

How to prepare for an interview

It is almost impossible to receive a job offer without first attending an interview of some sort. The secret of a successful interview lies in preparation, so it's worth spending a little time doing your homework to make it a positive, useful experience.

Preparation:

- Find out as much as possible about the company – products, size, locations, style, reputation both as employers and suppliers, the sort of job they would have for you. You can usually find out about most companies by looking for them on the Internet.
- Think about your skills, competencies, qualifications and experience so you can answer any questions on this without too much hesitation. Try to think in particular about how these relate to the company and the position offered.
- Prepare some questions to ask at the interview and prioritise them as the interview may not be long enough to ask them all – see below for some suggestions.
- Talk to friendly colleagues, present or recent, about their view of you as a team member, your strengths etc as this is a common subject for interview questions.
- Prepare answers to standard questions.
- Ring and check who will be interviewing you – it could throw you if, instead of the one-to-one you had imagined, you are faced with an interview panel of six people.
- Check the format of the interview – for example will there be any personality or skills testing?
- Read through your CV and application letter and take additional copies.
- Check transport/parking/directions.
- Be polite to support staff you meet. They count too – and may be able to influence a decision in your favour. Make sure you know who it is you are meeting as it will look bad if you get their name wrong.

Personal Presentation:

- First impressions count! Practice a good positive handshake; not too firm, not too weak. Always smile and make eye contact with the interviewer.
- Are you well dressed, in a way that follows conventions in this job sector? This is not the time to show how much of an individual you are, as they want someone who will fit in with the company.

Timing:

- You do not want to arrive looking flustered. Remember that if you arrive at the company exactly on time, you could be delayed at reception or while locating the correct department so a few extra minutes can make a big difference to that all important first impression.
- If you are late this may mean that your interview is cut short so you may not have a chance to convince the interviewer of your skills.

At the Interview:

- Make the most of your research – mention some of the facts you have gleaned from the media, etc.
- Make sure you talk to everyone if it is a panel interview rather than directing your answers at one or two people only.
- Find out as much as you can about the job – how else will you be able to decide if they make you an offer? For example, you should want to know who the job reports to and why it has become vacant.
- If the first interview is with a recruitment consultant, pump him or her for as much information as possible about the organisation and the job.

Helpful Hints:

- Try to relax as much as possible. The company has taken the time to interview you and they need to fill the position so it is in their interests too that it is successful.
- Try not to monopolise the meeting – let your interviewer talk.
- Do not be too passive – ask questions of your own as this shows you are really interested.
- If they do not tell you, find out what the key parts of the candidate specification so you can show you meet them.
- Ask how the job contributes to the success, efficiency and profitability of the organisation.
- Be honest about your experience. Lies will always be found out.
- Avoid too much self opinion.
- Never smoke.
- Keep your replies simple, but avoid just saying 'yes' or 'no'.
- Offer positive information – do not harp on problems or criticise previous employers.
- Ask about the existing team and show how you would be able to join and enhance this

After the Interview:

Do:

- Learn from your mistakes – make a list of the questions you answered well and those you answered poorly. Think about what you should have said.
- Write to the company thanking them for the interview and assure them of your interest in the position. Sometimes a professional phone message is a good idea if the job involves lots of phone contact.