Interview Skills

The job interview is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the selection process. If you have been successful in gaining an interview you should feel confident that your application has been competitive and the employer wants to meet you. You are more than half way there – your aim now is to convince them that you are the best person for the job!

Interview style will vary from organisation and employer – but a formal interview panel will generally have at least 2-3 people and last around 30-40 minutes. Some employers also hold group interviews, or ask you to complete a presentation as well as a panel interview. Whatever style is used, the aim of any employer is the same – to find the most suitable candidate for the position whose personality will ‘fit’ into their organisation’s culture.

Why is an interview important?

- The interview is an opportunity to market yourself and show how well you are suited to the organisation.
- Remember the interview has two perspectives – yours and theirs! The interview is also your chance to find out more about the organisation, as well as to create a good impression.

RESEARCH BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

The more you prepare for an interview, the more control you will have over the situation, and the less nervous you may then feel.

The Job
Make sure you understand the job and the key duties and skill requirements of the position description – think about how you meet and can evidence these in the interview. If you have any questions about the job or want to find out more, ask the employer / HR department for clarification. If you’ve been invited for an interview where there is no job description listed (e.g. via networking) ask the employer for some information before you meet, so you can prepare properly.

The Organisation
You may well be asked what you know about the company / organisation – a simple search of their website can give you valuable insight into their current plans, team culture and important areas of work. Research about the organisation could also involve looking at social media sites, perusal of an annual report or just an enthusiastic phone call to the employer requesting more information. More specific research prior to an interview may include gathering information about the interviewers and the expected style and content of the interview.
Your Application
Always review your application, as you may need to refer to it during the interview. Be prepared to talk about the experiences in your resume, and any examples you cite in key selection criteria.

Yourself
Be prepared mentally for the interview. Ensure you are professionally dressed and aware of the interview location. Reflect on your strengths and weaknesses, and show your enthusiasm for the job.

YOUR PRESENTATION AT AN INTERVIEW

First impressions
Employers only have a short time to gather as much information about you as they can, so the way you look and act will be a key factor in the information they gather. Avoid extremes of fashion and style unless research into the dress code of the organisation indicates that it would be suitable.

Make a positive start
Be prepared to firmly shake the hand of your interviewer/s regardless of gender. If this situation does not occur, take time to make direct eye contact with everybody in the room greeting them with a friendly smile. This introductory body language will set you up for a confident start to the interview.

Be aware of your body language
During the interview maintain eye contact with the entire selection panel and not just the person asking the questions. Adopt an enthusiastic posture by sitting up straight and slightly forward. Avoid crossing your arms – a good place for your hands is in your lap. Your positive body language will reflect a confident and enthusiastic applicant.

Don’t forget your personality!
An interview is an interpersonal exchange, but some candidates go into an interview and leave their personalities at the door. Engaging the panel is an important part of the process – remember they’re looking to see who is going to ‘fit in’ best in the organisation. One of the main qualities being assessed at an interview is your communication skills.

Smiling, seeking clarification of questions, using low-key appropriate humour and generally being an active rather than passive participant in the process, enables you to display these skills to the panel.

MOCK INTERVIEW
It is a good idea to practice your interview techniques a few times prior to the big day. Ask a friend or family member to run through some typical interview questions with you. UTAS Career Development and Employment (CDE) can also assist you to prepare your interview performance by way of a mock interview where you would be asked questions relevant to the position you are going for. Feedback on your responses, as well as your body language and appearance will be given. Bookings are via CareerHub, or email Careers.Service@utas.edu.au

What will I be assessed on?
In an interview a candidate will be assessed on their:

- ability to provide comprehensive answers that include real-life evidence of your skills and abilities
- dress and grooming
- confidence, motivation and enthusiasm
- ability to speak clearly and listen well
- understanding of the job

INTERVIEW SKILLS
Below are some skills that are very useful in an interview. How confident are you to apply these methods?

Active listening
High level listening in which your entire attention is focused on the person speaking.

Control of the content
The interviewer may control the questions / process – but you are in control of your responses and content you choose to put forward.
Let others speak for you
Let others build you up by saying something like, “My boss felt some of my most valuable attributes were that I could always be counted on to get a project done on schedule and that the details had all been taken care of.”

Master the art of story-telling
Using stories to sell your skills is a highly successful interview technique. In less than three minutes you can tell a story that will make interviewers remember you favourably.

Employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success, so tell stories that vividly describe your successes and ensure you provide evidence of the skills you discuss. A good technique to use is the STAR model, which we go into more detail about below.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Although you cannot predict the exact wording of interview questions, employers are generally looking for similar information – evidence of how you meet the skills and requirements of the job and learning about your past behaviour and how you’ve dealt with particular situations. Knowing this, you can reflect on the experiences you’ve had and prepare responses beforehand that demonstrate your skills and experiences.

Seek clarification
Never begin to answer a question that you don’t fully understand; instead, ask for clarification.

It is also OK to think about an answer for a short time. This is preferable to launching into a vague and unclear response.

Link to your selection criteria responses
If the organisation has listed key selection criteria, you can be sure there will be a number of questions that directly relate to them. Have examples ready of how you meet each of the selection criteria and do not be worried about repeating examples given in your written application.

Effective answering techniques
Questions should be answered with enthusiasm and so one-word answers are never sufficient. As a guide, your response to each question should take approximately 1-2 minutes. After concisely explaining how the key examples you have presented address the question, check with the panel to see if they require any further detail or clarification.

A good way for answering questions is by using the STAR model:

- **Situation** – context, who/what/where
- **Task** – your role, any challenges
- **Action** – how you managed it/skills used
- **Result** – outcome (ensuring it’s a positive one!)

This way of telling a story provides a strong emphasis on evidence based examples.

Avoid the temptation to say “The information has been given in my written application” – this will make you appear arrogant and inflexible. It is worth remembering that it is possible that some interviewers may not have had the opportunity to read your application.

Your questions
At some point in the interview you may be given the opportunity to ask questions. You should use this opportunity to clarify any points that are unclear in relation to the position you are applying for.

Ideally your questions should reflect your interest and research into the position and/or the organisation and not things that you could find easily through your research.

If you cannot think of any questions, that is ok. Don’t forget to thank the panel members, and re-iterate your interest in the position and what you can offer the organisation. By doing this, you will end your interview in a confident and professional way.
EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

There are many good websites and blogs with ideas and examples of interview questions and a quick Google search will also help you narrow down questions for your area of employment (i.e. lawyer, researcher).

You may want to watch an interview tip video – Career One has some good ones on interviews:

www.careerone.com.au

Click on the Career Advice Videos link under the Career Advice heading.

KEY INTERVIEW TIPS

SHE – Smile, Handshake and Eye contact – if you can only remember this, it will help ensure you make a good impression to the interview panel.

WATER – if offered a glass of water, take it, even if you don’t feel thirsty. Having a sip of water whilst thinking about the question being asked may buy you 5-10 seconds thinking time before you begin your response (and the employer will not realise you are).

PREPARATION – Interviews are at their most basic, a conversation. Prepare ahead and be confident in what you have to offer the panel.

CONTACT US

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