

# Interview Guide

## Introduction

The interview process is a two-way street: it is as much about the employer's opportunity to delve deeper into your skills and experience whilst getting a feel for how you will fit into the team and organisation culture as it is yours to find out more about the role and the company, and ensure it is an opportunity that fits your short-term and long-term career goals. When it comes to interviews, preparation is everything. We have identified several aspects that we believe- if covered, will enable you to impress anyone. They are:

- A. Research
- B. Self-assessment
- C. How you are presenting yourself & the 7% rule
- D. Preparing questions for the interview
- E. Practice before your interview

### A. Do Research

Systematic and methodical research should be completed about the company, the role and the people you are going to meet (LinkedIn profiles, company webpage). Re-read the job description several times so that you get a good understanding of what the hiring manager is looking for. Check the company's website (careers page is a must) and read the latest reports and news. Visit 'About us' page as this will help you understand what markets/products/services they cover/offer and what their challenges are. To learn or read their mission statement and vision is also important. This can only demonstrate your commitment to understanding the company you want to join. A well-informed applicant will always stand out from the crowd, so make use of the multitude of research tools available in the public domain: use websites, news channels, annual reports and social media.

### B. Self-assessment

Whilst it can be a nerve-wracking process, remember the interviewer already thinks you could be a good match for the role (that is why they selected you for an interview). Now they just want to find out more about you and confirm you are the best fit for the job. Therefore, it is crucial you look at yourself to understand what will make you stand out from the crowd (your X-factor). Self-assessment is an effective way to critically look at your skills, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, interests and work ethic. It enables you to think about what is important to you, the kind of role that will make you happy and also be the basis on which to develop your career plan.

By undergoing a period of self-reflection before the interview you will be able to examine your accomplishments, achievements and successes, and understand those areas that are particularly relevant to the job. Make notes about what motivates you, what you want from your career and how it fits with the role/company.

Tip: make sure you familiarise with your CV as well.

**C. How you are presenting yourself & the 7% rule** (7% refers to the weight carried by the actual words being spoken, 38% represents the tone with which the words are expressed and 55% represents the body language). Using effective non-verbal communication (body language, appearance, proxemics-distance, eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, physical movement and gestures) is essential. All body language should point to you being confident about yourself and your qualifications for this role, whilst also showing the interviewer that you are an open and friendly person who is perfect for the job.

Find the right tone for the interview by paying attention to and adopting the posture of your interviewer (this is called mirroring). This is from body posture, using the same vocabulary or the same approach to the meeting (more/less in/formal). **Mirroring** the communication and behavioural styles of interviewers is an interesting concept as it creates a sense of bonding but is almost, if not entirely, indiscernible to the interviewer himself. It works because the closer communication and interpersonal styles are, the better the chance that you will 'click'.

Interviews have a degree of subjectivity and therefore it is not just what you know that counts, but also other factors including making the interviewer feel comfortable with you so that they see the possibility of working with you.

E.g.: subtly mirror the body language - if he or she leans back, lean back yourself, if expressive hand movements are used do so yourself, try and talk at the same pace in the same range of tones. If you breathe at the same pace as the interviewer you will find yourself communicating at a similar pace. BUT be natural, don't try to be someone you are not and use natural body language. If you have never done it before, it may not be a clever idea to 'test' the concept during an interview.

**Body language on the telephone:** although the interviewer will not physically see you, body language still has a major part to play in telephone interviews. The way you carry yourself, sit/stand, look and feel will all impact how you come across and how well you respond, so before your interview, take a few moments and:

- sit up straight or ideally stand-up so you sound alert
- dress smart - studies have shown that people who dress professionally for a phone interview will perform better than those dressed casually
- smile so your voice and tone are friendly rather than negative or confrontational
- speak slowly and clearly.

**What to wear for face to face interviews:** dress for the job you aspire to and people will picture you in the role. It makes sense to dress your best for an interview regardless of the dress code at the organisation. Pay attention to detail. All job interview clothes should be clean, tidy and ironed.

Good body language: It's about the confidence	Bad body language: What not to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start with a firm handshake.</li> <li>• Maintain a good posture and friendly expression</li> <li>• Relax into your chair, but without slouching.</li> <li>• Keep good eye contact - if you have more than one person interviewing you, look at the person asking the question when you reply but glance at the other interviewers from time to time.</li> <li>• Breathe and pause before answering a question, this gives you time to react</li> <li>• Interact with the interviewer as an equal, not a subordinate.</li> <li>• Be poised – be happily confident in yourself.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't wave your hands and arms around</li> <li>• Don't fold your arms – it suggests a defensive attitude.</li> <li>• Don't move your legs too much – this is distracting and indicates nervousness.</li> <li>• Don't rest one leg or ankle on top of your other knee it looks too casual.</li> <li>• Don't speak in monotone but don't vary tone and pitch too much - you could come across as overly excited or emotional.</li> <li>• Don't sound too apologetic or defensive.</li> <li>• Don't interrupt the speaker/interviewer.</li> </ul>

**D. Prepare questions for the interview**

After you have read the job description and conducted research about the company and interviewer, you should prepare several questions (5 to 10 ideally) that will help you understand more about the role, the daily tasks, the challenges within the role you have applied for and the long-term career opportunities.

Tip: Ask the interviewer why they enjoy working there? Or take an interest in their career progression and ask something that shows you took time to research about them.

**E. Practice**

You know what your career goals are, and have a good understanding about the role you applied for and the company culture. Now is the time to get to grips with your interview technique. Set up mock interviews with a friend or family member. Throughout this process make sure to consider your career goals and the results of your self-assessment, and focus on promoting your key skills (X-factor). Remember to communicate positively and concisely the message you want to send across.

## Types of interviews

### Telephone

Telephone interviews are typically used for initial screening purposes. They allow consultants or employers to make an initial assessment of each shortlisted candidate without too much investment in time or money.

It's therefore crucial you treat each telephone interview seriously and professionally.

- Make sure you have a quiet place where you can interview without interruptions.
- Always keep your CV and any other kind of information to hand; if you have to look for it, the interview is over.
- Have a pen and paper ready, you may be required to write down essential information.
- Have a glass of water nearby to avoid a dry mouth.
- Ideally stand-up, do not sit down – it will help you come across better

### One-to-one

This is the most common type of interview. In the one-to-one interview the candidate meets directly with the interviewer. One-to-one can happen at any stage in the interview process; some companies may use one-to-ones with an HR representative on the outset of the interview process, others may wait until the final stage before setting up a one-to-one with your prospective line manager.

### Panel interview

A panel interview typically involves three or more members of the company you are applying to work with interviewing you in one meeting. Each member of the panel will typically come with their own agenda, will want to ask their own set of questions and will evaluate your performance based on their own unique set of criteria. Each member of the panel is there for a reason, so it's important you treat each of them equally; don't be tempted to focus just on your potential boss.

When engaging with an interview panel, it's important you make eye contact with each person. This brings the interview together and shows your understanding of why they are there and how the teams interact. Before arriving at the interview it's wise to understand the roles and actions of each member of the panel. For example, if you are going to be interviewed by the Chief Actuary, Group Finance Manager and Human Resources Manager you should be ready to ask each one of them specific questions about their area.

### Competency-based interviews

Competency-based interviews (also called structured interviews) are designed to test one or more specific skills against a job. The key competencies for each role are usually described in the job advert, and your responses will be matched against those criteria and marked accordingly. In a competency-based interview, every applicant for the position is asked the same questions as every other applicant applying for the position.

How to prepare: make sure you understand the skills and competencies being tested.

- Use examples from your past experience to demonstrate you possess the skills and competencies you are being asked to demonstrate.
- Learn to narrate the story using the STAR method. This means setting the scene (S), explaining how you handled the tasks (T) by placing the emphasis on your actions/contribution (A) and detailing the outcome/result (R).

### Technical interviews

A technical interview typically features questions that are specific to the role you have applied for, and are focused on proving you can do the technical aspects of the job. Although technical knowledge is very important in this setting, it's important to note that interviewers are not just interested in technical knowledge but also how you approach problems, construct your thought process and demonstrate your personal skills.

## Typical interview questions likely you will get asked:

1. Tell me about yourself/ Take me through your CV.
2. Tell me about your current role
3. Tell me your strengths/weaknesses (areas for development)
4. Tell me about your long-term career aspirations (5-year plan)
5. What is your greatest professional achievement?
6. How would your boss and co-workers describe you?
7. How do you handle stress and pressure?
8. What are the reasons for wanting to leave your current role?
9. What do you know about us/our organisation/ Who are our competitors?
10. From what you know, what differentiates us from the competition?
11. Major challenges for the organisation over the next 5 years? This is an opportunity to not only show the interviewer that you know the organisation, but also that you know the industry and you have a grip on challenges it faces.
12. How do you handle success?
13. What motivates you/What's your dream job?
14. What's your management style?
15. Why should I hire you/ Why do you want this job?

### Competency-based questions:

- a. Describe a situation where you worked in a team
- b. Describe a difficult work situation / project and how you overcame it
- c. Describe a situation in which you used initiative/ solved a problem.
- d. Describe a situation in which you showed adaptability/took responsibility.
- e. Describe a situation in which you influenced or motivated people.
- f. Tell me about a time you exercised leadership.

Tip: stay positive even if you feel you answered a question badly, don't dwell on it - move on, and do your best in the other questions; employers will be looking at the interview and will not focus on the odd slip.

## After the interview

**Follow up:** at the end of the interview you might want to ask what the next steps in the interview process are and when you would be likely to hear from the interviewer.

If your interview has been arranged via a recruitment consultant make sure they are your first port of call upon leaving the interview. They will want (and need) to know how well you thought the interview went before contacting their client and providing them with your feedback. Always be open and honest at this stage; if you feel the job is not for you, tell them.

A good idea after face to face meetings with the hiring manager is to write a message you can send to the recruitment consultant who can forward it to the hiring manager on your behalf. This demonstrates interest, commitment and assurance you are still very much interested in the opportunity.

**Good luck** and do not forget to always keep a **smile** on your face!