

Interview Tips

Do your homework

Before the big day, visit the organisation's website, as most have information on careers. Read up on the skills they're looking for and whether you meet those requirements. Then think about any examples you can talk about that demonstrate those skills. Interviewers are likely to ask you for examples of times you've demonstrated a particular skill or behaviour. That's because they know previous behaviour can help predict your future performance. If the website doesn't have a lot of information, look at the job specification or advertisement, and note the key skills they want. Once again, think about how you can demonstrate these.

Plan your travel and expect the unexpected

Little is worse than getting lost or missing trains before an interview. Of course, things can happen that are out of your control and it's important to inform your interviewer if you're going to be late. Leave early for your interview and you'll feel more prepared and composed on arrival.

Prepare the questions you want to ask

You want to demonstrate that you've researched the organisation and you're interested in them, so prepare a question or two to ask. Perhaps you read something about the organisation that captured your interest. Or you might want to ask the interviewer what they most enjoy about working for the organisation.

Don't panic

It's natural to feel nervous before an interview. But don't panic if things don't go according to plan. If a question throws you off track, ask for a moment to think about it and compose yourself. If you're really stressed, let your interviewer know; this will help them understand your situation and make you feel at ease. They don't want to catch you out – they just want to see if you have the right skills and motivations for the role.

Be yourself

Give an accurate picture of yourself in the interview. Friends and family may have advised you about what to say, but it's best to be yourself. This way, you reveal your personality and make yourself appear much more relaxed.

First impressions last

First impressions count, so make sure you're wearing something appropriate for the interview that's not too uncomfortable. Your handshake is important, so look the interviewer in the eye, and shake firmly – although not with too much force!

Listen and answer the questions

You may have prepared answers for some questions. However, don't answer a question with a response that doesn't relate to it. Listen carefully to the interviewer and make sure you answer appropriately. Don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to elaborate or repeat themselves.

Change your examples

If an interviewer wants you to demonstrate your communication skills, team-working talents and business ability, don't use the same example for every question. Try to think of various ways to demonstrate your skills, perhaps by talking about things you do outside work or university.

Look interested

Smile, nod and show you're interested in what your interviewer is saying. If you look bored or don't maintain eye contact, your interviewer may think you're not interested in the job.

Related content

Paper-based applications may have fallen out of fashion in recent years. However, they're still great for encouraging recruiters to read your CV and helping you stand out from the crowd.

Who's recruiting?

If possible, find out the name of the recruiter and address your cover letter to them. This makes your letter more personal and shows you've used your initiative.

Spelling and grammar

Always check your spelling and grammar before sending your covering letter. If it's poorly written, a recruiter may throw your CV in the bin.

Keep it short

Don't write an essay about your skills and how much you want the job. Keep it short and to the point.

What to include?

Highlight the job you're applying for at the top of the letter. Then outline your relevant skills and the reason you're applying for the role.

Clarify your availability

If you're going to be away or out of reach for some time, let the recruiter know. It's frustrating for busy recruiters when they can't get hold of candidates.

Contact details

Make your contact details clear on the letter.

Say what you expect

End the letter by saying what you expect to happen next. Perhaps highlight that you will call them to follow up in a few days or ask them to contact you by email or phone – and remember to include your contact details.

Sending CVs online

If you're applying online with your CV, consider making your covering letter the first page of your CV, so it's all in one document. Personalise the letter to the company you're applying to and title it 'Covering letter for x company'.

When applying for jobs, your CV is your ultimate selling tool. By following these tips and spending some time getting it right, you could soon reap the rewards.

Further Tips

Interview Tip 1: Look the part

Plan to dress professionally in conservative clothing with appropriate shoes, minimal jewelry, and perfume. Even if the office is casual, you should dress in business attire.

Interview Tip 2: Before the interview

Bring a portfolio with extra copies of your CV, a list of references, and a notepad and pen. Use a breath mint before you enter the building. Leave the gadgets at home or turned off in your bag or briefcase.

Interview Tip 3: Arrive on time

Arrive a few minutes early for your interview. If you're not sure where you're going get directions ahead of time and do a trial run, so you know where you're going. When you arrive for your interview, greet the receptionist and let him or her know why you are there.

Interview Tip 4: Answer questions calmly

During the interview try to remain as calm as possible. Ask for clarification if you're not sure what's been asked and remember that it is perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to frame your responses so you can be sure to fully answer the question.

Interview Tip 5: Ask questions about the job

Be prepared with questions of your own, because you will probably be asked if you have any at the end of the interview. Having questions will show that you've done your homework and are truly interested in the position.

Interview Tip 6: Follow up

Ask your interviewer for a business card. That way, you'll have the correct spelling of names and job titles for your thank you notes and follow up calls. It's important to thank the interviewer for their time and to let them know that you look forward to hearing from them. Follow up by sending a thank you note to everyone you interviewed with.

Top 10 Interview Blunders

1. Don't prepare

Being unable to answer the question "What do you know about this company?" might just end your quest for employment, at least with this employer. Background information including company history, locations, divisions, and a mission statement are available in an "About Us" section on most company web sites. Review it ahead of time, then print it out and read it over just before your interview to refresh your memory.

2. Dress inappropriately

Dressing inappropriately can work both ways. You will certainly want to wear a suit if you are interviewing for professional position. When interviewing for a summer job at your local theme park or as a lifeguard, for example, dress accordingly in neat and casual attire. If you aren't sure what to wear, visit the organisation and watch employees coming in and out of the office to see what they are wearing.

3. Poor communication skills

It's important to communicate well with everyone you meet in your search for employment. It is, however, most important to positively connect with the person who might hire you. Shake hands, make eye contact, exude confidence, engage the person you are speaking with, and you

will let the interviewer know that you are an excellent candidate for this position - before you even answer an interview question.

4. Too much communication
Believe it or not, a recent candidate for employment, who, by the way, didn't get the job, didn't hesitate to answer his mobile phone when it rang during an interview. Leave the phone behind or at least turn it off before you enter the building. Same goes for coffee, food and anything else other than you, your CV, your job application, and your list of references.
5. Talk too much
There is nothing much worse than interviewing someone who goes on and on and on... The interviewer really doesn't need to know your whole life story. Keep your answers succinct, to-the-point and focused and don't ramble - simply answer the question.
6. Don't talk enough
It's really hard to communicate with someone who answers a question with a word or two. I remember a couple of interviews where I felt like I was pulling teeth to get any answers from the candidate. It wasn't pleasant. So, even though you shouldn't talk too much, you do want to be responsive and fully answer the question as best you can.
7. Fuzzy facts
Even if you have submitted a CV when you applied for the job, you may also be asked to fill out a job application. Make sure you know the information you will need to complete an application including dates of prior employment, graduation dates, and employer contact information.
8. Give the wrong answer
Make sure you listen to the question and take a moment to gather your thoughts before you respond.
9. Being rude about past employers
Your last boss was an idiot? You hated your job and couldn't wait to leave? Even if it's true don't say so. I cringed when I heard someone ranting and raving about the last company she worked for. That company happened to be our largest customer and, of course, I wasn't going to hire someone who felt that way about the company and everyone who worked there. It's sometimes a smaller world than you think and you don't know who your interviewer might know, including that boss who is an idiot... You also don't want the interviewer to think that you might speak that way about his or her company if you leave on terms that aren't the best
10. Forget to follow up
Afraid you didn't make the best impression? Are you sure that you aced the interview? Either way, be sure to follow up with a thank you note reiterating your interest in the position and the company.