



Interview Skills

Introduction

An interview can strike fear into most people, however, the key to success is not to panic but to take it in your stride whilst remembering to investigate and prepare. There are generally two types of interview and these are as follows:

In a **traditional interview**, you will be asked a series of questions which typically have straight forward answers like "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?" or "Describe a typical work week."

In a **behavioural interview**, an employer has decided what skills are needed in the person they wish to hire or accept and will ask questions to find out if the candidate has those skills. Instead of asking how you would behave, they will ask how you did behave. The interviewer will want to know how you handled a situation, instead of what you might do in the future.

5 good reasons to prepare for your interview

- You stand out from other candidates
- Helps you show that you have a genuine interest in the company, college or university
- Research to give you some information about the person interviewing you, this can give you something to discuss
- Have good, relevant questions for when they ask you at the end of the interview "do you have any questions"
- To understand the organisation you are committing a large part of life to

Preparation will help you grow in confidence which will support you through the interview process.

Attitude

The one display that you show that stands out more than any answer to any question is your **Attitude**.

If you display a negative attitude from the outset of the interview the interviewer will remember you for this and not your positive answers or outlook. A first impression is the first and most important thing people first think about you, please make sure it is positive.

An attitude is purely your personal reaction to a situation, remember, "you have the ability to change your attitude in a heart beat".

How do you get the best out of an interview

Ask open questions i.e. how this allows the interviewer to provide more information. Interviewers will also ask you open questions instead of one answer questions so they can get to know your personality and more importantly you.

If you are not asked open questions and they are yes or no replies, try and expand on the answers to give the best information as possible. Examples include "yes, because" or "no, but I have"

What if you can't think of an answer

Firstly, **don't panic**, you won't be alone in this happening to you during an interview. Remember, you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you.

To gain a little more time you can repeat the question back to them, if you feel that isn't enough be truthful and ask for a moment to think about it. This is far better than saying the word which springs to mind or allowing yourself to ramble on and on. Alternatively, you could ask them a question back or a statement to allow you to gain composure and thinking time.

These can include:

"That's an interesting question", "What would be your view", "Can I ask the same question", "Can you tell me", "Could you explain what you mean a little more".

Body language and why it is so important



An understanding of body language can give you an added advantage. You can only make a first impression once so make sure you are prepared and ready to give the first impression that leaves the right lasting impression.

There are three main ways we use body language signals, movements and gestures and they are:

- Direct replacement for words is sign language.
- Reinforcement of our words are gestures which highlight what we are saying.
- Mirroring our emotions and attitudes is people read our facial expressions, the way we sit and our distance.

"It's not what you say but how you say it that is heard"

This saying certainly rings true, have a think about the last time you said something and the way it came across was completely different to how you meant it. It is our body language and the way others read the signals that make the difference.

Here is the breakdown of other peoples perceptions:

Words account for only 7%

Tone accounts for 38%

Body language accounts for 55%

The things to remember about your body language

- Facial expressions
- Hand shakes
- Eye contact
- Head movements
- Gestures and body movements

The handshake

A confident handshake says a great deal about you as an individual. By offering a firm positive handshake that interlinks the palms for a couple of shakes from the wrist is a good start. Remember to look the person in the eye whilst shaking their hand.

Avoid a limp wrist that just touches their hand or the opposite of trying to prove who is the strongest by crushing their fingers.

A positive handshake should look like this:



Eye contact

Your eyes are the most powerful method of communication. A wrong look can speak volumes. Here are some basic things to consider when it comes to eye contact:

- What are you staring at?
- Look at me when you are talking to me!

Maintain eye contact with the interviewer a direct and open gaze is preferred, ensure you look attentive in order to show your interest. Practice with your parents and friends, hold their eye contact so you can see what is comfortable and feels normal.



Head movements

Head movements can provide the interviewer with so much feedback about your understanding, positivity and most importantly negativity, in regards to an interview.

The nod shows you are in agreement and provides encouragement.

Slow nodding encourages the interviewer to continue and shows you are listening.

Slightly faster nodding displays that you understand.

Fast nodding shows that you agree and possibly want to make a point of your own.

Research has shown that an active listener who nods can gain up to four times more information.

Gestures and body movements

Gestures and body movements are used in so many ways to display our expressions. Literally, any part of your body can make a gesture. So here are some to beware of:

Shoulders shrug displays 'I don't know', 'I don't care' and 'I am doubtful'. Both shoulders are used and are usually matched by a facial expression or head movement. A single shrug usually means 'leave me alone'.

Hands can display so many emotions. If they held finger tips together this displays confidence. Hand movements with palms facing up show openness and honesty. Movements with palms facing down generally means you mean your opinion is right, however, this can be seen as aggressive.

Legs and feet if crossed can show nervousness or defensive. Uncrossed knees pointing to the person displays that you are listening. Uncrossed and pointing away from the person can show that you are not concentrating and are distracted.

Arms should always be held at your side either resting on the arm of the chair or in your lap. Crossed arms makes you look defensive and can display aggression or that you are unapproachable.

Your sitting position can unfortunately make a negative impact. If a seat is soft and you sink into it, you will look slumped and this can limit your speech and even your confidence. So try to change the chair or sit on the edge and lean slightly forward which displays that you interested and listening.

How to show your confident body language

When you act with confidence, people see and take that confidence as a sign you are capable of doing whatever you are talking about. A thing to remember is confident people inspire confidence in others.

To get to grips with positive body language for interviews is by preparing. Normally you will be given a few days notice of any interview and you should use this time to prepare. Practise open and confident body language and it will start feeling normal the more you practice.

You will give the interviewer the first impression of you within the first 30 seconds of them meeting you. Remember to use this time to its full, by giving the perfect introduction, handshake, your name and smile.

Your dress code is very important, there is nothing wrong to ask the interviewer what the dress code is before the interviewer, For example, if you are applying for a Gym Instructor role you won't want to be giving a practical demonstration of the treadmill in a suit.

Remember, your personal hygiene is very important. Especially, as we sweat more when we are nervous.

How to beat your nerves

There is only one real answer to beating your nerves and that is to make sure you have prepared this will help you get a goodnight sleep before and be able to get as much rest as possible,

When you feel nervous take a deep breath, stand tall and smile.

Example interview questions to help you prepare

Your application:

- What made you apply?
- Tell me what you know about us?
- What interests you to have applied?
- What do you think we can offer you?
- In your application you said Explain this to me?

Your aspirations, desires and ambitions

- Tell me about your short and long term goals?
- What is your career ambition?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?
- Describe your ideal job?
- Tell me about an important goal you have set yourself. How did you reach it?
- Tell me about a time you failed to reach a goal?

Work ethic:

- Give me three good reasons why we should accept/employ you?
- What skills or experience can you offer?
- How do we get the best out of you?
- Tell me about your biggest achievement to date?
- What has been the biggest challenge you have had to overcome and how did you overcome it?
- Have you ever had any work experience or part time jobs?

Character traits:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- If I was talking to one of your friends, how would they describe you?
- How are you motivated?
- What are your hobbies and interests?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- How would you describe yourself?

Challenging questions:

- Define challenge for me?
- Explain the gap in finishing your education until now?
- Describe the best tutor/manger you have had?
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made?
- Tell me about a time your work was criticised and how did you handle it?

Some questions to ask an interviewer

- How or why has the position arisen?
- What are key responsibilities of the job?
- Who would I be reporting to?
- How many people will I be working with?
- What qualities are you looking for in the right person?
- Do you have an appraisal system?

Something to remember

Please remember, that in the modern world the interviewer, can research things about you just the same way you can research the interviewer or the company / institution you are applying for.

So please, ensure, your Facebook, Myspace and Twitter accounts do not portray you in a negative light. Remember, a university or employer will want to employ or accept someone who doesn't just seem to be partying all night long or is slagging off their friends.

They see you as an investment and they will not want their investment to turn bad, by poor behaviour and a negative attitude. You will probably be joining a team so please ensure they see you are a team player, especially if you have not made your pages secure.