

Interview Tips

Interviewing can be daunting for a variety of reasons – lack of practise, lack of confidence, fear of an unknown situation.

In almost all cases, real difficulties in interview situations stem from a lack of proper preparation.

Candidates need to bear in mind the following key areas when preparing for interview:

- **Communication**
- **Specific Questions**
- **Knowing the Brief**
- **Knowing the Company**
- **Possible Problems**

Communication:

Strong communication in an interview is absolutely essential – without it, your experience and skill sets are almost entirely irrelevant. If you cannot accurately and clearly convey your message to the interviewer, then the content of what you're saying is rendered useless.

Always remember that, in general, interviewing is not the same as a normal conversation. The way that you communicate, verbally and non-verbally, should be structured differently to your ordinary conversational style:

- **Listen carefully to the whole question**
- **Consider your whole answer**
- **Deliver your whole answer**
- **Wait for the next question**

Many interviewees struggle to communicate clearly because they fail to properly consider their answer before delivering it. Instead, they will plough straight into delivering the answer and attempt to think as they go along. This approach can lead to over-long, unstructured, vague and ultimately weak answers.

In non-verbal terms, your communication should always convey that you're alert, enthusiastic, and paying attention:

- **Maintain eye-contact**
- **Sit up straight**
- **Don't fidget**



Above all else, you should aim to speak more slowly and more deliberately than you ordinarily would. Don't be afraid to pause for thought (not for too long!) in order to make sure that you have a clear point to deliver, and you know the approximate wording that you will use. This will ensure that you answer coherently, and come across as considered and clear in your thinking.

Specific Questions:

Interviewees will often run into difficulty in an interview if they find themselves having to think on their feet for long periods of time – it's difficult to sustain clear, accurate communication in an interview if you're constantly struggling to find the right answers to the questions being put to you.

It's sensible to prepare for specific questions in advance – to have answers lined up for questions that you know are extremely likely to be asked during the interview.

Every type of company, and type of role, will have a slightly different set of questions that frequently get asked during interviews. There are a few generic questions that get asked in nearly every interview and for every kind of role:

- Why are you leaving your current role?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- What are your long term ambitions in your career?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?

If you've prepared strong, robust, clear answers to these, and other generic questions that are highly likely to be asked, then you are setting yourself up for a less stressful interview – you won't be forced to think on your feet constantly, and you will gain confidence from delivering answers that you already know are suitable.

Knowing the Brief:

Job specifications are written for a reason. Likewise, recruitment consultants brief you carefully on a role for a reason. Interviewers are rarely impressed by interviewees who are unable to demonstrate that they understand the role that they are interviewing for. Why? Because interviewers don't want to waste 15 minutes of their time explaining to you what the job entails – rather, they want to spend that time getting to know why you're suitable for it.

Furthermore, by thoroughly reading a job spec you can begin to get to grips with understanding the kinds of questions you're likely to be asked, and the areas that your interviewer might focus on during your interview. Look at the "role requirement" or "experience" section of a job spec. You would be sensible to prepare to answer questions based around your experience, vs. these wish-lists. Consider areas of your experience that you think are especially relevant. Make sure that you talk about these areas during the interview when given the opportunity.



Knowing the Company:

Knowing the nitty-gritty detail of the company at which you're interviewing goes hand in hand with knowing the job spec, and benefits you in the same way. Spend time researching the company – their core activities, their history, key members of their senior staff. Talk about what you've found out, always making sure that you link your findings to positive reasons why you're keen to work with the company. For example:

“I've noticed that your CEO has worked for a number of high profile online companies in the past. I'm really excited about the opportunity to learn from someone with this experience and benefit from their knowledge”

Thoroughly understanding the company means that you'll be better prepared for questions surrounding your motivation, and also has the added benefit of clearly demonstrating to your interviewer that you're taking the prospect of working for them seriously.

Possible Problems:

Bear in mind these possible pitfalls during an interview:

- **Filling the Silence** – don't feel compelled to continue speaking once you've delivered your answer. Remember that interviewers will frequently be taking notes as you speak – don't take their silence as an indication that they want you to keep talking, they will often be noting down the points of your answer. Continuing to talk once you've delivered your answer can undo your hard work if you're not careful – you can start to be vague, unfocused, and talk about irrelevant topics.
- **Boundaries** – remember that an interview is your opportunity to present yourself in the best possible light to a prospective employer. Be constantly aware of the way that you could be being perceived. Tailor your conduct to suit the tone set by the interviewer. However, always remember that you should maintain a standard of behaviour in an interview that goes further than the “bare minimum” required. And always follow the golden rules: don't swear, don't get personal, don't talk about confidential information, and don't get caught out by being too flippant.
- **Points of Etiquette** – whatever the truth is about your opinion of the role that you're interviewing for (ie, it's not your first priority, you prefer something else that you're considering, etc) it is polite to the interviewer to treat the interview that you're in seriously and do your utmost to show yourself off as the best possible candidate for that role. Similarly, if your motivation for the role leaves you wondering why you're even bothering to go through the process, it would be rude to air this opinion during the interview itself. Interviewers will never react well to being told that “I'm not even sure why I'm here, because I don't think this role is right for me.” Expressing this feeling, no matter how true it might be, reflects poorly on you as a professional.



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- **Complacency – remember, you may be getting all the right signals from your interviewer and be feeling extremely positive about the outcome, but you should be wary of switching off. The best interviewees maintain their focus and discipline until the final handshake.**

For more information:

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