

Applications & Interviews

Interviews

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What is an interview?

An interview is a meeting for two-way discussion and to exchange information.

There are many types of interview:

- With employers or recruitment organisations/agencies
- With one person, or several, whether one at a time or all together (panel interview)
- In person, face to face, or over the telephone
- The 'technical' interview, to see whether you can do the job, whatever it is, which may involve some form of testing
- With a group of other applicants. Here you will be assessed against them on things such as leadership, team working etc.

Regardless of the type of interview, in general it's a game of three parts – before, during and after.

Before - preparation

Congratulations if you have been asked to attend an interview.

Check out the practicalities first – when and where, how long the interview will be, the names and titles of the people you will be seeing, how to get there.

It is important to prepare for the interview by thoroughly researching the organisation, the post and yourself.

- Re-read your CV and/or application form
- Re-read any other papers connected with the position, especially the job advertisement, the job specification if available, etc.
- Research the company/organisation, see if they have a website; read any company literature eg recruitment brochure, annual report, product literature.
- Find out all you can about what is happening in the industry or career area so that you can talk about any current issues with confidence.
- Know what your main strengths are in relation to the job and be prepared to explain them at the interview.
- Write down the main points you would like to get across in the interview.

Prepare answers to likely questions

Now look back at the information you have on the company. Put yourself in the recruiter's shoes. If you were interviewing for this position, bearing in mind what you know about the company and the job, what questions would you ask?

Look at your questions, and the questions below. For each question, write a list of three points you would use in an answer.

Now practise your answers out loud. You can do this by having a mock interview at the Careers & Employability Service - just ask at reception. If this is not convenient, get a friend / family member to interview you. Give them the list of questions below,

and ask them to pick questions at random. Remember to ask for feedback on what you said and how you said it (body language, how interested you seemed).

Examples of regularly asked questions:

Why are you interested in this job/career area?
What sort of skills do you think someone doing this job would need to have?
How do you match up?
What sort of work experience have you had?
How might that be useful to you in this job?
Why did you choose this course at this university?
What have you gained from it which will be useful in this job?
What do you think are the major issues facing this industry (that you are interested in) at the moment?
Tell me about yourself.
Describe your weaknesses.
How would you react in a situation where you were not in agreement with the rest of your team?
What job would you like to be doing in 3/5 years?
Describe a situation where you have had to overcome a problem or obstacle in order to move forward. What did you do?
What qualities do you have that single you out from other graduate applicants?

Some tips:

- Always keep your answers positive.
- Keep your answers relevant to the job. For example, if you are asked about your degree, don't ramble on about the finer points of romantic poetry.
- Make sure you get across your key selling points even if they do not ask exactly the right questions - weave your points into the other answers.



During – making an impression

First impressions

The person who looks the part gets the job.

Consider all aspects of your image - clothing, hair, hands, shoes, face, and accessories. Remember that first impressions count - decisions are often made on 'gut feel' in the first few minutes of an interview, and you never get a second chance to make a first impression. When choosing clothes, remember that you need to look like someone who is already doing the job you are applying for.

Here are some general tips:

- Avoid spicy foods/garlic/alcohol
- Eat a light meal before the interview
- Only accept offers of tea/coffee if you are going to drink them
- Plan your journey to arrive 10 minutes early.

Points to remember that can help create a good impression include:

The Handshake - be firm and friendly.

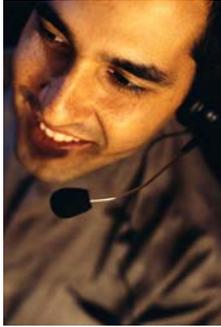
The Smile - this can be very powerful, but try to be natural.

Eye Contact - keep regular eye contact, but not a fixed stare, for 60-70% of the time. Try not to look around the room, at your watch, out of the window or at other distractions - this can imply you are disinterested and be very off-putting for an interviewer.

Body Language - be sensitive to the interviewer's body language, reflect their mood, how they sit and watch their head and hands. Sit upright but relaxed and look alert and interested.

Voice - convey enthusiasm and vitality. Try to vary your pitch and tone as in normal conversation. Be concise in your replies, not long winded. Speak clearly and avoid using sloppy language or jargon.

All round niceness - be pleasant with all the staff. You do not know who will be asked for feedback on you. Don't assume that anything is off the record.



Answering questions

The starting pistol - many interviewees start answering questions too quickly. The problem with this approach is that it does not allow the interviewee time to

think, and as a result, answers can end up being a waffle or irrelevant. Pause a little and give yourself time to think before you speak. Use a buffer if the silence is uncomfortable. *Let me think about that... So you're asking me...*

Waffle - always keep in mind the idea of having three points in answer to each question. Go through each point, then stop.

The runaway train - some interviewees give very good answers, but don't know how to stop, and end up repeating themselves endlessly or just grinding to a halt. Give your response and stop. If this sounds a bit bald, use a summary to end some of your answers. *So in summary my main skills are...*

Nodding dogs - if you are interviewed by a panel, you need to keep them all involved. You may know job titles, but you probably don't know who is making the decision. The trick is to have some eye contact with each of them to keep them all nodding and smiling at you.

Skeletons in the cupboard - keep them there! If there are negative things in your past (e.g. failed exams, periods of unemployment) don't volunteer the information. However, do prepare positive answers (e.g. *failing this exam taught me how to better organise my work, and since then...*) in case you are asked awkward questions about your skeletons.

After – learn from it

Once the interview is over, before you relax too much, think about how it went and try to work out what you can learn from it for next time.

Think through the following and note down your thoughts:

- What questions were you asked?
- Which did you find easy / which difficult?
- What were your strengths? How could you build on them?
- What were your weaknesses? How could you overcome them?
- What else do you need to do to prepare for the real thing?

If you have been successful, you may be invited for a further interview or an Assessment Centre – see info sheet for further information on what to expect.

More help

Visit Prospects website –

www.prospects.ac.uk/links/AppsInterviews

To find out about telephone interviews,

visit www.cipd.co.uk

At Careers & Employability Service:

Pick up the AGCAS booklet *Going for Interviews*.

Book a mock interview with a Careers Adviser.

Watch the DVD 'Why ask me that?'