

The interview guide

How you present and market yourself at interview is crucial in determining whether or not you secure the job you want. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with best practice advice as well as hints and tips on undertaking a successful interview.

STEP 1 –

PREPARATION

Preparation, preparation, preparation. The importance of preparation cannot be stressed enough – it is essential for a successful interview. The better prepared you are, the more confident you'll be.

The basics

Before your interview, ensure that you know the following:

- The exact time and location of the interview, route, transport options, parking and how long it will take to get there.
- The interviewer's correct title and pronunciation of his or her full name.
- Specific facts about the company – its history, financial position, mission, markets, competitors, latest news, products and services. The company's website is often an excellent source of this information. Simple internet searches can also reveal information that may not be profiled on the company's website.
- Facts and figures about your present or former employer. Refresh your memory on this as you will be expected to know a lot about a company for which you have previously worked.

Dress

Dress like a professional, in a smart business suit with a clean, ironed shirt and tie (or blouse) and dark shoes. Do not wear casual clothes even if you know that it is company policy.

Review your CV and the job description

- Review your CV and ensure you are equipped to answer questions on the details you have supplied.
- Be ready to use pertinent examples from your career or personal life to demonstrate your skills and competencies.

- Review the job description and the core competencies of the role. Examine your suitability and prepare specific examples before the interview.

Questions to ask the interviewer

Remember that an interview is a two-way process. The interviewer will be trying to determine whether you are the right person for the role and, likewise, you should take the opportunity to determine whether the potential employer will provide the career development and challenge that you seek.

Some questions you might ask include:

- Why has the position become available?
- How does the position fit into the structure of the organisation?
- What training programmes are available to ensure continued personal and career development?
- What plans does the organisation have for future development?
- What motivated you to join the organisation?

STEP 2 –

THE INTERVIEW

During the interview, your strengths and areas for development will be assessed. In addition, specific personal characteristics will be examined, such as attitude, aptitude, stability and motivation.

Hints and tips for a successful interview

Making the right first impression

- Arrive on time or a few minutes early, but not too early. Late arrival for an interview is inexcusable.
- Greet the interviewer and thank them for their time.
- Follow the interviewer's lead let them set the tone of the interview.

Body language

- Shake hands firmly.
- Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting.
- Sit upright in your chair and look alert and interested at all times.
- Be as charismatic as possible; it is very important that you demonstrate your interpersonal skills during the interview.
- Be a good listener as well as a good talker.
- Smile and maintain eye contact.

Marketing yourself

- Describe your accomplishments and how they apply to the prospective role in a clear, concise way.
- Always conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing.
- Never close the door on an opportunity. It is better to be in a position where you can choose from a number of offers – rather than only one.
- Avoid enquiring about salary, holidays and bonuses at the initial interview unless you are positive that the interviewer wants to hire you. You should however, know your market value and expect to specify your required salary or salary range.

Competency based interviews

Organisations are increasingly using this technique to standardise the interviewing process. Competency based interviews (also sometimes known as behavioural interviews) focus on the core competencies that are needed to be successful in a role including knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics.

You will be required to give specific examples of past situations or exercises that demonstrate your competence in particular areas. You will need to give thoughtful answers, recalling as much detail as possible, ensuring that you make it relevant to the position you are interviewing for.

Examples of competency-based questions

Give me an example of when you had to work to an important deadline.

How manageable were your timescales?

What did you do to ensure that the deadline was met?

How would you organise your activities differently next time?

Describe the last time you missed a deadline.

Why did this happen?

How responsible were you for this?

What did you do to try to overcome this problem?

Give me an example of when you had to support others in a team.

Why did they need support?

What did you do to support them?

How did that change things?

Describe an occasion when you had difficulties working with a team.

What caused the problems?

How did you respond?

What was the outcome?

Tell me about a time you were able to anticipate a problem.

How did you know the problem was likely to occur?

What did you do?

How effective was your action?

Give me a recent example of when you have experienced a setback.
Describe the situation.
How did you react to the problem?

Traditional interview questions

You also need to be prepared to answer more traditional interview questions such as:

Why did you choose your particular career path/field?

What kind of role are you seeking?

Why would you like to work for this organisation?

What interests you about our product/service?

What do you think determines a person's progress in a good company?

What do you want to be doing in your career five years from now?

When was your last salary review?

What style of management gets the best from you?

What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?

Which job did you enjoy the most and why?

What have you done that shows initiative in your career?

What are your major weaknesses and what are your strengths?

Are you willing to relocate?

What are your hobbies?

What does 'teamwork' mean to you?

STEP 3 – CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

If you are interested in the position, enquire about the next interview stage. If the interviewer offers the position to you and you want it, accept on the spot. If you wish for some time to think it over, be courteous and tactful in asking for that time. Set a definite date on which you can provide an answer.

Don't be discouraged if no definite offer is made nor a specific salary discussed. The interviewer will probably want to consult colleagues or interview other candidates before making a decision.

If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and you have already been rejected, don't let your discouragement show. From time to time an interviewer may intend to discourage you in order to test your reaction.

Thank the interviewer for the time spent with you.