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# Interview tips

20 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW



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## The big day is near..!

You have been selected to attend an interview. It's an important development and the consequences matter. The right job can change the whole direction of your life.

This guide is designed to help give you confidence during the interview and put yourself across in the best light.

### **Understanding what you want is the first step when preparing for the interview.**

Spending time objectively considering what you have to offer a prospective employer, means you will feel more comfortable presenting your strengths, skills and aptitudes to the interviewer.



# 1

## Your Skills and Aptitudes

A good interviewer is looking to establish your skills and aptitudes and to determine the extent to which these match what they are looking for.

**You should aim to expand upon your CV or application, focusing on when and in what context you have performed well and the skills and aptitudes you have applied or gained in the process.**

Remember to include skills and experiences that you have developed outside of the work environment (such as through hobbies or raising a family).

Write down all the skills and aptitudes that you believe you possess. Then consider which of these are likely to be most relevant to the organisation that is interviewing you.

Once you have identified these relevant skills and aptitudes, it is important that you feel able and confident to present them in an interview.

You may find it helpful to practice by saying them out loud to yourself as this enables you to get used to talking about yourself without feeling embarrassed or apologetic.

Try this out in front of a mirror or with a friend who can give you encouragement and positive feedback.

# 2

## Your Strengths

A good interviewer will be interested in how you will perform the job, not just whether you have the ability to do it.

Your skills show what you can do; your strengths show how you do them.

**How would you rate yourself in the following areas?**

- assertive \_\_\_\_\_
  - conscientious \_\_\_\_\_
  - creative \_\_\_\_\_
  - determined \_\_\_\_\_
  - displays initiative \_\_\_\_\_
  - enthusiastic \_\_\_\_\_
  - flexible \_\_\_\_\_
  - quick to learn \_\_\_\_\_
  - self-motivated \_\_\_\_\_
  - self-reliant \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Rate yourself for each on a scale of 1 to 10 and think of real life examples where you have shown those traits.



### Past Achievements

To help you consider your achievements, make a list of at least 10 accomplishments – things that made you feel proud at the time and perhaps still do.

If you get stuck, use this list to help you.

- Qualifications from school, college or university Professional or technical achievements
- A personal difficulty you overcame
- A significant business problem that you solved A new skill you have now mastered
- A sporting / health accomplishment
- A way in which you have improved results
- A money saving idea you have introduced



### Areas for Improvement

You are likely to be asked about your weaknesses or limitations during an interview, so it makes sense to think about how you can turn these areas to your advantage.

For example, if you know you can take longer to accomplish some tasks, view this from a positive slant and explain to the interviewer that you are thorough and don't like to make mistakes.

Don't get defensive and pretend that you never do anything wrong, just work out a way of framing your shortcomings in a positive light.

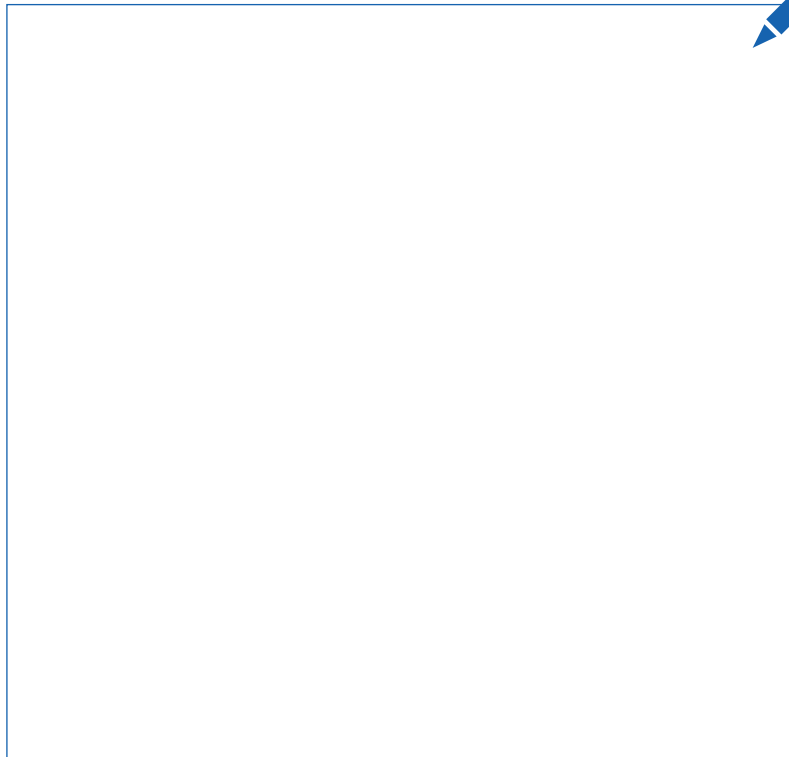
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### Do Your Research

Why do you want to work for the company that is interviewing you?

While you can't be expected to know everything about them, you should spend some time on the internet or asking around to see what sort of reputation they have.

The more research you can do, the better prepared you will be and the bigger advantage you will have over other candidates.



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### First Impressions Really Do Count

We all tend to make initial judgements about other people within the first few minutes of meeting them.

#### Appearance

Your appearance can say a lot to an interviewer. It gives clues about your self image, so it is important to dress appropriately for the interview you are attending.

Overdressing can be as much a danger as being too casual. It is preferable to appear well presented but comfortable, rather than extremely impressive but ill at ease.

#### Non-verbal communication

We can end up revealing far more than we may be aware. Although you will be concentrating on what you are going to say, you should also be aware of how you say it and the body language you use. Research shows that what you say accounts for only 35% while your tone of voice and body language accounts for 65%.

Although many people who conduct interviews are trained not to make too much of those first few minutes, the initial impact will still be important if you want to create the right impression.

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## A Two Way Process

It is important to remember that the interview should be a two way process - as with any day to day discussion you would have with friends or family in which you would be relaxed and would naturally indicate your interest in the person to whom you were speaking.

**It is advisable to take a notepad with you with a list of prepared questions you would like to ask. It is also worth noting that a key positive signal to an interviewer is the act of note taking as you are showing an interest in what they have to say.**

Whilst an interview may be a more formal style of discussion, an interviewer will still appreciate it if you give your full attention. Appear comfortable and relaxed, and give signals that you are listening by nodding, smiling and looking interested.



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## Questions Questions Questions

As with any discussion there will be questions asked by both parties.

**An interviewer may ask the same sort of questions to each candidate so they can compare answers.**

It is possible to anticipate and prepare for many of the questions you will be asked in advance as most interviews are conducted along similar lines.

The following pages cover the typical areas of questioning:





## Questions About YOU

These questions aim to get you talking about yourself and are often open questions that require more than one word responses.

**You can use this to your advantage by directing the response in the way you want.**

However, be aware of how long you talk for and take your cue from the interviewer's responses and body language.

### ***Tell me about yourself...***

An interviewer will often use this as the opening question. It is meant to encourage you to start talking whilst the interviewer 'tunes in' to what you are saying. The problem can be that without any parameters, many candidates say too much.

An interviewer will often expect a 5 or 10 minute summary of your work history or main achievements rather than any in depth descriptive information.

Try to establish how much information the interviewer is looking for by asking the questions "shall I begin from when I left full time education" or "would you like me to give a 5 minute summary of my employment history to date?"

### ***What do you think are your strengths?***

As mentioned earlier, your strengths should reflect how you perform a job, whereas your skills and aptitudes show what you are capable of doing. Try to avoid giving a list but give key strengths and provide examples of when you have demonstrated these, preferably in the workplace.

### ***What are your weaknesses?***

Interpret weaknesses as areas you would like to improve upon. Having prepared yourself as outlined, be brief about the area itself but give examples of how you have already overcome that weakness in certain situations.

### ***What can you do for us that nobody else can?***

This is an opportunity to stand out as different from other candidates. Incorporate some of your strengths and focus on your personality as well as what you are capable of doing.

### ***What do you do outside work?***

This type of question often comes near the end of the interview and is an indication that the interviewer is interested in you as a person, not just as a potential employee. Try to give a brief answer that shows you have a variety of interests and pursuits.

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## Questions about Your Work History, Skills & Experience

**An interviewer will use these questions to establish what you have done in the past as well as what you are capable of doing, An interviewer may have set questions to ask, or may be guided by your CV or application form.**

### ***Why are you leaving/did you leave your present position?***

You need to avoid becoming defensive or negative at this point. If you have left your previous position under difficult circumstances, focus on the opportunities for development and improvement this has given you rather than the problems you have experienced in the past. It's best not to criticise previous employers or people you have worked with.

### ***In your current/last position what did you enjoy most?***

Try to give aspects of your current or previous job that are likely to feature in the job you are being interviewed for. Give genuine reasons why you enjoyed certain aspects of the role.

### ***In your current/last position what did you not enjoy?***

It is best to give only one aspect of the job that you enjoyed the least, and if possible, explain the ways in which you coped with them – and why it wasn't such a big deal really.

So for example, if there were not enough things to do and you were bored, you might have used the time to improve upon systems or develop your knowledge in other areas.

### ***What contribution did you make in your current/last position?***

Remember from your preparation earlier that an achievement does not have to be major or highly visible for it to have made a difference.



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## Questions About The Company

The interviewer will be looking for what you have found out about the company as well as questioning your motives for wanting to join them.

### ***What do you know about our company?***

Make sure your response shows that you have done some research, but try not to inundate the interviewer with facts and figures. If you have been unable to find out as much as you would have liked, it is better to tell the interviewer and ask about the gaps you were unable to fill in.

### ***Why do you want to work for us?***

It is worth spending some time thinking through several reasons why you want to work for the company. Try to ensure that some of the reasons are in the company's interest and not purely your own! Think about what the company is looking for and will need from the person they appoint, and try and relate this to what you have to offer.

### ***How long would you stay with us?***

Most interviewers will know that employees no longer start and finish their career with the same organisation. However, a company invests a great deal of trust and time in their staff, and like any investment, they will want to see some return. Try to show how your career could continue with the company for some years and outline what would encourage you to stay.

### ***What sort of person do you think we are looking for?***

An interviewer will often use this question to discover your level of understanding about the company and its priorities. In your preparation, you will have given some thought to this and hopefully discovered the type of person that is likely to fit in and succeed in their organisation.

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### Questions About The Job/Department

**An interviewer will use these types of questions to discover why and how you would do the job, not just whether you are able to do so.**

#### ***Why should we appoint you?***

From your preparation you will have a clear idea of your strengths, and now is the time to elaborate on these and not list your skills or previous experiences. Remember to match your strengths to those the interviewer is likely to be looking for.

#### ***What do you look for in a job?***

Again, you should try and ensure that your answers reflect what is on offer in the opportunity in question.

#### ***What do you think you would enjoy the most about this position?***

Try and give the key feature of the job and remember to say why you would enjoy it, preferably showing how it would allow you to demonstrate your strengths and so benefit the company.

#### ***What do you think you would enjoy the least about this position?***

It may be more diplomatic to say that at this stage, you don't feel you know enough about the role to give an answer to this, If you are pushed to give an answer; try to pick an aspect that you would be able to enjoy once you have learnt more about it.

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### Some Other Questions Worth Bearing in Mind...

1. What interested you most about our products or services?
2. Why did you choose your particular field of work?
3. Which job did you like best? Which least? Why?
4. What do you want to avoid in your next job?
5. What praise have you received for good work?
6. What criticisms have you received in your job?  
How did you feel about that criticism?
7. Did you make any changes in your last position?  
How do you think these changes benefited the company or yourself?
8. Do you prefer to work under pressure or in a more relaxed environment?
9. Do you like routine work? Regular hours?
10. How long have you been looking for work?  
How have you gone about it?
11. Are you willing to relocate?  
Would this cause you any undue difficulty?
12. Would you accept a job requiring travel?
13. What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in this position?
14. To what style of management do you respond best?  
How do you manage people?
15. Describe your style, method and relationship?

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## Your Turn to Ask Some Questions.

**There comes a point, in every interview when you are asked, “Have you any questions?” The worst response you can give is “No”.**

You will usually have an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview if it has not been possible to ask them as the interview has gone along.

Remember that the interview should be a two way process, which means that it is just as important for you to obtain information as it is for the interviewer.

By asking questions, you are demonstrating to the interviewer that you are interested in the job and the company and that you want to know more.

Without asking questions, if a further interview or the job is offered to you, you may not have all the relevant information to make your decision.

You could ask the interviewer to expand upon things that have been mentioned in brief or to cover areas that have not been raised. You can also use this time to ask about the next step in the selection process.

What questions you ask will depend on what has already been covered and how much information you had prior to the interview. . The following questions give you some ideas.

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## Prepare some Questions in Advance.

It pays to think through some questions you may like to ask.

**The best questions are the ones you think of yourself, because they are important to you.**

The following list is not intended as a script, but as food for thought.

Use a notepad to write down your questions and take the notebook into the interview. Nerves may rob you of your memory so the notebook can act as a reminder.

**You should prepare a minimum of six questions before you attend your interview.**

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## Questions About the Job and How Appropriate You Are For It.

**The following questions are designed to get at the fundamental needs of the job from different angles.**

When you receive the answer to any of these questions, tell the interviewer briefly what you can do or have done in similar situations.

1. What are the immediate priorities?
2. What obstacles might I encounter?
3. How can the successful candidate best contribute to the objectives of this department?
4. Is this a new position?  
If so, why was it created? If not, why was it vacated?
5. What was the previous incumbent's approach to the job?  
What were his/her major successes?
6. What changes would you like to see in the way this job is performed?
7. Can you describe your ideal candidate to me?
8. Have any internal candidates been considered?  
If they have been rejected, why?
9. How valuable would it be for a candidate to have 'x' skills or experience?(Choose something you are good at). Don't volunteer information about what you can do without first asking how useful or important this skill would be.
10. What do you consider to be my major strengths for this position?  
Are there any drawbacks in your view?
11. What are some of the important personal traits the successful candidate should have in order to fit effectively into your corporate culture?
12. Where would you see a successful person in this position progressing to in the organisation?
13. If you recruited me, how would I know what you thought of my progress and development in the role?

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## Questions about the People and How You Will Fit In.

Would you mind telling me about your career to date with the company?

What can you tell me about the people I will be working under?  
Also peers, subordinates?

How would you describe the management style of the company?

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## Questions about The Company.

**Generally avoid questions you should have been able to answer with a little prior research.**

Have there been any major organisational changes recently?  
Are there any planned?

Are there any major acquisitions or diversifications now being planned?

What are the company's profit and turnover projections over the next few years?

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## Ending the Interview.

Research shows that the way in which you leave an interview has a major effect on your chances of getting a job offer.

When an employer is faced with a choice between two equally capable candidates, they will offer the job to the candidate who showed most interest in their company and job.

So, if you want the job, say so at the end of the interview!

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## Conclusions.

An interview is often described as a selling exercise in which you sell your skills, experience and personality to the interviewer.

Your challenge is to persuade an interviewer that you are worth 'buying'. Remember that if the company recruits you, they have taken a decision to make a long term investment in you. It's in both your interests that the right decision is made.

**Learning how the interview process works won't get you a job you are unsuitable for, but should make sure that you can progress your career by working for companies that appreciate your skills and will fit with your ambitions.**

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