

Interview Skills

Preparation

- Find out what format the interview will take – how many people will be interviewing you? Who are they? Do you have to complete tests of any type?
- If the interview is online, think about the technicalities. Check that your camera and microphone are working well, think about lighting and where best you can secure a strong internet connection.
- 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 to 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 in case you are invited to do so.

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 questions asked focus on assessing the skills the employer is seeking, eg

- Tell me about a situation where you dealt with an unhappy 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 lead a team to complete a target/project successfully. What was your role and what was the outcome?

In response the employer is expecting you to outline a specific example which you can take from any aspect of your experience including your studies, work experience, volunteering or extra-curricular activities.

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

- **S**ituation – describe the background to the situation.
- **T**ask – what was your responsibility?
- **A**ction – what you did specifically.
- **R**esult – 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 and role specific:

The interviewer may want to test your basic knowledge of the sector and environment in which the business operates and if the job requirements include specific technical knowledge (common in an IT or laboratory role for instance), you are likely to face questions to assess your knowledge. Examples include:

- 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 tools have you used for penetration testing?
- What steps would you take to ensure specimen integrity when preparing a blood sample?

Hypothetical:

Here you are asked to respond to a given scenario. There are no right answers: the interviewer is assessing how you think on your feet and solve problems, eg

- How would you react 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?
- If you saw a colleague speaking inappropriately to a patient, what action would you take?

At the end of the interview you may be invited to ask questions, so it is useful to think about some possibilities. These could be around the main objectives of the job, how your performance will be measured, or opportunities for career development. Avoid questions on pay or benefits unless the interviewer raises these topics.

The Interview

- Leave yourself plenty of time to arrive (or get set up).
- 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.

Video Interviews:

- These are increasingly common in graduate recruitment and are often used to sift candidates early in the selection process.
- There are two main types of video interview. One is in real time and you are interacting directly with the recruiter, the other is an automated interview. For the latter you will be sent a web link in advance along with a deadline for completion so as long as you complete before the deadline you can choose the time which suits you best. Typically you will be presented with a series of pre-recorded questions on the screen and there is only one chance to record your answer, ie you are interacting with the interview platform and not a person.
- Set up your equipment and do a trial run in advance to make sure everything is working. During the interview, look at the camera and not at your screen.
- Be aware of your backdrop, and avoid lighting directly positioned overhead.

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.
- [Bright Network](#) offers video interview tips.
- Visit the [Preparing for Interviews](#) learning pathway on the careers portal and use the “[Interview Simulator](#)” which allows you to browse a range of typical questions and record your answers.
- [Prospect Personnel Solutions](#) provides tips specifically for telephone interviews.