

JOB/WORK INTERVIEWS

PURPOSE

The interview is an exploration of information between an employer and a you for a job. The objectives are:

- To supply information about yourself that is not contained in your CV; to show that you understand yourself and have a sense of direction in going for this job.
- To help the employer to evaluate your personality and attitudes in terms of the demands of the organisation and the job on offer.
- To help you to get information about the organisation and the job which is not available through other sources.
- To give you and the employer an opportunity to discuss the next step.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

KNOWLEDGE OF YOURSELF

To impress an employer you must be well prepared and understand the value of what you have to offer. Be able to relate your assets to the job and the organisation. To accomplish this you must know yourself. We have already looked at your values and Emotional Intelligence. Of course there is a lot more that you could assess.

Review your CV and be prepared to answer questions about it. Back up all points with information. Rather than trying to work out only at what level you are currently capable, some interviewers want to see how you have grown over time in areas related to their job, e.g., interpersonal/work skills, motivation. Some will make you talk about your failures and mistakes to find out what you have learned or have since done differently.

KNOWLEDGE OF COMPANY/ORGANISATION

You **must** be familiar with the **job** and the **organisation** so that you can demonstrate how and why you will be an effective choice for them. Try to find out as much as you can about the organisation before your interview. Ask the company to send you material, e.g., annual report, brochures, in-house newsletter or magazine. This knowledge will also help you to decide whether you want to be associated with a particular organisation. Obtain information, if you can, on whom you will be meeting with and the schedule for the interview period. If you can find out about your interviewer(s), e.g., name, title,

background, in advance, you will be able to commit their names to memory and use them during the interviews.

YOUR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Your success or failure in the interview can depend on your appearance and the interviewer's first impression of you. If it is not good, it will be much harder during the rest of the interview to change the interviewer's mind. Look neat, clean and well-groomed. Select proper clothing for the type of organisation interviewing you. If in doubt, be dress carefully and tidily.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Don't worry about being nervous during the interview—this is normal and will be expected. Just remember, the interviewer wants to hire you if you have the right qualifications and interest in the job. Many interviewers will begin the interview with some "small talk" to help you relax. This may seem irrelevant to the job, but you are still being evaluated. Take these opening moments to show enthusiasm and a winning attitude, e.g., pleasure speaking with the interviewer, interesting facts about the organisation which you found during your research. You may want to ask some questions about the organisation, its products/services to hear the interviewer talk, to get a sense of energy level and pacing.

The second phase of the interview consists of the interviewer asking you questions to try to assess your match to the specifications needed to do the work well. The most reliable way for an interviewer to work out how you would perform in the future is to examine the past. Therefore, many employers prepare some behaviour-based questions. Which ones are asked depends on the work you are interviewing for. Examples:

- Tell me about a time when you had to go beyond what is ordinarily expected of an employee in order to get a job done.
- Give me an example of an important goal you set and describe your success in reaching it.
- Discuss occasions when you adapted to a wide variety of people and situations.
- Describe a time when you had an angry customer on the telephone.

By analysing the questions asked of you, you will be able to find out more particulars about the job for which you have applied. What emphasis does the interviewer seem to be placing on which skills, knowledge, personality traits and attitudes. That insight can help you focus your answers more easily to the employer's job.

Always relate your answers to your future responsibilities and the

organisation's policies. Give real examples from your past activities as illustrations of your qualifications. Never answer with a simple "yes" or "no". Back up your answers with evidence whenever possible.

Your points must be:

clear	· to enable the employer to understand what you are trying to say
relevant	· to enable the employer to determine your strengths for that particular job
adequate	· to enable the employer to have sufficient information to make a good decision

In your answers, if you use a model like the following, the interviewer should be able to get a yes to the three most important questions:

- Can you do the job?
- Will you do the job?
- Do you fit in?

Selling your Benefits/Competitive Advantage

(approximately 90 seconds)

Skill/Knowledge/Trait Statement	
70 seconds	What, Who, When Where, Why, How The Successful Outcome
Benefits Transferable to Interviewer's Organisation	
20 seconds	How

The above model will help you organise your answers to behaviour-based questions. For example, in response to the question, "What experience do you have organizing projects?", you would work out that the skill being looked for is organisational skills. Your Skill/Knowledge/Trait Statement could be, "I have developed excellent organisational skills by working on two major projects. The one I would like to tell you about came to a successful end six months ago." (Whatever statement you make must be true! Don't lie or exaggerate.) The example you would choose to back-up your statement would be a project that required similar skill to the project that the employer would want you to organise. Describe the what, who, when, where, why, how, and talk about the successful outcome or what you learned from the experience. As you tell the story, the employer can see or live through the action with you. The next step is the one that most candidates for a job do not do. Tell the interviewer what benefits or value you can bring because of that experience. "As part of the team being formed, I would be able to manage"

Early knowledge of possible questions the employer may ask enables you to **prepare points to include in your answers**, allowing you to relax and be yourself.

Think about why the question is being asked. What does the employer REALLY want to know? Following are some typical questions. Watch for behaviour-based questions!

And as you will see, it is sometimes very useful to silently repeat the question to yourself before you answer it. There are two reasons for this:

- 1) IT MAKES SURE THAT YOU ANSWER THE QUESTION THAT THEY HAVE ASKED AND NOT THE ONE THAT YOU WANTED THEM TO ASK!!**
- 2) IF YOU HAVE A HABIT OF GETTING EXCITED OR GIVING LONG RAMBLING ANSWERS AND FOLLOWING THOUGHTS IN YOUR HEAD AS THEY OCCUR, YOU MIGHT JUST STAY ON TRACK**

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short-term goals? What about in 2 and 5 years from now?
- What is your own vision/mission statement?
- What do you think you will be looking for in the job following this one?
- Why do you feel you will be successful in this work?
- What other types of jobs are you looking for in addition to this one?
- What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
- What experience have you had working on a team?
- What have been your most satisfying/disappointing experiences?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What kinds of problems do you handle the best?
- How do you reduce stress and try to achieve balance in your life?
- How did you handle a request to do something contrary to your moral code or business ethics?
- What was the result the last time you tried to sell your idea to others?
- Why did you apply to our organisation and what do you know about us?
- What do you think are advantages/disadvantages of joining our organisation?
- What is the most important thing you are looking for in an employer?
- What were some of the common characteristics of your past supervisors?
- What characteristics do you think a person would need to have to work effectively in our company with its policies of staying ahead of the competition?
- What courses did you like best/least? Why?
- What did you learn or gain from your part-time/summer/transition year experiences?
- What are your plans for further studies?
- Why are your points low?
- How do you spend your spare time?

- If I asked your friends to describe you, what do you think they would say?
- What frustrates you the most?
- When were you last angry at work and what was the outcome?
- How did you handle the time when you had to work with someone you disliked?
- What things could you do to increase your overall effectiveness?
- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year? Why was it difficult?
- Why haven't you found a job yet?
- You don't seem to have any experience in ____ (e.g., sales, fundraising, bookkeeping), do you?
- Why should I hire you?

To add to information obtained before the interview, you need to ask extra questions during the interview. The questions, however, should be related to the job and show your enthusiasm and knowledge. By asking intelligent, well-thought-out questions, you show them that you are serious about the organisation and need more information. It also indicates to the interviewer that you have done your homework. Examples are:

- Do you have a copy of the detailed job description?
- What do you see as the priorities for someone in this job?
- Would you be able to describe a typical day on the job?
- What would be a typical first-year assignment?
- What training programs do you have available for your employees?
- What level of responsibility could I expect in this job?
- What qualities do you look for in new employees?
- Is there a typical career path for a person in this job?
- How are employees evaluated and promoted?
- What is a realistic timeframe for promotion?
- Does the company have a promotion-from-within policy?
- What are the company's plans for the future?
- What do you see as the greatest threat to the success of the organisation?
- What/where are the greatest opportunities for the organisation?
- How would you describe your organisation's management style and working environment?
- What do you like most about your organisation?
- I feel confident that I would be able to do your job well, but what else do you need to know to make a decision on my suitability?

VERBAL/NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Meet introductions with a smile and a firm handshake. Keep good eye contact and smile when appropriate. Be enthusiastic and responsive. Radiate energy. How are you going to demonstrate your enthusiasm if you tend to be a quiet person? As you talk about your past and present activities in answer to questions, your passion and energy can be communicated both through the words of your stories and your body language (e.g., sparkling eyes and tone of voice).

- Sit comfortably, without slouching. Don't put anything on your lap or in your hands as it will restrict your natural body movement and you may be tempted to "play" with it. Keep your, note pad, bag, briefcase, or portfolio on the floor beside you for when you need it.
- Answer questions specifically and concisely but give enough details to enable the interviewer to assess you suitability. Interviewers become frustrated when they have to listen to long rambling answers. Think before you speak. It is quite OK to pause before talking in order to organise your thoughts, but **think quietly**. Avoid verbal fillers such as um, ah, you know, etc., or repeating the question in order to provide thinking time. Use business language. Avoid slang. Speak clearly.
- Prepare in before you get there to talk about any topic that you are concerned or feel uncomfortable about. If there is something that you don't want an interviewer to inquire about, you can be sure that somehow the interviewer will sense it, and ask. Practise your answer out loud often enough to feel confident when saying it. Maintain calm and self control. Maybe you need to think about that difficult experience as a learning opportunity which has made you a better person.
- Answer questions honestly. If you are playing a game in order to get hired, you will be found out once you are on the job and besides, you will probably not be in a job you love.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

ONE-ON-ONE

The most common interview is one interviewer speaking with one candidate.

TEAM/BOARD INTERVIEW WITH TWO OR MORE PERSONS

The key is good eye-to-eye contact with the person who asks you the question, but remember to look at the other persons in order to include them in your answer.

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

All candidates are asked the same questions for the employer's ease in assessing applicants. If there is important information that you have not told them by the end of the interview, when asked if you have any questions or anything to add, give the extra information. Usually the interviewer will make written notes of your answers.

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW

You have a better opportunity to give information as there is no set agenda for questions by the interviewer. However, you need to be well prepared and know the points you want to make.

PHONE OR ONLINE INTERVIEW

Because of the high cost of paying travel expenses for candidates to the employer's location, some first interviews are being conducted online by phone apps. If the call surprises you and you are not ready for an interview, ask the person to call back in 15 minutes, or arrange another time which will be convenient for both of you. You need time to refresh your memory on the organisation and what points about yourself you want to make. All points about good interview skills still apply. You just do not have to dress for the occasion. However, you may find that dressing up may help you perform better. Keep your CV and your list of questions to ask in front of you. Have another active device or pen and paper available to note any comments or questions you may have during the interview. Record it all.

COMPUTER INTERVIEWS

Because of the number of qualified applicants available for jobs, you may find that your first interview will be with a AI driven computer. The purpose of this screening is to compare your answers to the information on your CV. Be just as careful with your answers as you would with a human interviewer. You don't want the computer to find reasons to screen you out. Also be aware that there is a significant amount of AI software out there that can track your emotions from your voice and even indicate where you may be telling an untruth.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

Computer technology through on-line interview rooms allows companies to see more candidates from farther away than has been possible through visits in the past. The group of applicants who then get invited to the company for personal interviews can be more suitable. Recruiters conduct live, face-to-face interviews with job applicants via personal computers equipped with cameras and speakers. Use the same methods you would if you were meeting in person, knee-to-knee. Clothing, body language, and language should be no different. Your agenda is to be offered an invitation to meet personally for a second interview at the company. As above with phone apps, record it all.

SECOND INTERVIEW - PLANT/OFFICE VISIT

Except for short-term jobs, a candidate being seriously considered by a prospective employer will be invited to visit the organisation at one of its locations. One purpose is to provide you with an opportunity to meet other staff. The second is to give more people an opportunity to interview you at greater depth to determine whether a good match is developing. The visit can take an entire day, sometimes more. When an organisation offers to pay your expenses to travel to the interview, be careful in the costs. Your choice of medium rather than luxurious accommodation, food, transportation, etc. will reflect your good judgement.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

When it appears that the interviewer is about to end the interview, there are certain points you should make sure you have covered before you leave the room:

- Be aware of the next steps before anyone is selected for the job (e.g., another interview in same/other location, meetings with other individuals in organisation, etc.)
- Ask the interviewer when you can expect to hear about a decision or ask when you should make an inquiry as a follow-up.
- Express your interest in the job and thank the interviewer for interviewing you.
- Ask for a business card or ensure that you have the interviewer's name, title, address so that you can send a thank-you letter. Make sure your letter arrives within 24 hours of the interview.

EMPLOYER EVALUATION

Employers usually have a rating sheet with areas such as:

- neat and clean overall appearance/poise/communicative skills
- academic/work achievements (learning ability, standards of excellence)
- special skills (technical, languages, creativity, management, analytic, negotiation)
- personal characteristics (team player, enthusiasm, dependability, emotional stability, flexibility)
- self assessment, goals/ambitions
- leisure-time activities, balance in life
- reaction to job/organisation
- potential

EVALUATING YOUR PERFORMANCE

Evaluate how well you did after each interview. Ask yourself:

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications in the best manner possible, giving appropriate examples as evidence?
- Did I pass up opportunities to sell myself, to demonstrate the work I do, and to show how profitably I could do it for both the organisation and myself?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too tense? Passive? Aggressive?
- Did I find out enough about the employer and the job to help in making a knowledgeable decision?

TOP TIPS

Get a good night's sleep before your interview. Believe in yourself!

Be punctual. Arrive at least 15 minutes early to allow yourself time to collect your thoughts. Take the opportunity to observe the working environment. Keep your eyes and ears open. Be friendly with everyone.

Try to get the interviewer to describe the job and duties to you early in the interview so that you can relate your background and skills to the particular job. Your responsibility is to convince them that you are the best person for the job. Since the interviewer may not draw it out of you, remember the points which are important about your experience and skills. Give **practical examples or proof** right through the interview. Try to paint a visual picture that the employer will remember. The true stories you tell about yourself will put you out in front of the other interviewees. Radiate genuine enthusiasm.

Watch the interviewer for clues on how the interview is going. Is the interviewer's face or body language telling you that your answers are too long, not detailed enough, too boring, etc.? If in doubt, ask the interviewer if more details are needed. Listen carefully to the question and the way it is phrased. If it can be interpreted in more than one way, and if you are unsure what the interviewer really wants you to discuss, ask them.

If the interviewer becomes silent, look for the reason. Has the person run out of questions? Is the person testing you to see how comfortable you are with silence? Is the interviewer finding your answers too short and waiting for you to give more in order to get a better sense of who you are?

If the interviewer outlines an imaginary situation and asks you what you would do if you found yourself in it, imagine yourself in that situation. Give the best answer you can if it is a situation which you have not already experienced and successfully dealt with. In many instances, the interviewer is more interested in finding out how you would react in such a situation, and in your thinking/analytical process than in your final answer. In your analysis, think about which are the most important facts. Watch for a "red herring". Do you need to get additional information from someone else in the scenario before you could make a decision? Do you want the interviewer to supply more detail for understanding a key point?

When the interviewer asks about your weaknesses, choose something work-related, but not so serious as to disqualify you. **Briefly** mention one, always ending on a **positive** note. Show what you have learned from the experience or what you are doing to change. If pushed for more than one weakness, have another one or two ready to discuss. Also, if asked about any negative employment experience (e.g., being fired, trouble with supervisor), don't criticise past employers. Briefly acknowledge any difficulty and say what you have learned or discuss the positive outcome of the situation. By looking so carefully at weaknesses or negatives, an employer is trying to determine where you might have problems on the job. The bottom line for some jobs

may be: "Let's hire the candidate who will do the work adequately while having the fewest serious shortcomings".

Normally, do not inquire about pay, bonuses, benefits in the initial interview. If you are pressed to give a pay expectation, turn it around to the interviewer and ask what the organisation would ordinarily pay a person with your credentials. If you are still pushed, know what pay range would apply to that type of job in that region. You could try to get this information by speaking to people in the organisation before your interview. Good pay information is also available on the Internet.

Practise in a mock interview with another person. Check for quality of information in your answers, and the positive, non-verbal emphasis of your words. By speaking out loud you can "hear" your answers to ensure you cover the topic well. Don't practise so much though that you lose your energy and your answers sound rehearsed.

If you do not receive a job offer (especially if you felt the "fit" was very good), you may want to contact the interviewer to get feedback on your performance. It could be (1) they hired someone with better qualifications. Or (2) you didn't adequately present your experience and skills, thereby causing an incorrect assessment of your capability. If the reason is (1), keep going—you'll find the right match! If (2), make changes in your next interview!

YOUR RIGHTS IN THE INTERVIEW

The law in many countries restricts what type of questions are appropriate or inappropriate in employment interviews. Following are some of the categories that have restrictions on what can be legally asked:

- birthplace, ancestry, ethnic origin, place of origin
- sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status
- age
- race, colour
- religion, creed
- citizenship
- education
- record of offences
- disability
- references and membership in organisations

Although it is the responsibility of the interviewer to know the law, this may not always be the case. It is to your advantage to be informed on the subject.

You've done the reading and know your rights as they pertain to the interview. Now you're in the middle of one and have just been asked what is clearly an illegal question. What should you do? There is no clear-cut answer. Much depends on you.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS:

- In some cases, you may be able to answer the "hidden" question. Try to think of what information the employer is trying to elicit. Example: "Do you have or plan to have children?" may be a disguise for "Are you going to be able to work overtime?" or "Will you be requesting time off for school holidays/events?" In this example, your answer should convey your willingness to work overtime as required or make alternate child care arrangements.
- You may elect to say "Why do you ask?" or "Would you explain how this point is connected to the qualifications for this job?" This may cause the employer to reconsider and/or clarify the question. This may offend some employers, but probably not the majority.
- If you feel that you should not answer the question (you shouldn't have to after all) or that you are not interested in working for the company, you may state, "I don't feel obligated to answer that" or "That question is inappropriate". If you choose this option, you will either enlighten (the employer may not realize it is illegal and will be happy that you pointed it out) or offend (the employer may not consider you for the job).

OK, how did you do?

If they offered you the job, great! You have still got a lot to learn though, as you will see on the programmes.

Whatever you do about your excitement, enthusiasm and energy on the job, be sure to never forget that life and work are learning experiences.

In both of them we have the job/life we have been given and the job/life we make.

KEEP A LEARNING DIARY FOR YOUR FIRST MONTH.

COMPLETE IT AT THE END OF EACH DAY (IT WILL ALL DISAPPEAR IF YOU LEAVE IT TO THE NEXT DAY)

WHAT DID YOU DO WELL? WHAT DO YOU NEED TO IMPROVE?

SHOW THEM THAT YOU ARE APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

Have a look at the "Success at Work" page.