

Shaping Your Futures



Your Interview

Make It Happen Toolkit

recruitable

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Contents

The tips here are designed to help you feel as confident as possible at your interview. They include:

- Staying positive.
- How to handle different types of interviews.
- Being prepared for anything.
- Looking the part.
- Doing well on the day.



Prepare for your Job interview

You've made it to the interview. What's next?

While everything you've done up to now has been important, nothing is as pivotal as a face-to-face interview. But don't worry, we've got lots of tips to give you the best chance of success and help you stay cool, calm and collected.

Things to remember to calm the nerves:

- Your resumé and job search are working.
- Don't worry about any shortcomings – you only get an interview if the employer thinks you can do the job.
- Your odds are pretty good – if you make it this far, your chances of getting the job are around one in six.
- Be prepared – planning for your interview makes a big difference.

Types of interviews

There are different kinds of interviews depending on the job you're applying for.

Screening or initial interview

A screening interview is an initial interview often with a recruiter or HR person designed to weed out candidates who don't meet the minimum job requirements. If you meet the requirements, you'll then be invited to a second interview with the manager or employer. While a screening interview is mainly to check your employment history, training and skills, the way you present yourself is still very important.

Here are some tips if your first interview is over the phone:

- Keep your resumé and reference materials in front of you.
- Prepare a list of good questions.
- Stay focused on the question being asked.

Standard unstructured interview

This is a very common interview usually with one or two interviewers - one from the team that's hiring and one from HR. These interviews are more conversational and designed to get to know you, your skills and experience. Because it's unstructured, it's good to be ready with some responses that communicate your key selling points and what you're looking for.

Behavioural-based interview

The behavioural interview looks at your previous experience and behaviour to work out how you'll perform in the future. This benefits you because:

- You have a clear structure for showing your skills and experience.
- It helps you demonstrate your achievements.
- It prevents personal opinion from swaying your evaluation.
- Everyone has the same opportunity to do well, as you're all asked the same questions.

Types of interviews

Situational interview

These interviews are focused on your creativity and analytical skills. They're similar to behavioural-based interviews, but are more future focused. Rather than looking at what you've done in the past, they're designed to see what you'd do in a hypothetical situation, so they're good for graduates and those without much work experience.

Panel interview

Panel or committee interviews usually have three or more interviewers from different parts of the company. Each person may use a different interview style to get information about you. You should direct your answers to whoever asked the question. As panel interviews look beyond experience and capabilities, it's important to be aware of your body language. Try to ask some insightful questions.

Video interview

A few tips to be your best in a video interview:

- Dress as you would for a face-to-face interview.
- Pace your responses if there's a time lag.
- Sit in front of a plain background and ensure you're the focal point.
- Make sure the lighting is good.
- Make sure your battery won't run out.
- Turn off your mobile.
- Make sure you're in a quiet room and won't be disturbed.
- Sit up straight and watch your body language.

Types of interviews

Assessment centres

The assessment centre process uses exercises designed to simulate different aspects of the work environment, and may take half a day to two days. An assessment centre gives you the opportunity to show off your skills across different situations. There may be six or more candidates, with an observer for every two candidates. Activities can include psychological assessments, group exercises, presentations, social activities, role-plays and interviews.

Presentations

Presentations are often used in assessment centres, especially if you're applying for a sales or PR job. You might be asked to make a 5 to 15 minute presentation to several interviewers, with or without a computer. Examples include preparing a presentation on a given topic, a sales pitch, or presenting the results of a group activity. You'll be assessed on your communication skills, presentation style, ability to perform under pressure, people skills and IT skills.

Tests of productive thinking

These tests are similar to situational interviews with the aim of assessing how good your ideas are. You're often asked to come up with solutions for a particular problem or situation within a set time e.g. to propose several strategies to improve low staff morale and high turnover in a particular company.

Group exercises

One of the most common group exercises is a group discussion, which involves participants working together on a task. This can include collaborating on problem-solving.

Role-plays

Here you're given a particular role to play in relation to a certain task. Most often, you'll be dealing with another role player while the interviewer watches. They'll be looking for you to demonstrate some of the key skills for the job, so be prepared.

Psychometric testing

Psychometric assessments help employers identify your strengths, weaknesses, interests, personality and values – in short, whether you'll be a good fit for the job. They often include reasoning assessments, personality questionnaires, and assessments of your values and motives.

Personality profile

Personality assessments look at your character to predict the type of worker you'll be and your fit with the company's culture. They measure things like sociability, energy level, attention to detail and so on. While it may be tempting to give the answer the company wants, it's always best to answer honestly, as this will help match you to a job that is suited to your personality.

Reasoning assessments

These ask questions to determine your general problem-solving ability, as well as the way you work with abstract, verbal and numeric data. The tests are usually timed, so you'll need to work quickly. If there are lots of questions, you may not be expected to complete them all.

If your interview process does include some sort of testing, try to find out more, as you might be able to get practice questions to help you prepare.

Be prepared

The key to taking the stress out of any interview is preparation. And just like anything, your interview technique gets better with practice. The more prepared you are, the more confident you'll be talking about what you've got to offer.

What the interviewer is looking for.

There are generally three things the interviewer wants to know:

1. Can you do the job?

Interviewers want to know about your skills, training, experience and achievements. Prepare by knowing your resumé inside out and being able to elaborate on your achievements.

2. Will you do the job?

The employer wants to know that you're hardworking, motivated and committed. Be prepared to talk about aspects of your work experience that show you go the extra mile.

3. Will you fit in?

They also want to know that you'll fit the company culture. This includes having similar values and being excited to work there. Learn as much as you can about what the company stands for and share how this reflects your values.

Doing your homework

If you'd like your employer to know how much you want the job, you need to find out everything you can about the company and the role. Here are some tips on doing your research.

Know the company

- Check out the company's website and LinkedIn page.
- Know its reputation, size, products, history, philosophy and culture.
- Find out the names and titles of important people.

Know the role

- Try to get inside information on the role and the people you'll be working with.
- Know the skills and qualities the employer is looking for.
- Know your duties and responsibilities.
- Think of how you might stand out from other applicants.

Know the interviewer

- Know their title and what division they work in.
- Be familiar with their line of authority.

Interview goals and objectives

Interviews are better if you know what you want to achieve. Before your interview, jot down what you want the interviewer to know about you so you don't forget to mention anything. Remember, your aim is to get to the next stage of the selection process.

Activity to practise

Interview goals and objectives

The purpose of this interview e.g.:

- Get the job.
- Assess my potential career with the company.
- Be offered a second interview.

The impression I want to create is (be specific):

The main points I want to get across are:

Interview skills

A big part of shining in an interview is making the right impression. The key is to not just answer the interviewer's questions, but respond to them.

Rapport building

Interviews are just as much about your people skills as they are about meeting the job requirements. Here are some tips on building rapport:

Finding similarities

Look for common ground with the interviewer. You can find it from your research before the interview or cues during the interview, such as interests, social events or things around the office like photos, art or awards that you can ask about.

Value and respect

Small gestures can help people feel respected and valued. This can include waiting for the interviewer to sit first, leaning forward when listening, using people's names and smiling. Just remember, you need to be authentic.

Active listening

An interview is a two-way conversation rather than simple questions and answers. Active listening means not just hearing what's said, but understanding and responding appropriately. It involves:

- Paying attention and using body language to show you're listening.
- Showing you understand, by paraphrasing what's been said.
- Never talking over the interviewer.
- Asking insightful questions.

Responding to general questions

A lot of the interview will consist of the interviewer asking you general questions, which you can prepare for beforehand. Remember, you don't have to memorise your responses, but putting them on paper will help to jog your memory during the interview. Here's how to practise:

- Get a friend to ask questions so you can practice talking, then ask for their feedback.
- Practise your answers in front of a mirror.
- Record questions and play the interview as many times as you need to.

Activity to practise

General interview questions

Below are some typical interview questions and what the interviewer will be looking for.

Tell me about yourself...

Give a brief background of your career, capabilities and qualifications. You might like to use your elevator pitch. Begin with phrases like “friends would say that I...” or “I’m known for...”

What are your strengths?

The interviewer wants to know if your strengths match the skills for the job and the company. Respond truthfully and with examples.

What are your weaknesses?

This is difficult because no one is perfect, and claiming to have no weakness may be counterproductive. In most cases, the interviewer wants to see that you’re aware of your skill gaps and are keen to improve, so respond with an example of how you’re trying to overcome your weaknesses, such as lack of experience. It is also helpful to choose a trait that can also be a strength. For example, having close attention to detail may mean it’s difficult for you to move onto new projects, but that your work is to a high standard.

What are your major achievements?

Don’t sell yourself short. Recall some of the achievements in your resumé. Remember the FAB approach and tell a story to illustrate the point.

What do you know about us and why do you want to join?

This is your opportunity to show them what you know about the company, what they do and what they value. Then, explain why you’re a good fit.

Why did you leave your last job?

Keep the reasons for leaving your last job positive, such as “There was a restructure and my department was affected”. Other reasons may focus on your career goals, such as “I was looking for career growth which wasn’t available”. Remember, never say anything negative about your past job, employer or colleagues.

Activity to practise

General interview questions

Other common questions

- What do you see yourself doing in five to ten years from now?
- What aspects of your last job did you enjoy the most/least?
- What were your specific responsibilities?
- Why have you been out of work so long?
- Why have you changed jobs?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What motivates you?
- In what environment do you work best?
- What were some of the problems in your last job and how did you handle them?
- What attracted you to this job?
- Why do you think you're the best person for this job?
- What sort of people do you like to work with?
- What training have you had?
- What salary are you looking for? What were you earning in your last job?
- What did you learn in your previous job?
- If we called your last employer, what would they say about you?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Responding to

Behavioural-based questions

Behavioural-based interview questions describe a situation, asks you to talk about a similar situation in your past and explores how you addressed it. The aim is to see what you learned from your mistakes or what you'd do differently next time. Using this technique stops applicants giving practiced answers while helping the interviewer assess whether you're suited to the job.

To prepare, you can use the STAR method below.

Situation

Describe the specific event or situation you were in...

Task

Or the task you needed to achieve. This can be from a previous job, volunteer experience or anything else.

Action you took

Describe the action you took.

Results you achieved

What did you achieve?

How did you contribute to the company?

What did you learn?

Try to provide a measurable result.

Remember, the purpose of the interview is to determine how you'll perform in certain situations. So share stories that highlight your skills and successes. Think back over your projects, work experience, extra-curricular activities and personal achievements and ask yourself when you demonstrated the relevant skills. Think through each situation using the STAR method. Following are some examples for you to practise using the STAR method.

Activity to practise

Answering behavioural questions

Problem solving

Tell me about a time you had to identify the key cause of a problem.

- (a) What was the problem?
- (b) How did you work out the cause and solve the problem?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Influencing others

Describe a time you were able to convince someone to see things your way.

- (a) What was the situation?
- (b) How did you convince the person to see things your way?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Time management

Describe a situation when you needed to work under pressure.

- (a) What was the situation and how long did you work for?
- (b) How did you cope under pressure?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Activity to practise

Answering behavioural questions

Project management

Tell me about a project you were responsible for that needed a lot of planning.

- (a) What was the project?
- (b) How did you plan it?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Teamwork

When did you have to make an extra effort to support others in your team?

- (a) What was the situation?
- (b) How did you give support?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Conflict resolution

Describe a time when you've had to resolve a conflict at work.

- (a) What was the conflict?
- (b) How did you deal with it?
- (c) What was the outcome and what did you learn?

Responding to situational questions

Situational interviews focus on your behaviour at work, but rather than looking at past behaviour, they look at what you're likely to do in the future.

Despite being focused on the future, you can still draw from past experiences to help your response. You can use the STAR approach to think about what you've learned and suggest that's how you'll respond in the future.

Activity to practise

Answering situational questions

What would you do if you were experiencing a conflict with a colleague?

- (a) Think of a time when you constructively dealt with conflict.
- (b) How did you handle it and what was the result?
- (c) What did you learn and how will you apply that in the future?

What would you do if a project changed with short notice and you wouldn't meet the deadline?

- (a) Has this ever happened to you before and how did you respond?
- (b) Did it help and what did you learn?
- (c) What would you do the same way and what would you do differently?

What would you do if you didn't understand how to do something?

- (a) Think of a time when you successfully learned how to do something.
- (b) What strategies helped you in the past?
- (c) How would you respond in the future?

The interviewer's not the only one who should ask questions

Asking questions in an interview can be even more important than giving answers, especially questions that show interest in the employer and the job. Remember you shouldn't ask questions about salary or career advancement straight away.

Activity to practise

Answering situational questions

Example – Questions to ask

The job

- What are the specific responsibilities of this job?
- What is the first challenge that needs attention?
- What are you looking for in the person who will fill this role?
- How will job performance be measured?

Key associates

- What can you tell me about the person I'd report to?
- What about the other people in key positions?
- How would you describe the people I'd be working with?

Training and development

- Are employees encouraged to continue their training?
- Does the company sponsor courses and seminars?

Next steps

- What's the next step in the application process?
- Is there an approximate timeframe for hearing from you?



Interview

Dos and don'ts

Do

- Pay attention to what you say and do.
- Listen attentively to the questions.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand anything.
- Present yourself positively.
- When answering questions about your weaknesses, describe what you've learned or how you could improve.

Don't

- Provide 'yes' or 'no' answers without further explanation.
- Disagree with the interviewer.
- Overtalk or provide irrelevant details.
- Speak negatively about previous jobs, employers or workmates.
- Interrupt the interviewer.
- Smoke before the interview or chew gum during the interview.

Looking the part

At your interview

The image you present at an interview dramatically impacts on what employers think of you. It only takes seconds for the interviewer to form an impression, so it's important to create a positive one.

What to wear

It's best to go for a professional look that shows you understand the importance of the situation and respect the person you're meeting.

When choosing how to dress for an interview, avoid extremes in hair, makeup or clothing that could detract from your abilities. Always dress to suit the interviewer's image of the successful job holder.

Men

- Wear a suit and tie for corporate positions.
- Facial hair should be neat and tidy.

Women

- Wear a nice blouse for corporate positions.
- If wearing heels, choose a pair that is not uncomfortably high.

Arriving at your interview

Arrive 30 minutes early so you're familiar with where you need to go. Plan your route carefully, even practicing the day before to ensure you are comfortable with the directions. You can then tell reception that you've arrived ten minutes before the interview. Arriving early allows you:

- To deal with unexpected delays such as traffic jams, late trains or getting lost.
- Time to take in the office environment and read company information such as brochures in reception.

It's also helpful to chat with anyone you come into contact with. This not only helps you get to know the staff, it will warm you up for your interview.

Interview checklist

Here's a checklist so you're fully prepared for your interview:

1. Preparation

- Check the time, date, location and interviewer's name(s).
- Be aware of the interview process.
- Find out about the company and the interviewer.
- Check how long it takes you to get to the interview if face to face.

2. Practice

- Be aware of questions that could be asked.
- Practise your answers to general questions.
- Be comfortable talking about your skills using the STAR method.
- Be familiar with your resumé and achievements.
- Think of some questions to ask.

3. Presentation

- Arrive 30 minutes early.
- Turn your mobile off.
- Don't smoke before the interview.
- Look well-dressed and well-groomed.
- Be professional and positive.
- Have a copy of your resumé, as well as referee contact details, references, certificates and more.

Finishing up your interview

As your interview comes to an end, here are some extra steps to make the most of the opportunity.

Closing the interview

If you think your interview has gone well, you can finish by asking to meet other people in the company or see more of the office, to show how keen you are.

Before ending the interview, ask what the next step is. Then, repeat your interest in the role and thank the interviewer. You could prepare something to say that will leave a good impression. For example, “Thank you for your time today, it was a pleasure to meet you and I hope to hear from you soon.”

Learning from the interview

Even if you don’t get the job, you can treat the interview as a learning experience.

Ask yourself:

- What went well?
- What was difficult?
- What did I learn?
- What will I do next time?

Use the following tracking sheet to make notes about the interview:

- Interview details e.g. the role and interviewers present.
- Things discussed.
- Positive parts of the interview.
- Difficult questions (make sure you prepare some better answers for next time).

You should also:

- Consider things you’d change about the interview, including time of day, opening remarks, listening, enthusiasm, your questions and answers.
- Plan your follow-up activity.

Activity to practise

Evaluating the interview

Practice writing responsibility and achievement statements for one of your previous roles below or write down on a separate piece of paper.

Interview details

Things discussed

Positive aspects

Difficult questions

Your next career step

If you're looking for your dream job, the Make It Happen Toolkit has everything you need to make your next move an unforgettable one.

From crafting your resume through to tackling the toughest interview, these tried-and-tested tips will empower you to move into your next role with ease.

Make sure you explore each section in this five part series.

