

Interview Tips

Planning

Interviews can be nerve-racking and can take place in a variety of different styles, however the key to success in any interview situation is:

Preparation
Practice
Performance

The more you know about how you will be perceived, the more you can prepare. From a survey of recruiters, the qualities that influenced them were, in priority:

- Your personality, how you present yourself in the interview
- Your experience, how closely it matches the company's requirements
- The qualifications you have for the position
- The enthusiasm you have towards the organisation and position
- Your background and references

An invitation to an interview means that an employer believes you have the potential to do the job. The interview is your chance to convince the recruiter that you are the right person. So how do you prepare and make sure that your performance gets you the job?

PREPARATION:

Research the company, most employers will ask what you know about their company, or why do you want to work here?

Use the companies own website but also check out their social media: Linked in, Facebook Twitter to see what information they are sharing. For financial information go to Companies House to get a copy of their last set of accounts and annual report.

All interviewers expect you to do research about their company, however to really impress them, use the research you've done to describe how you will hit the ground running and contribute right away - the bigger the impact the better.

Research the market they operate in, what challenges are they facing, who are their competitors, what are the latest industry developments.

Interviewers want to see enthusiasm for the job and company, they don't want to get the impression that you only applied because you need a job, any job, and this job was all that was available.

Once you have done your research on the company and the job, this will help you compile questions you would like to ask, this is your opportunity to interview the employer to assess whether this company and the position are a [good fit](#) for you.

Asking questions is a good way to dig into the [company culture](#) and the specific day-to-day responsibilities of the job, so that your first week or so in the position won't be accompanied by any major surprises.

THINGS TO PRACTICE:

Consider what they might ask, and prepare examples to highlight areas of your ability you want to showcase. One way to do this is to review the job description and list the experience, skills and personal qualities that the recruiter is looking for. Then list your skills, values, and interests as well as your strengths and weaknesses, for each item on the list, consider a time when you displayed that quality.

Take the time to match your list to the requirements of the job, and use a past situation to describe how you successfully handled it.

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Body Language

An invitation to an interview means that an employer believes you have the potential to do the job. The interview is your chance to convince the recruiter that you are the right person.

Think about the lasting impression that you will leave the interviewer with, how will they remember you when assessing all candidates at a later time.

Handshake:

Most likely, the handshake will be your only moment of physical contact with the interviewer. Studies say that handshakes play a significant role in first impressions, so make it count. Your shake should be neither bone crushing, nor limp fish. Aim for a firm handshake, and as you shake, make eye contact and smile.

Eye Contact:

Make eye contact. This is the best way to show you're actually paying attention and engaging with the situation. Of course this doesn't mean stare blankly at your interviewer, but strive to hold eye contact for a few seconds at a time. If you're faced with more than one interviewer, be sure to make eye contact with all of them. Address the person who asked the question, then hold eye contact with the other interviewer for a few seconds, before returning your attention to the first interviewer.

Smile:

A genuine smile is often contagious and can immediately create a more positive environment.

Sit up, sit still:

Don't slouch, sit up straight and don't recline back in your chair. Do lean in from time to time as this shows that you are engaged with the conversation. Try to avoid crossing your arms and fidgeting, you want to convey confidence and these mannerisms show the exact opposite.

Gesturing:

Use Your Hands: Do you naturally talk with your hands? Go ahead and let them move during the interview. Stopping the natural gestures may lead to an awkward appearance. Just make sure your motions don't become so enthusiastic that they distract from your words.

Breath:

Try to relax and enjoy the interview. The more relaxed you are, the better you will perform on the day.

Most of all, be yourself. The interviewer is assessing whether you will be the right fit for their team and does want to get to know the real you. The trick is making sure you show them your best self.

Remember:

Think positive, talk positive, feel positive

Be the best version of you!

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Opening Questions

One of the most common reasons for being nervous at interview is not knowing what you are going to be asked and having to think on your feet, to overcome this there are some simple things you can do to prepare.

Common opening questions:

Some interview questions are very common, hiring managers will expect you to be able to answer them smoothly and without hesitation.

Prepare your answers to the following questions ahead of any interview, even if you are not asked these exact questions it is great practise to get used to talking about yourself in a work context.

Practice your answers with a friend or family member.

Make sure to keep your answers concise and relevant to the job role.

1: Tell me about yourself:

You are an expert on yourself, so this should be easy to answer, but where do you start?

Prepare an elevator pitch - a summary of where you are in your career, why you are looking and what you want next. The underlying message you want to convey is why you are attending this interview. A good elevator pitch should last no longer than a short elevator ride of 30 to 60 seconds, hence the name.

Many interviewers use this as a first question to get the interview started. Some interviewers don't have set questions but will use your response to structure the rest of the interview.

2: Tell me about your current / most recent position:

As well as assessing how well your previous experience compares to the role on offer, the interviewer will be assessing how well you present the information.

Start by setting the scene: what does your organisation do, or, if you work for a very large organisation, what does your division do, how many people are in your immediate department and what is your role within that structure.

Then offer a brief description of your responsibilities, focusing on the areas of your work which are most relevant to the post that you are applying for. Avoid jargon or internal acronyms, practise explaining your job to someone who has no idea about what you do. As Einstein said "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

3: Why are you looking for this change?

Always be positive, reasons could include career progression, change in circumstances, seeking a new challenge. Where possible, link these to the job you are being interviewed for, reinforcing why this would be a great job for you. The interviewer will expect you to be looking at other opportunities but they want to see evidence that you are enthusiastic about their role and that it meets your requirements to reassure them that you will commit to the post.

Always be upbeat, it will make you appear more confident.

Never discuss problems at a previous company, all employers want to know that a candidate is discreet and professional.

Never criticise.

4: What functions and tasks do you enjoy the most in your current role?

The interviewer wants to know that you understand what is involved in the role that they are offering, by asking about your current role they can see if there are synergies with the tasks and responsibilities in the job role. Align your answers to the research you had done on the job description, and as much as possible explain why you enjoy those aspects.

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Awkward Questions

There are often very good reasons for, what many candidates feel are, awkward interview questions. Think about it from the interviewer's point of view, what are they trying to uncover?

1: What are your weaknesses?

No-one is perfect! It does not have to be a huge character flaw, but we all have to try a little harder than others in some aspects of our work. Be honest, the employer is looking to see (a) if you are self-aware (b) how you overcome difficulties (c) if there are training or personal development opportunities. This is not an attempt to catch you out, they are looking for a solution-based answer.

Have you thought about any weaknesses you may have? If not, do so now before you have to assess these in an interview situation. If you are finding it difficult, think about previous colleagues, what were they particularly good at and poor at, make a list and then consider which of those traits you identify with. Once you've done this, how do you minimise the impact at work, you possibly do this subconsciously. By doing this you can answer the question and portray yourself in a positive light.

3: What are your strengths?

A similar question would be "What do you think you can offer this company?" or "Why should we employ you, rather than one of the other candidates?". This is your time to shine.

If the job description comes with a person specification, detailing what they are looking for from a candidate, then half of your preparation work is done, identify which aspects you are best at and provide examples. If you don't have a person specification then research the company, what do they say about their employees, what values does the organisation have, use this as a guide to choose which of your talents you focus on.

You got the interview because your CV showed that you have the practical experience to meet the employer's needs, now is the time to go into more detail about the personality traits and the skills you have developed which make you the best person for this role.

4: Where do you hope to be in five years' time?

Someone thought up this question years ago and it has since become established as a 'standard' interview question. What the employer is hoping to establish is your degree of ambition for career progression. Always answer in general terms, who knows what the future will bring, and definitely avoid staking a claim for the interviewer's job.

This question is important for both parties, not every role can offer progression and development, and therefore not every employer is looking for this, so be honest about what you want from a job. It is better for both parties to establish if the role, and the employer's expectations, will change or stay the same over the next few years, and if there is anticipated change, will you be comfortable with that?

Above all, ensure that during your interview preparation you have established what your own expectations are, as well as those of the employer.

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Competency Based Questions

Increasingly, companies choose to employ "competency based" questions as a means to standardise the interview process.

This allows all candidates an equal opportunity to answer the same questions and present their abilities and skills in line with the specific requirements of the position being sought.

Because all candidates will be asked the same questions, the questions will be generic giving the interview a more formal feel.

Questions focus on specific skills or behaviours that are deemed to be essential to fulfilling the role, rather than an individual's experience of completing tasks, for example:

- Organisation
- Teamwork
- Staff management
- Problem solving
- Flexibility

It is usual practice for a score to be allocated for each competency examined during the interview. The interviewer is looking for specific, strong evidence, that the candidate demonstrates the particular competency being assessed.

Preparation:

The secret to success is having prepared detailed examples to showcase your abilities. If the job description includes a person specification then this may list some of the competencies required. Either way, research the company and the job role, make a list of competencies that you identified as being important to the company and the role, then consider at least one example for each competency. It is acceptable to use examples from your personal life, as well as from your professional activities, although the latter is preferred.

When preparing examples, make sure you give a good level of detail:

- Set the scene: give the background to the example including where, when, and who else was involved.
- Identify the problem to overcome, or the challenge to achieve, that required you to draw on that competency.
- Explain what you actually did, focus on your contribution
- Conclude with the positive result from your action

Interviewers may spend several minutes probing further into your example to get additional details.