

INTERVIEW HINTS & TIPS

You've obviously already made a great first impression through your cover letter/CV, but you need to be able to do the same in person. Making it through to the interview stage means the employer likes you enough to take the time to meet you. You are one step closer to securing the job. Follow these tips to stride ahead and make a great impression during your interview.

Before the interview

Believe it or not but you can make a great impression before you've even stepped inside the employers office by arriving on time, if not 10 minutes early, for your interview. Punctuality is a strong indicator of your professionalism and enthusiasm for the role. Research the address and how you are going to get there. Give yourself plenty of time for traffic, train delays or any other obstacles that may arise on the day.

Be professional

Your career depends on this interview so it's important you act professionally and remain serious during the entire period of the job interview. Do not chew gum, slouch in your chair or crack jokes. It's true some employers might not mind the odd joke, and sometimes it may lighten the atmosphere, but it's hard to know whether the employer who is interviewing you appreciates a joke or not. Therefore, it's best to steer clear and focus on being professional.

Dress to impress

Your appearance reflects on how serious you are taking the role. Wear appropriate clothes that indicate how you would represent the company. A neat, tidy and clean appearance will portray professionalism. Make sure that you do not over dress by wearing too much jewellery or a bottle of perfume.

Keep your composure

It is important to remain as relaxed as possible. Even the most seasoned professional can get interview nerves. Preparing thoroughly will help you to maintain your composure. Remember that both you and the interviewer want a successful outcome from the interview.

Be confident

No doubt your nerves will be all over the place and your heart may feel like it's going to beat out of your chest, but it is critical to remain confident right from the beginning. Greet your interviewer standing, with a firm handshake, good eye contact and a smile. Researching interview questions and preparing examples beforehand will lift your confidence when answering questions.

Make them remember you

Close the interview with a handshake, a smile and a genuine thank you. A brief, friendly email thanking the interviewer for their time and consideration is often viewed positively. Restating your enthusiasm for the role could be a deciding factor as to whether you are offered the job.

Do the research

Researching a company enables you to talk compellingly about their business and how you can impact upon it.

Places to look:

- The company website
- LinkedIn
- News websites
- Online forums
- Corporate literature
- The Companies Registration Office
- Professional bodies associated with the job

What you need to know:

- Company culture
- Key products and services
- Demographic
- Unique selling points
- Competitors

You also need to research the role, matching your skills and experience with the job description.

What you need to show:

- Increased profitability
- Problems solved
- Built/re-built relationships
- Identified opportunities
- Generated business

If you fall short of criteria outlined in the interview literature, close the gap by identifying transferable or complementary skills you do have.

How to answer competency based interview questions

Competency based interviews are becoming increasingly popular as a way to predict a candidate's future performance. Essentially, a series of behavioural questions, the interviewer will ask you to describe a situation which demonstrates your abilities that will be integral to the role you're interviewing for.

Key competency based questions

Drawing on 50 plus years of recruitment experience, we've put together a comprehensive list of key competency questions, grouping them into five bite size areas - Individual, Managerial, Analytical, Interpersonal and Motivational - for easier digestion.

Individual competencies

These refer to your personal attributes; your decisiveness, tenacity, knowledge, independence, risk taking and personal integrity.

A typical question may include:

- Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was challenged.

Managerial competencies

These refer to your ability to take charge of other people; leadership, empowerment, strategic thinking, corporate sensitivity, project management and managerial control.

A typical question may include:

- Tell me about a time you led a group to achieve an objective.

Analytical competencies

These refer to your decision making abilities; innovation, analytical skills, problem solving, practical learning and attention to detail

A typical question may include:

- Tell me about a time when you identified a new approach to a problem.

Interpersonal competencies

These refer to Social competence. Many workplaces function on the basis of project teams and the more collaborative they are, the more likely they are to thrive.

A typical question may include:

- Describe a situation where you got people to work together.

Motivational competencies

These refer to the things that drive you; resilience, motivation, result orientation, initiative and quality focus.

A typical question may include:

- When did you work the hardest and feel the greatest sense of achievement?

The trick to answering competency based questions

Answers to competency based questions are very structured, so we recommend the **STAR** technique, describing:

- the **Situation**
- the **Task** required as a result
- the **Action** you took
- the **Result** of that action

It's all very well having a technique for answering questions but we think you'd benefit from having a deeper understanding of what is required of you, along with examples of the questions themselves.

Finally

Remember, be yourself when answering competency questions; use real life examples and relate them to your experience, how you reacted or how it made you feel. These are not trick questions, they're designed to create the best match between an individual and an organisation. A little bit of preparation and you'll quickly realise that competency based interviews represent an unprecedented opportunity to describe some of your finer moments to a captive audience.

Ten challenging interview questions

It's the interview moment every job seeker dreads. Just when you thought you had them eating out of the palm of your hand, you're hit with a question straight out of left field.

While there's no way of predicting exactly what you'll be asked at an interview, these answers to our 10 challenging questions might just help you out of a tight spot:

Why are you leaving your current job? – If you left, or are leaving, your job because of a personality conflict, never try to explain the situation. You can say that you saw this job advertised and that you believe you would be very well suited to it, or you might explain that you're looking for new challenges in the workplace.

How do you respond to taking direction from superiors? – Here you need to emphasise your ability to work as part of a team and talk briefly about how all teams need to take direction from a manager.

How well do you handle criticism? – Here you get to show your human side by talking about how we all make mistakes, and how we can all learn from constructive and positive criticism.

What motivates you? – This is definitely not where you talk about 'money' and 'fast cars', mention instead how being immersed in a working project which delivers regular results motivates and drives you forward.

How long would it take before you make an impact if you started today? – You can always say you'd hope to contribute from day one, but you also need to be realistic and explain that it might take a couple of months before you fully understand the inner workings of the company to a sufficient extent that you could make a noticeable impact.

Have you attended other interviews? – This is a great question which you can really turn to your advantage. A candidate in demand will naturally appear more appealing to any hiring manager. So, say you are actively looking for a new position but don't give them the impression you're more interested in landing another job than the one you're being interviewed for.

What do you know about the company? – This is where your pre-interview research pays off. Outline briefly what you've learned about the company and appear keen to hear more.

What can you offer us that the next candidate can't? - This is where you get to show off what you've got to offer. Talk about your achievements to date and the areas of the business you feel you could work with and where you feel you can make a positive impact.

We're concerned you may be a little over qualified for the position, how do you feel about it? – Explain that you're eager to establish yourself within the organisation for the long-term. You can say that you believe your experience will enable you to make significant contributions to the company from the outset and that ultimately you feel very well suited to the position on offer.

What aspect of this job least appeals to you? – Less is definitely more when answering this one. There's really only one answer: that you've read through the job spec thoroughly and there is no aspect of the job that doesn't appeal to you. And then move along, quickly. Remember, the interview table is no place for moaning.

Asking the right questions

Asking questions at an interview will not only give you answers but it shows your employer you have initiative and enthusiasm for the position and the company. This will impress any employer.

Below are some examples of questions you could ask. Make sure you listen carefully to information given during the interview in case your questions are answered.

- How is performance measured and how often is it reviewed?
- What long-term career opportunities are available and how do you support the up-skilling of staff?
- What are the key challenges of the role, particularly in the first six months?
- How many people are in my team and what are their roles?
- With whom will I be working most closely?
- How would you describe the culture of the company?
- What is the leadership style of the upper management team?
- What are the major plans for the company in the next five years?