



Get the job:
Successful interviewing

Introduction

So you've invested the time creating the perfect CV and now you've secured an interview for that all-important new role that will take you to the next stage of your career. Now comes the daunting part – the interview. The interviewing process is the employer's opportunity to delve deeper into your employment history, including your skills and experience whilst getting a feel for how you will fit into the team and wider organisation. Don't forget though that it is your chance to find out more about the role and the company and ensure it is an opportunity that fits your long-term career goals.

Whilst it can be a nerve-wracking process remember the interviewer already thinks you could be a good match for the role – that's why they selected you for an interview – now they just want to find out more about you and confirm you are the best fit for the job.

Follow our simple guide to interviews to ensure you are fully prepared and know how to perform to your best to secure that job offer.

When it comes to interviews, preparation is everything.

On the very basic level, interview preparation can involve merely knowing what's included in your CV, having a good story to tell about the highlights of your work experience and understanding the basis on which to promote your key skills and experience. However, the key to preparing for a winning interview is based on much more.

Good preparation should also mean having a structure for your conversation; it's about ensuring you come across as professional and expert; making sure that what you want to talk about is talked about, and can even make the process more enjoyable and your performance much more memorable.

Self-assessment

Before even thinking about the role you are interviewing for, it's crucial you look at yourself, understand what makes you a desirable option and what will make you stand out from the crowd.

Self-assessment is a good way to critically look at your skills, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, interests and work ethic. It enables you to think about what is important to you, the kind of role that will make you happy and also be the basis on which to develop your career plan.

By undergoing a period of self-reflection before the interview you'll be able to examine your accomplishments, achievements and successes, and understand those areas that are particularly relevant to a prospective job.

Make notes about what motivates you, what you want from your career and how work fits into your life. This will be the basis for your conversation and dictate your agenda prior to the meeting.

CV/resume

You'll have no doubt updated your CV/resume before securing your interview, but it will help significantly if you use the lessons learned from your period of self-assessment to revisit it, making sure it's on message, reflects your immediate and future needs and is focused on the job you are applying for.

This could just mean looking at your CV/resume to make sure it is accurate and that you are able to talk around any part of it, but it could also mean revisiting the content to make sure it is aligned with your career goals and makes the most of the stories that matter to the role you are applying for.

In preparation for the interview, it's wise to look at your CV/resume and link your key achievements to the role you are applying for and the responsibilities associated with it. If you don't have a story to tell about each achievement, you might want to consider whether it's worthwhile including the achievement in the first place.

Research

It's impossible to over-estimate the value of researching the company you are interviewing with. Understanding their challenges, aims and objectives not only shows your commitment to understanding the company you want to work for, but it also allows you to tailor your performance, your key skills and expertise to the unique requirements of the company.

A well-informed applicant will always stand out from the crowd and separate good interviewees from average ones. So make use of the multitude of research tools available in the public domain; use websites, news channels, annual reports and social media groups to learn about the culture of the organisation, what motivates them, the kind of projects they work on, their plans for expansion, and the types of people that thrive in the company.

If your research shows the company you are being interviewed for prides itself on being a thought leader, then show them you value thought leadership too. Your preparation could include examples of where you have been a thought leader.

You can always go that extra mile by researching competitors too.

Practice, practice, practice

So you know what your personal and career goals are, understand how these are aligned to the needs of the company you are interviewing with and how the company's needs fit your own. Now is the time to get to grips with your interview technique.

Set up mock interviews with a friend or family member; use the job description and the results of your self-assessment as the basis for the interview, making sure to address typical interview questions confidently and expertly. Throughout this process make sure to consider your career goals and the results of your self assessment, and focus on promoting your key skills and communicating the value you can bring to the organisation.

Although it may be difficult, it's crucial you encourage your interviewer to be critical. The point of this exercise is to help you improve and be the best you can be, so it's better to get criticism now than during the interview.

What to wear

Dress for the job you aspire to and people will picture you in the role. It makes sense to dress your best for an interview regardless of the dress code at the organisation.

While no one ever got a job because of the way they dressed, many people did not get it because of something they were wearing. If you do not dress appropriately, you will be on the back foot before you even open your mouth.

Prepare beforehand and select your interview clothes carefully. Pay attention to detail. All job interview clothes should be clean, tidy and ironed. If you have to travel any distance to your job interview consider how wrinkled your clothes may look after a couple of hours travelling. Select job interview clothes that do not crease easily.

Top tips for women

- Solid colour, conservative suit
- Co-ordinated blouse
- Moderate shoes
- Limited jewellery
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Tan or light hosiery
- Sparse make-up & perfume
- Manicured nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

Top tips for men

- Solid colour, conservative suit
- White long sleeve shirt
- Conservative tie
- Dark socks, professional shoes
- Very limited jewellery
- Neat, professional hairstyle
- Go easy on the aftershave
- Neatly trimmed nails
- Portfolio or briefcase

Interview preparation checklist

Preparing a simple preparation checklist can provide structure for your pitch and ensure that you are on message with your responses and meeting the needs of the company. Below is a simple example, which you can tailor for your own requirements.

Interview preparation checklist	
Company name:	Role applied for:
Date/time of interview:	Interviewers:
Location:	
Why should they employ me?	
Why do I want to work there?	
Which of my key skills do I want to focus on? - -	How will I get these across? - -
How does my experience reflect the needs of the company? - -	How will I get this across? - -
What challenges does the company face? - -	How can I be of value? - -
What questions will I ask at the end of the interview?	

Types of interviews

Telephone

Telephone interviews are typically used for initial screening purposes. They allow consultants or employers to make an initial assessment of each shortlisted candidate without too much investment in time or money.

If you are working with a recruitment consultant you should expect a telephone interview to take place before your CV/resume is submitted to an employer. It's therefore crucial you treat each telephone interview seriously and professionally.

- Make sure you have a quiet place where you can interview without interruptions.
- Always keep your CV and other kind of information to hand; if you have to look for it, the interview is over.

- Have a pen and paper ready, you may be required to write down important information.
- Have a glass of water nearby to avoid a dry mouth.

One-to-one

This is the most common type of interview. In the one-to-one interview the candidate meets directly with the interviewer. One-to-one can happen at any stage in the interview process; some companies may use one-to-ones with an HR representative at the outset of the interview process, others may wait until the final stage before setting up a one-to-one with your prospective line manager.

Either way, this is probably the most common type of interview.

Panel interview

A panel interview typically involves three or more members of the company you are applying to work with interviewing you in one meeting. Each member of the panel will typically come with their own agenda, will want to ask their own set of questions and will evaluate your performance based on their own unique set of criteria. Each member of the panel is there for a reason, so it's important you treat each of them equally; don't be tempted to focus just on your potential boss.

When engaging with an interview panel, it's important you make eye contact with each person and if possible, cross reference a question with one that has already been asked by a different member. This brings the interview together and shows your understanding of why they are there and how the teams interact.

Before arriving at the interview it's wise to understand the roles and actions of each member of the panel. For example, if you are going to be interviewed by an organisation's Customer Service Manager, Finance Manager, and Human Resources Manager; you should familiarise yourself with current information about the organisation's customer service policies, finance policies, and HR policies. Be ready to ask specific questions of each member of the panel, relevant to their different organisational roles, which will also show how well you engage with different parts of an organisation.

Group interviews

Group interviews usually mean you will be interviewed simultaneously with other candidates all applying for the same position. The purpose of this type of interview is to observe how applicants interact with each other.

Some group interviews are used as part of real life scenario exercise where an activity linked to the role you are applying for is designed to show how you would go about your job. Each applicant is compared in a real life setting so that employers can more easily evaluate one candidate against another.

When taking part in group interviews it's crucial you are seen as an active participant rather than merely an observer. Contribute your views and ideas while also listening to the other candidates, making sure to avoid dominating the conversation and interrupting the other applicants, no matter how tempting.

Competency-based interviews

Competency-based interviews (also called structured interviews) are designed to test one or more specific skills against a particular job type. The key competencies for each role will usually be informed by the job specification or advert, and your responses will be matched against those criteria and marked accordingly.

In a competency-based interview every applicant for the position is asked the same questions as every other applicant applying for the position.

How to prepare

- Make sure you understand the skills and competencies being tested.
- Use examples from your past experience to demonstrate you possess the skills and competencies you are being asked to demonstrate.
- Learn to narrate the story using the STAR method. This means setting the scene, explaining how you handled the situation by placing the emphasis on your role and detailing the outcome/result.
- Practice responding to competency-based interview questions, examples of which can include:
 - How do you manage upwards?
 - Give us an example of a situation where you had a fundamental disagreement with one of your superiors and how you managed it.
 - How do you influence people in situations where there are conflicting agendas?

Technical interviews

A technical interview typically features questions that are specific to the role you have applied for, and are focused on proving you can do the technical aspects of the job. Although technical knowledge is very important in this setting, it's important to note that interviewers are not just interested in technical knowledge but also how you approach problems, construct your thought process, and demonstrate your personal skills.

Technical interviews are designed to show recruiters what you know and how you solve problems associated with the job you are applying for. Some will therefore involve evaluating your understanding of the technical aspects of a job, for example software processing, while others will focus on looking at how you approach problems associated with the technical aspects of the job.

Body language

It's no secret that your body language speaks volumes, and never more so than in a job interview. Using effective non-verbal communication techniques, which include tone of voice as well as physical movement, are just as important as the actual words you use.

All body language should point to you being confident about yourself and your qualification for this role, as well as showing the interviewer that you are an open and friendly person who is perfect for the job.

Good body language: It's all about the confidence

- Bookend your interview with a firm handshake.
- Maintain a good posture and friendly expression – this indicates that you have a positive approach.
- Relax into your chair, but without slouching.
- Keep good eye contact - if you have more than one person interviewing you, look at the person asking the question when you reply but glance at the other interviewers from time to time.
- Rest your hands, loosely clasped, in your lap or on the table and keep them away from your face.
- Cross your legs at the ankles or place both feet flat on the floor.
- Smile and nod where appropriate.
- Speak in a clear and controlled voice.

- Vary your tone and pitch to reflect what you are saying - this helps shape the message that you are trying to convey.
- Breathe and pause before answering a question, this gives you time to react in a considered way and it ensures the interviewer has finished the question.
- Interact with the interviewer as an equal, not a subordinate.
- Be poised – try not to show too much or too little emotion, but be happily confident in yourself.

Bad body language: What not to do

- Don't wave your hands and arms around – this can be perceived as nervousness and shows a lack of professionalism.
- Don't fold your arms – it suggests a defensive attitude.
- Don't move your legs too much – this is distracting and indicates nervousness.
- Don't rest one leg or ankle on top of your other knee – it looks too casual.
- Don't cross your legs high up – this conveys a defensive attitude in the one-on-one context of a job interview.
- Don't speak in monotone.
- Don't vary tone and pitch too much - you could come across as overly excited or emotional.
- Don't sound too apologetic or defensive.
- Don't erupt into laughter on your own - you'll look deranged.

“The content of what you say accounts for only 7% of your credibility. Non-verbal cues account for 38% but 58% of your credibility rating is based on visual cues such as facial expressions and gestures.”

**Based on research by Mehrabian,
American psychologist**

R is for “Rapport”

Find the right tone for the interview by paying attention to and adopting the posture of your interviewer. This is called mirroring. If they have adopted a more formal posture do the same until you see that the interviewer has relaxed and become less formal.

Mirroring the communication and behavioural styles of interviewers is an interesting concept as it creates a sense of bonding but is almost, if not entirely, indiscernible to the interviewer himself. It works because the closer another person's communication and interpersonal style is to our own, the better the chance that we will 'click', and of course where interviews are concerned, it is not just what you know that counts, but also those other factors which make the interviewer feel comfortable with you.

Subtly mirror the body language - if he or she leans back, lean back yourself, if expressive hand movements are used do so yourself, try and talk at the same pace in the same range of tones. If you breathe at the same pace as the interviewer you will find yourself communicating at a similar pace. BUT be natural, don't try to be someone you are not and use natural body language.

Body language on the telephone

Although the interviewer will not physically see you, body language still has a major part to play in telephone interviews. The way you carry yourself, sit/stand, look and feel will all impact on how you come across and how well you respond, so before your interview, take a few moments and:

- sit up straight or stand so you sound alert
- get dressed - studies have shown that people who dress professionally for a phone interview will perform better than those dressed casually
- smile so your voice and tone are friendly rather than negative or confrontational
- speak slowly and clearly

Interview questions

One thing you can be sure of in an interview is you're going to be asked a question or two. But trying to second guess what those questions might be is enough to give even the most hardened of interviewees a sleepless night.

Instead of weighing yourself down with a very long list of potential Q&As, the secret to success is to prepare for the areas the interviewer will want to cover.

Tell me about yourself...

Your current role

You do it every day, but make sure you know it inside out, remembering all the skills and responsibilities you have, even if you only carry them out once a fortnight/month/quarter/year.

Your previous roles

Make sure you know your CV/resume back to front - you may be asked about skills and experience from previous jobs which may be more relevant for the role you are interviewing for.

Your strengths

Leadership, organisation, empathy – if you've got it, flaunt it. This is your moment to shine, so ensure you tell the interviewer all the great things about you, citing examples to give your strengths context and relevance.

Areas for development

Recognising the areas in your character and working life that need to be improved is a sign to the interviewer that you are self-aware and strive to progress. But be careful which area you choose – wanting to be more organised could lead to awkward questions from the interviewer as to why you're lacking this basic skill. However, wanting to have more experience in advanced areas - such as leadership and public speaking - shows the interviewer that you want to develop and succeed.

Aspirations

Keep them achievable and relevant to the role and organisation. If you're looking at this role as a stepping stone in your career for bigger and better things with another company, then keep this strictly to yourself.

Achievements

Always mention a work-related achievement (heading up a successful project or saving the company money is always a good choice), and if you've run a marathon or scaled a mountain, well, that's an achievement that could be shoe-horned into the conversation too.

Reason for wanting to leave your current role

Whilst it's important to be honest, it's even more important not to be dismissive or derogatory about your current employer. This could make you look bitter and leave the interviewer wondering if you'll end up thinking the same way about their company should they give you the role. Career development and the opportunity to take on a more challenging role are always good starting points.

What can you tell me about our organisation?

What do you know about the organisation?

What does it do/sell/make? How many employees work there? Where does it operate? Is it listed on the stock exchange? These are the key things you should know about a company before going to the interview.

Reason(s) for wanting to join the organisation

Salary and more holidays aren't going to cut the mustard – you need to find out what's great about the organisation and the department you are being interviewed for, and need to link it to your career goals.

Who are the organisation's competitors?

If you're successful in securing the role, these are the companies you'll be up against, so get to know who they are and how they relate to the organisation.

What differentiates the organisation from the competition?

If you know what the company does and who its competitors are, then a little bit of research should help you differentiate the two. But remember, flattery will get you everywhere, so be positive towards your potential employer.

Major challenges for the organisation over the next 5 years

This is an opportunity to not only show the interviewer that you know the organisation, but also that you know the industry and you have a grip on challenges it faces.

How do you fair in a team environment?

Competency questions generally cover topics that you will have already addressed when preparing to talk about yourself – namely:

- strengths
- weaknesses/areas for development
- leadership skills
- risk-taking activities
- problem-solving skills

Be a STAR

For maximum impact, use the STAR technique to answer competency-based questions:

Situation - briefly describe the where/when/who.

Task - outline the task or objective (what you hoped to achieve).

Action - describe what you did, focusing on your role and your input.

Result - tell the interviewer what the outcome was, and what skills you developed as a result.

“Engage with the interviewer and show that you are a confident individual who listens and interacts.”

Challenging questions

If you're prepared, then the more awkward questions shouldn't be a problem, but panic can kick in, so take a little more time to consider the question and your answer before replying.

Gaps in CV/resume

If your CV/resume has gaps explain why honestly and try to make those experiences not listed on your CV, e.g. travelling or working on a project for charity, relevant to the role you are going for. If you can make them relevant then stick to honesty; if you wanted to travel for a year, tell them.

Changes in your career

This is your chance to give a positive spin on an area that could be misinterpreted by someone reading your CV/resume. Again, honesty is the best policy, but try to show your progression.

How would your friends/colleagues describe you?

This is another opportunity to be positive about yourself, so remember to reiterate all your good points.

Working with people you didn't/don't like or individuals who do not do their fair share

Don't be negative, describe the challenges you face with these colleagues, show empathy towards them and finish on a good note by describing how you approach difficult individuals and how you would use your manager to support you in these scenarios.

Personal questions

Recruiters must not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability. If you feel uncomfortable about a particular question or line of questioning, you could say, 'I'm sorry but I don't feel comfortable answering that question.'

Any questions for us?

An interview is a two-way conversation, so be prepared to ask relevant questions. There's no need to wait until the end, feel free to interject with queries and comments as the conversation flows. This will not only give you relevant insight into the organisation, it will also help you engage with the interviewer and show that you are confident individual who listens and interacts.

As the interview draws to a close, don't feel the need to ask a question for the sake of it. You can show your enthusiasm and interest by discussing aspects of the training programme or talking about the working culture or opportunities for gaining further qualifications. Alternatively, if the interview does not give an opportunity to discuss an aspect of your course, work or extracurricular activities that you feel strongly supports your application, this is an appropriate time to mention it (briefly!).

Important things to remember

Be bold

Avoid answering simply 'yes' or 'no' to questions, and if you don't understand a question or it's not clear what they are asking you, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Speak clearly and loudly enough for the interviewer(s) to hear, and try not to speak too fast. This can be difficult when you are nervous, but take a deep breath before you start to answer a question and work on keeping your answers concise.

There are no trick questions

And though it sometimes may seem like it, interviewers are not trying to trip you up. It costs organisations a lot of time and money to set up interviews, and they want to get the best out of you so that they make a good decision.

Be positive about yourself and your achievements

Being overly modest or playing down your achievements will not win you a job, neither will arrogance. Being confident as you highlight your achievements, successes and strengths will show you in the best possible light.

Difficult question to answer? Be honest

Answer as honestly as you can, without being defensive or apportioning blame to anyone. Try to turn your answer into a positive statement with a successful outcome and place weaknesses and other problems in the past, clearly stating what you learned from overcoming any difficulties.

Stay positive

Even if you feel you answered a question badly, don't dwell on it - move on, and do your best in the other questions; employers will be looking at the interview as a whole, and will not focus on the odd slip. A positive attitude and a clearly demonstrated enthusiasm for the job will keep you in good stead.

Do's and Don'ts

Do...

- Make sure you know exactly where the interview is and how long it takes to get there
- Dress smartly and appropriately
- Arrive on time – turning up late is never excusable
- Turn off your mobile phone
- Greet everyone you meet with courtesy and respect – you only get one chance to make a good first impression
- Bring extra copies of your CV/resume to the interview
- Shake hands firmly but not aggressively
- Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting
- Sit upright and show interest at all times
- Make eye contact with your interviewer(s)
- Show enthusiasm throughout the interview – even if the role is not what you thought it was
- Be truthful
- Be confident
- Focus on your good points
- Make the most of your research into the company
- Use the interview to evaluate the interviewer and the company – an interview is a two-way process
- If needed, ask for a question to be repeated – it will give you more time to think
- Be prepared for a question about your salary requirements, but avoid leading a discussion about salaries, holidays, bonuses or other benefits until you have received an offer
- Put together a number of questions to ask the interviewer(s) about the position, company, or industry
- Be professional at all times

Don't...

- Chew gum during the interview
- Contradict yourself
- Use swear words, poor language, slang, colloquialisms
- Rely on your application or CV/resume to do the selling for you – it is the basis for a conversation
- Fidget or slouch
- Walk into the interview smelling of smoke
- Act as if you are desperate for employment
- Criticise your past employers
- Interrupt
- Answer questions with just a “yes” or “no” - use the opportunity to go into details wherever possible
- Discuss personal issues or family problems
- Answer calls during the interview
- Be tempted to ask about salaries, holidays, bonuses or other benefits until after you've received an offer

After the interview

Follow up

At the end of the interview you might want to ask what the next steps in the interview process are and when you would be likely to hear from the interviewer. This gives you a good idea of the timescales involved and how soon you should follow up if you don't hear back.

If your interview has been arranged via a recruitment consultant make sure they are your first port of call upon leaving the interview. They will want to know how well you thought the interview went before contacting their client. Always be open and honest at this stage; if you feel the job is not for you, tell them.

If you have been dealing directly with the employer you might want to wait until after the closing date for

feedback before contacting them again. If you have not heard back after the closing date, then it is acceptable to call the company and politely enquire about the status of your application, whilst reiterating you are still interested in the role. If a decision still hasn't been made ask for a clear date of when you can expect to hear and don't chase again before this date!

Thank you letters

After a good interview it's crucial you remain in the interviewer's mind and reinforce why you would be the best person for the job. One of the best ways to do this is with a well written and structured thank you letter or email.

The key purpose of your thank you letter is to thank the interviewer for their time, while being a good opportunity to reiterate your key skills and confirm you are still interested in the role. Don't lose sight of the fact it is,

essentially, a thank you letter. By overselling yourself you run the risk of looking desperate.

A suggested format would be to thank the interviewer for their time in the first paragraph, and then follow-on by providing a succinct summary of what you particularly enjoyed about the interview, why you are still interested and highlight any key skills you feel may have been overlooked in the interview. Be careful though not to just repeat everything that was discussed previously.

If you're prepared, then the more awkward questions and job will keep you in good stead.

Sign off your letter by once again thanking the interviewer and reiterating your interest in the role. Remember to state that you are looking forward to hearing from the company with regards to taking the process forward.

Top tips for thank you letters

- Keep it short and to the point
- Show enthusiasm
- Be professional
- Make sure you proof read the letter thoroughly

Social networking

Connecting to your interviewer

Connecting with interviewers following an interview through networks such as LinkedIn, Xing or Viadeo is becoming increasingly popular. Much in the same way you would exchange business cards it is now commonplace to exchange social network connection requests. These requests are seen as a good way of increasing contact with your interviewer while giving them the opportunity to refresh their memory by viewing your profile. Any updates you post will also help keep you top of mind following the interview. Remember though if you have been put forward for the role by a recruitment agency you should not discuss any elements of the role with the interviewer directly but should channel all communications through your consultant who will be better placed to discuss any queries you, or the employer, may have.

Please be aware that whilst some interviewers will be happy to connect with you after one interview, others may choose not to accept until they have a clearer idea of

your professional skills and understand you better. In fact it might be seen to be a little too premature if you do ask to connect after the first interview.

If you plan to send a link request you should do it within 48 hours of your interview. Use your judgement to decide whether you had rapport with the interviewer before sending out the invitation – you don't want to cause offence! If you do decide to link up then write a personalised message rather than a generic one. In contrast it is not recommended that you send your interviewer a Facebook or Orkut request following an interview. Facebook and Orkut are seen far more as social platforms and sending a 'friend' request can be seen as presumptuous and overly familiar by many employers.

Connecting to your recruiter

Connecting to your recruitment consultant is a great way to ensure you remain top of mind for any new roles that arrive, should you not get the first role you are interviewed for. It will also help you create a wider network with other potential employers who will be connected to your consultant.

Accepting a job offer

If your interview has been successful and you are offered the job, don't be rushed into making a decision. Remember the purpose of the interview is to ensure the company is a good fit for you – just as much as it is them screening you, so you might want to think about how the role fits with your career goals, whether the salary or rate is what you expected/wanted, whether you feel you can succeed in the organisation.

A new job is a life-changing thing; make sure you are accepting the job for the right reasons.

If you decide to go ahead, always ask for the job offer in writing and check the terms of the offer carefully before formally accepting and handing in your notice at your current company.

“The purpose of the interview is to ensure the company is a good fit for you - just as much as it is them screening you.”

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