

Attending interviews and assessments

Employee guide



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Overview

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance on preparing for and attending an interview and will also provide some general information on other selection processes used within the recruitment process.

The interview process varies for every job; some are informal and others more structured. As a result, being 100% prepared can be a challenge. Whatever the format of the interview, the process plays a key role in determining whether the role and candidate will make an effective match. The following information may help you successfully address some of the concerns associated with attending an interview.



Preparing for an interview

Preparation for an interview is essential; the more prepared you feel, the more relaxed and comfortable you will be.

Research the Company's Profile and Background

The 'what you know about the company' question will usually make an appearance at the start of an interview so you want to get off to a good start by being equipped with the detail. Interviewers will expect you to have a general understanding of what the organisation does.

This information is readily available on the company website. In order to set you apart from other candidates, you may want to do some additional research, for example – try googling the company to see if there have been any recent articles on contract awards, social responsibility activities or recent appointments.

If you know people who have worked or currently work within the team, speak to them to find out more, you get some insight into the culture.

If you are being represented by an agency, they should be able to inform you about the company.

You should also find out who will be conducting the interview and what their role is within the organisation. The company directory or LinkedIn can help with identifying this detail.

Read the job advert and job description

Take time to understand the job description fully and know how it fits into the overall structure of the company. If you have any questions on this try to raise them before the interview or be prepared to bring them up as you go along.

Review your CV

Read through the CV that you submitted during application for the role. It is likely that an interviewer will select information and ask you to expand on it. They will be looking for you to support the information in your CV with examples, skills and competencies used. You can take a copy of your CV to the interview with you to use as a point of reference.

Plan your journey

The last thing you want to worry about on the day is the journey to the interview; make sure you look into the location of the interview. Plan how you will get there, what route to take, how long it will take you, and if you are driving look to see if parking is available nearby.

Appearance

Look out what you plan to wear prior to the day of the interview so you don't have to think about it on the day. You want to make a great first impression on the employer and usually attire should be slightly smarter than day to day attire. If you are not sure, don't hesitate to ask your HR/ Recruitment contact at the time of arranging the interview.



Preparing for an interview – practice questions

When you are invited to attend an interview, ask what format will be used. The format might include behavioural and competency interviewing which consists of a series of probing questions, where the interviewer will ask you to provide situational examples of times in the past when you have performed particular tasks or achieved particular outcomes using certain skills.

There are several resources online which provide an overview to typical interview questions and you should take time to investigate these and think about how you would answer them.

For this type of questioning you should provide real examples and you should keep the answers concise and relevant. The rationale is that if they know how you have performed in the past, it will give an indication of how you might perform in the future. If you do not have experience in an area, be honest and say so and instead describe how you think you would approach the situation.

Below are some examples of the key competencies that employers may look for candidates to demonstrate:

Communication
Leadership / management
Team working
Ownership / responsibility
Problem solving
Customer service
Results and delivery
Planning
Change management

Identify the key skills for the job and think of examples which enable you to demonstrate those skills. This will help you when answering questions and may also raise some responsibilities of the role that you might like more detail on.

To help answer these types of questions you could practice using the **STAR** model:

Situation – Explain the context

Task - What you had to do

Action - What and how you did it

Result - The outcome and what difference it made

Try applying this model to the below questions:

Q. How do you handle pressure?

Q. Can you give me an example of when you have had to manage conflict?

Q. What motivates you?

Q. Tell me about a suggestion that you made that was implemented?

Q. Tell me about a team project that you worked on?

Q. Describe a project that required input from people at different levels in the organisation?

Q. Describe a situation in which you found a creative way to overcome an obstacle?

Q. Describe a time when you faced a significant obstacle to succeeding with an important work project or activity?

Q. Tell me about a mistake that you made and what did you learn from it?

Below are some tips when deciding what examples to use:

- Your most relevant examples will be from the last year or so.
- You can go back further for a situation that is particularly impressive or relevant.
- Pick an experience that really allowed you to shine. Did you step up to solve a problem, resolve a conflict, or bring the group together? Maybe you helped to achieve great results (revenue generation; reduced costs; customer service; delivered a high-profile project).
- Keep it relevant. For each interview, review the job description to get a better understanding of the responsibilities and competencies required for the role. Then pick the most relevant example you have that demonstrates this.

Think about what you might be asked and try to prepare some examples in your mind in advance.

Some of the things an interviewer will be assessing:

- Do you collaborate well?
- Can you communicate effectively with different personalities?
- Do you know how to push back diplomatically when necessary?
- Can you motivate people to perform?
- Can you step up and take action without being asked?
- Can you adapt to changing situations?
- Are you results focused?
- Are you someone who can learn from failure?

Other typical interview questions that you could be asked:

Q. Why do you want to work here? or, Why are you interested in this role?

From taking time to research the company and assessing the job description you will have a good understanding of the company's values, mission statement, strategy, and role responsibilities. Use this information to describe how your goals and ambition match.

Q. What are your strengths?

Most candidates find it easy to highlight their strengths: you're detail orientated, hardworking, a team player. Make sure you back up what you say with an example, or highlight feedback you have received from your previous managers on why this is a strength.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

This is best handled by picking something that you have made positive steps to address. Avoid starting your response with 'I can't, I have not or I don't'; using negative words will automatically leave a negative imprint in the interviewer's memory.

Instead try to use terms like – 'would like development in....' or 'I identified that I needed training in/exposure to'. Example – 'For rolling out a new process I was required to deliver presentations on the changes. I had little exposure to public speaking so asked to go on a presentation course before the roll out which I found really useful, and it really helped to build my confidence. This is something I would like to build on should I get the opportunity to do so again.'

Q. What do you think the main challenges will be?

The interviewer wants to know if you fully understand what the job will involve. They want to know why you think you'd be good at it, and how you would approach it if they offer you the job.

Q. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

This is your chance to show how enthusiastic you are. You should avoid coming across as too aggressive and overambitious or unenthusiastic and passive. To avoid this, you could talk in terms of short-term and long-term goals. Your short-term goal could be to get that job and start to learn / develop / embed within the culture to see what opportunities the company can bring to you. Then you can talk about how that might fit into your long term goals.

Q. How would your friends describe you?

When answering this question, be sure to emphasise any personality traits, skills and experiences that are relevant to the position you are applying for. It is also a good opportunity for an employer to assess how well you will fit into a team.

The interview

Hopefully the preparation for the interview will help to calm any nerves and give you confidence on the day. Some other factors to pay attention to during the interview include:

Arrive early

Plan your journey so that you arrive around 15 minutes early. You can use this time to take in the surroundings of the office. They may also have some industry or company literature in the reception area that could give you some last minute insights. Make sure you follow instructions given to you. You may be required to complete a building/safety induction for example.

First impressions count

Make sure you are polite and confident to anyone that approaches you, for example, some conversation with the receptionist may help to relax you. You should also be aware of your body language throughout the interview, points to consider include:

Body language

Handshake

A firm handshake is important, remember, this is one of the first body language cues that the interviewer will pick up on.

Posture

Good posture will be interpreted as reflecting energy, enthusiasm and self control. It is important to stand or sit with a straight back.

Gestures

Look at how others use hand gestures and consider your activity accordingly. Nodding demonstrates interest. Try to avoid playing with pens and other objects.

Eye contact

It is important to maintain eye contact without appearing to stare. A tip for those who feel uncomfortable is to look at the interviewer's nose. Looking away can be misinterpreted as a lack of interest.

When answering questions

- Don't forget to highlight your achievements and the aspects of your work you enjoy.
- Remember to keep answers concise and if you feel that you are going off on a tangent try to pull it back to the question asked.
- If you don't understand or hear all of a question, don't hesitate to ask for clarification.

Asking questions

If the interviewer offers up some information that you would like more detail on, don't hesitate to ask. This can show that you have a genuine interest in the role and that you are already thinking ahead to what you can bring to the role.

There is usually an opportunity to ask any questions at the end of an interview. You should come prepared with a couple in mind, some examples are:

- Q. Can you tell me how the role relates to the overall structure of the organisation?
- Q. What type of training opportunities do you offer?
- Q. What challenges could I face in the first 3 months?

Ending the interview

Once the interview has come to a close, be sure to leave with a good impression, thank the interviewers for their time and shake their hands on exit. You may want to follow up later that day with a call or e-mail to the HR/ Recruitment contact that arranged the interview to thank them, give them initial feedback on how you thought the interview went and confirm that you are still interested in the role.

Assessment tools and techniques

It is increasingly common for a number of assessment tools to be used to select the right person for the role. This could include:

- **Presentation** – As part of the interview you may be provided with a topic which may be related to work or personal situation. Make sure that you practice and time your delivery so that you don't run over an allocated time slot. Keep text on slides to a minimum, maintain eye contact, and select appropriate imagery to make an impression.
- **Assessment Centre** – A series of structured and timed, exercises designed to simulate the kind of activities you might undertake within the role. Employers often comment that successful candidates are those who are enthusiastic and participative, who show genuine interest in fellow candidates and participate actively in discussions.
- **Psychometric Testing** – Tests designed to measure aspects such as aptitude, ability or personality traits. You may be asked to complete these prior to being invited to an interview. Tests tend to be completed online in a timed environment. They might include logical reasoning, language and numerical testing and/or behavioural questionnaires. This kind of testing may vary significantly depending on the employer.
- **Technical Assessment** – If you are applying for technical role you may be asked to complete a test relevant to your field, for example, computer programming or engineering.



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