

Interview & Selection

Your personal opportunity to sell yourself

When you wrote your CV and began sending it off in response to job advertisements and speculatively to potential employers, you did not expect to be sent a contract and given a start date. You were trying to interest them in you, your skills and experience and, in your covering letter, no doubt suggested to them that you would like to meet face-to-face.

Interviews take many forms, from an informal chat over coffee to three intensive days of assessments, tests and discussion. There may be several people to meet over a number of interviews, a panel all meeting you at once or your potential future manager on their own discussing the role. Regardless of the type of interview, its location and whom it is with, you want to make it as successful as possible and ensure that both you and the business know everything necessary to make a decision about the role. You should:

- Thoroughly understand the role you are applying for
- Research information on the Company from their website, public sources and from people within your own network who work or have experience of working for the company
- Make yourself thoroughly familiar with your CV
- Have examples of your achievements and skills that you can talk about enthusiastically and concisely
- Read through the different styles of interview questions to ensure that you can adapt them to the information you want the company to know about you
- Think about the interview from the Company's perspective. How well do you meet their needs and what would make you more attractive?
- Review your personal appearance and the first impression that you make
- Consider a practice interview to hone your responses

You want to make the best impression and present the best possible case for you as the ideal candidate for the role regardless of the assessment process. You can also take the opportunity to see whether the company and role would also be a good fit for you, your personal style and career aspirations. There are some important steps before during and after the interview that you should keep in mind that are covered later in some detail. You will not get a second chance at a first meeting so it is important to make the most of it.

Types of interviews

Face-to-face individual interviews

The important thing to remember is that the interview is your chance to talk about yourself and your experience, to engage the interviewer and allow them to assess your suitability for the role.

The surroundings for an interview are usually quite neutral; a meeting room at the company headquarters or in a hotel but on rare occasions they can be much more dynamic even on a train or in a car at a racetrack! Wherever you are being interviewed the format and style will be quite similar – one or two interviewers asking questions in either a structured or conversational style. The time will pass incredibly quickly and the key to successfully managing the interview is to be well prepared and to remain relaxed but alert.

Panel interviews

Interviews involving small groups of interviewers can be a little daunting but are still quite common in some organisations, especially in the public sector. Listen carefully when being introduced and try to memorise the names and roles of the members of the panel. You may write them down, if need be and don't be afraid to clarify a name or role you have not heard first time.

what's next for me?

Each panel interview is different but it is usual for each individual to ask about a specific area of interest although in some interviews some members of the panel may not speak but act as observers. Turn toward the panel member who has asked a question or responded to your reply and address them directly. Try to also include the other panel members by making frequent eye contact. If one person appears to be the real decision maker, ensure that you listen particularly carefully to their questioning but avoid directing all responses to them.

Try not to be overawed by the presence of so many people and treat this as you would any interview, remaining calm and composed, confident and engaged. Don't be afraid to ask questions and try to manage the group situation to your advantage.

Telephone and video interviews

Interviewing by telephone or using video technology is becoming more frequent not only for initial screening of applicants but also for reasons of geography and possibly to ensure that you are comfortable using these mediums if this will be part of your role.

You will normally receive advance warning of the date and time when your interview is to take place and much of what you have learned from face-to-face interviews will be relevant. There are some advantages to a telephone interview and before the call comes through, make sure you have reviewed your career achievements and have anything you need to refer to close at hand.

For a video interview, prepare as you would for a face-to-face interview and ensure that, if you are at home the area is appropriate for an interview, quiet and relaxed. This also applies to a telephone interview. Neither you nor the interviewer wants to be interrupted by domestic noise and distraction.

Your objective from a "remote" interview is to secure a face-to-face meeting, so remember to ask about where and when it will be and with whom if you successfully move to the next stage.

Assessment centres

Many companies use assessment centres to interview and assess a number of candidates in a relatively short period, usually between one and two days. They allow the business to see how candidates react and behave in a number of situations and often they will include a wide variety of interviews, exercises, presentations and tests.

Because there are a number of candidates and activities, assessment centres can feel very competitive but you must remember that you are participating to demonstrate your skills and experience and you should concentrate on your own performance and not other people's. Don't panic if you feel you have done less well in one exercise because you are being assessed on your all-round suitability for the role. Stay positive and deliver your best on every exercise. Ensure that you listen carefully to the brief before each exercise and remember that if you are doing exercises at different times then avoid discussing what you did with other candidates who may benefit from your advice.

If you are asked to carry out aptitude or personality tests ensure that you advise the company if there is an option on your preference of language if English is not your first language. It is especially important to advise the assessors ahead of time if you have any type of disability that may impact the tests or any part of the assessment centre.

An assessment centre can also be an excellent opportunity for you to meet various team members from your potential employer who are on the assessor and interviewing team. Take the time to meet them and to get a feel for your fit within the team. Remember that the assessment does not stop during tea breaks, lunch or dinner, especially if you are chatting with the assessors!

Interviews by head hunters and recruitment consultants

Most executive search consultants are highly professional and go out of their way to make you feel relaxed at interview. They are largely paid on results and have a vested interest in finding the best candidate for the role. They want to find out as much as possible about your suitability for the role to ensure that you are the right fit for the company. Remember they have a reputation to protect and will only put you forward if they believe you "have what it takes" to impress their client.

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As well as the technical and professional aspects of your work they will usually ask about your career objectives, your management style, and your motivation. The head hunter will be looking for your strengths and probing any development areas. Questions about your personal life, your education, family and hobbies are quite common because they want to build a complete picture of you that they may summarise in a report to your potential employer.

The consultant needs to know a lot about you and is experienced in getting you to reveal a lot of information about yourself. The meetings may feel quite relaxed and informal but you should be natural, remain professional and stay alert. In all instances, the consultant is looking for the right candidate to fit the organisation. If you are not put forward for a role, ensure you get feedback and if you are successful, use the consultant to gain further insight into the candidate profile that the company has given and in which areas you are strongest and weakest.

Interview preparation

Once you have received the call or letter inviting you to attend an interview, you need to get ready to attend the interview. In the same way that spending time on your CV and application got you through the door the key to a successful interview is preparation. This cannot be stressed enough. It is not enough to have your interview outfit dry-cleaned or reread the job advertisement although neither is a bad idea. You have to research the company, make yourself familiar with your own CV and prepare the answers that you will give to specific questions that you can undoubtedly anticipate. This is a role suitable for your experience after all. You also need to consider your own appearance and the expectations of the company interviewing you. It is not just what you say at interview but how you appear and how you act that will complete the picture of your fit for this role.

Researching the company

Before you completed your application, you researched the company offering the role and clearly had both an interest in working for it and, equally importantly, believed that you would be suitable for the role. Now is the time to dust off your notes and to allocate some time to thoroughly understand the business. This will allow you to tailor your interview answers and boost your confidence ahead of your meeting.

Your research should focus on what the company says about itself, what the press has to say about it and any news stories especially around areas of the business affecting the role that you have applied for. Look on the company's website and pay particular attention to:

- Company performance reports and financial statements
- Mission and vision statements
- News about products and services
- Personnel changes or interviews with key members of staff which may give an insight into the future of the company and its culture

If you know someone who works at the company or there is someone within your extended business network who does, ask them for their view of the business and what it is like to work there. Find out if they know your interviewers and what they are like. The more information you have the better prepared you can be for the style of questions you may be asked.

If you want to summarise the details you obtain from your research, complete the company research form at the back of this section.

Familiarity with the role and presenting your experience

It seems extremely basic to suggest that you reread your own CV and the job advertisement or job description as you prepare for the interview. But if you have applied for a number of roles with different companies and have written covering letters or added information onto your CV around a specific role, it is vital that you familiarise yourself with the original job advertisement and thoroughly review your CV with this in mind:

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- What was it that attracted you to the role in the first instance?
- Why did you think that you would be a good candidate for the role?
- What experience do you have that is appropriate and what do you want to emphasise?
- What questions do you think you will be asked about your experience?
- Do you have any materials that you may want to take to support your experience? If so ensure that they are in an easily presented form

You need to be thoroughly familiar with your CV. It got you to the point of interview and has been reread by everyone that you will meet during your assessment process. You need to be familiar with the chronology and roles and should take time to practice talking knowledgeably, enthusiastically and concisely about yourself. Importantly, you are selling yourself in the context of this role, so think about the interview from the company's perspective. They may not be that interested in what a great employer you had three roles ago but they are interested in what you achieved and how this could be of benefit to them.

If you want to complete a summary of why you applied for the role, use the form at the back of this section. In addition to read more about the importance of interview preparation review the appendix also at the back of this section.

The Interview

Arrival & personal presentation

First impressions really do count in all areas of life and none more so than the job interview. If you present a polished and confident exterior appearance you allow the interviewer the confidence to quickly get to the facts about you that you want to present. You have a short time, have already prepared the areas you want to talk about and want to make a strong initial impression.

Be appropriately and properly groomed and tend towards the conventional. Many businesses have individual dress codes but you should tend to a more formal approach and a business suit is most often appropriate for both sexes. Even with information that the company has a smart-casual style, your interviewer may dress formally for your meeting and it is essential that your appearance is a reflection of how well prepared you are.

Punctuality is both a practical consideration, allowing you time to compose yourself before your meeting, but also an indication of your enthusiasm and work ethic. You are not in control of traffic and transport connections but you can allow for these eventualities and plan to arrive early. Make sure that you make yourself known at least 10 minutes early. You can then sit and wait in the reception area and may even be able to learn a little more about the company through material on display. You can also take the time to check all aspects of your appearance in the restrooms. If, for reasons beyond your control, you are going to be late, call and advise of your expected arrival time.

If you want help in preparing for your arrival at interview, complete the interview checklist at the back of this section.

This is a high-pressure situation even for the most confident individuals and it is important to try to maintain your calm. Take some steady controlled breaths and wait to be taken into the interview.

At the interview

Perhaps the most critical moment of your interview is the beginning. Like any first meeting both you and your interviewer are looking for a positive start to the interview and you will want to give a clear impression that you are confident, composed and ready not only to discuss your experience but also to take on the challenges of the role.

Handshake

Your hand should be dry and your grip firm but not crushing. Look the person or people you are meeting in the eye and smile. You should look like you are keen to start the interview and to discuss why you are the right person for the role.

what's next for me?

Take a seat

Sit down where and when you are invited to. Look confident and ready to take part in a business negotiation.

Eye contact

It is important to maintain good eye contact with the person talking with you especially if there is more than one interviewer. Retaining eye contact ensures that the person you are speaking to knows that you are addressing them and can hear you properly. Talking into your lap does not.

Your voice

You may be loudly or quietly spoken but it is important to moderate your voice to an appropriate level for the size of room and the number of interviewers. Make sure that you can be heard and that you speak confidently and succinctly.

Use your hands

Be natural but try to avoid being overly animated.

Humour

Again be natural and occasionally allow humour into your responses when it is appropriate. You do not want to be seen as flippant or off-hand when giving serious responses.

Posture

Sit upright, leaning slightly forward to demonstrate your active listening. You want to appear calm and confident rather than relaxed and casual. Try to find a comfortable resting position for your hands, locked together in your lap for instance. This is a technique that you can easily copy from interviewers and guests on television news programmes. Importantly, try not to tap or fidget during the interview as this is distracting for the interviewer and shows that you are uneasy.

Controlling the interview

Be energetic and enthusiastic and talk with passion about your experience and what you can bring to the role. Listen carefully to what the interviewer is asking and what they tell you about the role during the interview. Remember, not everything is in a job advertisement or job description and the interviewer may be able to help you tailor your responses exactly to the role on offer.

Be relevant and answer the questions you are asked and ensure that you ask questions where necessary to keep the interview exchange totally relevant to the interviewer's agenda.

Treat the interview as a business meeting. You are selling something: you and your experience. The interviewer wants to buy something: an individual with expertise, enthusiasm, insight and dedication. You are in a business negotiation and you should treat the interview as one. It is an exchange not an interrogation and you should be projecting that you have the skills and capabilities that the business is searching for.

Think like the interviewer

If you have researched the company you are being interviewed to join you have had the opportunity to tailor your answers around its problems, opportunities and to demonstrate how good the fit of your skills and experience will be. You may find that your interviewer begins to share more information about the direction or challenges of the business with you and it is important to actively listen for these insights:

"We are concerned about..."

"You may have heard that we are..."

"How would you handle this issue if you were to join us...."

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Be careful not to try to solve the problems or direct strategy during what is, after all, a short meeting. You currently only have an outsider's view and may quickly run into sensitive issues or appear too opinionated rather than simply well informed. "The company **could** do this..." is much safer than "The company **should** do this..." for instance. Always bring the question back to your own experience and what you would be able to bring to the business to formulate the solution rather than volunteering a solution in the first instance:

"I am not fully familiar with the business but from what you have discussed it appears to be similar to an issue I tackled at a previous company when I...." is a much safer place to begin than "what you need to do is..."

If you want to consider what types of questions you might get asked and which aspects of your career you really wish to convey at your interview, complete the Interview Preparation Form at the back of this section.

Answering questions

The interview may start in a number of different ways. Many interviews begin with a very open question such as: "Tell me about yourself". Some interviewers take a very direct approach, opening their notes and asking you for a background overview: "Take me through your CV" or to talk about your achievements in the context of the role: "Tell me what could you bring to this Company". Others may outline the role or give you more background.

Whichever approach is adopted you can adapt your own style accordingly because you should have already prepared both a CV run-through and specific examples of your achievements based upon this role.

The interviewer may also explain the style of questioning, especially if they are asking competency-based questions which many companies now do. If they are asking these questions, they will ask you for specific examples of how you have handled certain challenges or projects and carried out work activities and tasks to gain an understanding of your skills and knowledge. They are trying to understand how you added value in an organisation to determine whether you could do the same at their business.

Regardless of the way that the interview starts, make sure that you listen carefully to what you are being asked and take your time to formulate an answer. It is the quality of your answer not the speed of your response that the interviewer is interested in. You are not on a quiz show! If you are not sure what the question means or what they are looking for then ask for clarification. Often if the question is repeated the interviewer will rephrase it to give you a clearer idea of what is being asked.

Importantly, it should go without saying that this is a job interview and your answers should be about your career and experience with clear examples from projects and situations you have directly been involved in. When business leaders and politicians are interviewed they try to answer the question but also to ensure that people understand the key facts that they want to share. They may be discussing the economy or their career but never fail to mention if they have a new book in the shops! By carefully preparing answers around specific, relevant areas of your experience you can tailor your answers to match a variety of different types of questions and ensure that you cover the key achievements in your career.

To help prepare yourself for some typical interview questions, go to the back of this section and complete the Practice Interview Questionnaire.

Types of questions

It is unlikely that you will know the specific style of questions you will be asked during your interview but you do know that they will be about you! You should ensure that you have prepared examples of your achievements, skills and personal style, as this will allow you to quickly match your answers to the style and specific detail of questions you will be asked.

There are a huge variety of questions you could be asked but remember that the interviewer is trying to gauge your experience and suitability for a role within their company and so it is unlikely that their questions will stray hugely from your previous roles, knowledge and business approach

what's next for me?

There is no substitute for practice. Reading through a list of typical questions and matching them to your own experience and skills will ensure that you are not surprised or flustered during your interview and can turn probing questions to your advantage. Go to the list of questions at the back of this section and try matching them to the area of your career you most want to discuss.

There are a variety of styles of questions asked:

Questions about you

Many people are comfortable with factual questions about their career but can be thrown by an interviewer who switches to a more personal line of questioning:

“Well, you’ve spoken about your career successes, how would you describe your management style?” “We all have areas that need further development, tell me about yours?”

or one of the most common questions:

“Why do you want to leave (or have you left) your current employer?”

Personal questions are more difficult for many people because they are asking you to give an opinion about yourself. It is vital that you realise that you will be asked questions about yourself and decide before hand how to answer them. If you have already left your employer or it seems that you are happy there, you should have an answer prepared about your career decisions that is succinct and understandable. If you want to consider this area in more detail, refer to the Creating a Department Message in the Handling Change section.

Topical questions

These questions are used in an interview to see if you are fully aware of what is going on in your industry or in the wider economy. They are intended to show that you take an interest beyond your own role and that you understand the implications of any developments in your industry.

The questions can be specific about recent news:

“How do you think last week’s Government announcement will affect our industry?”

or ask for an opinion about your view of the future

“Where do you see the industry going over the next five years?”

“Who do you think our major competitors will be in 5-10 years time?”

You should keep yourself in tune with developments in your industry and, if you are changing career, in the industries and markets of the companies you are applying to. Have an opinion about the key issues but try to avoid taking a controversial stance on any major issues.

Situational questions

Sometimes interviewers will describe a scenario and ask how you would handle it:

“You have an important presentation to make later today but your hard drive has crashed and you have lost the file. A colleague has a draft copy that you need to find and amend but you are asked to go to speak urgently to the Managing Director. What do you do?”

It is important to think carefully about the situation described and then describe honestly the approach that you would take. There is no right or wrong answer but the scenario, whether specific to your role or more generally about your personal style, will give the interviewer a chance to see how you react under pressure both in the interview and in the workplace. Take a few moments to formulate a response. Above all try not to ramble.

Competency questions

Interviewers may probe your experience and competence in certain situations. This is often against a framework or list of competencies that the company feels are important for the role it is recruiting. They will ask you to describe how you handled certain situations in previous roles some of which may be the more challenging elements of people and project management. They are looking for you to explain the situation, what happened, why it happened and what the outcome and result were. Typical questions might be:

“Tell me about the biggest issue you have faced in one of your previous roles. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?”

“Describe a project or initiative that you have initiated and the results achieved”

“Give an example of dealing with a customer concern. What solutions and actions did you take to resolve the situation?”

Again it is important to take your time when responding to these questions. You can check understanding and give yourself thinking time by repeating the question and at the end of your answer you can also check if the example was specific enough or appropriate to the question. You cannot “Pass” on questions but if you really cannot immediately recall an example ask if you can come back to the question and think about an example while you move on to other issues. If you have never been in the situation, say so, but remember that you can add additional information that might be relevant: “I have not dealt with a customer concern but on a project I was working on, another team raised a concern and I.....” and so on.

Presentations

It is quite common practice when recruiting some roles, to ask short-listed candidates to give a short presentation. The subject will most likely be chosen for you and may be a wide brief or a specific topic:

“What can you do for this organisation?”

“How would you organise a customer event to launch a new car?”

It is vitally important that you plan your time well and stick to the preparation and presentation timings that you have been given. Don't run out of time because you have spent too long making your presentation look pretty or because you want to include too much information.

Use visual aids to give impact to your presentation, but remember that they are not a substitute for good content and your delivery has to be simple and clear with plenty of eye contact. If you have to refer to your notes, do so sparingly and do not read from a prepared script. Above all, if you have prepared slides or a flip-chart presentation make them clear and concise and do not read from them – trust that your audience can do so themselves!

Use the rule of three: tell your audience what you are going to talk about, talk about it and then summarise. Advise them at the start when you would prefer to take questions.

If you are asked to bring a prepared presentation on a particular subject, there is naturally an expectation that it will be more professionally presented and well considered.

Go to the back of this section, to read a guide on giving an interview presentation.

Concluding the interview and following-up

You will know when the interview is drawing to a close when an interviewer indicates that they have covered all of the items that they want to. They will then give you the chance to ask anything that you would like to. This is a genuine opportunity for you to find out more about the company and the job and you should have prepared some questions and quickly review whether they have been covered in the interview.

If you have asked questions as the interview has progressed you can let the interviewer know that everything has been explained clearly and that you have no further questions. You might also add:

"I have enjoyed our meeting and want to say that I am very interested in the job and know that I have a lot to offer the company"

If you have not had much opportunity to ask questions ask one or two while avoiding anything controversial:

"What are the key business priorities in the coming months?"

"What is the working environment and culture like here?"

You may be asked what your current or last remuneration package was so you need to ensure that you have your salary and benefit details to hand. Remember that it is likely that your new employer will have already benchmarked salaries for the role it is offering and the salaries of likely candidates. If you are leaving another role you may also be asked about your notice period so ensure that you know the facts.

Always finish the interview by asking about the next stage of the recruitment process and when you might hear more. Leave with a handshake and smile.

If you would really like to work for this employer, email or write to the interviewer to show your interest in the role and in going to the next stage of the recruitment process. Keep your letter short. If you would like to see an example of a follow up email, review one at the back of this section.

If the role has come through a recruitment agency, phone them to express further interest. Always ensure that you get feedback on how the interview went regardless of the outcome.

Evaluating the offer

You may have the opportunity to discuss the salary and benefits and terms and conditions of an offer during the interview. If you have been successful the discussion may also turn to your availability to accept an offer and begin working with the company. This may also happen in a call or letter after your interview.

Once you have been offered a new role it is important to spend some time evaluating the offer. Is the salary comparable with other roles and is it what you expect? Is the complete benefits package in line with your expectations and how does it compare to other offers you have had or the role you are in or have recently left? Are there elements that you would like to change to better suit your needs and lifestyle; travel assistance for instance or car allowances, child care vouchers or pensions?

If you have been searching for work for some time it is tempting to accept the first offer that is made and, in many instances, your new employer recognises your value and the offer is in-line with your expectations and market rates. However, you should ensure that any negotiation takes place before you have signed your contract and that there are no "grey-areas" where your understanding of what is being offered and your new employer's understanding may differ.

What's important - interview and selection

1. Introduction

Your CV, networking and job search are all leading you to one place: being in front of a decision maker at a new employer, answering questions about yourself. However it takes place and whoever is involved one thing is certain, you will meet face to face and you will be asked questions! So in the same way that you have carefully prepared your CV and written your application letters it is important to spend time preparing for your interview because unlike your CV, there is no chance to edit once you have answered all your interviewer's questions.

2. Types of interviews

- Make sure you prepare thoroughly for your interview and remember you are the expert about yourself
- Listen carefully and answer questions succinctly, demonstrating your knowledge and experience
- Give positive answers and avoid negative statements and criticism
- Treat a panel or telephone interview as you would a one to one interview remaining calm and composed
- If you are at an assessment centre remember that although tests may be looking at your teamwork, the other candidates are also your competitors for the role

3. Interview preparation

There is no substitute for preparation. Whether you have a day, a week or a month before your interview, make sure you maximise the time you have to prepare. Familiarise yourself with your CV or application form: this is what the interviewer knows about you. Research the company you are being interviewed by to demonstrate you are up to date. Most importantly, re-read the job description and job advert and ensure that your answers and preparation are relevant to the role you have applied for.

4. Personal presentation

- Be appropriately and properly groomed and remember that your appearance reflects how well prepared you are
- Punctuality is both a practical consideration and an indication of your enthusiasm
- Plan to arrive ready for your meeting, at least ten minutes early
- Take the opportunity to check your appearance one last time before you meet your interviewer
- This is a high-pressure situation so try to maintain your calm. Take some steady controlled breaths as you wait to be taken into the interview
- Remember to smile!

5. Controlling the interview

You know your CV and experience better than anyone. If you were an interviewer what questions would you ask and what areas would you want expanded on to support your application? You should balance telling an interviewer about your career high points and anticipating the questions that you might be asked. And if the questions you imagine are hard then make sure you prepare thoroughly because they may well be the ones that will be asked!

6. Answering questions

- Know why you have applied especially if you have applied for a number of similar roles. Ensure you are answering questions about THIS role
- Adapt your own style according to the style of questions you are asked
- Give specific examples of projects and situations you have been involved in that demonstrate your skills and knowledge and how you added value to the organisation
- Listen carefully, seek clarification if required and take your time to formulate an answer
- Treat the interview as a business meeting – You are selling yourself and your experience

7. Types of questions

It is likely that you will be asked questions in a variety of different styles during your interview. You will not be able to practice answers for every eventuality but you should prepare the key facts that you feel are most relevant to the role and ensure that you weave them into your answers regardless of how the questions are worded.

what's next for me?

The styles of questions you may be asked may fall into the formats below:

- **General questions about you**
Questions that give insight into why you are applying for the role
- **Topical questions**
These questions are used to gauge your industry awareness
- **Situational questions**
You will be given a scenario and asked to describe what you might do in that scenario
- **Competency based questions**
These probe your experience and competence in certain situations often against a framework of what the company feels is important

8. Delivering a presentation at interview

- Clarify anything you do not understand from the brief before you start
- Stick to the preparation and presentation timings that you have been given
- Use visual aids to add impact
- Don't write what you are going to say on your slides or flipchart – you want your audience to concentrate on what you are saying
- Use the rule of three: tell your audience what you are going to talk about, then talk about it and then summarise

9. Concluding the interview

- You generally have the chance to ask questions but if you have asked them during the interview let the interviewer know that you have no further questions
- If you have not asked questions, ask one or two but avoid anything controversial
- Ensure you know the facts about your salary, benefits or notice period
- Always finish the interview by asking about the next stage of the recruitment process and when you might hear more
- Leave with a handshake and a smile

Company Research Form

Name of Company:

Job Applied For:

<p>1. What do you know about the background of the business? For example: financial position and ownership, size, number of sites</p>
<p>2. Does the business have a single purpose or does it do a number of different things and is this relevant to the role you are applying for?</p>
<p>3. Is the structure of the business relevant to your career aspiration? Are there questions that you would like to ask at interview about future opportunities?</p>
<p>4. Are there any recent developments that are relevant to the role you are applying for?</p>
<p>5. Has the company recently been in the news and why?</p>

Role Questionnaire

Name of Company:

Job Applied For:

1. What was it that first attracted you to this role?
2. Which elements of the advert/job description are most relevant to your experience?
3. Which elements of the role are new to you or do you feel will be most challenging?
4. What are the key skills and experience that the new role requires?
5. Do you have examples of how you can demonstrate these skills and what can you bring to the role that will add value?

The importance of preparation

I was recruiting for a professional role recently and had a fantastic response to the advert. On paper, the candidates' CVs looked superb in terms of their experience, skills and qualifications. It was very difficult to select for interview but I narrowed it down to 16 candidates and so ensued the lengthy interviews that I always pride myself in carrying out in order to get an excellent shortlist which matches my client's needs.

Typically, I have a set of standard questions, largely competency based. This means that they have to give examples of their experience in relation to that question and how it added value to an organisation. It's a straight forward process but I was surprised how many candidates struggled with this type of questioning.

My opening question to all candidates is always: "What are your top 3 career achievements to date, why and how did they add value to the organisation?" Most candidates try to come up with something specific they have achieved but regularly fail to explain why it is important and how it added value. Many are stunned by the question and ramble on for a long time and actually don't answer the question. Nearly 75% in this case had difficulty! I cannot stress enough the importance of preparing for interviews and rehearsing some potential questions beforehand. Know your CV inside out as generally it will include your top achievements.

Be proud of your achievements! I am forever impressed by the achievements noted down on a CV but very few candidates convey this information in an enthusiastic manner or with pride.

Top tips:

1. Prepare for your interview and rehearse potential questions
2. Know your CV inside out
3. Ensure you answer the question? Most employers want to hear how you did a certain job for an organisation to see what you could do for them
4. If you need time to think, repeat the question out loud or if really stuck ask the interviewer to move onto the next question and you'll come back to that one
5. Utilise metrics where possible to enhance an answer, for example:
 - "By introducing X system into the business I saved the company £X in labour and efficiencies"
 - "I reduced employee turnover by X% which saved the company £X by introducing a career development ladder which aided retention"
 - "By introducing a new sales aid, I increased revenue by X%/£X in the first year"
 - "I designed and made the gear box for the Formula 1 championship car which assisted in the performance improvement of the vehicle"
 - "I introduced a new cleaning process into H ward, trained all cleaners and wrote notices/guidelines for the staff and public resulting in no super bug illnesses all year"

Interview Checklist

What is the name of your contact on arrival?	
Do you have a telephone number for this person or the company in the event of you having to contact the company prior to arrival?	
What is the name and address of the company?	
Do you know how to get there? Have you requested a map or directions or downloaded these from the company website if available?	
If driving, how long do you estimate the drive at the time of the day you are making the journey?	
In addition, is there somewhere to park on site or do you need to leave time to find a parking space?	
If taking public transport, are there any special provisions you need to put in place, e.g. taxi collection from the rail station or 10 minute walk from the bus drop off?	
What is the company dress code?	
Do you have something appropriate to wear and if so is it ready for you to wear on the day of your interview?	
Have you been asked to bring anything with you to the interview? If so do you have everything required?	
Is there anything you particularly want to take to the interview to demonstrate your skills and experience?	
Is there anything that you need to make the company or the interviewer aware of prior to your meeting?	

Interview Preparation Form

1. Based upon what you know about the company and role you are being interviewed for, which areas of your experience, your CV and the requirements of the role are most likely to be asked about?

1

2

3

4

5

2. What areas of your experience, projects you have worked on and achievements are most relevant and important for you to cover during this interview?

1

2

3

4

5

Practice Interview Questionnaire

<p>1. Tell me about your top 3 achievements in your career and why they are important to you. What benefits did your previous employer(s) see as a result of you delivering these achievements?</p>
<p>2. Describe the biggest problem you've faced in your career. How did you handle the situation and what was the outcome?</p>
<p>3. Describe a project that you carried out. What was particularly challenging about it?</p>
<p>4. What are the key strengths that you will bring to this job? Why should you be selected for this role?</p>
<p>5. What interests you in this role?</p>

6. Tell me about additional responsibilities or tasks you have taken on. How did these come about?

7. Occasionally we have to work with people who get upset or angry very easily. Tell me about a time when you dealt with someone like this. What was the outcome?

8. How do you stay aware of new developments, technology or trends in your position?

9. How do you incorporate new ideas or technologies into your work? Give me an example of when you did this effectively.

10. Have you ever had to deal with a customer problem or concern? What typical solutions or actions do you take to resolve these problems?

Practice Interview Questions

In this section you can find a number of real interview questions put together from discussions with Human Resources Managers and Recruiters across the UK. These are the type of interview questions that you may be asked and, depending upon the role, there will be varied emphasis on certain types of questions. Remember, the interviewer is not trying to catch you out. There are no right and wrong answers; these are questions about your experience, performance and opinions and the interviewer is using this dialogue to build up a picture of you as a potential future employee in the limited time available.

The variety of questions that you could be asked can feel overwhelming and impossible to prepare for. But there are only a limited number of areas that an interviewer can probe and there are several ways to ask for the same information. The better prepared you are to answer questions about yourself and your experience, the easier it will be for you to ensure that you have answered the questions thoroughly and talked about the most relevant elements of your career. At no point in an interview do you want to realise that you have “never really thought about that” or that you “don’t have an example of that” or an alternative you want to discuss.

The questions below are regularly used in interviews. The majority of interviewers and employers are looking for responses to questions that relate to specific experiences you have had in previous jobs. They are expecting a detailed answer to the question. Be specific. Don’t be evasive because it is quite evident if you are talking around rather than about a subject.

Your answers should describe the situation and what happened, what you did and the outcome. The interviewer will be looking at how you added value to your previous employer, e.g. improving a system which saved time or money; or how you increased the company’s profit; market share; grew their sales or saved them money. Remember that the interviewer does not work for your old company and so does not know internal structures and jargon; ensure that you use universally understood language in your answers. This is not simply asking you to describe what happened at your old company, it is asking you to detail what part you played in the process and outcome. Using “I” rather than “we” in your answers is helpful in maintaining your focus on yourself.

An interview typically lasts between 45 and 90 minutes incorporating an introduction and time for your own questions. It is normal for an interviewer to ask between seven and ten questions in the time that they have with you

This section is intended to show you the different style of questions that may be asked and to give you a chance to prepare yourself for the information that is expected at interview. While you review the questions, it is useful to refer to your CV and write down relevant examples from your career. You can then prepare key phrases about your achievements and experience that you can weave into your answers.

Professional knowledge role-based skills and competence

These questions are intended to probe how appropriate your general competence; skills, knowledge and experience are for the role. The questions will be determined specifically for the position but some sample questions could include:

- Describe a project or assignment that challenged your skills as a _(Job name)_. What did you do about it?
- What technical training have you received? Give me some examples of how you've applied this training
- Different jobs require different levels of technical expertise. Has there been a time when you have been particularly satisfied (or dissatisfied) by the opportunity to use your technical expertise?
- What experience do you have operating ___(equipment/software)___? What is your proficiency level?
- When was the last time you learned a new technical skill? Describe the situation and how you were able to apply your new skills
- Give me an example of your most complex assignment or project. What went well and what obstacles did you encounter?
- Do you have any skill areas that need development? What are you doing about it?

Fit with the company position

Every company has different ways of working and different values. These questions are probing your previous experience and personal values to see how they fit with your new potential employer. The interviewer is looking both for how well you will fit in and also how personally satisfying the role will be for you.

- Tell me why you have applied for this position?
- Describe your general responsibilities and the situations and decisions you influence.
- Describe your current (or previous) position and where you are within your organisation (or team). Do you have anyone reporting to you directly or indirectly?
- Describe the three most important events (or key achievements) in your career. Why were they important to you?
- What were some of your biggest disappointments and how did you cope with them?
- Describe how you set personal goals and ensure that you achieve them
- Tell me about a job (or situation) in which you were satisfied (or dissatisfied) with the amount of recognition you received. Tell me why and what did you do about it?
- Describe the specific job conditions, tasks, or assignments that excite you the most about your position.
- All jobs have their frustrations and problems. Describe some specific tasks or conditions that have been frustrating to you. Why were they frustrating? How did you complete them?

It is important that in your answers to these questions, you try to choose examples that you can demonstrate are relevant to the role you are applying for. It is also very important to carefully listen to the question and to turn it to your advantage. If the interviewer asks when you were dissatisfied, avoid being drawn into a long description of the problems you faced. Focus instead on the positive outcome or learning from the experience.

Problem solving and analysis

Every role involves solving problems and analysing situations to find the best outcome. The interviewer is looking at your approach to problem solving, your ownership of the issue and the methods you have used to identify the issues and reach a conclusion.

- Describe the biggest problems you've faced in a role and how you handled them. What was the outcome?
- Describe an instance when you got results by recognising and dealing with an issue before it became a problem
- What impact did your early intervention have on a situation? What was the final outcome?
- Have you ever recognized a problem before anyone else in your company was aware of it? What did you do? What was the result?
- What complicated problems have you faced? Describe how you identified or gained a better understanding of the problem. What did you do about it? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you have used more than one approach to solve a complex problem.
- Describe to me a method, process, or product that you designed. What was the biggest challenge? How did you deal with it? What was the final outcome?

You will almost always be asked or expected to describe the analysis and solution to a problem and also the outcome. It is important that you paint a complete picture of your involvement and knowledge of the final outcome to demonstrate that you saw the issue through to completion

Planning and organisation

Creating and managing plans is an essential part of many roles and also an important skill for your own personal development. These questions are looking at the extent to which a course of action was pre-planned and carried out.

- How do you stay organised? Walk me through a typical week and tell me how your planned schedule worked out.
- Which responsibilities or tasks account for most of your time during a typical week?
- Describe your procedure for keeping track of things that will need your attention?
- How often is your time schedule upset by unforeseen circumstances? Give me a recent example and tell me what you did about it.

- Do you ever have to work on several projects at the same time? What approach do you use to ensure that everything gets done when needed?
- We all have times when we just couldn't complete everything on time. Have you missed deadlines and if so why and what did you do about it?
- Give an example of how you manage a project.

Initiative and implementation

The key elements of most roles are the ability to take the initiative, improve your way of working and implementing and delivering change. The interviewer will be looking for specific examples when you have made beneficial changes to the way you work and taken responsibility for delivering change.

- Describe additional responsibilities you have taken on and what you did as a result
- Give me an example of how you have changed a process, function or method of doing your job? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about your biggest accomplishments in your current (or last) position.
- Give me some examples of where you did more than was required.
- Have you ever made any cost saving suggestions? Were they accepted?
- Do you ever take action on a project or problem without specifically being asked to do so? Give me an example and describe the result
- Have you been dissatisfied with the amount of direction you received from others? Why? What happened?
- Give me some examples of procedures and policies that were part of your job. How did they affect your work?

Managing resources

Managing a company's resources is essential to deliver productivity targets and cost control. You may be asked about how you managed other people, company resources and your own time to deliver company objectives.

- Describe to me a challenging project that you managed which involved planning and coordinating resources. What was the final result?
- Describe a project where you have had a very tight timetable for delivery. How did you ensure that you successfully allocated resources?
- Describe a situation in which your results did not meet your manager's expectations. What happened? What action did you take?
- Tell me about a time when you weren't pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- Have you ever had to adjust your work schedule because you didn't have all the necessary parts, information or equipment? Tell me about the situation. What did you do about it?

Specific management questions (if applicable):

- As a manager, describe how you plan for and allocate your resources including those of your team.
- How do you estimate time and costs required when you are managing a project?

Specific questions on health and safety (if applicable)

- What hazardous materials or equipment have you worked with? Tell me about the procedures you followed? What were the results?
- Give me some examples of safety procedures that were part of your job. How did they affect your work?
- Sometimes people have to bend safety rules to finish a job on time. Do you have any examples of when this has happened and how you reacted?
- Have you trained others to use safety equipment or follow procedures? Give me some examples.
- Tell me about a time when you recognized an unsafe situation. What did you do?

Quality and validation

In roles where a high degree of consistency and accuracy is important, you may be asked about how you have ensured that you met targets and performance measures

- What are the quality standards for your job? How do you ensure that you meet these standards? Give me a recent example
- Tell me about a time you weren't satisfied because of quality defects in your work. How did you handle the situation?
- Describe a situation where you were involved in a validation process. What was your role? What issues arose? What was the result?

Customer focus

Arguably all roles should have a focus on customers and customer satisfaction. Interviewers are looking for your focus on customers, adding value for customers and growing the business by understanding customers.

- What types of customer contact have you had in your past roles? What results have you achieved with this approach?
- Describe how you ensure that the work you do is focussed on your customers
- Have you ever had to deal with a customer problem or concern? What typical solutions or actions do you take to resolve these problems?
- Have you ever gone out of your way to satisfy a customer? Describe the situation
- Tell me about the different techniques or approaches you use in dealing with people of different levels or positions

General questions

These are some of the most critical questions to have prepared because regardless of the precise wording they are questions that you will be asked at some time by your new potential employer:

- Why do you want to (or why did you) leave your current (or previous) position?
- What notice period do you have to give your existing employer?
- What is your current (or previous) remuneration package?
- What type of remuneration package are you looking for?

Possible questions you could ask at the Interview:

- What are the main business priorities this year?
- How would you describe the culture and environment in this organisation?
- How would you and your managers describe the leadership style?
- What is the next stage of the selection process and when will I know if I have been successful?

Competencies – communication and interpersonal skills

Communication

- What types of reports do you have to prepare? How complex are they to write? Have you improved the way you report your projects or work?
- Have you ever written any procedures or instructions for your work area? Give me an example. What value did they add to the business and were they implemented?
- Have you ever made a presentation in which you gave the results of a project?
- How do you explain complex or technical information to a non-technical group or individual?
- Tell me about a time when you persuaded someone to do something. What was the situation? How did you persuade them?
- Describe your most satisfying experience in gaining support for an idea or proposal. How did it turn out?

Interpersonal relationships

- How do you stay aware of your co-workers' or team members' general attitudes on work-issues?
- Occasionally we have to work with people who get upset or angry very easily. Tell me about a time when you dealt with someone like this. What was the outcome?
- Do you have to negotiate with co-workers for resources? Describe a recent situation where you had to do this. What was the outcome?
- How do you think other workers would describe your management style? Why?
- How do you think your co-workers would describe you at work? Why?
- Tell me about a time when you strongly disagreed with another employee's attitude or their position on an important issue. How did you resolve the situation?
- Tell me about a situations where you had to adjust quickly to changes in your role or within the business. How did it affect you?

Competencies – teamwork, leadership and development

Teamwork

- Some people work independently and others work as part of a team. Which do you prefer? Why? Tell me about a time when you enjoyed working this way. What was the result?
- Can you describe a time when you worked with people in another department to resolve problems? What was the outcome?
- Describe for me what you do to foster teamwork within your own team and between your department and others within your organisation.
- Have you faced any issues with departmental boundaries and what have you done to overcome these issues?
- Describe a time when you have been asked for your assistance on a project. How did you feel about your involvement?
- As a manager, what types of tasks or responsibilities do you delegate and why?

Leadership

- Describe for me how you get others to follow your direction
- Did you ever have a situation where someone failed to respond to your request for information or action so that you could complete an assignment? What did you do?
- Describe a time when you submitted a good idea that was not taken further. How did you feel about this and what could you have done differently?
- Things don't always go our way. Describe a situation in which you tried your best, but did not achieve your expected outcome. How did you feel about that?
- What was the last big business decision you faced? How did you decide what to do? How long did it take to reach that decision?
- Describe a decision you involved others in making. How often do you do this and to what extent do you use their input?
- What kinds of decisions do you tend to make quickly and which ones do you take more time on?

Development

- What are the main things you have learnt in your current (or previous) position?
- Describe a time when you were able to learn something complex in a short period of time.
- Describe a time when you found it difficult to learn something complex. What was hardest to learn?
- How do you maintain your effectiveness and enthusiasm when you experience the disappointment of a good plan or idea not working?
- How have you recognised your personal development needs and made improvements?
- How do you stay aware of new developments, technology or trends in your position?
- As a manager, how do you identify the developmental needs and improve the effectiveness of your team?

Developing a team as a manager

- As a manager, how do you give positive and negative feedback to member of your team?
- As a manager, how do you ensure cooperation from within your team and from other teams?
- As a manager, how do you ensure that your team performs effectively and on schedule?
- As a manager, tell me about a situation when one of your employees was not delivering their objectives. What did you do to address the situation? What was the outcome?

Strategic competencies

Risk management

- Describe how you determine strategic and financial risk and then plan and allocate your resources to address those risks?
- Describe a situation where you had to make a decision with potential negative consequences. What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you had to determine the risk associated with a process, procedure or project? What action did you take? What were the results?
- Tell me about a project that contained significant risks. How did you identify those risks? What recommendations did you make? What was the result?

Business, operational or technical strategy

- Describe how you plan and allocate your resources (human, material or financial) to meet the organisation's long-term objectives.
- What are some obstacles you've had to overcome in complying with company policies and procedures? How did you handle them? What was the outcome?
- Have you had an input into the strategic planning process and what recommendations have you made that had long-term impact on your organisation?

Innovation and creativity

- How do you incorporate new ideas or technologies into your work? Give me an example of when you did this effectively.
- Describe a time when you identified a new or unique way to meet goals or solve a problem. What was the result?
- Tell me about a new approach that you took to solve a problem. How did you come up with that approach? What happened?
- Describe a significant project you initiated. How did you know it was needed and would work? Was it used? Did it work?
- As a manager, describe how you support the creative ideas and efforts of team members

Preparing an interview presentation

If you are asked to prepare and deliver a presentation at the interview:

Take five minutes to read the question carefully and make notes about what it is asking you to do and outline the approach you might take.

You may be asked if you fully understand the assignment. Whether or not you have been asked, if any area of the presentation topic is unclear then ASK FOR CLARIFICATION. You could spend thirty minutes preparing and fifteen minutes delivering a sparkling presentation that is completely off-topic if you have not correctly interpreted the brief.

There are some basic presentation preparation and delivery recommendations to consider:

- You are not being asked to prepare a business quality presentation with such short preparation time. The quality of your thinking and ability to present clearly, confidently and under pressure are more important than the supporting slides or visual aids.
- If you have a flip-chart or are able to prepare some basic visual aids use these sparingly and only spend your valuable preparation time writing and drawing if you have a clear presentation flow worked out
- At the presentation follow the rule of three: tell you audience what you are going to tell them in outline, fill in the detail and summarise.
- Try to avoid presenting a controversial viewpoint unless you are clear that the brief is asking you to take a provocative stance. Remember that you are presenting to an audience who are better informed about the company, it's products and services and culture.
- Clarify if you are happy to take questions as you go along or would prefer them at the end.
- Anticipate that there will be questions and ensure that you have thought about the areas you know will lead to discussion.

If you are asked to prepare a presentation before the interview:

It is un-common, but not unknown, for candidates to be asked to prepare a presentation before the interview and deliver it during the interview process. This allows the interviewer to review both the quality of your research, your presentation preparation skills and also your presentation delivery.

Treat this as you would any business presentation and try to ensure that you keep to the brief, present your points clearly and anticipate the questions that you will get from the audience. Here are a few things to consider:

- Stick to the brief and clarify any points you do not understand before you begin the presentation
- Find out who your audience will be. This will help you to pitch your presentation at the right level.
- Ensure that you know what style of presentation is expected; you do not want to arrive with a PowerPoint presentation with embedded video and web-pages to find that you have no audio visual equipment available
- Concentrate on content and delivery. Slides or audio visual material are a visual aid and the content of the presentation is crucial
- As your slides are a visual aid less is more! Candidates have been known to arrive with 100 slides for a 30-minute presentation with questions. This would be one slide every 20 seconds. One slide every two minutes is generally considered appropriate.
- Practice before hand to ensure that the timings work and that your key points are clear, concise and memorable
- If you have a PowerPoint or computer based presentation ensure that you have a back-up copy with you and check that the hardware is compatible with the format of your presentation or the computer or storage device you are taking to use.
- At the presentation follow the rule of three: tell you audience what you are going to tell them in outline, fill in the detail and summarise. Clarify if you are happy to take questions as you go along or would prefer them at the end.
- Anticipate that there will be questions and ensure that you have answers prepared for areas you know will lead to discussion.
- Thank the audience for their time and leave a paper copy of the presentation for their files and to reflect upon after the interview.

Example follow-up email

Subject: Our meeting on Monday 1st regarding the sales administration role

To: John Smith

From: Andrew Watt

Dear Mr Smith

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your time on Monday and for considering me for the position of Sales Administrator at XYZ Ltd. I enjoyed the chance to discuss my background and achievements and was enthusiastic about the additional information I took away regarding the role.

I believe that I would be able to really draw upon my previous experience to develop this role at XYZ Ltd and know that I could support and enhance the company's sales efforts and growth ambitions through my work at Head Office.

If there is any further information you need please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watt

Mobile – 09777 111 222