

How to do well in job interviews

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If you feel nervous about going for job interviews, you're in good company. While public speaking came top of a poll of work-related fears by recruitment agency Forward Role, job interviews were high on the list too. Another survey by Jobsite also suggests many people are stuck in jobs they don't like because finding a new one would mean going for interviews.

There's no getting away from the fact that job interviews can be stressful. The good news is you don't have to dread interviews if you do plenty of preparation and plan things well in advance. Not only will preparing for interviews make the process less nerve-wracking, it could also boost your chances of getting the job too.

Did you know?

According to the Job Hunter Opinion Survey 2016, the average job seeker applies for 16 jobs a week, and it usually takes 27 job applications to secure one job interview. (Source: *StandOut-cv.com*)

Be on time

One thing you don't want to do when you have a job interview is to be late. Most managers agree

that effective time management is an important quality in a job candidate, and being late for your interview could persuade a prospective employer you're not the right person for the job before you've spoken a single word (according to a survey by jobs website monster.co.uk, 96 per cent of managers agree they look for good timekeeping in job candidates).

If you have a job interview coming up, make sure you know where you're going and how long it will take you to get there. If you're not familiar with the place where your interview is being held, you may want to consider doing a trial run to help you work out how long the journey will take on the day. Also remember that problems can and do happen, such as bad traffic or train cancellations - all of which could make you late. So try to also allow for some extra time to accommodate any unforeseen circumstances.

Aim to arrive slightly earlier than your interview so you have time to collect your thoughts and make sure you're calm - try to time it so that you're about 10 minutes early, but not any earlier (remember to switch off your mobile phone while you're waiting).

And if you do run into problems on the way, make sure you have the phone number of your interviewer handy so you can let them know immediately that you could be delayed.

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Do your research

Arming yourself with as much insider knowledge as possible can really help boost your confidence during a job interview. So try to find out as much as you can about the company and the job you're applying for beforehand. If you know someone who works for the company, quiz them about what they do, how the company is run and so on.

If you don't know someone who works for that particular company, you may have an acquaintance who works in that market or industry who could give you some important insights beforehand. If so, aim to find out as much as you can about how the company operates, who the company's competitors are, what changes are taking place in the company's industry, and the challenges and opportunities it's facing now and in the near future.

If relevant, you could also do your homework by looking up the company's website and searching for it on social media sites such as [LinkedIn](#).

Prepare your answers

It also pays to be prepared for the typical kind of questions that are asked at interviews, such as:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What can you offer that other candidates can't?

- What positive things would your last boss say about you?
- How competitive are you?
- What salary are you looking for?

Think about what you would say if you were asked any of these - or similar - questions, as they often come up in interviews.

For instance, one of the most dreaded questions in interviews is 'what's your biggest weakness?' There are several ways you could answer, any of which may reveal something about you that could spoil your chance of getting the job.

An effective way to answer the question would be to think of a weakness you've taken positive steps to improve - such as a particular skill you're working on (such as a personal development skill or a technical job-related skill). Avoid saying things like, 'I work too hard' or 'I don't have any weaknesses'. But do try to show that you have the self-awareness to recognise your weaknesses and that you have the initiative to do something about them.

Rehearse (but don't overdo it)

Before the day of your interview, read through your CV and make sure you know it really well. Your interviewer may ask you to run through your work history, so have all the information you need in your head. You can take a copy of your CV into an interview, but try not to read from it or from any notes you may have made (you may also want to take along a few spare copies of your CV in case you're being interviewed by more than one person).

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Try to imagine what an interviewer might ask you about your work experience or anything else on your CV, and make sure your answers don't conflict with the information you've written down. If you have any gaps in your employment history, it's likely they'll ask you to explain them - you'll sail through the interview much more easily if you have your answer prepared. Also study the job description and your job application so that you know them like the back of your hand.

Practice saying out loud the answers to questions you think you may be asked - why you left or want to leave your current job, for example. Try to sound comfortable and confident with what you say - you may want to write your answers down to help you practice. However, don't learn your answers word for word, as you want to sound natural on the day itself rather than rehearsed.

Another thing you could do to prepare is to remind yourself of the things you shouldn't talk about, such as religion, politics or gender relations. Also avoid criticising companies you've worked for in the past, including former employers and colleagues, and try not to be arrogant, argumentative or controversial - unless, of course, the job you're applying for demands it.

Boost your body language

It's not just what you say that counts in job interviews. According to monster.co.uk, interviewers are also keen on observing a candidate's body language. Eight out of 10 managers say they look for a candidate's ability to hold eye contact, while just over half believe a strong handshake makes a good impression.

Here are some body language dos and don'ts you should be aware of:

Do check your posture - try to look relaxed but avoid slouching (being too relaxed may suggest you're bored and not that interested in the job). Sit up straight and keep your shoulders relaxed and facing forwards (or angled towards the person asking you a question). Crossing your arms should also be avoided, as it can make you look defensive.

Don't fidget - avoid touching your face or hair and using your hands a lot while you're talking (too much movement can be distracting). Also try not to tap your fingertips or cross and uncross your legs - and most importantly, resist the temptation to bite your nails, as it signals that you're nervous.

Do make eye contact - though not to the extent that you're staring at your interviewer (aim to hold eye contact for a few seconds at a time). If you have more than one interviewer, make eye contact with all of them individually whenever they ask you a question.

Don't forget to smile - especially when you first meet your interviewer or interviewers. However, don't grin too much, as it can be off putting. Try to reflect your interviewer by smiling when they smile, even laughing a little if they laugh.

Remember to ask questions

Most interviewers ask job candidates if they have any questions. Asking thoughtful questions can show a prospective employer that you're interested in the job. So don't get caught out - think about what you'd like to ask in advance. If

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you need to, write your questions down (though memorising them will make you appear more confident and spontaneous during the interview).

There are lots of questions you could ask, but here are a few examples to get you started:

- Why has this job become available?
- What's the biggest challenge facing the person who takes the job?
- What will be expected of the successful candidate?
- What will the priorities be of the person taking this job?
- Will there be any opportunities for training or gaining new skills?
- Will the job allow me to use any particular skills or qualifications?

Dress the part

While many people like to think their personality and abilities are the only things that matter when it comes to getting a job, the truth is the way someone looks can make a big difference too.

Try to find out the dress code for the company you're applying to, and dress for your interview accordingly. If you look the part, it may make the right impression and persuade your interviewer that you'd fit in well.

Above all, don't decide what you're going to wear on the day itself. Plan your outfit well in advance - the night before or even earlier - and make sure your clothes are well fitting, clean and ironed, and your shoes clean and polished. Try to avoid wearing strong perfume or aftershave (if you must

wear fragrance, choose something subtle), and keep jewelry and accessories to a minimum.

According to monster.co.uk, 73 per cent of managers say personal appearance is important in job interviews, while 62 per cent believe dress sense has a major impact on employability. Meanwhile, more than two thirds are put off instantly by tattoos. So if you have any tattoos that are visible outside work clothes, you may want to consider covering them up.

It's also a good idea to avoid drinking the night before an interview or smoking before your interview starts so that you don't smell of drink or smoke.

Stay calm

No matter how well prepared you may be, it's still natural to feel nervous during job interviews. If you can choose the time of your interview, opt for the morning - that way, you'll have less time during the day to get worked up. Also start using techniques that will keep you calm in the run up to your interview:

- Get a good night's sleep. Try doing something that helps you to relax before going to bed and avoid caffeine (in tea, coffee, chocolate and colas) and alcohol.
- Have a healthy breakfast and - if relevant - lunch.
- Drink plenty of water to avoid getting dehydrated.
- Also try to have a short walk before your interview and take lots of calming deep breaths.

Follow up

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After your interview, try to get feedback on how it went. Before you leave, you could also ask your interviewer when a decision will be made about who they will appoint.

Some experts recommend sending a letter or email to your interviewer to say thank you for seeing you. If you plan to send a follow-up note, do it within two business days and use the opportunity to stress your interest in the company and the job, and to remind your interviewer what makes you a good candidate. Use the right names and titles of all those who interviewed you, and make sure your follow-up note goes to the right address (whether via post or email).

You may feel a little awkward sending a follow-up note at first, but doing so shows that you can be proactive, and it might just give you the edge over someone else the company is also considering.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this guide, in the first instance call our free helpline on 0808 801 0550. Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

Other sources of information:

National Careers Service

nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

Advice on choosing or changing career, including help with preparing for job interviews.

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