

Interview guide



This guide highlights useful tips on ways to approach an interview, what to expect, example questions as well as what the recruiter is looking for in an answer.

Quick tips for interview success

- 1 Never underestimate the importance of preparation. It can be as simple as researching the company and the marketplace, but that alone can be the difference between success and failure.
- 2 Look smart and professional. If you're not sure what to wear, it is safer to look too formal than informal.
- 3 First impressions are vital. The interview starts as soon as you enter the building, so be polite and professional from the start. Use open body language to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the role.
- 4 Once the interview starts, make sure you pay attention to what they're asking and only answer the question they ask, not the one you wish they had asked.
- 5 When you answer a question, speak slowly and clearly. Ask for a moment if you need time to think and ask for clarification if you do not understand the question.
- 6 Don't give yes or no responses, but avoid giving unnecessary detail. The body language of the interviewer can often tell you whether you need to expand or bring an answer to a close.
- 7 Always be truthful but positive. If you have to present negative information (e.g. a failure or a weakness), say how you learned from or overcame it.

Stand out from the crowd



Bring a list of ideas relating to the company or the sector that you think would be beneficial. For example, if you go for a job in marketing, bring some ideas for blog posts that you think would be good for their website.

Common interview questions

Here we list some common interview questions and which skills those questions are trying to draw out.

General

- > Tell me about yourself.
- > What are your key strengths?

Motivation and values

- > Why do you want this job?
- > How does this job fit into your long term career plans?

Drive and determination

- > Tell me about a situation in which you have had to cope with various setbacks.
- > Describe a task that you completed that you didn't enjoy. How did you motivate yourself?

Adaptability and initiative

- > Describe a situation when you have taught yourself a new skill in order to complete a task.
- > Can you tell me about a time when you had to adapt to an unexpected change?

Teamwork and interpersonal skills

- > What qualities do you have that make you an effective team member? Can you give me examples?

Communication and negotiation

- > Tell me about a time when you persuaded someone to change their mind about something.

Commercial awareness and customer focus

- > Can you give me an example of when you have gone above and beyond your duty to provide a good service to someone?
- > What are the most important issues facing this sector in the next five years?

Prioritising and organising

- > How do you handle your workload when a number of tasks need to be done at the same time?

Leadership

- > How do you get the best out of people?
- > How would you describe your leadership style?

What to expect



Here we discuss the different types of interviews you may experience and how to deal with them effectively.

Strength-based interviews

Strength-based interviews are so called because they aim to find out what comes naturally to you; what you do with ease and enthusiasm, rather than simply what you are able to do. In this type of interview, you are likely to be asked more questions about your motivations and your values.

You may be asked several follow-up questions. 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 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, and the STAR approach will be useful for these.

The STAR technique

Situation

Briefly outline the context of the situation.

Task

Explain the specific task, problem or goal.

Action

A step-by-step explanation of what you did to solve the problem or task.

Result

Outline the outcome to show that you demonstrated that specific skill.

Practical advice to plan your journey

> It's imperative you look at your route beforehand and have a back-up route in case there are any travel disruptions.

> If there are delays in getting to your interview, having a number for the recruiter or the person interviewing you is vital. This way you can phone ahead, explain the issues and inform them of an updated ETA.

> Give yourself plenty of time to arrive early. You may have to go through a signing in process at the front desk.

Telephone and video interviews

This method of interviewing is becoming much more common, as it is cost-effective and saves travel time. Prepare as you would for a face-to-face interview – they will still want to know that you have the motivation and ability to do the job. However there are certain extra considerations:

- 1 Control your environment. Prevent any potential disturbances or interruptions 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.
- 2 Check the technology in advance. If you don't use Skype regularly, try some practice conversations with friends. Consider using a microphone and / or headphones to help reduce 'fuzz'. If you experience technology problems during the interview let them know. Be honest about it and ask to rearrange.
- 3 Body language is still important. Even if the interviewer can't see you, sit up straight with a good posture, smile and speak enthusiastically. Wearing interview clothes is a good idea as not only will you look professional, but it will help you feel professional.
- 4 Be ready! First impressions count. Warm up your voice before the interview time. Start the call in a professional manner and be prepared for either a serious question or small talk.
- 5 Memory aids (such as written notes for telephone interviews) can be useful. Use them well and they can make your answers sound seamless and informed. However, use them poorly and they can make your answers sound unnatural or result in long pauses or rustling sounds as you look through your papers.
- 6 If you are on the phone and have no visual clues, pause periodically to allow the interviewer to interject. This will help you gauge whether you have said too little or too much.

Interview answers



Below we list some common examples and look at how to follow up after the interview.

How to answer common questions

> Why do you want this job?

The recruiter is looking for your motivation and enthusiasm for the industry, company and role – i.e. what you will get out of it apart from the salary. They will also be checking that you have a realistic understanding of the job and organisation. The best answers will show how the skills you enjoy using align with the nature of the job, and how your goals align with the organisation's goals.

> Tell me about a situation where you had to manage multiple deadlines.

This is a competency based question where you are being evaluated against the skills the employer thinks are required for the job. Plan ahead and identify examples you can use for the skills that you may be asked about. When you talk through your example, use the STAR technique.

> What is your biggest weakness?

You need to demonstrate self-awareness, so be honest and avoid answers such as 'I'm a perfectionist'. Admit a minor weakness such as being impatient or needing to be more assertive. Don't confess something that would majorly impact your ability to do the job. It is important to demonstrate how you overcome your weakness, so turn it into a positive by explaining how you manage it.

> What do you think are the biggest challenges facing our organisation at the moment?

This is where you can demonstrate your knowledge of the organisation and its work. Prepare for this type of question by reading industry news and using events and networking to find out what people working in the area think.

> Can you tell me about a time you've worked effectively as part of a team?

This is another competency based question. When you are answering these, try to use a mix of examples from work, volunteering, and academic work. When you're talking about teamwork, make sure that your answer is about what you did, and that you're not using 'we'. The recruiter is interested in what your contribution was, even if it was a team effort.

Preparation

To prepare for questions about your strengths, try asking yourself the following:

> What am I good at and what do I get complimented on? Think about examples that back this up.

> Which activities do I enjoy doing at work? You may enjoy having everything organised or you may excel under pressure. Either way, both can be viewed as a strength.

> The job description lists exactly what the employer is looking for, so read it carefully and you can make an informed guess that you will be asked questions relating to these areas. If the job description mentions planning, communication and team working skills, make sure you prepare examples to demonstrate these skills/competencies. Interviewers are seeking evidence and examples of what you have already done. Examples could come from work experience, your course and extra-curricular activities. See the box on the STAR technique for an effective way to structure these examples.

Following up after the interview

Now you've got all of your preparations out of the way, it's time to think about the follow-up.

Firstly, make sure that you know exactly what you should be asking at the end of the interview. Having some excellent questions of your own really shows your initiative and passion. Try to come up with at least four or five questions; that way if one or two of them are answered during the interview, you have backups in place.

Some examples of questions could be:

- > What's the working environment and culture of the company like?
- > How could I impress you in my first three months?
- > What do you like most about working here?
- > Are there opportunities to progress within the role/company?

And it doesn't stop here. Following up after the interview and asking an interviewer for feedback should be a key part of your job seeking process.