



Interview skills

Great, you've been invited to interview! An interview need not be scary, nor anything to be nervous about. Instead, try to think of it as a two-way conversation. The interviewer is trying to find out more about you, and you're trying to find out more about the organization and role.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW USE ALL AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TO

- Understand the **interview purpose and process** (what the interviewer is looking for, potential interviewing techniques, interview styles and formats)
- Recognise how first impressions really count (demonstrating preparedness, attention to personal presentation – appearance, verbal and non-verbal presentation)
- Know how you will put yourself across in the most effective way (demonstrating organisational skills, job and self-knowledge, question awareness, and listening and communication skills)
- Be prepared for additional selection activities such as **psychometric testing** and **assessment centres**.

PREPARATION

- **Find out all that you can about the organisation and role.** Don't be afraid to ask the employer directly. They are only an email or 'phone call away, but treat everyone as if they are a part of the selection process (marketing, information, public relations, administrative and human resources staff are all potential contacts). Many public and private sector organisations have web and social media sites and/or publish product/services information, annual reports, and in-house newsletters
- Brainstorm the types of questions you may be asked and have answers prepared to give
- Analyse the job advertisement, job description and any recruitment material including application forms. This will produce a vast number of clues about the criteria upon which you are likely to be assessed. List these, and from your own experience (paid work, voluntary work, academic study including participation in projects and tutorials, student life, leadership roles, travel etc.) identify scenarios to illustrate that you possess the skills, knowledge and attributes they are seeking. Your examples don't have to be earth shattering, and you may describe only aspects of a larger event, but you do need to convey a sense of enthusiasm about the things you have done.
- Many organisations offer advice on their interview process on their websites and/or their pages on social media platforms such as Facebook; LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Practice being interviewed. Have a friend or family member interview you and ask you typical questions. Alternatively, record yourself or practice in front of the mirror answering questions such as "Tell me about yourself" and "What are your career goals and aspirations". You can look for body language, facial expressions and nervous habits. Also listen to the level and tone of your voice.
- If the course you have done is very relevant to the position, it is quite possible that at one of your interviews you might be asked quite detailed technical questions relating to your knowledge base.
- Think of 4 – 5 key skills and facts about yourself that you would like the interviewer to know about by the end of the interview. This may help to give you some focus in the answers you give to questions.

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- Everyone has some positive personality traits. Identify yours and select several on which you will build through the course of an interview and communicate through body language. These could include:

goal-orientation	honesty	open-mindedness	friendliness
assertiveness	insightfulness	flexibility	thoroughness
practicality	responsibility	confidence	persistency
work ethic	energy	optimism	ambition
conscientiousness	co-operative	decisiveness	consistency
cheerfulness	loyalty	sense of humour	creativity
productiveness	resourcefulness	sincerity	reliability
enthusiasm	patience	adaptability	trustworthiness
inquisitiveness	diplomacy	empathy	morality

- An interview will develop on points from your **CV** so make sure you have read thoroughly the version that you submitted to them.
- Find out where to go for the interview in advance, what parking is available and who to ask for when you arrive. Also decide in advance what you will wear to give you time to make sure it is clean, ironed and business-like.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Organisations can use a variety of methods to shortlist and select potential recruits. In addition, once you're through the **written application** stage the order in which subsequent processes are carried out can vary. For example:

- you may be asked to undertake **psychometric testing** before shortlists for interviews are decided
- psychometric testing** may be scheduled concurrently with the interview
- you may be asked to visit the organisation as part of a first or second interview process
- you may be invited to attend an **assessment centre**
- organisations participating in a university graduate recruitment programme may choose to conduct first interviews on campus

Before the interview you can ask for an indication of what to expect e.g. length, type of interview, names and positions of interviewers. To avoid surprises once you are in the room, be aware that there are different types of interview and styles of interviewing, and that aspects of these may be combined within a single interview. Alternatively you may have a sequence of interviews but of different types.

Screening interviews:

Shorter interviews usually indicate that more people are being seen. Longer interviews mean that the organisation has been tougher on their initial paper-based short-listing. Apart from checking technical competence and how the position fits with your own career goals, the questions will probably be open-ended and designed to assess how your personality would fit the corporate culture.



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Telephone or Skype interviews:

These are often used to screen people quickly or to conduct a long-distance first interview. In both cases you need to be assertive, enthusiastic and focused – make the interviewer want to meet with you. In the latter case you need to be particularly well prepared, and in both cases to have a good telephone manner. In 'phone interviews show an ability to communicate without the advantage of body language by listening carefully, and using clear diction and animated speech patterns. One advantage of telephone interviews is that you can have prompting notes to hand.

Stress interviews:

(not to be confused with inappropriate interviewer behaviour). Designed to see how you react and perform under pressure. Questions may be asked quickly, or the interviewer will use silence, emotion, or a challenging, confronting style. Recognise this type of interview for what it is and stay calm. Breathing and pausing, and asking for clarification, are techniques which can help you to maintain your 'cool' and to buy time. Often the questions do not have a right or wrong answer. The interviewer may be trying to assess whether you have opinions which can be supported in logic and fact, how confident and assertive you are, or how good you are at negotiating.

Unstructured interviews:

Rely on open-ended questions such as "tell me about yourself" and "what are your career goals?". The interviewer's focus may not be clear but you should be quite clear about yours. In this case you're not in control of the questions but you can control the content of the interview.

Panel interviews:

Try to decide if there is one person taking the lead role: they are your referral point, but as the rest of the panel are also likely to be active participants you need to focus on the questioner, involving the whole group by establishing eye contact. In some cases there will be someone who is acting as an observer and/or note taker so don't be unnerved by this, and as panels are not always well organised don't be distracted by any undercurrents of confusion!

Behavioural/competency-based interviews:

You can expect the type of questions currently being asked in behaviour-based application forms e.g. "What has been the most successful team situation you have been involved in?" "How did you contribute to the success of the team?", or "Describe the most challenging situation.....". Often interviewers will focus on areas such as leadership, problem-solving, initiative and team work, and they make the assumption that what you have done in the past will indicate how you will behave in the future. It is not appropriate to divulge very personal information. Select situations that demonstrate the top range of your skills and achievements and summarise clearly the situation, the required or necessary actions, the results, and what you learnt from the experience. Prepare a range of examples to draw from and practice talking about these in a concise and interesting way, but don't learn your answers by rote.

Sequential interviews:

A series of consecutive interviews by different individuals in the organisation who will compare notes and impressions afterwards.



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MORE SPECIFICALLY, INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ARE DESIGNED TO ASCERTAIN

- whether or not you understand their needs
- the level and breadth of any requisite technical, scientific or specialist knowledge
- intellectual strengths – levels of understanding, the ability to process and apply knowledge, to think analytically, and to solve problems
- skill levels and evidence of their successful application e.g. communication and teamwork
- experience, and the ability to transfer skills and knowledge
- interpersonal and social skills
- attitudes, motivation, interest, enthusiasm, passion and maturity
- operational style and potential e.g. your ability to ‘think on your feet’ and perform under pressure, leadership and management potential.

You are also making an assessment and not everything you need to know will be apparent from already available information. Get the interviewer to participate in the conversation, don't leave the interview with unanswered questions, and before making final decisions about a job offer ensure you are satisfied that:

- the opportunity has the potential to meet your short to medium-term career goals
- the organisation and environment feels right for you
- you are comfortable with the negotiated terms and conditions of employment.

AT THE INTERVIEW

- Assessment can start with the receptionist so stay calm, arrive on time, smile, look everyone in the eye and try to be relaxed and friendly. Be prepared to shake hands with the interviewers, but not a bone crunch or wet fish please!
- Watch your body language. Upright, and shoulders relaxed. Keep limbs under control and don't perch on the edge of the seat or fall into the back of the chair. Whilst you don't want to look like an immovable object you do need to watch out for distracting fidgeting. If you feel the interview is slowing down or lacking energy find an opportunity to get things going – lean forward and ask an open question e.g. The job description lists a number of duties/responsibilities/ objectives, what would my priorities be?
- Nerves can get in the way. They can make us talk too much so if necessary ask for the question to be repeated or for aspects to be clarified, pace your answers, and check if the interviewer has been given sufficient information, or not enough. Avoid yes/no answers. If you get lost, stop and gather your wits. If you make a bad start answering a particular question say that you would like to go back and start again, or look for an opportunity to cover something afresh if you think your original answer let you down. To avoid some of these problems however, ensure that you listen carefully and answer the actual question. Remember, the selector wants to know what you have done, and how you perform, so avoid generalisations, and it never hurts to look thoughtful, so take that moment to think.

Ask questions throughout the interview as this gives you the opportunity to gain or clarify information. Doing so can also demonstrate thoughtful preparation, genuine interest and can generate additional discussion.



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A lack of interchange can be interpreted as a lack of interest. If everything you needed to know has already been covered by the time the interviewer asks if you have any questions don't panic. Refer to the fact that you've already asked your questions and received sufficient information, and use the space as an opportunity to reinforce, or add to or rectify any matter in relation to your own interview performance.

Alternatively you could engage the interviewer in further discussion on broader aspects of the work unit, organisation or industry. Don't however introduce new topics if you feel things are winding up as you want the interview to come to a comfortable closure, with time to find out what will happen next, and in what time-frame (this could be one of your questions), and also to express continuing interest and appreciation for the interviewer's time. Leave on a positive note, smile, shake hands if appropriate, and leave promptly.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW:

- Useful follow-up to the interview could include a thank you note to the interviewer reiterating your interest in the position and why.
- If you don't receive an offer but would like to be reconsidered should a similar or relevant vacancy occur find out how you can stay in the loop.
- If you have been unsuccessful you could seek feedback on your performance as some organisations are pleased to help out with constructive advice, but don't be annoyed if this is refused.
- Always review your own performance, and seek assistance early if you're getting interviews but not job offers.
- It's very important to remain positive and focused, and a hint of desperation will not enhance future interview performance.

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES:

Psychometric testing:

These are exercises, often in the form of multiple choice questions. They are designed to assess your reasoning abilities or how you respond to different situations. The two main types are aptitude, cognitive, ability or intelligence tests to assess your reasoning capabilities, and personality questionnaires which look at how you react or behave in different situations, and your preferences and attitudes. Along with other activities the results will contribute to your overall assessment, but in some cases they may be used to determine whether or not you'll be interviewed at all.

Assessment centres:

An assessment centre may vary in length from half a day to two days and a typical mix of activities could comprise a structured interview, tests, and simulation exercises. The latter exercises could include individual or group activities, e.g. a case study in which you are asked to identify the issues or problems to be addressed and to prepare a plan of action. Assessment centres are usually full-on, but they can be fun, and you can learn a lot about yourself.