

Interview Skills

Congratulations – you’ve got an interview! Feeling nervous? Don’t worry, you’re not alone. Most people feel anxious before an interview, but the following information should help you to feel more prepared and confident.

When you get to the interview stage in a selection process it means that the organisation is interested in you as a possible employee. The interview is the employer’s opportunity to find the best person for the role, and it’s your opportunity to find out if you want to work for that employer. 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.



Need more help? For more help on interview skills, see the **Interviews/beyond** section on the C&E website, and view the list of **events** in **CareerHub** for Interview Skills **workshops**. You may also like to look at the online **module** on interview skills – available under **Career Development Programs**. C&E also offers one on one interview coaching – call the C&E office on 3138 2649 for details.

Types of Interviews

Panel interviews – Probably the most common type of graduate interview, usually with 3 people on the panel – often the HR manager, the section manager, and an independent member of the organisation. If you haven’t been told who the individuals on the panel are, you may like to contact the organisation to find out; so that you can do some research on them. The panel will take it in turns to ask you questions - when answering, direct your response to the person who has asked the question. Keep in mind that the panel members are individuals who may have different priorities in questioning you. Perhaps the panel members will try to use a ‘good cop/bad cop’ strategy in the interview to see if you remain cool, calm and collected (one may appear to be very supportive of your responses, while another may be tougher on you). The key is to remain professional and polite throughout the interview.

Telephone & Videoconferencing - Interstate or overseas companies may use this method for interviewing. You will need to clearly communicate with either videoconferencing technology or over the phone. For a phone interview, try to organise to have the call on a landline in an environment free from distractions – don’t forget to turn your mobile off!



Screening interviews – Employers may conduct screening interviews, sometimes over the phone. Often short, the purpose is to determine who will be invited for a second interview. They may check your technical competence and/or use open questions to ascertain whether they think your personality would fit into their corporate culture.

Stress interviews – Being well prepared is the key for these. Questions and situations will be designed to place you under stress to see how you react. Recognise the behaviour for what it is, and stay ‘cool’. Deep breathing and clarifying the question before answering are useful techniques.

Individual Interviewing - Sometimes the interview is conducted by just one person. In some instances these may be less formal than other types of interview. Spend time to ensure you build up a rapport with this person before you launch into answers. Be aware that sometimes an individual interview is actually suggested to you by an employer or contact as an ‘informal chat’ – be just as prepared as for an actual interview – a ‘chat’ with a prospective employer is rarely an ‘informal chat’!

Assessment Centre / Group - Many organisations are now using assessment centres, where a group of candidates participate in various activities over a period of time. You could be asked to perform tasks such as move into pairs and do role plays, form teams and compete, do tests, give spontaneous or planned presentations, have discussions, or problem solve in groups. These activities are designed to assess both technical and general skills, such as teamwork, or your ability to handle pressure. There could be up to four observers together with the facilitator. There are sample online tests on various websites.

Interview Tips

Typical Interview Format

1. Getting to know you/general questions – sometimes aimed to help you relax and be less nervous
2. **Behavioural questions** – these typically relate fairly closely to the selection criteria or key skills for the position. For example, if there were six selection criteria, it is highly likely you will get one question about each, on topics such as communication skills, team work, customer focus and time management. The panel usually knows what they are looking for in answers to each question before the interviews begin and will match your answers to their expectations. 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. The interviewer is aiming to assess the approach that you apply – 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. Using the STAR (L) approach is the recommended way to answer – see our separate information sheet for details about this.
3. Sometimes the interviewers will then ask you to complete a task which is relevant to the role you are applying for, e.g., in an interview for a PR position - prepare a media release.
4. Often before the interview ends, you will be given the chance to ask some questions – it’s good to have a couple prepared, and you may also come up with a relevant question or two during the course of the interview. Asking questions shows your interest in the organisation and the role, gives you the opportunity to gather useful information, and can clear up any confusing issues. This is NOT however, the time to ask about salary. A few examples would be:
 - What type of growth do you foresee in your organisation in the next few years?
 - How does the company promote professional development?
 - What is the process going forward, regarding the selection of successful candidate/s?



Common Interview Questions

Below is a list of the types of questions typically asked by potential employers in an interview. How many are you prepared to answer?

Behavioural Questions – Use STAR (L) to answer

(Note: These will often be closely related to the selection criteria or key skills for the job)

1. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
2. How do you work under pressure?
3. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
4. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
5. Can you describe a time when a project you were working on encountered difficulties?
6. What is the most innovative thing you have done in your previous work or university experience?
7. Tell me about a good and a bad decision you’ve made in the last year.

Technical / Work-Related Questions

8. What do you know about our company?
9. How has your university experience prepared you for a career?
10. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
11. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to him or her?
12. What led you to choose your field of major study?
13. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?

General /Biographical Questions

14. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
15. How would you describe yourself? How do you think a friend or professor who knows you would describe you?
16. What are your short and long-term goals and objectives?
17. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
18. Why did you choose this career?
19. What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?
20. Why should I hire you?
21. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Key Interviewing Skills

Active Communication

Active communication can be defined as high level listening - in which your entire attention is focused on the person speaking - and effective speaking. Employers are attracted to active listeners – and they are perceived to be better employees. 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.

Research the organisation

Researching an organisation can yield big dividends during an interview. Read annual reports, recruiting brochures and their website content. 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.

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, uni, hobbies, and volunteer or paid work. Think through the experiences, or write them down, and then practice giving a one and two minute version of each. 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.

Let others speak for you

You may find it difficult or awkward to “sell yourself” to the interviewer/s. One way to deal with this is to ‘let others speak for you’. When you answer questions, 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.”



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.

Before the interview, try to predict if there are any objections the interviewers might come up with, and develop appropriate and effective responses, e.g., you don't have experience in a particular skill or area – your response could be that you learn quickly.

Projecting Your Personality

During the interview employers will be asking themselves “Do I like this person? Will we work well together?” When considering two people with equal qualifications, the one who the employer feels will fit better with the organisation's culture will always be hired. In order to adequately sell yourself, you need to know your personality type and skill set. These include attributes such as being cooperative, effective under stress, energetic, flexible, enthusiastic, friendly, inquisitive, hard-working. Identify 6-10 attributes / skills which are unique to you and which you can refer to and demonstrate.

Dress to impress

- Wear clean, neat clothing and shoes, appropriate to the setting of the interview
- Be comfortable in what you wear
- If in doubt, wear the more conservative option
- Be restrained with perfume, aftershave and accessories.

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, and on the panel members if you know their names.
- Have at least 3 key skills or qualities about you that you can talk about that make you the best person for the job
- **Practice!** Prepare some responses and practice in a way that works for you.
 - Talk through them with a mirror
 - Talk through them with friends/family
 - Write down some responses
- It's okay to take some **written notes** in with you – this can help you feel more confident during the interview, you may not even need to look at them.
e.g., You may like to take something like this into the interview with you...

My key strengths / skills	Stories / examples of how I have demonstrated them

During the interview

- The interview starts when you arrive at the interview location, not just while you're sitting in the room – be professional and polite to reception staff, and anyone else you come across prior to the interview starting.
- **Make a good first impression!** First impressions are important and are formed in the first 2 minutes. Think through the first 2 minutes of the interview – you will walk in, have your right hand free in case they offer their hand to shake, put your bag / any documents down etc. Once formed, impressions are hard to change. Be confident and not too aggressive or passive.
- **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. The 'Learn' part of this approach is optional – use it if relevant.
 Situation Task Action Result (Learn)
- **Relax** and allow your personality to flow through.

After the interview

- **Reflect** on your answers and make some notes – these will be helpful when preparing for your next interview.
- If you haven't heard whether or not you were successful within 2 weeks of your interview, it's recommended that you phone them to check the outcome and request feedback.
If you do get a call to say that you didn't get the job – thank them anyway, and let them know you're interested in any other positions that come up.

