

INTERVIEW SKILLS

A Step by Step Guide to Interview Skills

Well done on securing an interview! We set out below various hints and tips to help you through the interview process.

1. Preparing For Your Interview

- (a) Be positive! It is surprising how many people prepare themselves to fail the interview. What you should remember is that as you have achieved an interview, so your interviewer already thinks you can do the job on offer.
- (b) Interviewers can work only on the information you give them, so give them the very best information about yourself.
- (c) If you know exactly what type of job you want or you are going for, then develop a career statement about yourself. This should be stated as early as possible in the interview. The statement should be brief and powerful, highlighting all your employment ‘trump cards’, including skills from previous jobs which, if left to be gleaned from your CV/career history, would not be given in the context of the particular job you applied for. The question: “Tell me about yourself” is a gift to the well-prepared interviewee.
- (d) Practice talking about yourself out loud – in the bath, whilst driving – others might think you rather strange, but who cares if you are more likely to get a job! So practice, and develop your fluency for talking about your achievements.
- (e) Anticipate your interviewer’s questions. They are likely to cover the following areas: physical make-up (health, appearance, speech), attainments (education, qualifications and experience), general intelligence (intellectual ability), special aptitudes (literacy, numeracy, languages, etc), interests (practical, physically active, social), disposition (mature, reliable, team worker) and circumstances (transport availability).
- (f) What are your USP’s, i.e. your Unique Selling Points? Pose a question to yourself: “What have I got that I can offer this employer which makes me special, or different from other candidates?” What do I have that they want and need in order to help their business be more successful? Make a list of:

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- 5 achievements
- 5 skills
- 5 things you are good at
- 5 things you are proud of

This exercise will provide you with excellent experience in talking about yourself in a situation where you were achieving something specific or using your skills at work.

- (g) Research the company to find out as much as possible about their local office and the global group if they have other branches. Look at their website, brochures and adverts. Be prepared for the interviewer to ask you “what do you know about our company?”

REMEMBER: INTERVIEWERS WILL NOT KNOW HOW GOOD YOU ARE UNLESS YOU TELL THEM!

2. Looking the Part & Giving a Good Impression

- (a) First impressions last, and how you look will have a tremendous effect on your success rate. Here are some basic rules for dress code:
- Dress smartly in your own style and colour, rather than high fashion or bright colours.
 - Darker colours are more powerful than lighter colours.
 - Be traditional rather than avant-garde.
 - Dress to the stereotype of the industry or function. Find out before your interview what their dress code is.
 - Dress as expensively as you can afford.
 - If you buy a new outfit, practice wearing it before the interview.
 - Get a good haircut and ensure your hair is smart and clean.
 - Buy good shoes and keep them clean.
 - Ensure your hands and nails are clean.
 - Go for less rather than more jewellery.
 - Co-ordinate your colours.
- (b) Manners and etiquette are very important. Be positive, affirmative and friendly.
- (c) Remember to smile!
- (d) Practice your handshake - shake firmly. No one is going to give you a job on the basis of a handshake, but a good firm and friendly handshake may just contribute to the overall impression you give.

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- (e) Body language and non-verbal clues. Give out positive non-verbal clues, such as:
- Nod the head when the interviewer is speaking.
 - Lean forward slightly when listening and when replying.
 - Make a high level of eye contact with the interviewers - this will make you appear more confident. Not looking at the interviewers when you answer them may well give the impression that you are insecure or nervous.
 - Sit up straight and sit far back in the chair. If you sit on the edge of the chair, as you relax you will lean back awkwardly.
 - Keep your hands firmly in your lap, resting them on your thighs or clasping them.
 - Cross your ankles or keep your legs together.

3. The Interview Questions – How to Handle Them

- (a) Interviewers have three basic queries:

- Can this person do the job?
- Will this person do the job?
- Will this person fit in?

- (b) “Can this person do the job?”

This question is about experience, track record, achievements – in short what you have done before. It is up to you to deliver information about your skills and experience.

- (c) “Will this person do the job?”

In preparation for your interview, decide which aspects of your work to date will illustrate that you are committed and motivated, and that you give more than others. Tell them about these situations.

- (d) “Will this person fit in?”

Organisations are like individuals in that they have character and value systems. They will want the new employee to fit in with their culture and with the rest of their staff. At interview it is important to show how you can fit in with their business. By reading company literature, and by actively listening to their existing employees including the interviewer, you can pick up clues as to their culture (e.g. hard-working/relaxed/small close family-type group).

- (e) Don't say anything until your brain is in gear! Thinking time is allowed. One of the easiest ways to fail in an interview is to give a knee-jerk reaction answer to a well-placed question.
- (f) Tell the story and give examples. Use stories of real experiences in your life and work to illustrate a particular point or answer a specific question. Never lie or exaggerate your capabilities.
- (g) Stress the benefits. Employers are far more interested in what you can do for them than in what skills or abilities you have as an individual. The interviewer is trying to establish what benefits you might bring to the organisation and whether those benefits outweigh those of other candidates.
- (h) Explain the gaps. Be prepared to talk about any gaps in your CV. The professional interviewer will probe for insights into your motivations, aspirations and value systems. The wise applicant will think through suitable answers in advance, which can be delivered in a positive manner.
- (i) Don't use tentative language. The interview is one of the few places where it is legitimate to promote yourself and your abilities firmly.
- (j) You may well be asked about your weaknesses. If so, adopt the following approach:
- Choose a trait about your character or personality which is true.
 - Extend that trait until it becomes a fault.
 - Put it back in the distant past.
 - Show how you have overcome it.
 - Confirm that it is no longer a problem.
 - Don't over explain.
- (k) Interviewers are trained to discover what they can about you, not just as an employee but as a person. The two most popular ways of doing this are by asking you either about what you do in your free time or what has taken your interest in the news lately. Prepare in advance for these questions. Where possible it is appropriate to show that you have interests that indicate you are social, intellectual and achievement-orientated.
- (l) Example questions by the interviewer. Be prepared for the following:-
- What do you know about this company?
 - Why do you want to work for this company?
 - Why do you want this job?
 - What skills do you think are important for this job?
 - What can you bring to this organisation?

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- Why do you think you are suited to this particular position?
- Why did you choose a career in [insert field of work]?
- Why did you leave each previous position?
- How ambitious are you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- Why should we employ you?

4. Managing the Interview Process

- (a) The interview start and finish. Remember that the interview starts when you arrive at the car park or the reception area and finishes when you leave the premises. You should be polite, friendly and formal with *all* members of staff you meet before and after the interview. The interview is never over until you are out of sight and earshot of *all* company staff.
- (b) Arrive early. There are many reasons to do so including:
- Arriving early gives you time to allow for delays with the traffic, getting lost, finding a place to park, etc.
 - Most people are anxious before an interview. The longer you have to stay at your prospective employer's organisation, the more you will relax.
 - Arriving early gives you the opportunity to use the toilet facilities if necessary, so you won't have that problem during the interview!
 - It will give you time to read additional information and brochures about the prospective employer.
 - Being early will give you time to take in the atmosphere of the place.
 - It also gives you time to leave in reception anything that is not essential for the interview, i.e. bags, coats, etc, if you wish.
- (c) Don't forget to switch off your mobile phone.
- (d) Don't eat, chew, drink, smoke or be merry during your interview.
- (e) Don't discuss salary at the interview, unless you are asked specifically for your current salary and/or salary expectation, which are acceptable to disclose. Please note that any job offer, salary and package will usually be made via your recruitment agency.
- (f) Ask questions. Towards the end of the interview you will generally be asked if you have any questions. It is important to try and ask at least one question to show that you are still interested in their company and vacancy. There are certain questions that can be asked at any interview, if you haven't already been given the answer, e.g.:-

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- How many people work in the team which has the vacancy?
 - Who will I report to?
 - What is the average age of the staff in the team?
 - What training do you provide?
 - What professional qualifications might I be able to study for?
 - How long is the probationary period?
 - What are the potential opportunities for promotion?
 - Will travel be required with this role, either now or in the future?
- (g) What happens next? At the end of the interview, find out what the next step will be and when it is likely to happen. Asking about this will show that you are not only highly motivated but also well organised; the sort of person who likes to know where they stand and can take appropriate action.

5. After the Interview

- (a) Every interview is a learning opportunity. However thoroughly you prepare, you can always improve. You should review your interview performance as soon as possible after the event and make any notes that you feel are necessary, so that you can learn from the opportunities provided.
- (b) Give your feedback to the agency, explaining what you thought of the company, the interviewers and the role itself. Your agency will then find out the feedback from the organisation's side within a couple of days generally, and will contact you as soon as there is any further news.

GOOD LUCK!

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