

Interview Skills & Preparation Guidance

Interview tips

Homework (If you know who the employer is):

- What exactly does the company do?
- How is the company structured?
- What are the current hot topics (company and industry)?
- What are the company's values and principles?
- What does the basic information suggest? Doing well/poorly?
- Who are the key personalities?

Phone interviews:

- Agree a time when you know you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Ensure the interviewer has the correct contact number to reach you on.
- Ensure your chosen location is quiet – no background noise (traffic, chatter, children etc.)
- Ensure your chosen location has satisfactory reception if using mobile.
- Try to use a location with a table and space to spread basic documents.

Face-to-face interviews:

- Avoid cramming in revision immediately before the interview.
- Avoid taking sheets of notes into the interview for reference.
- Avoid taking (writing) your own notes in the interview.
- Try to dress to fit the company/role on offer, not your old or current one.
- Always dress on the side of smartness unless certain otherwise.

Key questions to prepare for

1. Tell us about yourself.

Recommend:

- Plan on 2 minutes max.
- Consider starting with your immediate situation and why you have left/are thinking about leaving your current job (most relevant).
- Go back to education.
- Then each key role/phase of your professional career back up to current situation.

2. What do you consider your key achievements? What are you most proud of?

Consider educational, professional, and personal.

3. Why are you interested in us and the role on offer?

4. What have you been told are your areas for development?

Only ever give 1. Apply STAR. What was identified, what you did, what the positive outcome/development was.

5. Tell us about a time you managed a project, or showed leadership or innovation?

Apply STAR. Try to use impressive examples with valuable and positive outcomes. Consider using one of your stated key achievements.

6. Tell us about a time you came up against an obstacle or were faced with confrontation? Apply STAR. Use examples with positive outcomes and/or lessons learnt.

7. What is your management style?

8. What cultural differences do you think you will face between your previous/current employer and this one?

Try to highlight similarities and skills & methods that both areas share.

General principles of answering

Do

- Always apply PEPP:
 - Show that you're *prepared*
 - Be *engaging*
 - Be *positive* and describe positive decisions and results
 - Demonstrate your *professionalism*
- Always apply STAR when giving examples.
- Always finish on a positive – even when giving a 'negative' example.
- Always be focused, and interested in the role on offer.

Don't

- Do not volunteer examples of failure.
- Do not answer with irrelevance or waffle – answer the question.
- Do not belittle yourself or your achievement.
- Avoid negatives, after-thoughts, cynical or sarcastic comments, and strong negative opinions.
- Never be confrontational with the interviewer.

STAR

If asked to give an example of something you did, always follow this method:

Situation

- Describe the situation you were confronted with. Why was it important? Why and how were you involved?

Task

- Describe the task which needed to be done to resolve the situation.

Action

- Describe what you did. Be clear about your exact role. Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you made the decisions you did.

Result

- Describe what the result was. Always volunteer examples with positive outcomes. If asked for an example of something that did not work – always use an example where positive lessons were learnt and follow this up with an example of when these lessons learnt were evidenced.

Asking questions in an interview

Consider asking some of the following additional questions:

- If I got this role, what would you see as my priorities in the first e.g. 3 months? (to future line manager)
- How does this role fit into the company's longer-term plans? (to future line manager)
- How would you define success for this position? (to future line manager)
- As an employee, how could I exceed your/the company's expectations? (to any interviewer)
- What do you like about coming into work here? (to any interviewer)

More importantly, questions you should not ask:

- Do not ask about gossip or rumors you've heard about the company or role.
- Do not ask too much about the interviewer themselves.
- Do not ask if they do background checks.
- Do not ask how quickly you can be promoted.
- Do not ask how soon after hiring you could start applying for other positions in the company.
- If you can Google it, don't ask it (unless the interview purpose is to introduce you to a role).
- Do not ask about salary, leave, or benefits during interviews (unless with caution during 1st interview or openly during final offer/contract negotiations).