

Successful Interviewing

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The reason why employers interview candidates is in order to find the most appropriate candidate for their vacancy. So surely if you are the best candidate for the job you should be successful? Unfortunately there is no fool proof way to ensure the best candidate is selected for the position as there are so many variables involved. However, following certain preparation guidelines will give you the best opportunity secure the role you desire.

The support of an experienced recruitment consultant, combined with taking time to plan and prepare, will take much of the stress out of what can be a daunting experience, giving you the opportunity to present yourself in the best possible light.

This guide offers an insight into the preparation you should undertake prior to the interview, the different types of interview and questions you might face and finally, how to give yourself a little extra advantage once the interview has been completed.

Given how important your performance at any interview can be to your future career plans, taking time to read this guide should prove invaluable.



Before the interview

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. The employer will be seeking evidence that you are truly interested in the position on offer and this is often measured by your knowledge of the company and the role. Therefore it is necessary to complete the relevant research prior to attending the interview in order to give yourself the best possible chance of success. Areas of preparation to focus on are:

Company and industry research - finding information on your potential employer online is relatively simple. Studying their website will give you access to facts about the company such as their services and history, as well as giving you a feel for their culture and future plans. Recent news on the business can be found in the press area of the website as well as investigating any relevant trade publications as well as media sites such as the Financial Times website. Don't forget to put the company's name into search engines such as Google or MSN to see if there are any other articles online that can be found elsewhere. Once you have investigated the company thoroughly, it would be wise to also investigate the interviewers and your potential future manager, if they are not in the initial interview. Again, simply putting their name into Google may give you an insight into their history but a particularly useful tool is LinkedIn, a business oriented social networking site, where you may be able to see a brief précis of their career and an overview of their current role in their own words.

Prepare interview questions - later in this guide you will find a list of common interview questions which you should read and prepare answers for. This will give you a strong base to prepare from but you should also think about questions you are likely to face based on the job specification of the role you have applied for and how you are able to demonstrate skills relevant to this. If you have not experienced a competency based interview previously, ensure you read the section later in this guide which covers this type of interview style and make sure you are able to provide relevant examples for each type of competency question.

Read your CV - it may sound ridiculous to be asked to read a document that you have written about yourself but doing so will highlight how much you have forgotten about previous roles and how you have presented this in the past. This is particularly relevant for those candidates who have added their most recent role to an old CV that they used to secure their last role.

Ensure you have all relevant information - including the name and job title of all interviewers, the structure of the interview, any additional tests that might be included, a full job specification, a copy of the CV that your consultant sent to the client along with any accompanying information they sent such as your salary expectations or notice period.

Plan your journey - where possible organise two different methods of reaching the interview, particularly if you are using public transport, and build in some extra time to ensure any delays do not make you late. Aim to arrive 15 to 30 minutes early but do not enter the building until 10 minutes before the interview time.

Dress for success - you should always wear your smartest suit (and tie for men) and ensure that you are immaculately presented. You are the product being sold at the interview and therefore you should not give the employer any reason not to want to "buy". If you are not sure if the item you are planning to wear is inappropriate - don't wear it. Be conservative as you want the interviewer to be interested in your skill set and personality, not your orange shirt!

Take a deep breath - if you have arrived on time and are comfortable in what you are wearing you will be as relaxed as you can be. Take a moment to compose yourself and remember that this is a two way process and that you are not only attending the interview in order to answer questions but also to determine whether the role and company suit you. The interviewer is looking for a candidate with the appropriate skills but also someone that fits their team and who they feel comfortable working with. Therefore, relax and try to enjoy the interview. Nerves hide your personality and therefore try to be yourself. If you have followed the advice above and undertaken all of the suggested preparation then you have given yourself the best possible chance of success. Now it's down to whether you are right for the role and whether the role is right for you.

In the interview

Walking through the front door - you are being interviewed from the second you step into the building. Be courteous to everyone as you never know how much influence the receptionist has with the interviewer.

First impressions - your body language will create an important first impression, so make eye contact, smile and shake hands firmly. Maintain good eye contact throughout the interview, be enthusiastic and open in your body language. Where there is more than one interviewer present make sure that you engage all of them even if only one is asking questions.

Relax and take your time - imagine you're having a conversation. Do not interrupt questions, think first about what the interviewer has asked and take time before you answer. Clients prefer to hear a well-thought out answer after a pause rather than the first thing that comes into a candidate's head.

Give concise answers - whilst you should avoid one word answers, interviewers will not want to hear convoluted answers. You should give examples wherever possible, keeping these succinct, to the point and relating directly back to your CV experience.

Be honest - if you don't know the answer to something, rather than guessing, simply state that you are unsure or ask to come back to it. If asked about a weakness, don't be afraid to give an answer but support this with confirmation of the steps you are taking to improve in this area.

Be positive - even you if you feel extremely negative towards your current/previous employer you should not let this show at interview. Ensure that all of your answers remain positive and if there is an issue at your current place of work, state fact rather than opinion and balance any answer so that it remains constructive. The interview is not the time or place to air your grievances.

Be adaptable - different interviewers have different styles and personalities. It is important that you adapt your interview style to meet the demands of your meeting.

Ask questions - show that you have thought about the role, the company and how it fits with what you are looking for. If you have prepared sufficiently, you will already have prepared a strong list of questions that are relevant to you. In some interviews where the structure is more conversational, you may have asked all of your questions during the course of the meeting. If this is the case, thank them for allowing you to ask questions during the meeting and re-highlight the sorts of questions you had coming into the meeting and the fact that they have been extremely informative in answering these. There is a list of questions you may want to ask later in this guide, however use these for examples rather than as a list to pick from.

A strong finish - it is important that the meeting ends on a positive note. If you are interested in progressing to the next stage of the interview process, let the interviewer know that you enjoyed the meeting and that you are keen to progress should they feel that you are suitable. Ask them what the next stage would be if you are successful.

The style of some interviewers can make you feel that the interview has not gone well. Don't let

This put you off - remain positive and still ask about the next stage.

Thank the interviewer(s) for taking the time to meet you and for considering your application as you leave and don't forget to acknowledge the receptionist.



After the interview

The period straight after an interview can be crucial to whether or not you are successful.

Give your recruitment consultant honest feedback as soon as you are out of the interview and make notes of any thoughts or questions you may have as soon as you are able to. If you did not answer any questions to the best of your ability or feel that you said something that you would not have done had you not been in a pressurised situation, let your recruitment consultant know as they may be able to speak to the interviewer about this and potentially save a situation that would otherwise have led to your failing to progress to the next stage.

The consultant at Austin Rose will work with you to ensure you make the correct decision to ensure that you secure the most suitable role possible and to help you consider how the next role will affect your long term career plans.

If the employer gives you their contact details during the interview you may want to send them an email confirming your interest once you arrive home. Speak to your recruitment consultant before doing so and ensure someone checks the email before you send it. If you are not given the interviewers contact details but still wish to send an email thanking them for their time and reconfirming your interest in the role, email this to your consultant who can forward it to the interviewer.

Typical interview questions

Interviews are unpredictable and therefore you will never be able to prepare for every question you may be asked. However an interviewer's objective is generally to build a picture of your skills, experience, competencies and personality in order to assess whether you are the right fit for the role and the company. Therefore it is possible to at least prepare for commonly asked questions such as those highlighted below. Consider the questions below and how you would answer these in a concise fashion, using examples that relate directly to your experience.

- Tell me about yourself
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- Describe the achievement of which you are most proud.
- What made you apply for this role?
- What are your career goals?
- What would you like to be doing in five years?
- What appeals to you about the company?
- What do you want from this role?
- What do you enjoy most about your current role? What do you enjoy the least?
- What do you see as your major strength/weakness?
- What were the main skills you took from your last role?
- Do you work best in a team or as an individual?
- What are your personal and professional motivations?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this field?
- What do you enjoy to do outside of work?

Competency based questions

Competency based questions are designed to test a candidate's ability to perform in the role by evaluating how you have performed in the past. This is an extremely effective technique that allows the interviewer to evaluate your suitability based around competencies that have been deemed necessary to be successful in the role and company. You will be assessed and scored on a predetermined scale based on your answers and all candidates will be asked the same questions.

Usually you will be asked to give situational examples of times in the past when you have performed particular tasks or achieved particular outcomes using certain skills.

We recommend the STAR technique as one of the most effective ways in which to structure your answers:

- Situation - describe a situation or problem that you have encountered.
- Task - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem.
- Action - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome.
- Results - highlight outcomes achieved.

The competencies can be considered as part of the following five groups:

- Individual competencies - your personal attributes: Flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity. A typical question may include: **Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was challenged.**
- Managerial competencies - taking charge of other people: Leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control. A typical question may include: **Tell me about a time you led a group to achieve an objective.**
- Analytical competencies - the elements of decision making: Innovation, analytical skills, numerical problem solving, problem solving, practical learning, detail consciousness. A typical question may include: **Tell me about a time when you identified a new approach to a problem.**
- Interpersonal competencies - dealing with other people: Communication, impact, persuasiveness, personal awareness, teamwork, openness. A typical question may include: **Describe a situation where you got people to work together.**
- Motivational competencies - the things that drive you: Resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus. A typical question may include: **When did you work the hardest and feel the greatest sense of achievement?**

Should you want to practice more competency questions, these can be easily found from many sources on the internet.



Questions to ask the interviewer

Now that you have finished answering questions, it's your turn. As the interview comes to a close you will be asked if you have any questions. This is another chance for you to demonstrate your research and skills such as commerciality - it is not a time to ask questions about salary and working hours. Examples of the type of question you may ask are:

- What are the potential career paths that might be available to me?
- Why has this position become available?
- Why do people join the business?
- Why do people leave the business?
- What has made the company so successful?
- How do you feel the company is perceived in the market?
- What future growth plans are there?
- What is the culture of the company?
- What induction/training programmes are there?
- What kinds of people have previously been successful in the company?
- Why do you like working at the company?