



# IMPRESS AT INTERVIEW

## CAN YOU DO THE JOB, WILL YOU DO THE JOB, WILL YOU FIT IN?

Interviews are an excellent opportunity for you to sell yourself, but remember the most important thing will always be to present your answers in a way that matches what the employer is looking for. It may sound obvious, but far too many people don't have a thorough understanding of **whom** they are applying to and **what** for. Your answers will differentiate you from other candidates, so do not underestimate the importance of preparation.

### Competency-based interviews

#### Before

##### *What will they ask?*

The job description and person specification will list exactly what the employer is looking for, so re-read it carefully to make an informed guess about those areas you'll be asked questions in. If they mention planning, communication and team-working skills, make sure you prepare examples to demonstrate these.

The idea is to show when you've used a skill in the past – not only that you understand the skill but also that you can use it effectively in a real-life context. By giving these examples you can convince them that you have the ability to do the job, so think in advance about how you can draw on work experience, your course and extra-curricular activities.

##### *Industry understanding*

As well as finding out about your skills and experience, the recruiter will also be assessing your understanding of the role, organisation and industry. They could test this

in a variety of ways, by asking you questions about the company's performance and place in the industry they operate within or, on a more personal level, which aspects of the role interest you the most. For more information on this read the commercial awareness article on page 28.

You could also be asked technical questions about a particular task or subject knowledge required for the job or, in some instances, how you've used and understood relevant software or equipment that you'll need to use. Again, the job description is the best place to give you an idea about what they might ask.

##### *Practice makes perfect*

Once you've prepared examples, it's worth practising how you'd embed these into an effective answer. It's one thing to think about your skills and experiences, but another being able to explain them out loud while thinking on your feet!

Contact your Careers Department as soon as you have a date for your interview to prepare a practice interview, which will give you the opportunity to practise your answers and receive feedback on your performance and tips on how to improve. Most departments also have access to an online video interview simulator, where you can record yourself answering questions and watch them back. Once you've got over the embarrassment of watching yourself on film, it's a great opportunity to reflect on how you come across. Failing all else, practise your answers out loud with a friend (or even a mirror)!

Avoid the temptation to memorise answers to questions you might be asked – not only do you run the risk of sounding robotic and cold, but there's a danger that in the pressured environment of an interview you'll lose the thread of your argument. Making some brief bullet points or notes to take in with you is fine.

It's also worth thinking about what you're going to ask at the end of your interview. Don't treat this lightly. It's a great opportunity to impress by asking well-formed, insightful questions, and also helps you get a sense of whether the role is right for you. For example, you could ask a practical question about the role, department or wider organisation, and it could be linked to their sizes, aims and priorities.

If you're not sure what to wear, dress smartly – it's better to dress a bit too formally than not formally enough.

## During

### *Some practical tips*

- Relax, and try to be yourself. Breathing slowly and deeply can help.
- First impressions are vital, so make sure to be polite and professional from the moment you enter the building including to staff who aren't on the interview panel.
- Pay attention to the questions. Answer those they've asked rather than the ones you wish they had.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand the question, and if you can't think of an answer, ask if you can return to it later.
- Avoid giving unnecessary detail. Use the STARR technique to answer the questions in enough detail, but try to be concise. You can use the body language »



## Strengths-based interviews

**Strengths-based interviews are becoming more popular, with some employers switching to this method as they feel it is less formulaic and allows them to see the real you.**

### Before

Strengths-based interviews take their name because they aim to find out what comes naturally to you, with ease and enthusiasm. So you're likely to be asked about your motivations and values.

It makes sense to work out what your strengths are. Try asking yourself:

- What activities energise me?
- When do I feel most like myself?
- What comes easily to me?

It's also worth thinking about the why – why do you enjoy those types of work or activities, and why are you good at them? Improving your self-awareness will help you perform better.

The organisation hiring will be looking for a good match between you and them, specifically people who share their values and who they think will be comfortable with their way of working. Make sure you research the company's values and think about what they might mean in practice in the workplace, as well as ensuring you have a solid understanding of the organisation as a whole.

### During

#### *Examples of strengths-based interview questions*

- What did you like to do most in your recent work experience and why?
- What did you like doing least of all?
- Which achievement are you most proud of?
- What does success mean to you?
- When were you most engaged while at university?
- What activities come naturally to you?
- How do you judge if you have had a good day?
- What energises you?
- How do you support others in a team situation?
- What challenges do you seek out to stretch yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What is your greatest strength?
- Do you prefer quick action or careful planning?
- How do you stay motivated?
- Do you prefer learning theory or putting it into practice?
- Why is this role and organisation right for you?

You may be asked several follow-up questions taken from this list. This isn't a sign that your initial answer was lacking, the interviewer is just trying to see how you think on your feet and also get to know you. There will still be questions where you'll be asked to give an example of when you've demonstrated a skill, so don't be afraid to use the STARR approach. See 'Demonstrating your skills' on page 25.

Recruiters are looking for people whose strengths align with the job, who feel comfortable and confident with the key skills required, and ultimately who will enjoy the role. While preparation and research is important, don't be tempted to dishonestly adapt your answers to something you think the recruiter wants to hear – be honest about your strengths and motivations.

of the interviewer to tell whether they need more detail, and, if you're really not sure, you can ask if they'd like you to expand on your answer.

- Don't lie but be positive! If you do need to talk about negative experiences (such as a failure), ensure you're showing how you learned from it or have improved as a result.
- Unexpected things happen in life: don't panic if something does go wrong on the day of your interview! Coping calmly with pressure and dealing with unexpected circumstances are valued traits, and you could even turn one of these things into a positive situation!

#### After

First of all, congratulations! An interview is a daunting experience, and being invited to and completing one is no mean feat. If you can, try and treat yourself to something immediately afterwards to take your mind off it.

The recruiter will probably have given you a sense of when they're likely to make their decision and inform candidates – this can vary from being on the same day to a few weeks away. Try not to think about the interview too much in the intervening period, as there's not a lot you can do at this point. If you haven't heard from them by the designated time, then there's nothing wrong with getting in touch with them to check when you're likely to find out, but don't overdo it as you don't want to come across as pushy.

If you're informed that they'd like to offer you the job, then that's of course great! While verbally accepting an offer isn't a legal agreement, they're likely to want to send through an agreement shortly afterwards so take the opportunity to ask any questions about salary, conditions or anything else concerning you at this point. If you're not being offered the position, then ask for some feedback – while disappointing in the short term, it should help aid your performance in future interviews. **L**

### Telephone and video interviewing – prepare as you would for a face-to-face interview

- Control your environment. Prevent any potential disturbances – warn the people you live with not to interrupt you and switch off any phones or alarms. For video or Skype interviews make sure there is enough lighting so they can see you clearly, and that the background is appropriate and gives a good impression. Check the angle of the camera, so you are in the middle of the screen and your eye contact is central.
- For video interviews, wear interview clothes. Not only will you look professional, but it will also help you feel professional. You could also try this for telephone interviews. The key is to feel confident and comfortable.
- Body language is still important. Even if the interviewer can't see you, sit up straight, smile and speak enthusiastically. Good posture will make it easier to breathe (helping to control any nerves), and will make your voice sound clearer and more confident. Some people find standing up to give the interview helps with this. Practise and see what works for you.
- Check the technology in advance. If you don't use Skype regularly, try some practice conversations with friends and family. Consider using a microphone and/or headphones to help reduce fuzz and echo. Be honest about it if you experience technology problems during the interview – let them know and, if you can't fix the problem quickly, ask to rearrange.
- Be ready! First impressions count. Start the call in a professional manner and be prepared for either a serious question or for small talk.
- Memory aids (such as written notes for telephone interviews) used well can make your answers sound seamless and informed. Used poorly, however, and they can make your answers sound unnatural or result in long pauses and rustling sounds as you look through your papers.



## Interview tips for shy people

**Interviews can be a daunting prospect for anyone, especially if you're naturally shy. Sounds like you? Then here are some tips on how to prepare:**

- If you've been invited to interview, then the employer must have seen something in you and your application which made them feel confident you could do the job. Keep this in mind, and try to draw confidence from it.
- Familiarise yourself with what you've written on your CV and application, and practise talking about it out loud. Getting used to talking about yourself should help you be less hesitant on the day.
- *'Tell us about yourself'* and *'Do you have any questions for us?'* are common features of an interview, and questions that you might struggle with if words don't come easily to you. Think about how you could answer these, and practise them.



**And during the interview, consider the following:**

- Positive body language can greatly help your confidence. Simple things such as maintaining eye contact with the interviewers and sitting up straight in your chair can make a big difference. Good posture can also aid your breathing, helping you to relax, which should in turn make you come across as more confident.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, then don't worry! Try to think of ways you can buy yourself a little extra time, such as taking a sip of water or saying 'that's a good question' while thinking about what to say. If you're really stuck, then ask if you can return to the question at the end. The interviewer won't mind, and this will give you more time to think.

## Examples of strong answers

*Tell me about yourself (alternatively, 'describe yourself', 'what are your qualities' and 'why are you suitable for the job?')*

Don't tell them your life story! Give a brief personal summary, including recent experiences and major achievements. You may want to include some details about your life outside of work, but remember to keep it professional and make sure your answer is relevant to the position you're applying to. Ultimately the recruiter will be looking for what you can bring to the organisation.

*Why do you want to work for us? (alternatively, 'why do you want this job?')*

Here the recruiter is looking for your motivation and enthusiasm for the industry, company and role (ie things other than the salary!). Think of ways that you can align your personal goals with those of the company and the requirements of the role, although be careful not to answer in a way that makes it sound like you're simply using the company to further your career.

## Video pitching

**Some employers, particularly in creative sectors and advertising, now ask candidates to include a video as part of their application. They may send detailed instructions and what they expect to feature, but here are some general guidelines:**

- The process is known as video pitching because you're pitching yourself to an employer. What qualities can you show them that will make them want to invite you to interview for a position with them?
- Make sure you don't just regurgitate your CV – talk about particularly relevant information from it, but don't forget that the reason employers ask for this is that they want to see something more than they'd find in a traditional application.
- While you may wish to do something creative to make your video stand out, don't lose sight of the fact that it should still be professional. As you would for an interview, dress professionally and research the company's values. Think about how your skills can work with these. See the STARR example on page 26 for advice on how to do this.
- Keep it brief – unless otherwise stated, aim for a video between one-two minutes.