

Interview Skills

Preparation

- Find out what format the interview will take – how many people will be interviewing you? Do you have to complete a test of any type?
- Look again at the organisation's website to make sure you are really familiar with their business. What are their values and objectives? Who are their competitors? Have there been any recent developments in the business?
- Any trends or news affecting the business sector in general?
- Read over your application again, make sure you know what you have said!
- Remind yourself of the skills and qualities the employer is looking for. Think of specific examples from your experience that will illustrate these and reflect also on your strengths – what can you offer the employer?
- Practise your answers to common interview questions – see examples below.
- Prepare some questions to ask the interviewer.

Typical Interview Questions

These fall into 5 broad categories:

Self-awareness:

- What has been your greatest achievement to date?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What are your main strengths (or weaknesses)?
- Tell me about yourself

Competency or skills based:

The range of questions here will depend on the skills the employer is seeking, eg

- Tell me about a situation where you dealt with an angry customer
- Describe a situation where conflict has arisen in a team –how did you respond?
- Outline a complex problem you have faced. How did you resolve it?
- Tell me about a time, when you had to lead a team to complete a target/project successfully. What was your role and what was the outcome?

The STAR framework can help you structure answers to this type of question:

- **Situation** – describe the background to the situation.
- **Task** – what was your responsibility?
- **Action** – what you did specifically.
- **Result** – describe the outcome. What did you learn?

Motivation:

- Why have you applied for this post?
- What are you looking for in a job?
- What are your medium and long term career goals?
- What is it about our company that attracts you?

Sector based:

The interviewer will expect you to research the job and the sector and if the role requires particular knowledge, eg of a specific software you may be tested.

- What are the main challenges facing this organisation?
- Who are our main competitors and how can we stand out from them?
- How might government policy on.....impact on our work?
- What are derivatives and what function do they perform?
- What are the key threats to the security of our computer systems?
- What steps would you take to ensure specimen integrity when preparing a blood sample?

Hypothetical:

You are asked to respond to a given scenario. There are no right answers: the interviewer is assessing if you can think on your feet and solve problems.

- What would you do if your supervisor made a decision you felt was wrong?
- What would you do if you knew you were going to miss an important deadline?
- What would you do if you saw a colleague mistreating a patient?

At the end of the interview you may be invited to ask questions, so it is useful to have thought of some possibilities in advance. These could be around the main objectives of the job, how your performance will be measured, or opportunities for career development for example. It is best to avoid questions on pay or benefits unless you are specifically asked about this.

The Interview

- Arrive with plenty of time to give yourself a chance to gather your thoughts
- First impressions are important: smile, look confident and enthusiastic, make eye contact and speak clearly.
- Listen to the question carefully before responding, it is fine to pause briefly or ask for clarification if needed
- Avoid “yes” or “no”: give examples to illustrate your skills and achievements.

Alternative Interview Formats

- Interviews by telephone or by Skype are often used as a sifting exercise in the early stages of the recruitment process
- Video interviews are increasingly common in graduate recruitment.
- For Skype and video interviews, set up your equipment and do a trial run in advance to make sure everything is working.
- Be aware of your backdrop, and avoid lighting directly positioned overhead
- For video interviews, you will be sent a web link in advance along with a deadline for completion. Typically you will be presented with a series of pre-recorded questions and there is only one chance to record your answer.

Prepare for these types of interviews in the same way as for any other, and if you dress as you would for a face to face interview, this can help you approach the task with the right mind-set.

After the Interview

- Reflect on the interview and note down what went well and what you might have done differently.
- If you weren't successful, ask the organisation for some feedback. This will help you to prepare and plan for future interviews.

Strengths Based Interviews:

This is a relatively new approach to the interview process based on positive psychology. The assumption is that if you are doing a job that you enjoy and are good at, you will be a more energised and productive staff member. The employer will identify the strengths and attitudes they are looking for and then the interview focuses on finding out whether your strengths match their needs.

Interviews usually begin with a fairly broad question, eg "what gives you energy", "describe a successful day" or "what satisfies you most: starting a task or completing it". Questions which follow are often of two specific types:

- The forced response: is it more important to take your time to produce a perfect result or to work more quickly to a lower standard?

Here you wouldn't be expected to just opt for one or the other – instead you might mention how your approach could vary depending on workloads and deadlines and in doing so show that you can make a balanced judgement.

- The scenario: You have produced a series of recommendations for a client and some new information has come to light. You now feel that these recommendations are not appropriate – how would you feel and what would you do next?

This question explores how you respond when things go wrong – are you able to re-think your approach when circumstances change, or do you become discouraged?

Although you are not being asked for specific examples from your past experiences, you can mention these to illustrate the point you are making. The interviewer will score your performance on the basis of whether you seem engaged and interested in the conversation as well as your ability to present a reasoned and clear response.

Additional Resources

- The [Prospects](#) website provides comprehensive resources on interview questions, how to prepare and common interview mistakes.
- [Target Jobs](#) provides information on interview preparation, including techniques for managing nerves and using positive body language. There is also a section on how to deal with "tricky" questions.
- [Prospect Personnel Solutions](#) provides tips specifically for telephone interviews.