

# Interview Skills

When you get to the interview stage in a selection process it means that the company/organisation is interested in you as a possible employee. The interviewer wants to hire someone and will be doing his or her best to give you an opportunity to present yourself as a strong candidate.

Employers value candidates who are prepared and focussed. By being prepared, you will be able to anticipate possible questions, demonstrate that you want the job and present yourself as being confident.



To assist you with career planning it is recommended that you access the **Planning Your Next Career Move** Blackboard site, under **Plan your career** in the **Course/career planning** section of the C&E website. For more information on interview skills, select **Applications** and/or **Workshops & workbooks** under the **Getting a job** section of the C&E website.

## Types of Interviews

**Screening interviews** - Many employers have screening interviews on-campus. Often short, the purpose is to determine who will be invited for a second interview. Apart from checking your technical competence, they often consist of open questions to ascertain those personalities, which would fit into their corporate culture.

**Panel interviews** - A panel of interviewers will generally take it in turns to ask questions. Focus on the person who asks each particular question.

**Sequential interviews** - These are conducted consecutively by different individuals in the organisation. Interviewers compare impressions and notes after the interview.

**Videoconferencing** - Often interstate or overseas companies will use this method for initial interviewing. You have to learn to do the difficult task of interacting with a camera and not a screen.

**Stress interviews** - These consist of questions and situations designed to place you under stress to see how you react. Recognise the behaviour for what it is, and thwart their attempts by staying 'cool'. Deep breathing and checking the question again before answering are useful techniques.

**Individual Interviewing** - Sometimes the interview is conducted by just one person. Spend time to ensure you build up a rapport with this person before you launch into answers.

**Assessment Centre / Group** - Many organisations are now using assessment centres where a group of maybe eight students at a time operate in a space for a number of hours. During this time they could be asked to form teams and compete, move into pairs and do role plays, give spontaneous or planned presentations, do tests, have interviews, have discussions, problem solve in groups, etc. There could be up to four observers together with the facilitator



## Need more help?

Check out the C&E website for more information on:

- Interview skills workshops
- Interview videos
- Information interviewing
- Interview strategies

C&E also offers one on one interview coaching. For more information call the C&E office on 07 3138 2649.

# Interview Content

## Strengths & Weaknesses Questions:

These questions are designed to allow you to market yourself and to demonstrate how self-aware you are. Examples include your strengths, why they should hire you, the qualities you possess, and your weaknesses.

## Behavioural Questions:

Behavioural questions often relate to the selection criteria such as communication skills, team work, customer focus and time management. An example of a behavioural question is 'Tell me about a time when you've had to deal with conflicting priorities.' The idea behind behavioural questions is that past behaviour is a fairly accurate indicator of future performance. If you have demonstrated a particular skill in one context, there's a possibility that this skill is transferable into another context - the job you're applying for.

## Biographical Questions:

These questions will want to know about your background including your degree of choice, your hobbies, and your aspirations.

## Case Related Questions:

This is a highly developed style of questioning specifically for management consultancy jobs but used in general interviewing also. This line of questioning focuses on "Brainstorming" - How many different ways (at least 30) can you use a mousetrap? (or paperclip?), "Scenario Planning" - How would you go about setting up a copper mine in New Guinea (or Afghanistan)?, and "Problem Approach" - How many gallons of paint are needed to paint the entire Qantas fleet. (or how many paper based nappies are sold each year in Australia?) They are not focussing so much on your answers but how you attack problems.

## Selection Criteria Questions:

For most Government and University positions where equity of approach, justifying the decision and withstanding appeals to the process might be involved, the questions usually follow fairly closely the selection criteria stated for the position. For example, if there were six selection criteria, it is highly likely you will get six questions, one question about each. The panel usually knows what they looking for in answers to each question before the interviews begin and match your answers to their expected needs.

# Interview Preparation

## Before the interview

- Ring the contact person to **confirm the interview details**, such as:
  - Who is interviewing?
  - Length of interview
  - Type of interview
  - Interview content
- Do some more **research** on the organisation.
- **Practice!** Prepare some responses and practice with friends.

## During the interview

- **Make a good first impression!** First impressions are important and are formed in the first two minutes. Once formed, impressions are hard to change. Be confident and not too aggressive or passive. Rehearse possible entry routines.
- **Sit comfortably and don't fidget.** Hold on to something if you are nervous, e.g. the chair or your other hand.
- **Take some deep breaths.** Controlled breathing leads to controlled thinking.
- Answer the questions using the **STAR L** approach.
  - **S**ituation
  - **T**ask
  - **A**ction
  - **R**esult
  - **L**earn
- **Relax** and allow your personality to flow through.

## After the interview

- **Reflect** on your answers and make some notes.
- **Send a thank you note**, even if it a short one.

# Key Interviewing Skills

## Active Listening

**Active listening** can be defined as high level listening in which your entire attention is focused on the person speaking – your body, your face, your eyes, all confirm you are listening. Active listening is important for two reasons. First, employers are attracted to active listeners. Active listeners are better liked and perceived to be better employees. Second, through active listening you'll pick up clues that the interviewer is consciously and unconsciously giving you. You can then process the clues to determine what the employer is really looking for. Use your body language to show that you are truly listening. Be relaxed, but don't slouch.

## Control the content, not the interview

Let the interviewer control the question while you control the content. Controlling the content means that you will be deciding what to say and which examples to give. Develop a game plan and know the points you want to cover and the experiences you want to describe. Look for the earliest opportunity to present the information in the interview.

## Let others speak for you

When you're answering questions in an interview, let others build you up by saying something like, "My boss felt some of my most valuable attributes were that I could always be counted on to get a project done on schedule and that the details had all been taken care of."

## Research the organisation

Researching an organisation can yield big dividends during an interview. Read annual reports, recruiting brochures and their website content as well as information held at C&E. Research can reveal problems or challenges the organisation is facing and can enable you to select, in advance, appropriate experiences you should describe in the interview. Learn what you can from your research then weave the information you've gathered into the interview.

## Overcoming objections

An objection is not a rejection; it is a request for more information. If the employer states, "you don't have enough experience", they are not rejecting you. In fact, they could be totally sold on you but for this one concern. Your task is to sell yourself and overcome that objection. Do not take the objection personally, and do not become defensive.

The first step in overcoming objections is predicting what they will be and developing appropriate, effective responses to them. The objection may be that you don't have the right coursework background. A way to deal with this is to convince the interviewer/s that you learn quickly.

## Master the art of story telling

Using stories to sell your skills is a highly effective interview technique. In less than three minutes, you can tell a story that will make interviewers remember you favourably. Employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success, so tell stories that vividly describe your successes. Don't be concerned if your stories are not highly impressive, as long as the experience demonstrates your effective use of a particular skill. Remember STAR L (Situation, Task, Action, Result, Learn).

**Practice telling stories.** Begin by recalling 5–10 experiences that you are proud of or feel good about. These experiences can come from school or college, hobbies, volunteer work, and jobs. In your mind recall the experiences, write 100 – 300 words about each one, practice giving a one and two minute version of each. With the longer version you can add details that provide a greater richness and make each story more memorable. The shorter versions take the most effort because you must decide which information is more crucial. Then, tell your story into a tape recorder. When you play it back, ask yourself, is it a well-told story? Is it interesting? Does it create word pictures?

In stories that demonstrate how you solved a problem or overcame an obstacle, create before and after pictures that highlight your impact on the situation. Not all stories have to be successful ones. It is often more effective to include unsuccessful ones so long as you learnt from the situation.



Select **Interviews** in the **Getting a job** section of the C&E website for extensive information on interviews. This information includes details about the different types of interviews you can expect, example questions to expect and example questions for you to ask.

# Asking Questions

Employers like being asked questions. In fact, most are disappointed if you don't ask thoughtful questions; they may even interpret a lack of questions as a lack of interest. Giving the interviewer a chance to answer your questions makes the interview interesting and makes you seem more interesting as well. Asking 1-2 questions also gives you the opportunity to gather useful information and clear up any confusing issues.

Each of the following questions could be appropriate at any time:

- Could you describe your management training program?
- Is there anything else I should know that would help me understand the position?
- What are the main opportunities you see for this department/company in the next three years?
- What are the challenges that have to be faced?
- What are the timelines for the selection process?
- When would I expect to be contacted?
- Is the company able to deal with technological changes in the next five years?
- What type of growth do you foresee in the next few years? Why?
- Does the company promote personal and professional growth? How?

# Record Your Progress

Keep track of your interviews by logging down the key details of each interview and some private comments about how you went, and where you might improve.

# Projecting Your Personality

On a conscious and subconscious level, employers will be evaluating your personality and asking "Do I like this person? Will we work well together?" When considering two people with equal qualifications, the one with the more pleasing personality will always be hired. In order to adequately sell yourself, you need to know your personality skills. These include being cooperative, effective under stress, and energetic.

During an interview you should not merely rattle off claims to each of these characteristics – you should demonstrate each one. In just twenty minutes, a perceptive interviewer can accurately assess you in each area – both by what you say and what you are. The famous saying, "you actions speak so loudly, I can't hear what you're saying", is especially applicable to the ways in which employers assess a job applicant's personality during the interview.

Identify 3-6 attributes which are unique to you and which you can refer to and demonstrate. Select them from this list or add in your own and think how you can model these characteristics during the interview:

Assertive  
Cheerful  
Conscientious  
Cooperative  
Decisive  
Diplomatic  
Discreet  
Energetic  
Enthusiastic  
Flexible  
Friendly  
Goal-oriented  
Hard-working  
Honest  
Humorous  
Inquisitive  
Insightful  
Loyal  
Open-minded  
Optimistic  
Patient  
Persistent  
Practical  
Productive  
Real  
Reliable  
Resourceful  
Responsible  
Self-confident  
Sincere  
Thorough  
Trustworthy