

1st Interview Techniques

1. Why read this?

Trust us on this one, by reading these notes you will significantly increase your chances of getting the job for which you are now at interview. In our experience preparation is the key to successful interview performance. You must be able to promote yourself in a concise, detailed and relevant way to demonstrate to the interviewer that you are the best candidate for the job. It is imperative that you 'revise' your subject matter, (i.e. your experience and unique selling points), and practise putting it all into words.

2. First Impressions

Please...

- Plan your route, take change for parking & our & the company's telephone number just in case
- Arrive a few minutes early
- Greet the interviewer by his/her last name
- Offer a firm handshake with a warm smile
- **Do the confident thing, and you will feel confident**
- Switch off your mobile phone
- Dispose of any chewing gum or sweets BEFORE entering the building
- Make a great first impression to the Receptionist too

3. Grooming

You **MUST** present yourself correctly, if not, you will be fighting an uphill battle from the start. If you *feel* right for the job, you will be more confident and thus perform to your full potential.

Women	Men
Wear a suit that is in good taste	Wear a conservative suit that is cleaned and pressed
Wear sensible shoes (cleaned and polished)	Wear a clean, ironed shirt; wear a tie that compliments your suit and shirt
Wear make-up that is polished and understated - avoid bright lipstick or nail polish	Have shoes clean and shined
Be moderate in the use of perfume	Stay away from overwhelming aftershaves
Have an attractive, neat hairstyle	Have hair cut and groomed; have a clean shave
Be conservative in the use of jewellery	Avoid trendy or oversized clothes
Have clean and filed fingernails	Trim/ clean fingernails; avoid gaudy rings, chains, etc

Pay close attention to personal grooming. It goes without saying that non-social foods (vindaloos, raw onions, garlic etc...) are best avoided before an interview – it's not just visual impressions that last!

Finally, a note on piercings. In a business interview it is inappropriate to display excessive piercing jewellery. You should not wear multiple earrings or other 'facial jewellery' to interviews arranged by us. This is our professional advice, and is in no way related to our own opinions on this subject.

4. The aim of the interview

- The main objective of an interview is to leave the interviewer with the overriding impression that your **skills, experience** and **personality** are a match for what they are looking for.
- The employer has a detailed picture of the attributes of the candidate whom they wish to recruit for the role, and it is your job to mirror this specification as closely as possible. This is done by presenting your skills and experience in such a way that it matches what they are seeking.
- If you sell yourself correctly, the interviewer will be able to 'tick' each aspect of their specification as you run through your (prepared) selling points.

- Remember - an interview is a conversation between two interested parties, not an interrogation to be feared. It is a two way process, since the employer wants to find out about you and you want to find out about the employer.

5. Personality & Attitude

Your personality and attitude are crucial. In situations where all candidates are capable of doing the job, these points are what make the difference between you and the other candidates. You are seeking to convey the right mix of professionalism and personality. Therefore, your approach must be:

- Polite and Professional
- Confident
- Lively
- Interested – in *this* job, not just *any* job
- **Enthusiastic**

The value of **ENTHUSIASM** cannot be over-emphasised, it's infectious!

So, if you want to be remembered as a candidate that the interviewer actually *wants* to employ, inject some enthusiasm into your performance. You will be amazed at how the interviewer will warm to you and thus how much better you will come across.

6. Experience & Skills

Any interviewer will want to see that you can actually do the job in question, and will be looking for evidence that you have the correct skills and sufficient experience to constitute a sensible recruitment choice for the vacancy in question.

The golden rule here is NEVER ASSUME. Do not assume that the interviewer is familiar with your background simply because they have your CV. It may not have been read recently, if at all. To expect the interviewer to do so during the interview is inviting failure. Also, do not assume your interviewer is a confident, well trained recruiter. This may well not be the case, and in instances such as these the onus is on you to tell them all they need to hear without being prompted into doing so by questions.

- It is your job to help the interviewer as much as possible by selling yourself
- Volunteer relevant information without being asked during the course of the interview
- Repeat verbally the relevant content of your CV
- What you don't tell them, they will never know

7. Preparation

So, having looked at what an interview is and what an employer is generally looking for, how do you prepare to sell yourself? How do you explain why *your* skills and experience make *you* the best choice for the role?

Exercise:

Before you go to the interview, you must list all the skills / attributes that the job requires, and against that list write why you satisfy each element of the job specification. (This is best done by referring to your CV and writing down what you will say in response to each point).

This list will then constitute a summary of your key work-related attributes and experience in relation to this job. All you then have to do is learn it, and then tell the interviewer!

Remember – you are being interviewed for a particular vacancy, so you must try to put your experience and skills across in a way that is **relevant** to the role in question. Focus on the attributes required by the job specification, and be prepared to back up your ability to meet each of these criteria. In fact, it is true to say that, armed with this list of your key attributes you are well equipped to answer any question which is related to the job specification.

The following questions can all be answered in this way:

- **What are your strengths?** – your strong attributes for *this* job
- **What motivates you?** – describe one of your strengths as a motivational factor
- **Why should we employ you?** – list your attributes for this job
- **What qualities do you have that are suitable for this job?** – again, list attributes
- **Describe your ideal job** – describe a role which uses your key attributes for *this* role
- **How would your best friend/colleagues/boss describe you?** – relate a strength for this job
- **Tell me about yourself** – describe yourself by relating your strengths for *this* job
- **What are your personal skills and abilities?** – the list for *this* job
- **How do they relate to this job?**
- **What are specific examples of how you have used them?**
- **Describe five ideas, accomplishments, strengths, skills, or personal qualities that you think would best "sell" yourself to an employer**

Keep your answers factual, explaining your skills and experience. Practice answering the above questions until you can do so in a clear, concise, confident manner, staying relevant to the job in question.

Do not be afraid to repeat yourself when answering these questions. If you have prepared the list of your strengths in relation to *this* role, you will be able to talk about *specific* skills and experience which are directly relevant to what the interviewer is looking for. If the questions you are asked give you the openings to do this then you will be able to respond with confidence, but if the interviewer does not provide the leading questions, you will be able to “take the bull by the horns” and present a lucid, well rehearsed summary of how your experience and skills are right for the job.

In other words, you will be able to sell yourself to the best of your ability. **If you do not undertake the preparation detailed above you will not stand a chance of being able to relate all the relevant selling points clearly and concisely,** (and consequently will probably not be offered the job).

Rehearse what you plan to say, practicing answers to common questions. Also be aware of nonverbal communication -sit up straight, look alert, speak clearly and forcefully, but stay relaxed, make good eye contact, avoid nervous mannerisms, and try to be a good listener as well as a good talker.

When answering questions about your experience, use the term “I”, rather than “We”. For example “I was responsible for.....”. Remember to end each answer on a positive note.

Smile. Follow the interviewer's lead, but try to get the interviewer to describe the position and duties to you fairly early in the interview so that you can then relate your background and skills in context.

Be specific, concrete, and detailed in your answers. The more information you volunteer, the better the employer gets to know you. Answer questions as truthfully and as frankly as you can. The interviewer may steer the interview into ticklish political or social questions - answer honestly, trying not to say more than is necessary.

Other questions you may be asked:

- **Why did you leave your last job / Why do you want to leave your current role?** The interviewer is looking to see if there were problems at your last job that may arise again. Employees usually leave a job for more than one reason and you should mention only those reasons that are favourable to you. If you were fired from your last job, explain what happened in a positive manner and note that the situation would never occur again. Do not say anything negative about a company or manager you used to work for as the interviewer will most likely view you as someone who will do the same thing again.
- **What are your weaknesses?** You MUST prepare an answer. Use one that can be turned into a strength, and explain your efforts to overcome it.
- **Why have all your jobs been short term?** The interviewer is trying to find out if you can keep a job. You should mention any straight forward factors that are responsible for your work history, such as returning to school, summer or temporary employment, travel, etc. If you have no explanation to offer the employer, mention that you were looking for work and assure the employer you plan to stay with this job for some time.
- **What kind of salary do you expect?** It is wise to learn what this range is prior to the interview. If unsure, tell the interviewer that you would work for whatever the company feels is fair, based on your qualifications and the company's standard salary level for that position. If you want to request a specific salary, be able to back up why you should get that amount (avoid stating personal reasons).

- **Where do you see yourself in 2 years time?** If unsure, play the middle ground between ambition and stability. The interviewer wants to know whether you are serious about staying with the company and to determine whether you have given some thought to your future. If your goals are related to the job in question, be certain to make note of this. If the position is not related to your goals, mention the advantages of gaining additional work experience as part of your career planning.
- **How much were you absent from work/school? How is your health?** The interviewer is trying to determine how dependable you are. If this has not been an area of concern for you, stress your past reliability and give assurance of your future reliability. If you have had past difficulties in this area, tell the interviewer why this was and why you feel that it will no longer be a problem. If it will continue to be a problem, be up front about this and try to negotiate a schedule that works for both of you.
- **When are you available for work?** If you are presently unemployed, you can most likely respond that you can begin work right away. However, if you are presently employed, you should be aware of how much notice your present employer requires before you are able to leave your present job.
- **Can you explain this gap in your employment?** The employer may be questioning your commitment to employment, thinking that you don't like to work, or wanting to find out what you have been doing with yourself during the gap. If you have been doing anything constructive during this time, such as dedicating yourself to college, taking courses, volunteer work, etc., mention these. Also, mention that you were looking for work, and that you enjoy working.
- **Do you have a criminal record?** If you have a criminal record, don't try to hide it from the interviewer. Briefly explain the situation, remembering not to sound like you are making excuses or blaming the incident on someone else. Reassure the interviewer that you have learned from your mistakes and have changed your ways.
- **Are you willing to cut your hair/take out your earring?** The interviewer feels that some aspect of your appearance does not "fit" with the business and wants to know if you are willing to change your appearance. The decision of what you say is yours. However, if you say no, you may not be considered for the job. Saying yes will increase the chances of being seen as a cooperative person and, consequently, of being hired.
- **What frustrates you?**
- **Why do you want to work for us?**
- **How do you handle pressure?** Give the interviewer examples of paid or unpaid activities that involved deadlines and pressures and be able to explain how you handled the stress. If you were unable to meet the deadline, explain what you did to compensate, such as working overtime, renegotiating the deadline, etc
- **What are your career aspirations?**
- **What do you know about our organisation/the job?**
- **What are you most and least proud of?**
- **Who do you admire most public or private and why?**
- **If you could choose anyone, which five guests would you invite and why to a dinner party?**
- **What company cultures do you thrive in?**
- **What newspapers do you read?/What was the last book you read?/What television programmes do you watch?**
- **How would you define a team?**
- **Give me an example of when in your present role, you have done more than that which was required**
- **Give me an example of when you have had to be persuasive / prioritise / deal with a difficult customer / follow a course of action you didn't agree with**
- **What were your favourite and worst subjects at school / college / university etc?**
- **Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?**
- **What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?**
- **What major challenge have you encountered and how did you deal with it?**
- **What have you learned from your mistakes?**
- **What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?**

You should also **RESEARCH THE COMPANY** before the interview, so that you can display some knowledge of your potential employer's operation. Not only will this enable you to relate any relevant experience and knowledge you may have, but it will also demonstrate to the interviewer that you have done some preparation and are taking the whole recruitment process seriously – do not assume that simply because you are in the interview that the employer will think you are keen: show them through preparation.

The Internet is the best place to start when doing this research.

- General information about the company
- Organizational structure
- Philosophy, goals and image
- The competition in the industry and the company's place in it
- The products or services marketed by the company, including recent media coverage of them.
- Career path in your field
- Recent news items regarding the company or the industry

If you have some of this information before the interview, you can develop a presentation that will relate your background and interests to what the company has to offer. When you ask questions in the interview, you should not ask for information that is readily available elsewhere if you want to make a good impression on the interviewer.

8. Closing the interview

So, imagine that you are in the interview, and have put forward your selling points, strengths and key skills and attributes for the job in a clear, professional manner. You have developed a rapport with the interviewer, and feel interested in the job. Now what happens?

Usually you will be asked if you wish to ask any questions, and usually your questions have already been answered during the interview. However, **you must ask some questions (or at least create the impression that you were going to), since it demonstrates that you have thought seriously about the role and have done some preparation. This is one of the most important parts of the interview, and a poor performance here will result in failure** – our experience has taught us this.

YOU MUST TAKE A FOLDER IN TO THE INTERVIEW CONTAINING YOUR QUESTION LIST.

This will:

- **Demonstrate your preparation**
- **Demonstrate that you are taking the job seriously**
- **Ensure that you don't forget anything**

You must produce and look in this folder, even if all your questions have already been answered.

Look in it and say "all my questions have been answered, thank you". The interviewer will be impressed, and you will stand head and shoulders above other candidates.

You could also write down your key strengths in relation to the job (as previously prepared), so that when you look at the list you can check to see if you have forgotten to tell the interviewer something.

Below is a list of questions you could ask:

- Who will I be reporting to?
- How many people in the team?
- What training will I be given?
- What specific duties will I have?
- How will the post develop?
- Training and future career developments?
- Nature of the industry – dynamic, stable, complex, competition
- Number of people in company / office / team / general hierarchy
- Priorities – self prioritising or managed
- How do you see the department / company developing or "Where do you see the company in two years?"
- Do you have the time to show me the office where I will be working?
- How many people have you seen?
- When do you need someone to start? Say when you are available
- What would a normal working day be like?
- Is it possible to move through the training program faster?
- How much contact is there with management?
- During training, are employees transferred between functional fields?

- How soon could I expect to be advanced to the next level in the career path?
- How much travel is normally expected?
- How often are performance reviews given?
- How much decision-making authority is given after one year?
- Does the company provide any educational benefits?
- How frequently do you relocate professional employees?
- Have any new product lines/services/curricula been announced recently?

PLEASE NOTE - the interview is **not** the time to ask questions about salary, benefits, hours or vacation. This information may be critical for you in making your decision, but wait until you have been offered the job before asking about them.

A final question to ask may be **“Do you have any reservations about me/my experience”**. You will then be able to lay to rest any doubts which the interviewer may have.

THE FINAL THING TO DO IS TO TELL THE INTERVIEWER THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THE JOB. WRITE THIS ON YOUR QUESTIONS LIST SO THAT YOU DON'T FORGET:

**“THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO SEE ME. I AM VERY INTERESTED IN THE JOB,
IT IS THE POSITION I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR.
WHEN ARE YOU LOOKING TO MAKE A DECISION?”**

Don't be discouraged if no definite offer is made or if no specific salary is discussed. If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected, do not let your discouragement show. Once in a while an interviewer who is genuinely interested may seem to discourage you to test your reaction.

Finally, remember:

- ENTHUSIASM IS INFECTIOUS
- SELL YOURSELF IN A CONFIDENT, PROFESSIONAL MANNER
- NEVER ASSUME – WHAT YOU DON'T TELL THE INTERVIEWER, THEY WILL NEVER KNOW
- DO THE CONFIDENT THING TO FEEL CONFIDENT
- EXPRESS YOUR INTEREST IN THE JOB

Good Luck from us all.