

We're here to help.

# Interview Skills

The job interview is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the selection process. Your aim is to convince the interviewers that you are the best person for the job. If you have been successful in gaining an interview then you should take pride in the fact that your application has been competitive.

Why is an interview important?

- The interview is your opportunity to sell yourself.
- An interview should be looked at from two perspectives, yours and theirs! The employer will be trying to assess what you can offer the organisation. Once this has been determined, most employers will then consider how you will fit into the organisation.

## INTERVIEW SKILLS

Below are some skills that are very useful in an interview. As you read through each one, consider whether you would feel confident/comfortable in using it at present.

### **Active listening**

High level listening in which your entire attention is focused on the person speaking.

### **Control of the content**

Let the interviewer control the questions/process while you control the content.

### **Let others speak for you**

Let others build you up by saying something like, "My boss felt some of my most valuable attributes were that I could always be counted on to get a project done on schedule and that the details had all been taken care of."

### **Research the organisation**

Demonstrate that you have read annual reports, recruiting brochures and other relevant material – some of this material is available in the Support and Equity careers resource library.

### **Master the art of story-telling**

Using stories to sell your skills is a highly successful interview technique. In less than three minutes you can tell a story that will make interviewers remember you favourably. Employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success, so tell stories that vividly describe your successes. Don't be concerned if your stories are not highly impressive, as long as the experience demonstrates your effective use of a particular skill.

### **RESEARCH BEFORE AN INTERVIEW**

The more thorough your preparation for the interview, the more control you will have over the situation. You will feel less nervous if you are well prepared. There are four ways that you should prepare for an interview.

#### **The Position**

Make sure you understand what the position is about. Ask for a copy of the Position Description from the employer and make sure you understand all the information it contains. If you have any questions about the Position Description ask the employer for clarification.

#### **The Organisation**

Understand the employer's needs and the business culture. Research about the organisation could include talking to other employees, competitors, perusal of an annual report or just an enthusiastic phone call to a secretary requesting more information. Also many organisations have their information on the Internet. More specific research prior to an interview may include gathering information about the interviewers and the expected style and content of the interview.

#### **Your Application's Strengths and Weaknesses**

Always review your application, as you may need to refer to it during the interview.

Be prepared to talk about your application in terms of the key selection criteria.

#### **Yourself**

Be prepared mentally for the interview. Ensure you are well groomed and well dressed.

### **YOUR PRESENTATION AT AN INTERVIEW**

#### **First impressions**

Creating a good first impression is vital. Employers only have a short time to gather as much information about you as they can, so the way you look and act will be a key factor in the information they gather. You should look and sound professional and feel comfortable. Avoid extremes of fashion and style unless research into the dress code of the organisation indicates that it would be suitable.

#### **Make a positive start**

Be prepared to firmly shake the hand of your interviewer/s regardless of gender. If this situation does not occur, take time to make direct eye contact with everybody in the room greeting them with a friendly smile. This introductory body language will sometimes be enough for some interviewers to make their minds up.

#### **Be aware of your body language**

During the interview maintain eye contact with the entire selection panel and not just the person at the head of the table. Adopt an enthusiastic posture by sitting up straight and slightly forward. Avoid crossing your arms or covering up your smile. A good place for your hands is in your lap. If you have thoroughly prepared for the interview (see earlier points) then it is likely that your body language will work for you and not against you. Your body language will reflect a confident and enthusiastic applicant.

### **Don't forget your personality!**

An interview is an interpersonal exchange, but some candidates go into an interview and leave their personalities at the door. Engaging the panel is an important part of the process – remember they're looking to see who is going to 'fit in' best in the organisation. One of the main qualities being assessed at an interview is your communication skills. Smiling, seeking clarification of questions, using low-key appropriate humour and generally being an active rather than passive participant in the process, enables you to display these skills to the panel.

### **What will I be assessed on?**

In an interview a candidate will be assessed on their:

- ability to provide comprehensive answers that include real-life examples;
- dress and grooming;
- confidence and ability;
- ability to speak clearly and listen well;
- understanding of the job; and
- motivation and enthusiasm.

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The best way to make sure that you will answer questions well is to prepare some possible answers beforehand. Of course you cannot predict the exact wording of questions, but basically interviewers are always looking for similar information. There is no hidden agenda about what they want to find out. Interviewers try to formulate questions that enable them to build up a picture of how you are likely to operate in the workplace. Knowing this, you are then able to reflect on the experiences you've had and prepare responses that demonstrate your skills and experiences.

### **Link to your selection criteria responses**

If the organisation has listed key selection criteria, you can be sure that there will be a number of questions that directly relate to them. Be prepared to give verbal answers that don't conflict with the written responses you have already tabled. Avoid the temptation to say "The information has been given in the written application" – this will make you appear arrogant and inflexible. It is worth remembering that it is possible that some interviewers have not had the opportunity to read your application.

### **Seek clarification**

Never begin to answer a question that you don't fully understand; instead, ask for clarification. It is also OK to think about an answer for a short time. This is preferable to launching into a vague and unclear response.

### **Effective answering techniques**

Questions should be answered with enthusiasm and so one-word answers are never sufficient. Even the simplest of questions can be answered in a way that shows something of your creative personality. As a guide, your response to each question should take approximately 1-2 minutes. After explaining, as concisely as possible, how the key examples you have presented address the question, you should then check with the panel to see if they require any further detail or clarification. Use the body language of the panel to help you judge if you are connecting with the panel members. Be wary of 'raving on' and boring them, as well as being too brief and thereby making it difficult for the panel to gain adequate insight into your skills.

### **Your questions**

At some point in the interview you may be given the opportunity to ask questions. You should use this opportunity to clarify any points that are unclear in relation to the position you are applying for.

Be careful to choose relevant questions. Time wasting will score very badly. Ideally your questions should reflect your research into the position and/or the organisation – this is likely to impress the panel in two ways:

- it is another opportunity to show them that you have put a lot of work into your interview preparation (organised, enthusiastic); and
- it makes you seem very familiar to them, one of the team.

## EXAMPLES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### Interviewee's Questions

- Are there established career paths?
- What is the organisation's attitude to further study?
- A question about the changes happening at industry level is good practice. It shows that you are aware of and interested in the 'big-picture'.

### Interviewer's Questions

- Why are you interested in joining this organisation?
- What do you believe you can contribute to this company?
- Why did you select ... as a career?
- Can you give us an example of your use of initiative – either in starting a new venture or doing more than was required in a particular activity?
- What are your major strengths?

- What would you describe as your weaknesses?
- What do you regard as your most important accomplishment?
- What does teamwork mean to you?
- What are the biggest obstacles you have had to overcome and how did you overcome them?
- If you were going to evaluate your own performance, what factors would you consider the most important?