few questions to ask at the end of the interview. Some examples are:

- Why has this position become available?
- What would be the career path from this position?
- What are the long-term plans for the company?

Prepare

- Make sure that you know how to get to the company, possibly even do a practice run the night before
- Arrive in plenty of time and this will account for any unforeseen delays
- Plan what you are going to wear. Always dress as smartly as possible, business suits, ensure shirts/blouses are well pressed and that your shoes are polished
- Ensure you are well presented and look professional – make sure your make-up and jewellery is kept to a minimum
- Switch off your mobile phone
- Be polite to the receptionist – they may be asked for their opinion and they can be a useful source of current information; smile and introduce yourself. Use this time to relax and possibly look over any notes you may have made, alternatively read any company literature that maybe presented to you

Attending The Interview

Perform

- Smile during your interview and try to relax, offer a firm handshake maintaining eye contact and introduce yourself
- Wait to be offered a seat once in the interview room
- Maintain eye contact, show interest in what your interviewer is saying and do not fidget
- Speak and listen (70/30%)



Suggestions for good interview practice

- Check the time of the interview and plan to arrive a bit early in case of transport delays
- Dress suitably, first impressions are very important
- Rightly or wrongly, people do hire the people they like, so establish rapport at the start and greet the interviewer with a smile and firm handshake. You want to be seen as friendly and make the interviewer feel they would be comfortable if you were their colleague
- You should come across as quietly confident but do not take total charge of the interview or interrupt. Establish how the interview will proceed and check how much time is available
- Your answers should be relevant, concise and to the point. Avoid jargon and don't get bogged down in detail
- Focus on how you can contribute to the organisation's success. It's not just a question of did you do something well, but also why was that activity important
- If there are periods of silence, don't feel you have to fill them. If you feel you are being provoked, keep cool. Some interviewers may try to upset you to see how to react
- Listen actively and look interested in what the interviewer is saying or asking you. Observe their reactions to what you say
- Be positive and enthusiastic without becoming gushing. Never criticise your past employer or sound embittered. If you are asked about your last organisation, give a balanced picture of both the good and the not so good
- Don't push the interviewer to meet your timetable or needs. Until you have an offer, they are in the driving seat
- Maintain eye contact (it helps to project confidence).
- Don't fidget



Popular Interview Questions

One of the best ways to prepare is to run through a few likely interview questions and practice your answers before the day. Some popular interview questions are:

- Tell us about yourself
- Why are you interested in the job?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Tell me about your current/previous boss
- Has your job performance ever been appraised?
- What part of the job do you do best?
- What are the most satisfying and frustrating parts of your current job?
- Describe yourself
- How would you describe your style of management?
- What have been your major achievements in the last 2 years?
- What has given you the most/least satisfaction over the last 2 years?
- How would your boss describe you as a person?
- What key skills could you offer a prospective employer?
- What would you do on the first day of appointment in this job?
- What would you change about yourself/colleagues/job?
- Give me an example of a work based problem that you have solved – How did you solve it?
- Describe your ideal job
- Give me an example of a method of persuasion you have used successfully.
- What are your goals for the next 5-10 years?
- Why do you think you are suitable for this job/what can you offer us?
- Why are you looking to leave your present company/why did you leave your last company?
- What do you feel are your strengths and weaknesses?
- You seem to have had lots of jobs. What are the reasons?
- What are your career objectives – short and long term?



Planning What You Will Say

Your job attitudes

- What do you look for in a job?
- What research have you done into the company?
- Why do you want to work for this organisation?
- What do you want to avoid in your next job?
- What are your long-term career objectives?

Your last position

- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- Name a couple of problems you resolved that had previously been overlooked
- Tell me about two things you learnt in your last position
- What do you think of your former boss?

About you

- Tell me about yourself
- If you could start your career over again, what would you do differently?
- How would your colleagues describe you? In what ways would you disagree?
- What kind of salary are you expecting?
- What makes you a good candidate for this particular role?

What To Avoid

- Text book answers such as 'I believe in adding value'. Try instead to give examples of how you did it
- Clichés and business jargon, even if they are in current use
- Inconsistency between what you say and the impression you give people. For example, there's no point you saying you value people if you don't mention the impact on people in anything you discuss



What Not To Ask

Remember that this is really just another part of your assessment, so use it as an opportunity to show that you are interested in the job, that you have done your research, that you have a real grasp of what the job entails and that you have thought about your career.

- Don't ask about pay and benefits; you should try to avoid mentioning them until you reach final interview stage. If they bring the subject up, try not to pin yourself down to a definite figure
- Don't ask questions that you could have answered yourself with some simple research
- Don't ask whether you have got the job there and then. The interviewer/s will probably need to discuss you after the interview before making a decision

Sample questions that you could ask

- What would you like the person you appoint to achieve in the first year?
- Have the principal objectives of the role/department changed recently and if so, why?
- What do you see as the obstacles in achieving those objectives?
- How could the successful candidate best contribute to the objectives of this department?
- Is this a new position? If so, why was it created? If not, why was it vacated?
- What was the previous position holder's approach to the job?
- What were their major successes? Shortcomings?
- What changes would you like to see in the way the job is performed?
- How valuable would it be for a candidate to have 'X' skill or experience (something you are good at?). Don't volunteer information about what you can do without first establishing how useful or important the skill would be
- What personal style best fits your culture?
- What can you tell me about the people I would be working with?
- What are the profit and turnover projections over the next few years?
- How would you describe the management style of the organisation?



At the end of the interview

- Usually the interviewer will signal when the interview is at an end
- Establish what will happen next and who should do what
- Be sincere in your thanks, even if you have been given a rough ride
- Reinforce your enthusiasm for the job. Even if you have some reservations, keep them to yourself, you can always turn a job down, but only if it is offered

General Tips

- Do not swear or use slang
- Speak clearly – nerves can make you stumble over your words
- If asked to be shown around the company, say yes; this will show interest on your part but also shows that the interviewers are interested in you
- Be courteous throughout the entire interview
- Remember that interviewers can be as nervous as you!

Post Interview

- Follow up letter
- Ask for feedback if unsuccessful

What to take with you

There are some things that it is useful to have with you but keep them put away unless they are needed. A folder is a neat way of storing any papers you want to take to the interview and is better than rummaging around in a pocket or a briefcase.



These can be useful:

- The job advertisement
- A copy of your application letter (and application form if there is one)
- Names and job titles of interviewers
- Company phone number, address and map
- Any important company or product literature
- Notes of key points you want to make
- Spare copies of your CV
- The job and person specifications
- Your diary
- Pen and paper
- Details of your referees



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