

Preparing For An Interview:

We have all heard the expression “first impressions count for everything” well it is especially true when it comes to preparing for your interview. Committing your time and your effort will ultimately help you reap the rewards you seek, literally from how to get there to what to wear, from the questions to ask and getting the final closure you seek then we have some guidance for you.

This guide has been put together to assist and remind those people who are not familiar with the interview process or become nervous at the thought. Very simply the following is designed to support and prepare you well enough to put yourself across confidently and professionally, therefore reducing the chance at the unexpected occurring in the interview where under pressure mistake can be made.

Etiquette:

There are certain “do’s and don’ts” for every interview – therefore stick to them!

- Always be smart and ideally wear a suit. (It’s better to look professional than scruffy.)
- Do you need to remove or cover piercings, tattoos etc.
- Never be late. Don’t be more than 10 minutes early – but be there early!
- Make sure you know the location, pre-plan the route and always prepare for delays.
- First impressions count, be courteous. (Receptionists are often asked for their opinion.)
- Smile and always use a firm handshake – it shows you are confident!
- Maintain eye contact throughout but try not to stare.
- Never fidget or play with your hands.
- If you are not happy with your wobbly seat/sun in your eyes etc. say so at the beginning.
- Sit up in your seat and never slouch – but be comfortable as you will perform better.



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Preparation:

Before the interview, always prepare and research the following:

- The company
- The interviewer
- The job details
- Your CV
- The questions you may be asked
- The questions you need to ask

These are the basics, miss these out and you will blow your chances immediately. Therefore let us show you just how simply you can prepare for the above through some basic research.

The Company:

Using the internet, newspapers and even friends (find information about the business.)

- What is the turnover/size/structure – does this relate to your background?
- What market sectors they work for?
- News – what does this mean for the future of the company and this job?
- Who are their competitors – do you know them?
- Ownership – stable environment for the foreseeable future?

Is it part of a larger group or are there other subsidiaries.

The Interviewer:

Again the internet may help you, always understand who the person is conducting the interview

- who is the interviewer – what is their position in the company, are they a line manager etc
- does the interviewer have any similarities to your career



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The Job:

Whilst it may seem obvious, read the job description thoroughly. Then carefully look at all the details which that may be specific to this job. Try to think about it from the employer's perspective;

- What are the key areas of the job that the employers will see as the most important.
- What systems experience, industry knowledge, etc do they require.
- What will the employer have seen in your CV as a strength or weakness.

Your CV:

This may seem obvious but make sure you fully understand your own CV. You will be amazed just how many candidates get dates, facts and figures wrong when questioned in an interview.

- Consider which specific details in your CV will be most relevant to the employer.
- Make sure you can clearly explain all the actions/experience/achievements when questioned

Finally make sure you have an 'elevator pitch'. This is what they call the thirty second pitch about selling yourself and your skills. Simply imagine you get into a lift with someone on the top floor and they ask you what you do. You then have until the ground floor to tell them.

Employer's Questions:

Using your preparation, try to predict the questions that the employer will want to investigate further. Employers can adopt several types of interview questioning during an interview so understanding what these are and what is expected is important before answering them. With any type of questions, never rush your answer and never worry if there is a silence as you collect your thoughts – you are better to take your time and answer the question well than rush it and fail.

Open Questions:

- The 'Who, What, Where, Why, When, How', impossible to answer 'Yes' or 'No'.
- The easy going questions to get you talking about your background, CV, and general skills.
- These types of questions occur in almost every interview so be prepared in advance.



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Closed Questions:

- They result in a one word (or very short) answer around a technical, factual or specific area.
- They try not to rely on one word answers though – elaborate!
- Always answered successfully through the knowledge of your CV and the subject matter.

Hypothetical Questions:

- Test your ability to think on your feet, allowing the employer to test your theoretical knowledge
- They test how you deal with a situation in principle.
- Competency Based Questions:
 - The most commonly used method of interviewing particularly for more senior positions.
 - They work on the assumption that past performance is best indicator of your future behaviour.

This type of question requires you to explain and discuss a past task which you undertook in order to look at how you dealt with it. In these instances the interviewer wants to ascertain to what degree you demonstrated a particular competency/trait.(eg; quick decision making, managing and working with deadlines and commercial awareness etc.)

There are “no right or wrong” answers to this type of questioning technique but remember the same questions will be asked of every candidate in the interview process so that the employer is able to measure the response of every applicant against the same benchmark. Therefore do not expect any flexibility in how the question is asked.

Example: ‘Describe a situation where you were under pressure to hit an imperative deadline but had an unrealistic amount of work to do to achieve it’ or ‘Tell me about a time when you spotted an opportunity and turned it into a reality’.

Answering Competency Based Questions (Using STAR)

This is how the employer will assess your answer (which will be done properly after the interview) and don't be surprised if you see the interviewer writing a copious amount of notes (this is to ensure they have all the details as a reminder after the interview).

Situation – Explain the situation that was occurring at the time, leading to why the task was set.

Task – Explain the task that had been set, who was involved, why it needed to be done.

Action – Explain the actions needed in order to achieve the task. Who set them and why.

Result – End result. Positive or negative, explain what was learnt from the experience.

Your Questions:

An interview should always be considered a two-way process where you will want to know more about the role on offer, maybe the company or perhaps even the marketplace that they work in. Some would even say that you are expected to question the client but it does show that you are interested in the role and have taken the time to prepare.

- Write a list of questions before the interview and take them into the interview with you.
- Try to mentally tick them off as the interviewer provides the information so as not to repeat
- Wait until you are asked if you have any questions and ask away.



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The Closure:

With the interview drawing to a close you want to know what they think of you and more importantly will you be included in the next round of interviews. Whilst a company may not tell you whether you are through to the next round they may at least confirm how you have done. Therefore the way in which you finish the interview is important and there are essentially three steps to follow.

1. Know the next step of the interview process.
2. Understand and defend your weaknesses and reiterate your strengths.
3. Always end positively and professionally.

1. The Next Step:

Regarding the next step of the interview process, ask them who will be involved and when it is likely to be. This will show you are forward thinking and wanting to be involved.

2. Your Weaknesses and Strengths:

Ask two questions in this order:

- What are your thoughts about me for this role?
- What concerns do you have about me for the role?
- Asking for the interviewer's thoughts on you means you get to find out how they are thinking
- about you for this job. You are then able to politely defend any perceived weaknesses and sell your skills/experiences and strengths where appropriate.

3. Closing The Interview:

- At the end of the interview, if you are interested in the job, tell the interviewer.
- Always be confident and professional, shake their hand and thank them for their time.