

# Getting ready for an interview

You've been asked to attend an interview - congratulations! Now what? Preparing for your interview will help you perform well, reduce your nerves and increase your chances of getting the job.

## Research

Learn as much as you can about the company and its reputation - it will be easy to research big companies but may be harder if it's a small business. Start with their website, read their annual reports, read about them in the press and if possible, speak to others who either work there or know the company quite well. Know:

- The size of the company
- The products and/or services it offers
- The target market
- The workplace culture

## Prepare for interview questions

Identify your key strengths and think of examples of how you can demonstrate that you have the right skills to successfully do the job. The interviewer may also ask you about your weaknesses. Think of ways you can answer these questions in a positive way - answer with a weakness that doesn't relate to the role you've applied for or state how you're currently working to improve a weakness.

If an interviewer ever addresses a gap in your skills or knowledge, express your willingness to learn.

## What should I wear?

What you wear depends entirely on the type of job and company. If you're unsure, it's best to dress conservatively in a dark suit, and always ensure you're well groomed. Avoid:

- Dirty, stained or torn clothing
- Overpowering perfume or aftershave
- Noisy jewellery
- Loud ties or shirts
- Sheer fabrics and low cut blouses
- Bringing large and bulky or numerous bags
- Anything else that is going to distract

## Attending interviews

Thorough preparation should leave you feeling calm and ready for your job interview. Here are some tips to see you through the interview.

- **Do not be late** - reduce your stress levels and get there early
- **Make eye contact** - look at the person who is talking to you and when answering questions, be sure to make eye contact with all the people in the room
- **Listen** – do not interrupt and if you do not understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat it
- **Be friendly and smile** - but do not be too casual and relaxed - you still want to be seen as professional and courteous
- **Give short answers** - get straight to the point and do not waffle, but do not give basic 'yes' or 'no' answers either

- **Frame negative things in a positive way** - never say bad things about former or current employers

## What do employers look for?

Employers look for the following traits in people they interview:

- **Honesty and integrity** – do not lie about your experience or achievements
- **Good communication** - be clear in your responses
- **A good fit** - they want to work with someone who can do the job and fit in with their culture

## What questions will they ask?

You'll receive a range of questions, each designed to determine your suitability to the job and the company. It's a good idea to think about how you would answer these questions before you get into the interview.

- Why do you want to work here?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- What are your long term goals?
- Why do you think you are suited to this role?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Can you tell me about a difficult situation you have faced?
- What do you like to do in your free time?

## What questions should I ask?

You will most likely have the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions. Even if they have covered everything you want to know about the role, it is still worth asking questions as it shows you have carefully considered the job. Ask any of the following (but not if they have already been answered):

- How would you describe the workplace culture?
- What long-term career opportunities are available?
- What are the key challenges of this role?
- What is the company's view on training?

People are asked to return for a second (or even third interview) because the employer feels that they need more information or need other staff to meet you before making a final decision.

Questions may be similar to the first interview, especially if you are being interviewed by new panel of people, but they are more likely to ask specific questions that relate to the duties of the job.

## Inappropriate interview questions

There are some questions in a job interview that you do not have to answer. For example, you do not have to answer questions that you feel are too personal or could be used to discriminate against you.

## Examples of inappropriate questions

Some questions are inappropriate even if they do not immediately set alarm bells ringing in your head.

The person interviewing you should not ask you about anything that is not specifically related to the job you are applying for, or your ability to do that job.

They should not ask you what political or sporting clubs you support or what non-work-related groups you are a member of. They should not ask you if you have any children.

And of course, any question about your age, marital status, religion or sexual preference is a question you do not have to answer.

These sorts of questions might seem friendly, but the interviewers could use your answers against you. For example, the reason you did not get the job might not be because you did not have the right skills or experience, but because you and the interviewer voted for different political parties at the last election.

The golden rule is, if you cannot see how something directly relates to the job or the workplace environment, you do not have to talk about it in an interview.

### **Talking about previous employers**

You are under no obligation to answer questions about your previous employers if the answers would reveal confidential information. In fact, it is not only unprofessional, it is unethical for you to talk about any confidential business details or personal details relating to people you have worked with.

### **Equal opportunity**

Being asked an inappropriate question in an interview can sometimes be an issue of equal opportunity or discrimination.

The [Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission](#) (new window) has some guidelines about things that you do not have to talk about in a job interview.

If you have a disability, it is up to you to decide what you say about it at a job interview. You have rights and responsibilities in this situation and the interviewers should respect this. You can find out more about this at [Choosing your Path - Disclosure it's a Personal Decision](#) (new window).

### **How to get around an inappropriate question**

It is hard to know what to say when you are asked about something you would rather not talk about. Try and be polite and steer the conversation back to more appropriate topics.

Here are a couple of examples of how to answer inappropriate questions:

- "I don't think we need to talk about this. I'd prefer to talk about things that are relevant to the job and your organisation."
- "I don't see why that question is relevant to the job, or my ability to do that job. Could you explain why you think it's important? I'll try to answer in a way that's relevant to the job"

### **Things to remember**

Job interviews are hard enough without having to deal with questions that make you uncomfortable or that trick you into revealing private things about yourself.

Just remember that even though you are just doing a job interview, you have rights all the same.

Knowing those rights and knowing how to stand up for them - or knowing who can help you to protect those rights - is an important part of the job application process.

## Job Interview Tips: TODAY

You have got the job interview you have been waiting for and you do not want to mess it up. Just think about the word TODAY. Each letter can remind you of something you might be asked about

**T** = Teamwork

**O** = Obstacles

**D** = Duties

**A** = Achievements

**Y** = Your strengths and weaknesses

### Teamwork

Employers want to know that you can work as part of a team. Almost any job you can think of will require you to work with people. Even if you have never had a job before you will be expected to give examples of teamwork.

There are plenty of non-work examples of being part of a team, including:

- Being part of a sports team
- Doing a dance class
- Organising family events

All you need to demonstrate is that you can communicate, make decisions and work with other people to achieve your goals. Being a part of any of the above kinds of groups requires those sorts of skills.

### Obstacles

In work, like in many other areas of life, there are problems to solve. Your employer needs to be confident that you know how to handle yourself in a sticky situation.

Examples of overcoming obstacles include:

- If you have had trouble learning a new skill but kept at it until you improved
- If you had a setback in your personal life but still managed to succeed in your work life
- If there were unexpected changes when you were planning an event

If you have had any experiences like the above ones, tell your interviewer about it. Explain what the obstacle was, how you dealt with it, and how things turned out in the end.

### Duties

When you are asked about duties, you are being asked about what sort of things you have done in your past jobs.

You need to be specific. If someone was filming a day in the life of you in your old job what would they have seen you doing?

- Did you go to a lot of meetings?
- Did you respond to customer complaints?
- Did you train new employees?

If you have not had a job before you could talk about:

- Something you did at school
- Volunteering you did at an event
- Your work as part of a community group.

You will probably only get asked this question if you have had a job before.

## **Achievements**

A job interview is your chance to sell yourself. What makes you stand out from the other applicants? If you won an award at school or were named Employee of the Month at your old job, let the interviewer know about it.

You can talk about other achievements outside work too, like if you helped organise a successful fundraising event for your local sports team.

If you set out to do something and you did it – that is an achievement. For example, if you started out baby-sitting for one of your friends and they recommended you to their friends and now you have regular baby-sitting jobs – that is an achievement.

Make sure that you recognise your achievements and feel comfortable talking about them. You never know which achievement could score you a job.

## **Your strengths and weaknesses**

Okay, so 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' don't start with a 'y', but you have to try to remember examples of both anyway.

### **What are your strengths?**

Think about what people compliment you on, for example:

- Your friends might say you are a good listener
- Your family knows you are reliable
- You are comfortable talking in front of groups of people

These are positives in life and in the workforce. Let the interviewer know what your strengths are and then give an example for each.

For example, "I love to have everything neat and organised. At my old job my workmates would always come to my desk to borrow stationery because I knew where everything was. "

### **What are your weaknesses?**

The worst answer to this is to say you do not have any. If you say you have none the interviewer will either think you are lying or not interested in becoming a better person or employee.

The best way to answer a question about your weaknesses is to be honest about what you're not good at, but then explain how you are working to improve it. For example:

- I'm not too fast at touch-typing, but I recently borrowed a computer program that helps me to practice and I'm getting better
- I don't know how to use spreadsheet programs, but I'm good with Word and I'm keen to learn
- I haven't worked with engines much, but I'm good with tools and I did okay in metalwork at school

## **Remember - TODAY!**

Keeping these five areas in mind when you go for that job interview is a great way to remember the kind of things you will probably get asked. It is a great way to improve your chances of getting a new job - TODAY!

## **How to deal with tricky questions in a job interview**

Interviewers might sometimes ask tricky questions. These questions are designed to get you to reveal something about yourself. They also want to check out how well you communicate and whether you can think on your feet.

In an interview you should always answer every question as honestly and positively as you can. Do not spend too much time giving your answers to tricky questions, though – you do not want them to be the focus of the interview.

### **Examples of tricky questions**

Here are some examples of tricky questions you may be asked.

#### **"Why did you leave your last job?"**

Here are some possible reasons you could give for leaving your last job:

- It didn't fit with your interests at that time
- You had to travel too far each day
- There were no opportunities to advance your career
- You've increased your qualifications and are looking for work in a more specialised field

#### **"Why have you had so many jobs?"**

You don't want the interviewer to think you cannot commit to a job. Here are some possible answers to this tricky question:

- You wanted to try different jobs to broaden your skills - this has given you a wealth of experience to bring to the job
- You were unsure about where you wanted to work, but now you are clear about what you want and are ready to make a commitment to one workplace

Your answer to this question could also include some of the reasons for leaving your job outlined above.

#### **"Why were you out of work for so long?"**

You don't want the interviewer to think that no one wants to employ you. It's better to say you chose to take time off between jobs. This might be because:

- You needed a break for physical or emotional reasons
- You wanted to explore study opportunities
- You were traveling to gain experience
- You had a personal situation that needed your attention

## Brainteasers

Sometimes employers like to hit their potential employees with brainteaser questions.

Interviewers ask these questions to test your thinking and check your problem-solving skills. It's all about how creative and resourceful you can be.

There are four types of brainteasers:

- 1) Questions with correct answers
- 2) Questions without "correct" answers
- 3) Questions that you have to break down
- 4) Questions that test your performance

### How to handle them

Here are some tips to help you answer brainteasers:

- The obvious answer is usually wrong
- All the information you need is provided
- Ask questions if you need clarification
- Share your thought processes
- Don't repeat the question to stall for time

### Sample questions

Here are some brainteasers and their answers to give you an idea of how they work.

#### Questions that have correct answers

*You're in a room with three light switches. Each switch controls a light bulb in the next room. All lights are off, and you can't see into the other room unless you go into it. You can go into the light bulb room once. How do you work out which switch controls which bulb?*

Call the switches 1, 2 and 3. Leave Switch 1 off. Turn Switch 2 on for five minutes and then off. Turn Switch 3 on. Enter the room. The bulb that is on is controlled by Switch 3. Feel the light bulbs. The warm bulb is controlled by Switch 2. The cold bulb is controlled by Switch 1.

#### Questions that don't have correct answers

*How would you weigh an aeroplane without scales?* There are many solutions, but one possible response is to put the plane on a boat and paint a mark where the waterline is. Now remove the jet and load the ship with items of known weight until it sinks to the line. The weight of the items is the plane's weight.

#### Questions that you have to break down

*Here's a mobile phone. Deconstruct it for me.*

All you have to do here is explain what the mobile phone does. Describe what it is as simply as you can. It's a tool you use to talk with people. Then talk about what it does. It can be used to store contact details, make calls, send emails, and take photos or videos. You could also talk about how you would use it if you got the job.

## Questions that test your performance

*Please take this pen and sell it to me.*

You have to convince the interviewer to buy the pen. You can be creative and make up some different uses for the pen (e.g. a hair pin, a lock pick, a back scratcher). The way you deliver this answer is important too. Get excited about the pen. You really believe in it!

### **Don't freak out**

Tricky questions are just another way that employers try to pick the best suited person for the job. But just because the questions are tricky doesn't mean they're impossible.

Remember - if you've prepared yourself to answer a few curly questions, then you've already given yourself a good a head start!

### **Creating a folio for a job interview**

So you've got the interview and they've asked you to bring in your folio. What now?

There are plenty of reasons you might be asked to bring in a folio to an interview. Whether you're an artist, a designer or a writer, whatever your field is there are a few things you should think about when putting your folio together.

### **Show your best work - not ALL your work**

You need to prove that you have what it takes to do the job, so choose work that demonstrates your range of abilities. If you're an artist, you could show one freehand sketch and one design that you did on computer.

You don't need to show everything you've ever done. If you include too many pieces in your folio your interviewers will not only get bored flicking through it, they might not have time to see your best work.

Be selective. Make it easy for them to see how good you are.

### **Show them what they want to see**

If you've got a written job description or - better still - a list of the type of work the interviewers want you to bring in then stick to what they've asked for! There's no point bringing in your abstract photography if you're applying for a job as a sign-painter.

If you have 3D work that demonstrates your skills, like a painting on canvas or a piece of clothing that you've designed, check if they want you to bring the real thing to the interview. Sometimes a photo of your work will do.

### **Show them the beginning, the middle and the end**

If you have a few pieces of work for the one project include them in sequence. This can help you to demonstrate that you can have an idea, flesh it out and make it happen. For example, if you're submitting a folio of your sculpture work, include your first rough drawing, a sketch to scale with colours and materials listed, and a photo of the finished sculpture.

**Know what you show**

Don't put something in your folio if you can't explain what it is or the creative process involved in putting it together.

You should be able to talk about anything you include and know where it sits inside your folio. Andrew Lam-Po-Tang of the Australian Graphic Design Association (AGDA) suggests that you make sure you have a "small story about each piece to make your passion and effort come alive" for the interviewers.

**Practice showing your folio**

Get to know your folio. Practice showing it to a friend or family member.

If you can, ask the advice of a teacher or someone you know who works in the industry.

Read through your folio by yourself. The better you know what's inside it, the more help it will be in your interview.

**The advantages of a good folio**

A folio can be an invaluable tool for arguing your case. It can prove to people why you should be the one who gets the job. Taking the time to make sure that your folio is right for the job, and that you know how to use it to demonstrate your abilities, can be the added advantage that makes you stand out from anyone else applying for that job.