

THE INTERVIEW

Preparation

1. Research

You'll be fully briefed by your consultant, but you can never be too prepared. Visit their web site, request a copy of the company's brochure or annual report, and keep an eye on the business press for relevant articles. If you're knowledgeable about the company, you'll come across as proactive and committed.

2. The job description

Familiarise yourself with the job description. Consider the key skills and experience they're looking for, and think of examples highlighting your strengths in each area. For all examples you give, consider the situation, the action you took and the effect it had.

For example, if confidence is important, the line of questioning could include:

- give an example of when you challenged a decision made by your peers/managers
- what factors did you consider before challenging the decision?
- what action was taken by your peers/managers?
- what was the outcome?

When you're answering, the interviewer will want to see:

- that you present yourself confidently and make a good first impression
- that you appear calm and confident under pressure
- that you are assertive about your needs/requirements, without being aggressive

Some other commonly required competencies are:

- decision making and problem solving
- resilience and tenacity
- confidence
- planning and organising
- team work
- commercial awareness

3. Questions

Having a few well thought out questions always creates a good impression. See 'Questions for you to ask' (below).

4. Your CV

Read it again so you're prepared to talk in more detail about your experience. If you have gaps in your CV or haven't stayed in a job for long, make sure you can give positive reasons. Based on your skills detailed on your CV, consider what you will actually bring to the company.

5. Plan your journey

Aim to arrive 10 minutes early, allowing plenty of time for the journey. Get clear directions and plan your route in advance. If delayed, contact your consultant immediately so they can phone the client on your behalf. When you arrive, turn off your mobile.

6. Clothes

Dress smartly and professionally. Although some companies have 'dress down' policies, a suit is usually best. If unsure, speak to your consultant.

During the interview

1. Body language

- A firm handshake shows you're confident
- Smile – this says I'm enthusiastic and friendly
- Make regular eye contact
- Be confident and alert, and try to control your nerves
- Speak slowly, clearly and take time to think before answering
- Listen – don't get distracted and don't talk too much
- Maintain an open stance – avoid folding your arms or fidgeting

2. Typical questions

- *Tell me about yourself?* Give a short summary of your qualifications, career history, skills and what you will bring to the role.
- *Why do you want to leave your current position?* Don't be negative and don't criticise former employers. Focus on positive reasons such as a new challenge, more responsibility, or the need for a change if you've been in your current role a long time.
- *What do you enjoy about your current job?* Try to focus on things that will be part of the job you're applying for.
- *Would you explain your current role?* Describe how you fit into your department, your reporting lines, who you interact with and your key responsibilities.
- *What have been your main achievements so far?* Think about recent work achievements, such as projects you've been involved with. What were the results, how did they impact the business?
- *What are your strengths?* A very common question. Think about three or four of your main strengths and how they would benefit your new employer. Examples include technical proficiency, flexibility and positive attitude. You may also be asked about weaknesses. A weakness is not

necessarily a negative, particularly if you can explain what you do to overcome it.

- *Have you ever come across a difficult situation at work and how did you handle it?* Make sure it's a work-based problem that didn't originate with you.

3 Other possible questions

- How would your friends/colleagues describe you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- How do you cope when your work is criticised?
- Do you like to work in a team or by yourself, and why?
- What are you looking for in a company?
- What can you bring to this organisation?
- How do you work under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- How would you react if you were asked to work late at short notice?
- When you're not busy, what do you do?
- Why should you get this job over other candidates?

4. Questions for you to ask.

An interview is your chance to assess the company, as well as theirs to assess you, so you'll always have the chance to ask questions. Even if the interview has already answered most of them, prepare a few to ask at the end. It shows you're interested and taking the interview seriously. Some examples are:

- How does the department fit into the company?
- What are the personalities of the team or manager?
- What sort of person is the team looking for?
- How long was the last post-holder in the position?
- Are any internal candidates interested in the position?
- What's the company culture?

- Do you run an induction programme?
- What sort of training is on offer?
- Why does the interviewer think it's a good company to work for?
- How does the interviewer feel that your skills set meets the requirements of the role?

Don't talk about salary at a first interview, unless you're specifically asked.

5. Closing

Thank the interviewer and ask what the next stage of the interview process will be. Remember to phone your consultant with feedback as soon as you can.