

Interview Preparation Guidance

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Introduction

Being invited to a job interview can be a very daunting experience particularly if it's been a few years since you've had one. Here we've pulled together some top tips to help you prepare.

There are four key elements to take a look at:

- Preparation
- Presentation
- Face to Face or Video meeting
- Example Questions.



Preparation



Research the Company

Make sure you fully understand the job description and that you have researched the company as much as you can. Use the website to look for recent press releases, the latest company news or their blog and think how this might relate to the role you are going for. Social media is also a useful source of up to date information – check out the company profile on LinkedIn and what they're saying on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram what's being said to them.

It's also worthwhile to search the names of the hiring manager online and on LinkedIn – it's a great advantage to know something about your potential interviewer! Pick up some trade journals or search the web to learn more about the company's industry. Try to get an understanding of where the company might sit amongst its competitors.

✓ Know Your Skills

Allocate some time to re-read your CV and spend some time analysing your skill sets that are particularly relevant to the job in question. Ensure you have thought through examples of previous experiences that would fit situations that may occur in this job. It is a good idea to have at least 3 achievement stories prepared. These demonstrate hard to measure qualities like initiative, team skills, judgement and leadership. As in your CV, quantify why these were achievements – an increase of sales by 10% year on year, etc.

✓ Know Your Motivations and Reasons

- Spend a little time thinking about yourself and how you can be perceived as an interested, enthusiastic candidate.
- Be clear about why you want to do the job. In addition to knowing about the role and the relevance of your skills and experience apply to it; think what you're going to say when the interviewer asks 'why do you want this job?' What is it about the company that attracts you? Are you going to find the job rewarding? ... Is it using your hard-won skills? Working in a team again? Working in a growing business? The flexible hours may be ideal and the company's offices may be close to home but be careful about not positioning this as your primary motivation.
- Be prepared to talk about yourself and your aspirations. Many people returning to work or opting for a flexible role are not necessarily driven by career aspirations, rather they're seeking a better life balance whilst doing a satisfying job. This is fine but interviewers may be looking for a better sense of personal direction and career or personal aims. Were you career oriented? What drives you now? How can the job contribute to your aims? Does this make the job valuable to you? Also, don't be afraid to talk about what you bring to the role at whatever stage you're at in your career e.g. experience, adaptability & organisation.
- Understand how you can add value to the employer. It follows on from 'what can the job do for me'. What can you do for the job and for the company? Understand what benefits you bring, the value of your experience, working as part of a team etc.





Be prepared for the Part-Time and Flexible Working Discussion

- Show you know how to work part-time or flexibly. Can you convey that you know what it takes to work flexibly? A part-week can be a concern to an employer but if they know that you understand the restrictions and opportunities and demonstrate your organisational skills you can roll past the issue and convince them that - with you - there won't be any issues.
- “Are you too Senior?” If it can be perceived that you are ‘trading down’ – if you’ve done a more senior role in your past career than the one you’re being interviewed for - why would you be happy doing this one? You may need to convince the interviewer that you can do a good job at that level, make a valued contribution and won't be bored and leave within a month. ‘I just want to work’ may be true but won't get you the job.
- Be prepared to handle the childcare question. Interviewers sometimes asks about whether you need to set up childcare (they shouldn't but do), one approach is not to explain the options or say you have to look into it but to simply say that this is not a worry and that you have options to choose from. Before going for an interview you should have explored these for when you're successful and your prospective employers' looking for a quick start.



Prepare your Questions

Remember: An interview is a two way process which means you need to be asking as many questions as the client! It is imperative that you have pre-prepared questions to ask so there are no awkward silences. Your interviewer will be enthusiastic about their business and will want to see this reflected in you. There are some suggested questions at the end of this document.



Prepare Yourself

- Decide the night before what you will wear and make sure it is ready – you don't want to be late because of ironing a shirt
- Go to bed early and get a good nights' sleep.



Know Where and When

Check the exact location of your interview and who you are meeting prior to the interview. Know where the station is or where you can park, take change for parking and allow yourself plenty of time to get there in case of delays!

If the interview is via video, double check you can access the link and the software doesn't need an update the day before.



Presentation



Don't Underestimate some of the Basics ...

First impressions are the most powerful and the hardest to change. It only takes 4 seconds to make your first impression and 4 years to change a bad one so make your initial one count!

- Always introduce yourself with a firm and positive handshake and a confident smile!
- It is important that you dress smartly. If you haven't worked for a while, ask friends or go online and look at the current trends in business dress.
- Remove any jewellery that could be considered "unprofessional" – It may be fine outside of work but not every employer may think so.
- If you smoke or vape, try not to immediately before the interview as it may be quite obvious to those who do not.
- Be aware of how much perfume or aftershave you're wearing!



Face to Face Interview

This is the time when you can really put your case forward as to why you are the best person for the job. An interview offers the opportunity not only to sell yourself but also to find out whether the company and job is really of interest to you.

1. Body language is incredibly important.

Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer and speak in a clear and confident manner. Try not to fidget or fiddle with your hair or jewellery despite how nervous you may be feeling!

2. Relax and smile! Why be nervous? You haven't even found out whether the job is of interest to you yet. Remember: the employer is interviewing you because they have a vacancy, they would like you to be the perfect person just as much as you would like the job itself.

3. Be attentive. Allow the employer to finish the sentences and listen clearly to what they say. No one likes to be talked over or interrupted.

4. Answer the questions directly. Provide the information that is being asked for and do not waffle! Use the STAR (situation, task, action, result) method to clearly communicate your answers when explaining a 'tell me about a time' type of question.

5. Tell the truth. If you don't understand what the client has asked you, ask them to explain. There is no point giving an answer that the client is not looking for.

6. Take your time. Pause before answering any difficult questions as you should think through the answer and express yourself clearly.

7. Always maintain your professionalism.

Even if the interviewer is very casual and friendly remain professional at all times.

8. Try not to put too much emphasis on salary or package details at this stage.

An employer prefers someone interested in the job itself rather than the salary. If you are working through an agency they will handle negotiations on your behalf, so only discuss ball-park figures at this stage.

9. Speak up. If you are not happy with "a wobbly chair" or "sun in your eyes" etc. during the interview you must inform the interviewer. Interviews can be hard enough without further issues.

10. Ask great questions. This not only shows you have researched the company in general, it also shows you are really interested in the job.

11. Say you're interested. If you're keen on the job, make sure you tell the interviewer. Try to find out what the next steps are and the timescales involved as employers often like people to close the interview in this way.

12. Shake hands as you leave.





Video Interview

If you're being asked to interview over video most of the above points still apply but there's a few extra's to think about:

Preparing...

1. Choose and test your tech

You can use a mobile but a laptop or tablet is better. Check that your webcam and microphone are working and your device is fully charged. It's a good idea to test and become familiar with the video application before the interview takes place.

2. Check your surroundings

Make sure your background appears professional or at least neutral, avoiding anything that might distract the interviewer or create the wrong impression.

3. No barking or crying

Make sure there are no noisy distractions such as pets or children around that could interrupt your interview. These could spoil the flow and again, create an unprofessional impression to your prospective employer.

4. Dress for success

Wear what you would normally wear to a face to face interview at the company's premises.

5. Be early!

Get logged on, comfortably positioned with water at hand before the scheduled start time.

Participating ...

1. Be more than yourself

It's important to be yourself during the interview but be aware of three things: Make regular eye contact (know where your webcam is positioned); ensure you have a good posture; and try to use positive, open body language.

2. Check understanding

If you're asked a question you don't understand, ask for clarification and if you feel that an answer you've given hasn't been understood don't be afraid to check understanding.

3. Pause for breath

Video requires people to be more deliberate in their actions and conversations so deliberately pause briefly between statements particularly if they're long or detailed.

4. Prepare your questions

Having your questions prepared ahead of time gives an even stronger impression over video than it does face to face. It demonstrates thorough preparation and enthusiasm for the job.

5. Use your notes

If you want to make or refer to notes, go ahead but don't get fixated by them!



Example Interview Questions

Here's some example interview questions that might come up. Remember to use the 'STAR' technique when answering where you can.

Competency-based Interview Questions

The most common type of questioning. Questions start with 'Tell us about a time when you...', 'Give an example of...' or 'Describe how you...'

Questions usually centre around the competencies outlined in the job description (ie, communication, decision making, leadership, results, teamwork, commercial awareness, etc). Examples:

Q. Tell us about a time you had to adjust your communication approach to suit a particular audience.

Q. Describe a time when you used your communication skills to get across an important point of view?

Q. Give an example of a time when you had to make a difficult decision.

Q. When did you make a difficult decision within a team that most people were against?

Q. Describe a situation when you assumed the role of leader. Were there any challenges, and how did you address them?"

Q. Describe a situation you were in when you motivated a difficult member of a team?

Q. Give me an example of a time when you believe you were successful.



Q. Describe a situation in which you were working as part of a team. How did you make a contribution?

Q. Describe a difficult and time-sensitive task you achieved whilst working as part of a team? What role did you play in ensuring the team task was a success?

Q. Describe a situation when you were responsible for the completion of a task.

Q. Describe a situation when you have had to use commercial awareness.

Q. Describe a period where you enhanced your skills effectively.

Q. When did you take onboard constructive feedback from a supervisor following an appraisal?

Q. Describe a situation where you have used technical skills in your work.

Q. Describe a time when you solved a difficult problem at work?

Q. Can you give an example of when you have supported change within an organisation?

Q. Describe a time when you had to deal with a customer complaint? What did you do and how did you resolve the complaint.



Behavioural Based Questions

Behavioural based questions are designed to reveal what motivates and drives a person. They ask the candidate to tell a story of how they did something and why. There are no right or wrong answers here. The questions are designed to gain an understanding of how the candidate thinks and acts.

Q. Give an example of a time when you didn't meet a goal, and how you handled this.

Q. Tell me about a time you had to persuade someone who didn't like you to perform a task at work.

Value Based Questions

Value-based interview questions help an employer determine whether a candidate's values align with their company.

Q. Can you describe a time where you had to adapt to a sudden change at work?

Q. Tell me about a disagreement you had with a teammate. How did you handle it?

Q. Can you tell me about a project you led and how that project concluded?

Additional General Questions

Q. Describe a situation in which you led a team.

Q. Give an example of a time you handled conflict in the workplace.

Q. How do you maintain good working relationships with your colleagues?

Q. Tell me about a big decision you've made recently.

Q. What has been your biggest achievement to date?

Q. Describe a project where you had to use different leadership styles to reach your goal.

Q. Tell me about a time when your communication skills improved a situation.

Q. How do you cope in adversity?

Q. Give me an example of a challenge you faced in the workplace and tell me how you overcame it.

Q. How do you influence people in a situation with conflicting agendas?

Q. Give an example of a situation where you solved a problem in a creative way.

Q. Tell me about a time that you made a decision and then changed your mind.

Q. Tell me about a time when you achieved success even when the odds were stacked against you.

Best of luck with your interview!!!