

GUIDANCE FOR JOB INTERVIEWS



Interview Definition

"A meeting of people face to face, especially for consultation"

An interview is...	An interview is not...
A discussion	An interrogation
An attempt to find out more about you	An attempt to catch you out
A measure of your suitability for the job	A test

Preparing for an Interview

- Location and planning your journey – know where exactly your interview will be taking place, how to get there and how long it will take you, allowing for delays. Aim to arrive about 10 minutes before your interview time unless instructed otherwise.
- If you are being interviewed remotely, usually called a video interview, test out the technology in advance with family or friends. Commonly used platforms for video conference include Skype, Teams and Zoom.
- Research the employer – you will be expected to show that you are interested in working for them in particular, not just that you want to work. There are a range of sources for background research:
 - **Website** – most organisations have a website and have sections that give information about them, any news etc. Some even have their goals/objectives listed and things like mission statements and ethos.
 - **Social media** – depending on what type of employer they are, it's likely they will have some online presence to promote themselves and interact. Commonly used for business include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram. Using LinkedIn you may

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also be able to see some of the people who work there and find out more about their roles and the company.

- **News** – do a Google search on the organisation and have a look under 'News' to see if there are any recent mentions of them – you might find something interesting to ask them about
- **Brochures** – many organisations still produce brochures to explain what they do etc.
- **People** – if you know someone who works there already or can be put in touch with someone who does, you can find out their perspective on what the organisation is like and what's good about working there.
- In doing this research, you should be aiming to find out:
 - What exactly they do
 - Any policies, mission statement, significant achievements/news about them etc.
 - How many staff/who are they
 - Who are their competitors

Interview Formats

- Whether interviewing in person or remotely, there could be an individual interviewer but there will usually be at least 2, or maybe more (panel), and usually this will include someone from HR.
- There could be multiple interviews with different individuals – be consistent as they will compare notes afterwards.
- Depending on the role, a presentation or work task may be included to help the interviewers see your potential for the job. You will usually know in advance and have time to prepare if there is a presentation.
- Psychometric/aptitude tests may be used as part of the process. Examples include numerical reasoning, verbal reasoning, mechanical reasoning, abstract reasoning and personality.
- Usually interviewers use a scoring system to compare candidates – they will be looking for certain things to see if you meet the criteria and will have scores depending on the level of knowledge/expertise and will also look at your level of motivation and interest as well as considering your personality to assess how well you would fit in.

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Interview Questions

Introductory questions

- “Small talk” questions
 - Often the first question or two will be to relax you and establish rapport e.g. how your journey was, the weather – they won’t affect your score but this is where you make your first impression.
- “*Why are you interested in the Job?*”
 - The interviewers will want to know if you really want this job, or if you just want any job? Recruitment is expensive so they don’t want someone who won’t be bothered about doing a good job or who might leave because they are uninterested or bored.
 - Think about how you can show genuine interest, motivation, passion?
- “*Why do you want to work for us?*”
 - Why us specifically – they want to know what makes you think they will be a good company to work for – you could probably do a similar job in other places so why them?
 - What do you like about us?
 - Why do you think you would fit in?

Competency/Skills based questions

These questions are designed to assess whether you meet the criteria – have you got the required skills for the job? You can usually predict and prepare answers for these as the employer will be assessing whether you have the skills they asked for in the job ad or person specification, which you should have saved from when you made your application.

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Sample competency question:

"Tell us about a time when you demonstrated effective communication skills in a difficult situation?"

Example answer 1:

"I often find myself in situations where I have to communicate effectively and I always manage to stay calm, use appropriate language and manage the situation"

=> This example is not likely to score well. It doesn't really answer the question, it makes a vague and generic reference to the skill being assessed.

Example answer 2:

"When I was working as a receptionist for XYZ Ltd. a customer came in and asked to see the manager. I explained that she wasn't available and asked if I could help. The customer had already seemed tense and at this point became very angry and aggressive. They had a complaint about a missed delivery that had affected their business. I felt a bit threatened by their behavior but I remained calm and offered to check the details of their order. It turned out there had been some miscommunication around the delivery date and nobody was at fault. I suggested that the customer could collect the most essential items from the warehouse straight away and that we would express the remainder by courier the following morning. The customer was happy with this suggestion and immediately apologised for their behaviour. They left satisfied that we had done our best in the situation and the manager thanked me for the calm and reactive way that I dealt with the situation."

=> This example is better. It provides a specific example of the required skill, demonstrating that the interviewee has the skill and could therefore apply it in this job.

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There is an effective technique you can use for preparing answers to competency questions: STAR

- **S**ituation – what was the context?
- **T**ask – what did you face?
- **A**ction – what did you do?
- **R**esult – what was the outcome?

Essentially it means providing some context, talking about what you did, and telling them what the result or outcome was. The focus should be on the “action” i.e. give the most detail for what you actually did as this is how you are demonstrating that you have the required skill.

STAR technique applied to example 2:

- **S**ituation – working as a receptionist
- **T**ask – dealing with a difficult customer
- **A**ction – calm communication, checking the cause, suggesting a resolution
- **R**esult – satisfied customer, positive feedback from manager

Other common questions:

You will never be able to predict every single one of the questions you will be asked at an interview but it helps to be prepared by thinking about other possible questions you could be asked e.g.

- Why should we hire you?
- What can you bring to the company?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What did you do before this?*
- Why did you leave your last job (or why do you want to leave your current job)?**
- What can you tell me about our company/the industry?

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- Situational questions – *"Imagine x happened, how would you deal with it?"* This type of question is to assess how you would react in situations common to the job
- Describe your personality? (Think about your 3 most appropriate traits for the job you are being interviewed for to make your answer relevant)
- What is your greatest weakness?***

*If you have been out of work for some time, be prepared to talk about this in a positive way. Decisions to take time out to have a family, care for a dependent or for health reasons are perfectly acceptable. You may be able to refer to other skills you developed during this time or talk about any activity you were involved in e.g. volunteering, community involvement, learning...

**Never speak negatively about a previous employer or the interviewers will worry you will do the same about them. Positive ways to talk about leaving a job include wanting a new challenge, a change of direction, having an interest in this employer...

***This isn't to trip you up, it's to see if you are aware of any area of weakness and that you manage or improve on it. Don't say you are a perfectionist! And definitely don't say you are weak on one of the essential skills for the job! Be honest so that you sound genuine but a good tip is to pick something you are already better at e.g. your IT skills used to be quite weak but you have taken a module/course to help you use technology better in your work.

Asking Questions at the End of the Interview

You will usually be asked if you have any questions for the interviewers. Prepare for this as it doesn't come across well if you do not have anything to ask.

When researching the company, think about possible questions (2 is ideal).

- **DO** – ask questions that show you are interested in the employer, the job role, your professional development, progression opportunities etc.
- **DON'T** ask about pay, holidays, pension, benefits – only ask questions on these following a job offer if needed!

If you prepare questions but feel they have been answered during the interview, tell them what you intended to ask and explain that they have already provided the information you needed.

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On the Day of the Interview

Interviewing in Person

- Dress appropriately and think about your appearance – even if you would be dressing casually for work or wearing a uniform, an interview is a formal meeting so dress smartly and look neat!
- Arrive 10 minutes in advance unless otherwise directed – it's not acceptable to be late. Being too early is also not advised as they won't have planned for you to be there.
- Nerves are natural and will be expected – they are not a problem unless you let them take over. Be in control. The best way to do this is to prepare well so that you get there knowing you are ready for the questions.
- Make sure your phone is on silent!
- First impressions count – be polite and professional with everyone you meet from the moment you walk in.
- Shake hands with the interviewers when you enter.
- Listen carefully so you are clear on exactly what you are being asked. Seek clarification politely if needed.
- Body language – think about your posture; maintain eye contact with all interviewers; don't cross your arms; gestures are fine but fidgeting is not.
- Remember to ask your questions at the end.
- Before leaving, thank the interviewers for their time.

Video Interview

Most of the same guidance applies in terms of appearance, controlling nerves and listening carefully, but for video interviews, some aspects are a bit different:

- Check in advance that your device, including camera and microphone are working correctly and you have a strong internet connection. A computer, laptop or tablet are preferable. If using a Smartphone make sure it's stable rather than holding in your hand so there's no shaking or movement. Whatever the case, ensure you are fully charged or plugged in!

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- Get set up somewhere quiet and well lit where there won't be any noise, distractions or interruptions. If there are other people around, make sure they know you shouldn't be disturbed.
- Have a glass of water to hand in case of a dreaded tickle in your throat or coughing fit!
- Consider your background – what will the interviewers be able to see? There should be nothing inappropriate or distracting. Some platforms allow you to blur your background, which can be useful, but only use if necessary.
- One advantage is that you can have relevant prompts, notes and your CV or application beside you. However make sure this is for occasional glances rather than constantly looking at them.
- In case of delay, wait until you are sure the interviewers have finished asking questions before you start answering. Maintain good posture and speak clearly.
- Eye contact is still important but when answering questions, this means looking at your camera not the interviewers on the screen. This can feel a bit odd but it comes across like eye contact at the receiving end. It's fine to look at the screen when listening though, so that you can see the interviewers faces.
- As with an interview in person, thank the interviewer(s) for their time at the end of the process.

Good luck with your interviews!

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