

Interviews

Being invited for an interview means the employer is now considering you as a possible hire for the job. Convert this possibility into a reality with good preparation and performance.

PREPARATION

Know yourself

Start by re-reading your application form, CV or covering letter. Try to think about it from the employer's point of view. What are your strong and your weak points? What areas might need clarification? Is there anything not on the form they need to know?

Anything you put on your application form or in your CV may prompt an interview question so be ready to expand on any of the information you have given.

Know the job

Familiarise yourself with the job description, re-read the person specification and list the skills and qualities needed for the job. Think about which examples, from your own experiences, you could use to demonstrate that you have those skills and qualities. It's good to draw these from a variety of situations.

Know the organisation

Find out as much as you can about the employer. Visit the organisation's website, Facebook or LinkedIn page or try to get hold of their annual report. Alternatively visit the website of the City Business Library to find out more. Companies often have mission/vision statements or key principles: try to think of situations in your own life which demonstrate those principles.

Keep your eyes on the news or on Twitter for any stories about the organisation or about their sector. Make a note of the facts and try to form opinions. If something significant has occurred (eg a change in legislation) try to think what impact that could have on the organisation, or the sector.

Many organisations hold presentations. These events can be an opportunity to find out information, get some insider knowledge about the organisation and meet some of the people you might be working with.

Know the details

Check the time of the interview, the date, the location and the name and job title of the interviewer(s). Take the letter or email inviting you to interview along with you. Have the phone number available in case anything goes wrong or you are delayed.

Make sure you know how to get there and how long it will take. It's always a good idea to think about alternative routes in case of transport problems and have enough cash for a taxi, in case of emergency.

PERFORMANCE

Interviewers are not just concerned about what answers you give to their questions. There are many factors that they will be taking into consideration, from how you dress to the questions you ask them.

First impressions

Always arrive on time or preferably early. Be aware of your body language (firm handshakes, smile, make eye-contact, be attentive, do not fidget). Make sure you're comfortable when you first sit down as this will help you to relax.

Their questions

Employers may ask you a variety of questions, but in essence they want to know three things:

- **Can you do the job?** Do you have the appropriate qualifications, knowledge, skills and experience?
- **Will you do the job?** Do you have the right motivation, commitment and enthusiasm? Are you really keen on this job or would you rather be doing something else?
- **Will you fit in?** Will you fit in with the people who work there and with the culture of the organisation? Would people enjoy working with you? Can you see yourself working with these people?

Your answers

- Try to relax and be yourself. Breathing slowly and deeply before you go in can help.
- Be enthusiastic, interesting, animated, or whatever else comes naturally to you (within reason).
- Pay careful attention to the interviewer and answer the question they ask, not the one you wish they had asked.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Ask for a moment if necessary.
- Don't give yes or no answers. Volunteer relevant information about yourself. Your responses should be long enough to answer the question, but not too long.
- Watch the body language of the interviewer. This can often tell you whether you need to expand on something or bring that answer to a close.
- Avoid going off at a tangent or becoming involved in unnecessarily detailed explanations.
- Be truthful but positive. If you have to present negative information (eg a failure or a weakness), say how you learned from it or overcame it.
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question.

Your questions

Good topics to ask about are:

- The job: find out more detail on duties, how long has it been vacant, where did the previous incumbent go?
- The organisation: what are the strategic goals, challenges they are facing, their most significant recent developments?

- The working conditions: what about support for training, career development, appraisals?
- The process: what happens next, how many people are being interviewed, when are you likely to hear whether or not you're being offered the job?
- Avoid asking about salary, holidays or anything you should already know from details they have sent you.

AFTERWARDS

What do you do?

- Make a note of the questions they asked. Were you satisfied with your answers, or could you do better next time?
- If they do not contact you when they said they would or if it has been a long time since the interview (more than two weeks), try ringing or emailing to check the situation.
- If you are rejected, try asking for some feedback so that you can gain an idea of where improvements need to be made.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

These are becoming more common. You might be telephoned unannounced and asked a few pre-screening questions, or the interview might be pre-arranged by letter or email and more structured around the required skills for the job.

TOP TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS BY TELEPHONE

Whether the interview is unannounced or of the pre-arranged type, the questions will be no different from those asked at face-to-face interviews. In addition:

- Prepare housemates for the possibility of an important call and keep it very much in mind yourself. For example, make sure you change an unsuitable answering machine or voicemail message.
- Make arrangements in advance to take calls with some privacy.
- Make sure your CV or application form is somewhere easy to find.
- If you have applied to more than one organisation keep the applications, brochures, correspondence etc in separate folders so that relevant documents are at hand.

Improve your verbal image

The major difference between face-to-face and telephone communication is, of course, the lack of visual contact. Research has shown that in face-to-face situations communication relies on non-verbal signals and tone of voice. Hence, on the telephone, the tone and rhythm of the conversation is as important as the words themselves:

- An awareness of how you sound is as useful as what you say, if not more so. Arrange with a friend to practise some answers on the phone and obtain feedback from them on how you sound.

- A more positive image can be projected if you stand up when talking, providing this does not make you sound too aggressive.
- Breathe deeply and relax. Speak slowly, clearly and with purpose.
- If you smile when you are talking this is communicated in your voice. Try it, it really works!
- Some people advocate dressing as if you were attending a face-to-face interview. This can help you get in the right frame of mind.
- Try to vary the tone and volume of your voice, be enthusiastic when appropriate and be careful not to mumble or shout.
- On a basic practical note, have a pen and paper ready to make notes of anything you might want to mention later.
- Make sure you have a diary to hand to take details and time(s) of any further contact.
- Try to explain any long pauses, for example with 'could I just take a moment to think about that?'

FURTHER INFORMATION

- *How to Succeed at Interviews and other Selection Methods*, The Careers Group, University of London, 2007
- *Great Answers to Tough Interview Questions*, Martin Yate, Kogan Page, 2005
- *Perfect Interview: All You Need to Get It Right First Time*, Max Eggert, Random House Books, 2007
- www.careers.lon.ac.uk/sortit look at the implementation section for interviews help
- www.cityoflondon.gov.uk click on leisure & heritage, libraries, City of London libraries and City Business Library for where to find information about employers

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