

Your Interview Preparation Guide

You have just been asked to come in for an interview for the job of your dreams, now you have 45 – 60 minutes to perform in your interview. It is make or break time, it is imperative that you put in the preparation to nail the interview. Here are some tips on how to prepare for your interview:

Types of Interviews

You will encounter a number of interview techniques during your job search. Approaches vary according to the nature of the role and the industry.

Behavioural Interviews: The interviewer will ask you to describe how you handled various situations in your previous role. The emphasis is on your experience and its relevance to the position for which you are being considered. Prepare by identifying four or five examples that show how you faced challenges and achieved positive outcomes in your previous role. In each case describe a specific task or situation that is relevant to the role in question.

Situational Interviews: These are very similar to behavioural interviews. The difference is that situational interviews pose hypothetical questions, rather than asking for specific examples of past performance. Questions are based on the skills and personality traits that are required for the role. Use the job description to identify key responsibilities because the questions are likely to focus on these areas.

Unstructured Interviews: This style is conversational and information is gained through a free-flowing discussion. The interviewer does not ask a set of questions in a predetermined order. You are required to carry the conversation and the topics you discuss generally lead to subsequent questions. Rehearsal is important because the interviewer, although apparently casual, will be looking for details that reveal your skill, personality and cultural fit for the role.

Panel Interviews: These consist of multiple interviewers who are usually sourced from different parts of the business. Objectives are likely to vary between members of the panel and this will affect the flow of questioning. Establish eye contact with the member of the panel asking the question and scan the other panel members during your response. Take particular care when answering technical or strategic questions as panel members may have specialist knowledge in these areas.

Here are the main areas to focus on:

1. **Research the company:** Researching the company and the industry in which they operate shows initiative, enthusiasm and a keen interest in the role. The fastest way to conduct research on a company is online. Start off with the company's website and then try expanding your search. Additionally, if you know someone who works at or has worked at the company where you are interviewing will give you insightful information:
 - a. Try to answer the following questions:
 - I. What are the company's core products and services?
 - II. How is the company perceived in the market place?
 - III. Find out what you can about the company's financial situation.
 - IV. Try to think like a client of the company and identify potential improvements.
 - V. Research the company's competitors and the industry as a whole.
 - VI. Use LinkedIn to profile employees.
2. **Personal appearance:** The fact is that when you first meet a person, they make a judgment about you in approximately four seconds, and their judgment is finalised largely within 30 seconds of the initial contact. Make sure it is a positive one.

- 3. Body Language:** Body language speaks volumes in an interview, Studies have shown that your body language communicates more to another person than what you say or the tone of your voice, here are the do's and don'ts:
- a. Things to avoid:
 - i. Shifting around too much in your seat, especially when faced with tough questions.
 - ii. Nodding too much when the interviewer is talking, this shows impatience on your behalf.
 - iii. Folding your arms, it sends a message that you are on the defensive.
 - iv. Slouching in your chair, remember to keep good posture throughout the duration of your interview.
 - b. Areas to focus on:
 - i. Slow down, the first thing you can practice is slowing down how fast we speak. Often when we operate at the speed of our minds, we lose control of our body language. So talking slowly and deliberately is a good way to keep our bodies in check during an interview.
 - ii. Eye contact, maintain frequent though intermittent eye contact. Sense the comfort level of the manager and give them slightly more than equal eye contact.
 - iii. Maintain a good posture, aim to look confident, interested and alert by sitting upright and leaning slightly forward. Keep your hands relaxed in your lap, using them to gesture appropriately as you speak.
 - iv. Do mirror your interviewer, mirroring is a well-known rapport building technique, which involves matching your own body language to the interviewer's body language. Without being obvious, you can discreetly adapt your posture, tone of voice and facial expressions to match the interviewer's. This helps build rapport by making the other person feel more comfortable around you. Your aim is to establish common ground and foster mutual respect.

- 4. Example questions you could be asked:** Below is a list of questions, some of which may come up in the interview, others that may not.

Why do you want to work here? Once you have researched the organisation, you will have no problems listing the advantages of working for them.

What kind of experience do you have for this job? By knowing what is expected for the role in question, you can tailor your answer using specific examples from your past that match what is needed for the role.

What did you dislike about your old job? Be cautious in answering this question. By slating your old role / boss / organisation you are sending out negative warning signs to the interviewer that you may be trouble. Keep answers short and positive: e.g. 'I really enjoyed my last job but I felt that I wanted a bigger challenge.'

Where do you see yourself in five years' time? A good response is to throw a question back: 'What opportunities are there within this company?' If possible and honest, blend this answer with your prepared answer. Remember the role you are applying for is the main priority.

What are your greatest accomplishments? A golden opportunity to sell yourself. It is absolutely crucial that you have several well prepared stories including facts and figures. The interviewer needs to be able to visualise you not only successfully completing that task, but completing such tasks for their organisation. Be conscious of time and don't ramble - get as much detail into as short a time as possible.

Can you work under pressure? A simple 'yes' does not separate you from the crowd. Think of specifics from your past including how you dealt with pressure and how you have managed this.

What are your greatest strengths? Look to the list of competencies above: Which of those are most relevant to the job in question? Have examples prepared for the three that you think are most needed for the role.

What most interests you about this job? Again, this can only be answered if you have done your research.

Why should I hire you? The interviewer will normally start the interview with a preamble about the company, why the position has come into being, and what they are looking for in a candidate. It is advisable to write down what qualities they are looking for. When it comes to answering this question, incorporate those qualities in your reply.

Describe a difficult problem that you have had to deal with? This is a chance to show off your approach to problems. Show that you employ a logical thought process by outlining a step-by-step approach to problem solving.

Where have you shown initiative previously? Managers want to hire someone who shows initiative and is a self-starter. It is best to think of examples that are work related.

Do you work better on your own or as part of a team? By knowing about the role you will have an idea of the balance of work in terms of how much time will be spent working on your own and how much contributing to team efforts. Respond according to the necessary balance.

What is your greatest weakness? Keep your answer short and end it on a positive note if possible. How do you compensate for this?

The interview will normally close with the interviewer inviting you to ask some questions. Having researched the company, you will be in a great position to probe and find out if this is the role / company for you. E.g. I understand the organisation has been changing. What does the future hold?

Avoid asking questions about the salary. This should only be discussed once the job offer is made. However, if you are asked the question be honest and realistic.

Show enthusiasm for the role. e.g. 'I understand that you are making a decision on the fifteenth. What do I need to do in the meantime to ensure that I get the job?'

5. **Interview questions you can use:** Before your interview, prepare questions you will want to ask the interviewer. 'Open' questions that begin with 'What?', 'How?', 'Will?' or 'Who?' should encourage your interviewer to talk and provide you with additional information. We recommend that you consider some of the following questions:

- I. How has the position become vacant?
- II. How will you assess my performance?
- III. How does the role fit into the structure of the department?
- IV. How does the department fit into the organization as a whole?
- V. Who will I report to and are there staff reporting into me?
- VI. What encouragement/support is given to undertake further training?
- VII. Where is the company going/growing? Expansion plans?
- VIII. What is the next step?

6. **Post interview:** You may have performed superbly in the interview, but you must bear in mind that peoples' memories are unreliable. To improve your chances of securing the job you must stay in the forefront of the interviewer's mind. On returning home, type an email to the interviewer ensuring that you have their name (and anyone else who was present at the interview) spelt correctly. It is an opportunity to re-sell yourself both in terms of your ability to do the job and it also shows that you are motivated and professional. The email should cover several areas:

- I. Thanking the interviewer for their time.

- II. That you are excited about the job, that you can do it, and that you want it.
- III. That you can make a contribution to the organisation.