

Tip Sheet No 4 – Interview Skills

So, you've been asked to an interview. Now is your chance to demonstrate why you are the perfect applicant for the role! No matter what your skills and previous experience, performing well at interview is essential in winning the job.

What is the purpose of the interview?

An interview is a detailed discussion between an employer and a job applicant designed to explore whether there is a match between the two. The applicant's role is to convince the interviewer that they have the appropriate skills, knowledge, personality and motivation for the job, while also gathering further information about the organisation and role. The interviewer is seeking to confirm whether the applicant has the ability to perform the job, as well as the right cultural fit for the organisation.

Preparing for the interview

Good preparation is essential. Some suggestions include:

- Research the organisation – look at their website and make a note of services offered, structure, names of key players, locations and so on.
- Review the competencies or requirements for the role mentioned in the advertisement and ask for a position description if available.
- Prepare answers to likely questions and think of examples that relate to the competencies they are looking for. Practice answering questions with a friend or colleague.
- Confirm the location and time of the interview, and take the address and phone number with you on the day. Ensure you know exactly where you are going and how long it will take to get there. Allow extra time for parking and delays.

Be aware that even if you are asked to attend an informal chat, you should still treat it as you would a formal interview and prepare accordingly.

Presentation – what to wear

First impressions count, and therefore you need to pay extra attention to all aspects of your presentation and grooming at the interview. Wear smart, conservative clothing that is clean and well-fitting. A general rule of thumb is to dress slightly better than you would if you were actually in the role. If in doubt, ask a friend or family member to review your proposed outfit the day before.

Likely interview questions

Most interviews contain three types of questions:

- **General or introductory questions** that ask about your previous roles and your personal qualities. Typical general questions include
 - Why interests you about this job/organisation?*
 - What qualities do you bring to the role?*
 - What are your strengths / weaknesses?*
 - Give a brief outline of your career so far.*
 - Where do you see yourself in one / three / five year's time?*
- **Behavioural questions** that ask for specific examples of your experience.
- **Logistical questions** about things such as ability to travel, salary, location, etc. Think about your answers to these types of questions beforehand. Try to defer discussions about salary if possible, or give a broad range and say you are negotiable.

There are a number of books and websites available which provide detailed suggestions on how to answer a myriad of specific interview questions.

Whatever the question, ensure your answer helps build the case for why you are the ideal applicant for the role, and do not introduce any potential negatives.

Negative factors – things to avoid!

Factors which typically lead to rejection following an interview include:

- Poor personal presentation and grooming
- Lack of ability to clearly articulate answers and information
- Lack of interest, enthusiasm, or clarity of career goals
- Over confidence – “blowing own trumpet”
- Overemphasis on benefits, salary, perks and “what’s in it for me”
- Lack of preparation and interest in the organisation
- Poor interpersonal skills – not building rapport, lack of manners or tact.

Answering behavioural questions

Behavioural questions require you to provide a specific example of something in your past, which will demonstrate your ability in a particular area or competency. Some examples of competencies include communication skills, negotiation skills and problem-solving ability. Your answer should contain four parts, according to the STAR model:

- S** A brief description of the **situation**
- T** A brief description of the **task** you were asked to complete
- A** The **actions** you took to complete the task and resolve any issues
- R** The **results** or outcome

The Actions and Results are the most important elements, so spend most time on these parts when answering.

Example

Question: Can you give an example of a time when you had to juggle multiple tasks?

Answer: (S) When I was the office manager at XYZ organisation, (T) I had to assist the General Manager as well as look after all the office administration, and manage the junior admin staff. This involved a variety of tasks. (A) To keep on top of everything, I used ‘to do’ lists, my Outlook Calendar and reminders, and every day I reviewed my tasks to prioritise what was important for the day. Sometimes I would delegate tasks to one of the juniors. (R) I was always able to complete all my tasks on time. I never missed an important deadline.

Asking your own questions

Always prepare some questions of your own to ask, as this shows an interest in the organisation and the role. Good questions relate to the duties of the role, finding out who your manager or colleagues will be, and what it takes to be a successful employee in the organisation. Questions about the organisation’s culture, structure and operations are also useful. Always establish what the next step in the selection process is, and when you may expect to hear further.

After the interview

Always send a thankyou to the interviewer or organiser within 24 hours to thank them for their time and, more importantly, confirm your interest in the role.

In the event that your application is unsuccessful, ask the interviewer for detailed feedback on your performance, so you know what to work on for next time.

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive a few minutes early. • Be friendly to the receptionist. • Greet the interviewer by name, with a smile and a handshake. • Take a copy of your cover letter, the advertisement and your resume with you. • Build rapport with the interviewer(s) via friendly small talk. • Ask the interviewer to provide a brief overview of the role at the start of the interview. • Make eye contact with each interviewer throughout the interview and use natural gestures when speaking. • Show some energy and enthusiasm, rather than sitting bolt upright and motionless. • Listen carefully to interview questions and check to make sure they are satisfied with your answer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrive late! If you are unavoidably delayed, ring to let them know and make sure to apologise. • Have your mobile phone on or look at it during the interview. • Wear clothing that is revealing or unusual. Select a fairly conservative outfit and accessories. • Make derogatory remarks about previous employers or colleagues. • Give long-winded answers to interview questions. Keep each answer to a couple of minutes, watch for body language indicating you have given sufficient detail, or ask if more detail is required. • Ask about salary, bonuses, or perks in the first interview.

Recommended Books

[301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions](#) by Vicky Oliver (2005)

[The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Job Interview](#) by Marc Dorio (2009)

[Ultimate Interview: Make a Great Impression and Get that Job](#) by Lynn Williams (2008)

[Winning Job Interviews](#) by Paul Powers (2004)

[Acing the Interview](#) by Tony Beshara (2008)

Useful Links

www.job-interview.net – contains practice questions, mock interviews and guides

<http://www.seek.com.au/career-resources/get-your-dream-job/interview-success.ascx>