

# Interview advice

If you get nervous in interviews you are not alone. Job interviews are the primary method by which both employers and candidates judge each other. For employers, the objective of the interview is to qualify candidates. For candidates the goal is to receive offers. It's important you make the right impression.

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## PREPARATION

Make sure you know exactly where the interview will take place and the name and position of the person you are due to meet. Work out your route in advance and allow a generous margin of error in case of unforeseen circumstances. Have the telephone number of the company handy so that you can let them know if you are running late, this is generally forgiven, whereas unannounced lateness generally is not. Find out roughly how long the interview will take and arrange other appointments accordingly, don't leave your car on a meter and end up worrying more about being clamped than getting the job.

### Research the company

- Candidates who arrive at interviews unprepared are remembered for the wrong reasons. Instead of demonstrating their competences, they display a 'wing-it' mentality that does not sit well with employers.
  - Use the Internet as a starting point for your research. Using a reliable search engine, conduct a keyword search on the company name:
    - Gain an understanding of the employer's history, philosophies, objectives and policies relating to its history, its current situation and its future.
    - Determine problem or need areas that you would be able to fill with your own unique interests and abilities.
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### Prepare yourself

Interviewers tend to ask the same general questions in addition to those of a more technical nature. Learn them, prepare your answers, and practice them on friends.

Common questions are:

- Why are you interested in this position?
- Why do you want to leave your current company?
- What are the most satisfying/frustrating things about your current employment?
- What are your strengths/where do you think your weaknesses lay?
- Why do you think we should give you this job?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years time?

In order to answer some of these questions you need to prepare yourself and try to assess yourself objectively. While it can be difficult to force yourself to do this, it is necessary if you want to perform effectively in the actual interview.

Organise information about yourself in the areas of educational, work and personal experiences in order to be able to relate to the position you are seeking.

Become aware of your strengths and weaknesses; be able to present them in a positive manner. Do not pretend you have no weaknesses because everyone has one, but on the other hand do not put yourself down, because you could be talking your way out of a job. You need to discuss your weaknesses as though you have recognised them and strive to overcome them.

### For example:

I used to have bad time management, now I prioritise my workload first thing every morning.

I like to take control and be involved in everything. I sometimes find it hard to delegate but when I have, the results have been positive.

### Think about your career goals:

- How do your aspirations relate to the employer and in the future?
  - What can you offer the employment?
  - How can you contribute to the employer in a way that will benefit the organisation?
  - What unique skills and abilities do you bring to the job?
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Have in mind the characteristics that you would like to get across in the interview and review everything you've done in the past for evidence of these characteristics and be prepared to address weak areas or gaps in your CV.

Ensure that you know your CV inside out and anticipate the questions you will be asked. Find the gaps and know how to plug them in a positive way. Then put in the time to make your responses flow. Aim to sound natural and conversational, not as though you are reading from a script.

Sell yourself. Try to avoid giving clichéd answers to interview questions (it is likely your interviewer has heard these responses more than you care to imagine). Use examples from your own experience, give your opinion.

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## TYPICAL INTERVIEW DYNAMICS - CONTENT AND PROCESS

### NON VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Consider your dress and personal hygiene, what does your appearance say about you? Remember that many employers form initial impressions based on an applicant's appearance (not attractiveness). Be sensible about how you dress.

Experts on interviewing give tips on what to wear, which colours to shy away from, what to carry and all that. The real rule for how to dress and what to carry is to use common sense. Look neat and clean.

- **Offer a firm handshake**

Your handshake says much about your personality. Give a firm, "full" handshake and use eye contact. Your handshake should be the same for both male and female interviewers.

- **Think about your eye contact**

Do not stare at the interviewer, but eyes should not wander around the room or be fixed on the floor. Good eye contact can communicate confidence and enthusiasm.

- **Be attentive**

Signals that show attention include nodding, smiling, eye contact, and "minimal affirmations" such as "yes", "okay" and "I understand."

- **Be aware of your tone of voice**

Monotones or soft speech may cause the interviewer to lose interest.

- **Consider your posture**

Good posture is important, be relaxed, but not sloppy.

- **Use gestures appropriately**

If hand gestures come naturally, and are not over used, they can be used to emphasize important points. Be aware of fidgeting, playing with jewellery, and foot shaking. A practice interview helps!

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## STAGES OF A TYPICAL INTERVIEW

- **Breaking the ice**

Small talk usually structured by the interviewer. During this time the interviewer develops his/her first impressions of you. Personal appearance, ease and positive attitude are all important.

- **Exploring the background and qualifications of the interviewee**

You can demonstrate assertiveness and self-confidence by communicating awareness of skills and interests. Use examples to "prove" your strengths.

- **Matching personal qualifications with the prospective job**

You can show greater assertiveness and may actually interview the interviewer to gain information about the employer. Thinking about whether you would actually like to work for the organization can form meaningful questions.

- **Summarising the interview**

The final stage involves the sharing of impressions by the interviewer and/or interviewee.

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## CHARACTERISTICS EMPLOYERS TYPICALLY SEEK

- Ability to handle pressure
- Assertiveness
- Communication skills
- Flexibility
- Initiative
- Intelligence
- Leadership
- Motivation
- Organisational skills
- Self confidence

- Enthusiasm
  - Interpersonal skills
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## TIPS FOR POSITIVE INTERVIEW BEHAVIOUR

### Be:

- Yourself! Present yourself in a confident manner
- Enthusiastic
- Assertive, not aggressive! You can sell yourself without being obnoxious or over bearing.
- Aware of Interviewer nonverbal behaviour. Follow his/her lead with appropriate behaviour

### Say:

- Give specific examples of your skills, tie them into the position
- Prove how valuable you are
- Dwell on the positive
- Express your interest in the organization
- Ask questions to gain information and demonstrate your interest
- Ask for feedback if it is not offered
- Questions about benefits, salary, working hours, etc, should be asked at an appropriate time (usually not the first interview, unless brought up by the interviewer)

### Do:

- Shake hands before and after the interview
- Keep track of your nonverbal behaviour

### Questions to ask

The best questions to ask are those that are unique and memorable.

Many questions can be answered by reviewing company literature; if you do your homework, it shows interest in the company. (And, you won't ask questions you could easily have answered for yourself by a little reading!)

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## REASONS INTERVIEWERS REJECT CANDIDATES

- Poor personal appearance
  - Failure to maintain appropriate eye contact
  - Lack of solid career planning, vague objectives and goals
  - Being late to the interview Overbearing, "know it all" attitude Lack of interest/enthusiasm
  - Failure to appear confident
  - No insight into the nature of the company
  - Lack of questions (i.e. lack of interest)
  - No understanding of personal strengths/weaknesses
  - Interviewee "assumes" interviewer will figure out why he/she is the best candidate
  - Inability to clearly express oneself; poor volume, diction or grammar
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## THE INTERVIEW ON THE DAY

### ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- Answer the question that is asked
- Answer questions honestly and directly
- Organise your answers
- Be brief
- Answer questions with interest and enthusiasm
- Be positive about your reason for leaving your current position
- Quantify the confidence other employers have placed in you
- Never speak badly of past supervisors or employers
- Make the position you are interviewing for your chief objective

If you do not know the answer to the question, do not try and answer it. Instead say how you would approach the problem/answering the questions.

### HANDLING OBJECTIONS – TURN WEAKNESSES INTO STRENGTHS

There may be aspects of your career that could present obstacles to employment if not handled correctly. Even the most common causes of concern for employers can be turned into positives:

- ***You were dismissed from your last job***

Terminations are emotional. Be sure that when you discuss your termination during the first interview, you can provide emotionally neutral answers. When you respond to questions about terminations, always include some lessons learned that will benefit future employers.

- ***You were made redundant***

By now, just about every interviewer has had some experience of redundancy situations. The good news is that the stigma of employment is disappearing, especially when the reasons for job losses are not performance related.

Emphasise that the redundancy was unrelated to you as a person and as a worker. Employers are curious about how you will react to adverse situations if hired, and here is a good opportunity to show that you are a survivor who makes the best out of every situation.

- ***You don't have enough experience***

When employers raise objections, you must be able to identify related experience or transferable skills that will convince the interviewer of your ability to do the job. If the interviewer feels you do not possess the right degree, stress the experience and quality of what you do have.

Remember, the fact that you are being interviewed, despite not having the right degree, means you are still a viable candidate.

- ***You are over qualified***

If you are deemed as being over qualified, your first defence should be to reiterate your best qualifications for the position. In other words, view the objection as another opportunity to sell your relevant qualifications. If the interviewer is still unsure, probe more deeply into the resistance.

- ***Salary questions***

This is probably the most uncomfortable part of the interview process for both parties. Should you ask about salary or wait for the interviewer to bring it up? Should you be honest about your most recent remuneration?

It is not advisable to ask about salary and package details at the interview but if you are asked you need to be realistic and give an honest overview. You should have been briefed by your recruitment consultant on salary guidelines within the company so do take notice of what they advise you.

At a later stage if you are working with a recruitment company, the consultant will play a key role in the negotiation process at offer stage. Your recruitment consultant is a trained intermediary, so talk openly with them. Share your concerns and expectations and call with comments or questions.

Above all, remember that the opportunity itself should be the single most important element of your decision. No amount of money will make a bad job good. A quality position and working with quality people in a dynamic work environment, offers rewards that money cannot buy.

## **ATTITUDE**

- ***Be un-aggressively assertive***

Find the right tone in which to present your positive aspects. You have to talk about your achievements to show you are the right person, but do it without being boast-ful. Under no circumstances should you spend a significant portion of the interview running down your current employer. This is viewed as negative.

- ***Have a positive attitude***

Above all, do not wait until after the event to decide that you wished you tried harder to get the position. Always go in with the intention of getting an offer, only then do you really have the chance to weigh up how this opportunity compares with others. Many people with the benefit of hindsight, have regretted that they did not take a particular interview sufficiently seriously. Do not let yourself be in this 'if only' category!

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## **CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**

There are only three important things to remember about closing an interview (besides the obvious thank you and a firm handshake).

1. If you have questions about the company that would affect whether you would want to spend further time interviewing, ask them now.
2. If the interviewer has failed to elicit some important information about you, make that information known before you close and reiterate your interest in the position.
3. Find out what the next step will be and when it is likely to occur.