

Interview Tips

Pre-interview checklist

As you work your way through this section dealing with applications and interviews, you will know that preparation is the key to a successful job interview. This checklist is a quick reminder — it is worth printing out to make sure you have covered everything.

Have you...

...worked out how to get there and how long your journey will take?

Why not do a trial run a few days before?

...found out what format the interview will take?

One-to-one, a panel interview or a group interview.

...found out what resources are available?

If you've been asked to do a written test or a presentation, you'll need to call ahead to find out what facilities are available.

...prepared answers to some of the typical interview questions?

Check again on responding to the Top 10 interview questions



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Top 10 interview questions

Avoid surprises — interviews need preparation. Some questions come up time and time again — usually about you, your experience and the job itself. We've gathered the most common questions so you can get your preparation off to a flying start.

Your skills...

Typical questions an interviewer might ask:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- What would your colleagues/Teachers and friends consider as your best qualities?
- Why should we employ you?

What the interviewer really wants to know: *can you do the job?*

Know your strengths, and mention ones that are relevant to the job you're being interviewed for. It's important to quote examples of when you used the skills; it's not enough to just say you have the skills.

Typical strengths employers look for are:

- Communication - the ability to get on with a wide range of people.
- Team working - the ability to be an effective team leader or team member.
- IT skills - most jobs these days need some IT skills.
- Good attitude - hard worker, honest, polite, co-operative
- Problem solving - using your initiative to identify solutions.
- Enthusiasm - employers like someone positive
- Quick learner - so you can take on new tasks.
- Determination - shows you are focused on achieving goal.
- Flexibility - doing a variety of tasks to achieve a common goal.

If you're asked about weaknesses, don't list many - only mention one! Choose a minor flaw that isn't essential to the job. Turn it into a positive, such as how you've worked on the weakness. Or you could present it as an opportunity for development.

Good answers:

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- Strengths: 'I'm a good organiser, and I plan everything in detail. I showed this when I was given a new project, and I had to get it up and running from scratch.'
- Weaknesses: 'Sometimes I'm too enthusiastic when working on a new project. But I've learned to adjust to everyone else's pace, and not go charging ahead.'

The employer

Typical questions:

- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about our company?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?

What the interviewer really wants to know: *Do you know what we do? Why have you chosen to apply to this company?*

The interviewer wants to know you've done your homework and that you know about the organisation and its aims. They want to know you've thought it through and you've chosen to apply to them for a good reason. Show your knowledge of the company by having some facts and figures at the ready, such as:

- the size of the organisation
- what the product or service is- have you visited one of the sites? if so, tell them!
- latest developments in the field
- the history, goals, image and philosophy of the employer.

When talking about why you want to work for the employer, focus on what you can do for them, not on what they can do for you.

Good answer:

- 'Smith's is a respected firm with a reputation for high quality work, and I'd like to be part of that success. The quality of my work is important to me, so I feel I'd be at the right place. I've also heard you invest in your staff by training and developing them.'

About the job

Typical questions:

- What will the main tasks and responsibilities be in this job?
- What do you think the main challenges will be?
- What would you do in the first day/week/month/year?

What the interviewer really wants to know: Do you know what the job's all about?

The interviewer wants to know if you fully understand what the job will involve. They want to know why you think you'd be good at it, and how you'd approach it if they offer you the job. To answer this question well, make sure you read the job description thoroughly and research how the organisation operates.

Good answer:

- 'The main task is to supervise a team of sales staff to ensure they exceed sales targets. It's my responsibility to motivate them and pass on my sales experience to enable them to achieve more.'

Your Motivation

Typical questions:

- What motivates you?
- Which tasks do you get the most satisfaction from?

What the interviewer really wants to know is what makes you tick@

By Finding out what motivates you, the interview can find out which environment you'll perform well in. Try to think of examples of when a task excited you.

Good Answer:

'I like problem solving and that point in a project where you come up against something unexpected and you have to think creatively to come up with a solution'.

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Your Personality and Interests

Typical questions:

- What was the last film you saw or the last book you read?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?

What the interview really wants to know: *Are you a well-rounded individual?*

By asking personality questions, the employer wants to know how well you know yourself. Having self-awareness means you can look at yourself critically and know what you are good at and where you could improve.

When it comes to your interests, the employer wants to know you're and proactive person who likes to get the most out of life. When choosing examples of interests to mention be sure to choose a wide range to show you are well balanced.

However, when quoting films or books, choose classic or mainstream ones rather than obscure or extreme ones.

Some employers will expect you to know about current affairs and popular culture in the media, for example.

Good Answer:

'In my personal life I'm always organising everybody. People look to me for ideas and plans and I guess in some ways that shows I'm a natural leader.'

Interviews - do's and don'ts

An interview is a discussion between you and an employer to find out if you can do the job. It's your chance to make a good impression. However, there are certain rules you should follow in interviews.

What to do:

- Dress smartly, look bright and attentive, and speak clearly and confidently. Don't forget that in the first few minutes only 7% of the interviewer's opinion of you is formed by what you say - the rest is judged on how you look, act and sound

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- Find out where the venue is beforehand, how to get there and how long it takes- if you're running late, CALL THEM!
- Get your outfit ready the night before
- Find out what kind of interview it will be so you can prepare
- Examine the person specification and your CV/application form, and think about what type of questions they will ask you
- Prepare answers for the main questions - for example, why do you want the job, what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are the main tasks in this job?
- Make about three or four points in each answer
- Quote real examples of when you've used certain skills - just saying you've got a skill isn't enough.
- Take your time when answering the questions: make sure you understand the question and take your time if you need to think
- Sell yourself: no one else is going to! Be positive about yourself and your experiences.
- Prepare some questions to ask at the end of the interview - use it as an opportunity to find out more about the role and the company. (Don't ask about money or perks just yet!)
- Get feedback on your performance, whether you were successful or not.
- Turn off your mobile phone: treat the interviewers with respect and give them your undivided attention
- Keep your answers focused on what you can do for the employer, not what they can do for you

What not to do:

- Don't be late.
- Don't swear or use slang words.
- Don't slouch in your seat or do anything that makes you look uninterested.
- Don't smoke.
- Don't lie: the interviewer may see through you. Even if you get the job, your employer can dismiss you if they find out that you have not been honest.
- Don't let your nerves show too much; a few nerves are normal but extreme nerves will affect your performance. Use breathing techniques and try to remember that it's not a life and death situation - there are plenty of jobs out there!
- Don't be arrogant and assume you've got the job. Nothing turns off employers more than someone who is disrespectful and over-confident.

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- Don't discuss controversial topics such as religion, politics and gender relations.
- Don't read from notes or your CV — you should be familiar enough with your own history to be able to talk about it unprompted.
- Don't criticise former employers or colleagues. Interviewers may mark you down as a troublemaker and a gossip — don't argue with the interviewer, no matter what. Remember to keep things positive!

These rules apply for most jobs. However, employers in some industries can use more relaxed and informal interviewing techniques. In some creative fields (design and media for example) it may be expected that you turn up for the interview in casual clothes, as that is the dress code in the office. However, smart casual is better than very casual. If you're in any doubt, do some research on typical interview techniques in your line of work.

Above all, preparation is the key to performing well in interviews. Research the role and organisation and prepare evidence and examples of your skills and competencies.

For further advice and information visit:

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>



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