

Preparing for an Interview

Doing some ground work before a job interview is essential to making a good impression on an employer. Researching the organisation and the role itself will help you answer the employer's questions, and show you're keen for the job.

The interview is your chance to present your skills, experience, personal qualities and other strengths as they relate to the position you are applying for. It is also an opportunity to get more information about the organisation or position. This will help you decide if it is the right job for you.

Research the organisation

- What is the public profile of the company? Are you aware of its services?
- Use the Internet, business or industry magazines and brochures to find out information.
- Think about your networks: do you know anyone who works/has worked there?

Anticipate the employer's questions

- Review your CV, covering letter and any application forms you have completed.
- Working from a job description, think of questions the employer may ask.
- Prepare answers to possible questions. Even if these questions are not asked it makes you think carefully about what you are offering.

General tips for answering questions

- Most interviews have a lead-in time of introductions and settling in, questions from the interviewer/panel, and then a chance for the interviewee to ask questions.
- Speak clearly and vary the tone to show you are interested and enthusiastic.
- Give yourself time to think about each question. Pause before answering so that you can think about the best response, and make sure you're giving them the information they need.
- Listen to questions carefully and let the interviewer lead the conversation. If you do not understand a question, ask for it to be explained or repeated.
- Be diplomatic and discreet, particularly about previous employers or co-workers. Don't badmouth anybody.
- Speak from experience - give examples that can demonstrate what knowledge and skills you have, and what you have learned in the past.
- Be positive about the skills you have and what you have done. Don't give the employer a chance to downgrade your abilities by saying things such as "I only have..." or "I don't have direct experience in that area". Instead, tell the employer what you do have or can offer.

Have your questions ready

You will usually get the opportunity to ask questions at an interview. Though you may think of questions during the interview, it pays to have some prepared in case you need them. Make sure you know why you are asking a question. If you ask an idle question, and the interviewer asks why you want to know the answer, you will have to justify yourself. Ask genuine questions about information that is not readily available. For example, don't ask about things that are on the organisation's website or in its promotional brochures. If you do, you'll show the employer that you haven't done your research.

Your research into the organisation can help, and may give you further questions about the job. Here are some examples of questions you could ask at an interview:

1. What type of work will you be doing?

- What are the duties and responsibilities of this position?
- What would a day in the life of a _____ with your firm typically involve?
- What will be biggest challenge I will have in this job?

2. What training and progression opportunities are there?

- What kind of induction or training programme will I complete when I begin the job?
- Will the organisation support ongoing study?
- Will there be opportunities for increased responsibility and broader experience?
- Is there a periodic employee appraisal or performance review? How is this organised?

3. What are the people like?

- Who will I report to in this position?
- How big is the team I will work with?

4. What's the organisation like?

- I find it interesting that you are expanding into _____. Could you tell me more about that?
- How does your organisation show that it values its employees?

Get your interview outfit ready

First impressions count. Dress appropriately and err on the side of being conservative to show you take the interview seriously. Your personal grooming and cleanliness should be impeccable and of a high standard. Employers will notice your presentation. Professional presentation shows you have taken time to look smart, and that may give you the edge over another candidate. Looking good will make you feel good too and that will boost your confidence.

Know where the interview is

Work out how you will get to the interview site and how long your journey will take. Have a contingency plan if something goes wrong, for example, if your children get sick on the day of the interview.

Be mentally prepared for all eventualities

You may be asked to take a test before the interview. It might be an aptitude test, or a test relevant to the type of job you have applied for.

You may be presented with a particular situation and asked how you would deal with it.

Interviews can vary tremendously. Some will be more formal than others. You could face a panel of interviewers, which may be two or three people. You could even go through a series of interviews with different people, all on the same day. Some people may be put off by meeting a situation that they had not anticipated. It's best to expect that anything could happen!