



Interview Guidelines

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PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Your CV has been successful in gaining an interview. Therefore, you have demonstrated that your skills, knowledge and experience are of value to the organisation.

The interview provides you and the interviewer with an opportunity to determine how well you will fit in with the culture, direction, and requirements of the organisation.

For you it is:

- an opportunity to convince the interviewer(s) of your potential
- an opportunity to find out more about the job and the company; "Is it right for me?", "Do I want to work with these people?", "Do the conditions/prospects fit in with my career goals?"
- an opportunity to expand on the information in your application form or CV

For the interviewer(s) it is:

- a means to assess your abilities in relation to the requirements of the position, "Have you got what they want?"
- an opportunity to discuss your training, experience, knowledge and abilities in more detail
- an opportunity to see what drives and motivates you and to determine whether you will be able to fit in with both the team and the organisation as a whole.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW FORMATS

Employment interviews generally take one of two forms – traditional or behaviourally based.

Features of Traditional Interviews

- Interview questions tend to focus on education, qualifications and credentials and the interview merely elicits responses that address credentials, opinions and feelings. Rarely will a traditional interview question prompt the candidate to tell the interviewer about actual performance on the job, or about job experiences and accomplishments in specific situations.
- The format is generally unstructured.
- Questions are frequently drawn from the CV or are 'vogue' questions.
- Initial impressions play a big part in this type of interview.
- Examples of traditional interview questions:

Tell me about yourself.

What do you know about the company?

What do you feel you have to offer this company?

What do you look for in a job?

Features of Competency or Behaviourally Based Interviews

- Based on the principle that "an individual's past behaviour is the best predictor of their future behaviour".
- Interview questions are designed to elicit specific information from each candidate about their past experience and relevant job behaviours, i.e. what the person did and said in past situations in circumstances similar to those they will encounter in the position for which they have applied.
- The format is standardised and a structured evaluative approach is used.
- All candidates are asked the same questions and the information gathered is directly relevant to the key requirements of the position.
- Example of a Behaviourally Based Question:

"Give me an example of a time when you had to do a difficult negotiation. What did you do, and how did it turn out?"

- A good approach is to structure your answer according to the STAR acronym:

Situation or **T**ask

Action

Result

What was the situation or task that you were presented with? What did you actually do? And why did you choose this course of action? What was the result? And most importantly what did you learn from the experience?

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Popular belief is that you cannot prepare for interviews. However, preparation is essential to maximise your chance of success. It is worth noting at this point that you are going to be nervous when you go for the interview, this is natural. However, the more prepared you are, the easier it will be to cope with your nerves, the less you will actually have to think during the interview, and the easier it will be for you to be able to fully answer the interview questions.

Research the organisation and job

- Find out as much as you can about the organisation, including its structure, what products and services it offers, who the customers and competitors are, and where the main offices are located.
- Thoroughly review the advertisement and position description.
- Try and determine the main focus, challenges, barriers, opportunities, tasks and responsibilities involved. Knowing this will help you predict questions for the interview and will help show that you have the right competencies to succeed in the role.

Ask questions prior to your interview

To assist in your preparation for the interview, talk to your point of contact in the organisation or, if you are going through a recruitment firm, speak directly with the recruitment consultant handling the position. Some helpful questions include:

- What are the names and job titles of the selection panel members?
- What format will the interview take?
- How long is the interview likely to be?
- Will I be required to perform any tasks during the interview (e.g. presentation, case study)?
- Am I required to bring anything to the interview?
- What skills, knowledge, education would the ideal candidate possess?
- Is there any other information that you feel it is important to know about this position?
- Why has the position become vacant?
- Is there other written information available about the department?
- Is there an organisation chart for the department or the team?

However, not all companies are willing, or able to provide this information in advance. Sometimes the interviewer or interview panel may not be selected until the day, other times the organisation prefers to keep this information from interviewees. There is no harm in politely and professionally asking for this information.

Predict and prepare responses for interview questions

Candidates often worry that their mind may go completely blank during an interview. Preparing, with a bit of method and structure, will help allay your fears and concerns in this area.

1. Revisit the key selection criteria for the organisation (and position) you are being interviewed for.
2. Review typical interview questions (refer to examples of both competency based and traditional interview questions).
3. Write out likely questions, based on the selection criteria and position description. For example, if you know that leadership is an important competency for the role, you can put yourself into the shoes of the selection panel and think of questions that would help assess the leadership skills of potential candidates.
4. Think through your ideal response for each of the above, note down outline answers using brief notes or bullet points. Think of key words and phrases that will trigger more detail in your mind, so you can provide the interviewer with full, relevant and impressive answers.
5. For a competency or behaviourally based interview, think about your previous roles and how these could be used to display to an interviewer that you have the skills / competencies that they are looking for.
6. Even if you are not asked competency or behaviourally based questions, include actual, specific examples as part of your answer as this will provide tangible evidence and clearly demonstrate your skills, abilities, experience, knowledge and/or achievements.

Prepare questions to ask interviewer

Ask questions to show your interest in the direction and the success of the organisation and how your contribution can add value. Your questions should demonstrate a clear and up-to-date understanding of the role and of the organisation's strategic goals and directions. Avoid direct questions on salary, hours of work, leave, other candidates for the position, bonuses.

THE INTERVIEW

Presentation & Grooming

- Clothes should fit well, be in good repair, and be neatly pressed. A suit is preferable. Shoes, belts and bags should be clean and in good repair. Less is best for jewellery, bags, scarves and hair accessories. Ties, generally, should be professional and conservative. Avoid garish, humorous and stained ties.
- Keep all electrical accessories (mobile, pager etc) out of sight and turned off. Turn off watch alarms.
- Keep your grooming clean, neat and simple. Pay attention to possible details such as loose hair, chipped nail polish and dirty fingernails. Make sure that any aftershave/perfume you wear is not overpowering as some people are quite sensitive to these products.

Starting the Interview Confidently

- Interviews can be won or lost in the first five minutes. If you appear to be confident and enthusiastic from the outset, your answers are more likely to be reviewed positively, as people's perception of information is coloured by the feelings they have towards you.
- Your body language provides a number of messages to interviewers. When you greet the interviewer smile and give a confident and welcoming handshake. A weak or limp handshake may give an impression of uncertainty or a lack of confidence.
- Remember that the interviewer is a person, so talk to them. Take in their responses, monitor their body language, think about their perspective. Try to enjoy the experience! Genuine eye contact and a smile will assist in this process.
- Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting.
- Maintain appropriate eye contact throughout the interview. (Do not stare or look away too much. Look at them).
- Listen to what the interviewer is telling you about the organisation and your likely role within it. Try to look interested at all times.

Answering Questions

- Listen to the interviewer(s) and clarify the question if you do not understand it. You can't answer a question adequately if you don't understand what is being asked. The bucket approach (i.e. throwing everything that you know about the question) seldom answers the questions adequately.
- Try to relate your answers to the requirements of the position and the organisation (i.e. in answering a question about your teamwork skills, you will provide examples that demonstrate your skills and then link these to what you know about the teamwork involved for this position).

Ending the Interview Confidently

- Have your own intelligent questions prepared before the interview, as in many cases, interviewers will give you time to ask questions or make further comments at the end of the interview. If you have any important things to add about your suitability, do it here.
- If there are particular things that you are looking for in a job and they haven't been mentioned in the interview, ask about them. For example:

Are there any areas you would like me to expand upon?

How is performance measured?

How tough is your organisation's opposition? (You should know from your research who the major competitors are.)

Are there opportunities that are unique to this job within the organisation?

What are the company's plans for the future?

What sort of induction and training do you normally provide?

INTERVIEW DOS AND DON'TS

Interview Dos

- Dress appropriately. Extremes in fashion or very casual clothes should generally be avoided. Look neat and clean.
- Be on time. Make sure that you are 10 minutes early and if you are going to be unavoidably delayed ring and let them know.
- Express yourself and your views clearly.
- Make eye-contact. Remember to talk to the interviewer(s) and not the top right hand corner of the room or at their shoes.
- Listen carefully to the questions and answer clearly and thoughtfully.
- Make sure you fully understand the question. Query any points that you are not sure about.
- Ask questions. Selection is a two way process. They select you, but you also select them.
- Be confident and show enthusiasm for the organisation and the position.
- Make sure that you always present your skills in a positive light. Even when describing your weaknesses you should always show them what you are doing to improve or overcome them.

Interview Don'ts

- Don't be late.
- Don't dress too casually or look untidy.
- Don't make derogatory remarks about past or present employers.
- Don't fidget or twitch.
- Don't sit there like a statue. However, if you like to use your hands for emphasis when you are talking, try not to be too excessive with your gestures.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer before they have finished asking you a question and never finish their sentences for them.
- Don't lie. If you have to lie about what you are like or your abilities in order to obtain the job, you are likely to find yourself in a position that you don't really like and may find it difficult to succeed in.
- Don't worry if you answer one question badly. Treat each question individually.
- Don't waffle or get distracted. Keep to the point when answering questions.
- Don't talk about salary, holidays or bonuses unless the interviewer(s) bring them up.
- Don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no". Make sure that you explain your reasoning fully.
- Don't wear too much perfume or aftershave.
- Don't smoke.