

Interview tips: Types of interview

Interview formats

Informal interviews are often used as the first part of a multi-stage recruitment process. For less senior jobs this may be the only selection method used. The format tends to be a general chat about you and your interests. Be aware that it is still an assessment of you. In structured interviews, all candidates are asked the same set of questions in a structured format. Typically they begin with a brief chronological review of your overall career to date.

Competency/criteria-based interviews - these are structured to reflect the competencies or qualities required by the job. The interviewers are looking for evidence of your skills and abilities and expect you to support your answers with examples of your experience from your life to date.

Technical interviews - if you have applied for a job that requires technical knowledge, it is likely that you will be asked technical questions or have a separate technical interview. Questions may focus on your final year project or on real or hypothetical technical problems. Don't worry if you don't know the exact answer - interviewers are interested in your thought process and logic.

Portfolio-based interviews - if the role is within the creative, media or communications sectors, you may be asked to bring a portfolio of your work to the interview and to have an in-depth discussion about the pieces you have chosen to include.

Case study interviews - in these you may be presented with a hypothetical or real business problem. You will be evaluated on your analysis of the problem, how you identify the key issues, how you pursue a particular line of thinking and how you organise your thoughts.

Specific types of interview

Face-to-face interviews - this is the most common method. One interviewer or two or a panel of interviewers will conduct the interview.

Group interviews - several candidates are present and will be asked questions in turn by two or more interviewers. A group discussion around a specific topic may be encouraged and you may be invited to put questions to the other candidates and/or to the panel.

Telephone interviews - telephone interviews are increasingly used by companies as part of the recruitment process, often at an early stage of selection, especially by overseas recruiters. Prepare in the same way that you would for a face-to-face interview. Make sure you choose a suitable time and date, in a place where you will be free to chat in a quiet place without any interruptions. Make sure your mobile is charged if you are using it. Remember to keep any necessary documents, like your CV and the job advert, to hand throughout the phone call.

Professionalism

Employers are noting your level of professionalism at each stage of the recruitment process. Use a formal style for every communication whether it's an email, letter or telephone call. It is courteous to respond in a timely manner to offers of an interview and job offers, even if you have decided not to accept. Even more importantly, demonstrating total professionalism leaves the employer with a good memory of you - essential should you decide to apply for any future position with them.

Interview tips - Preparing yourself

Before the interview find out:

- Where will it be held?
- How long will it last?
- What format will it take?
- Will there be any tests or group exercises?
- Do I need to bring or prepare anything specific?

The interview invitation is likely to provide you with the above information. If not then call the agency/company and ask for it.

Ensure that you check the date and time of your interview. Work out how you will get to the venue and how long the journey takes, especially if you are using public transport. Check for any planned disruptions to road or public transport services and aim to arrive early, rather than rushing in late. This is especially important for assessment centres, where the day runs to a tight schedule.

What to take

On the day, make sure you have the interview invitation letter and a copy of your CV, cover letter and application form if you used one. You will need notes of the key points you want to make and the questions you want to ask during the interview. Take some cash in case you need to get a taxi at the last minute or some other unforeseen expenditure.

What to wear

Decide on your outfit well in advance; ideally it should be a suit or equivalent business wear, if in doubt check with the agency to what is the required dress code. Ensure it is ironed and ready to wear. Have a second outfit as a back-up and ensure your shoes are clean. Personal grooming is essential and you should avoid wearing overpowering fragrance, if you have any piercings, it is wise to remove them for the interview until you know that these are acceptable; also if you have tattoos these should be concealed. It is probably best to avoid alcohol the night before the interview and smokers should resist the temptation to have a cigarette on the way to or while waiting for an interview.

Knowledge about yourself

If you are being interviewed for a job that was advertised, use the job description as a guideline as to what you'll be asked about in terms of your personality, skills, work experience and qualifications. Other candidates may have similar abilities, employment and academic experience to you. Think about how you might distinguish yourself.

Knowledge about the job

Know everything you can about the job on offer including the job and/or person specification. Search the web for profiles of employees who hold the same or similar roles and read the relevant occupational profiles in types of jobs.

Knowledge about the organisation

Research your prospective employer organisation. Employers will expect that you will have at least researched their website, their recruitment information and their annual report(s). Do more than this - search for media articles about it and consult job sectors for an overview of a range of employment sectors.

Interview tips: Making an impression

First impressions really do count. If you get an interview you can assume that your potential employers already like what they have seen. The interview is an opportunity for you to build on that impression to secure the job.

It's not just what you say but how you say it that reinforces the message you are giving and creates an overall impression of your suitability. Here are some tips for making a good initial impression:

- **Arrive on time** - ideally at least ten minutes early which will give you time to relax and collect your thoughts. If you are unexpectedly delayed, contact your prospective employer/agency as soon as possible to explain the situation;
- When you arrive you will meet a receptionist or someone appointed to receive you. State, in a clear and friendly manner, your name, the time of your appointment and the name of the person you expect to meet;
- Have all the relevant documentation ready to present if needed: your interview invitation and a copy of your CV and cover letter or application form;
- Switch your mobile phone off before you enter the interview room.

Once the interview commences you will continue to make a positive impression if you:

- Listen carefully to each question and give concise answers supported with relevant examples; avoid saying just yes or no;
- Ask for clarification if a question is not clear;
- Speak clearly and loudly enough for the interviewer to hear and try to keep to a moderate pace;
- Stay as relaxed as possible. Prepare techniques in advance that will help to offset any nervousness. This might be simply repeating a silent mantra such as 'relax' or whatever works for you and also taking a deep breath before you start to answer a question.

Body language

- Be aware of the effects of your body language and how to use it to your advantage.
- Give each interviewer a firm handshake at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Keep a relaxed but alert posture and a friendly expression. This will indicate a positive approach on your part. Be conscious of maintaining good posture throughout the interview as you may find that when an interview is going well you tend to slouch into a casual pose.
- Maintain good eye contact. If there is more than one interviewer, look at the person asking the question when you reply but glance at the other interviewers from time to time.
- Most interviewers need to make notes as you are speaking so that they will remember key things about you when making their selection decision. Showing that you are distracted by it will have a negative effect so stay focused.
- You may find that you fidget when you are nervous and/or wave your hands a lot when speaking. This can be distracting to the interviewer and take away from your performance. Develop a technique that will help you to control the movement whilst still appearing natural and relaxed.

Interview tips: Interview questions

Most interviews will contain questions about your competencies and skills, personality, interests and values. Interviewers will expect you to support your answers with evidence from your life to date. A useful strategy for providing that evidence and for answering competency-based questions concisely is to use the STAR technique:

- **Situation** - briefly describe the where/when/who;
- **Task** - outline the task or objective (what you hoped to achieve).
- **Action** - describe what you did - focus on your role and your input.
- **Result** - what the outcome was and what skills you developed.

Develop a range of examples of numerous competencies, using the above format. Draw from all aspects of your life. Store them safely and update your examples as you go through your career.

Challenging questions

Think of all the questions you would least like to be asked. Is there a gap in your CV? Have you had some poor academic results? Were you ever fired? Prepare an answer to each one. Answer as honestly as you can, without being defensive or blaming anyone. Try to turn your answer into a positive statement with a successful outcome. Show how you overcame any difficulty and what you learned from it.

Sometimes you may wonder if a question has been designed to antagonise you. Questions such as this are designed to test your emotional intelligence, i.e. will you just react or provide a calm and insightful response?

Finally, if you are asked a question that you feel you can't answer ask to return to it later and, if still unable to attempt it then, say so.

Your questions

Have a list of questions in mind to ask. You may feel that all your questions have been answered at some point during the interview but try to ask some, if only to show enthusiasm and interest.

Some Examples

Why has the role come about?

What are the opportunities to progress within the role?

What size and structure of the team will I be working in?

What are the company's growth plans for the next 3 years?

What additional training would the company provide?

How many other people are they interviewing for the role? How do I compare to them?

What software, computer systems do they use?

Ask the interviewer why they joined the company and what they enjoy about it?

Ending positively

If the interviewer does not tell you at the end of the interview, ask when you should expect to hear news of their selection decision and if you are successful, what the next stage of the process will be. You should also check if there are any other questions for you? This is the time to ask if the interviewer has any doubts or concerns why you couldn't do the role? And your chance to overcome these areas and leave the interview on a positive note.

Thank the interviewer and reiterate your enthusiasm for the job for which you have applied.

Quick Checklist

- *Am I as prepared as I could be?*
- *Demonstrate your interest, enthusiasm and a positive demeanour?*
- *Articulate your personal skills, strengths and abilities clearly?*
- *Relate your previous experience to the position for which you are being interviewed for?*
- *Remember to provide concrete examples of your skills and experience and avoid generalising?*
- *Don't under-sell yourself by. This is the chance to champion yourself, but be honest; otherwise you will be found out.*
- *Demonstrate to the interviewers how much you want the job?*
- **Research! Research!** *Demonstrate a good knowledge of the organisation and the position?*
- *Ensure you are dressed to impress?*
- *Don't let negative body language or nervousness detract from your performance?*