

A brief guide to interview techniques



1. Interviewing the interviewer

The job interview should be seen as a two-way process. The job interview is not just a chance for the interviewer to assess whether you are the right person for the job; it's also an opportunity for you to find out whether the job and the company are right for you. Your questions to the interviewer could give you key answers to help you decide whether the company is one you want to work for, if the job is offered to you. Remember that this is your best chance to find out exactly what the job is like. When it comes to negotiating an offer this information will be invaluable. More importantly, to succeed in an interview you really need to ask a lot of probing questions. This opens the door for you to sell yourself and gives you a greater idea of what sort of candidate they are looking for. This will help you to answer their questions more impressively. Intelligent and unique questions leave a big impression on the interviewer and set you aside from other candidates. An important part of completing a successful interview is the preparation you do, not just about the job you're applying for but about the company. You need to find out some history of the company, its structure, management style and market position. As well as illustrating your enthusiasm to the interviewer, thorough research will help you to feel more confident with the questions you ask.

2. Knowing your interviewer

Before you start 'interrogating' the interviewer, it's important to assess with whom you are dealing. You should be able to gauge this within a few minutes of talking to them.

A **professional** would have taken the time at the beginning of the interview to make you feel comfortable, opening the interview with some small talk. These are the best people to deal with, as they're likely to listen attentively to what you say. But they will be intolerant if you take liberties.

The **psychologist-styled** interviewer may try to look for hidden clues in everything you say, but it may be difficult to spot this type. So it's best to stick to the truth and be brief at all times.

The **formalist interviewer** usually sticks to a script. This can be frustrating, but don't let it intimidate you. Just be patient and affirmative, because your chance to have your say will probably come at the end of the interview, or when answering their questions.

The **interrogator** tries to intimidate you. The key to dealing with these people is not to get flustered. Take your time answering the questions and hold your nerve.

The **smooth talker** is one to watch. If they're waxing lyrical about the job and its prospects, without too much concern for your ability, then the alarm bells should be going off. This is the type of 'high staff turnover' job to avoid.

The **pretentious** interviewer is another to watch for as they can intimidate you with their 'know it all' attitude. But if you remain humble and respectful you're still likely to make a good impression.

3. Dealing with Objections

These may fall into the following categories:

- What sort of responsibilities the job entails
- Challenging or routine/mundane aspects of the tasks at hand
- What support and guidance is available, such as managerial assistance, flexibility, size of budget, mentoring etc.
- How often your performance is reviewed and details on any bonus schemes
- Training and development opportunities
- Scope for promotion and career path enhancement
- Extra expectations of the employer such as travel etc

Questions should reflect your keenness to work for the company and generally you should try to limit yourself to asking just a couple of the most significant questions you have. You don't want to make the interviewer feel brow-beaten with a long list.

Significant questions to ask about the job:

- Why has the job become vacant?
- What are the key tasks and responsibilities of the job?
- How was the job handled in the past?
- What is the greatest challenge facing staff at present?
- How do you review performance?
- What support and guidance is available?
- What training will be available?

- Find out about the company's long-term strategy. Are there plans for expansion? What new product plans are in the pipeline?

These kinds of questions will be essential in helping you to decide whether this company is one you would like to work for. It will also demonstrate your keenness for the company and not just the job.

Pertinent aspects of the company to ask about:

- Structure of the organisation
- Staffing: is it growing, contracting, outsourcing etc?
- Decision making process and line of authority
- Success of the organisation, its profitability and product portfolio
- Future strategies and development

4. Timing is everything

During the interview you need to look for opportunities to be proactive and ask your own questions or try to lead the discussion where appropriate. Be careful not to dominate the discussion or take up too much time. It can be an idea to find out at the outset of the interview how much time has been set aside for the meeting; that gives you an idea of how much time is remaining for Q&A at the end of the interview. If the time is seemingly already spent you can always ask if there is time for a couple of questions. Generally interviewers will give you an opportunity to ask questions but even if they don't actually ask you directly if you have any questions it pays to have a few prepared.

5. Making an Impression

Keep your concentration levels up during the interview and make sure you listen to the responses the interviewer gives you. The worst mistakes happen when people end up asking questions about topics that have already been covered in the interview or don't hear or understand what the interviewer has said. For that reason your questions need to evolve with the interview. But don't be afraid to ask for something to be explained in more detail.

Key points to remember during the interview:

- Make sure you give the interviewer your full attention
- Wait for them to finish speaking before you answer the question
- Make sure you ask open questions to ensure you get full answers

- Check that you understand everything that has been said
- Show the interviewer that you would relish the challenge of working in their environment and make it clear that you feel confident in being able to rise to that challenge.

6. At the end of the interview

Find out what the procedure is after the interview.

Key questions:

- When will I hear from you?
- How will I be informed?
- Do you need any more information from me?
- Is there anyone else I should speak to?

Don't forget to show appreciation for the time the interviewer took to interview you before you leave.

7. A thank you letter

Following through with a thank you letter is a popular way of reminding the interviewer of your enthusiasm, although they may not even acknowledge the gesture.

There is mixed opinion about the effectiveness of such a letter. Some HR personnel expect a letter and consider it rude not to hear anything further from you, while others see it as unnecessary. It is best to assess each situation individually and make your own judgement.

Tips on effective expression:

- Be enthusiastic
- Speak with clarity and confidence
- Be positive with your answers
- Keep to the point and be mindful of time
- Try to be honest and open

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