

You've written your "Interview Winning CV", so now it's time to stand out from the other applicants at that all important interview.

To achieve this, it's essential that you prepare - poor preparation can lead to poor results. So what can you do to make an often stressful experience run that little bit smoother?

Planning for the Interview

Interviews are part of the selection process, but they may not always be traditional one-to-one interviews assessing your range of experience. You may have a telephone interview, be interviewed by a panel of people or be required to complete assessment tests.

It is important to find out what the interview will involve so you can prepare yourself accordingly, for example;

- Will it involve psychometric or skills tests, or giving a presentation?
- Will there be role play or group discussions?
- Or will it be an interview in front of a panel or just the one person?

An interview with your potential manager could be very detailed regarding your skills and knowledge whereas meeting with a personnel manager may be more general but just as challenging, so it is important to find out who is interviewing you and their position in the organisation.

Here are just some of the examples of interviews that you should plan for:

Assessments

The use of assessment centres are becoming common place, as they help to make selection more objective and focus on abilities through the use of interviews, written tests, role plays, PC based psychometric tests and group discussions, exercises and presentations. Assessments can last anything from a day to a week; they can be group or individual, formal or informal and are designed to see how you react within a specific situation.

Testing

Psychometric tests, comprise of two main types of test; performance based and self assessment questionnaires, they give a profile of people's characteristics that can be compared with impressions gleaned from an interview, but they cannot predict accurately whether someone will be good at the job or not.

Performance based tests are timed tests where you are assessed on how well or how quickly you perform specific tasks, testing your attainment, ability or aptitude, for example:

Interviews are a two-way discussion, delivering information about experiences and expectations. Ultimately, the interviewer needs to know how well you could carry out the job and how well you will fit in with their organisation, and you need to convince them that you are the solution to their recruitment situation.

- Attainment tests can be simple arithmetic or typing test or test of specialist knowledge, technology or experience
- Ability tests include verbal, numerical, spatial ability or "intelligence" tests
- Aptitude tests are used to evaluate how quickly you can pick up specific skills

Self assessment questionnaires such as interest and motivation and personality questionnaires create a picture of you through your response to a standard set of questions, there are no right or wrong answers, but they include consistency measures to check you are answering honestly.

Preparing for that Interview

A common misconception is that you do not need to prepare for an interview with a Recruitment Agency – don't forget they are "marketing" you too so they also need to know what their client's will be "buying".

Research is Key – research everything! The organisation, the role that you are being interviewed for, what it might involve, how you can make a difference, and just as importantly research the locality of your interview and the time it will take to get there – be aware that the location of your interview may be different from where you will be working. Aim to arrive 15 minutes before your interview time, however take a mobile phone and contact details with you so that if for some unseen reason you are delayed you can ALWAYS let the relevant person know. Always remember however to turn your mobile phone off during an interview.

Interviews aren't always held on site nowadays and can be held in hotels or rented premises, so be aware of your personal safety: Find out as much as possible about the employer before you agree to attend an interview, make sure it's being held in a public place and tell a friend or relative where you are going, who you are meeting and when you expect to return – even arrange to have someone collect you at a pre-arranged time. **Remember – jobs that are "too good to be true" usually are.**

Jobseeker Guide

Interview Planning, Preparation and Technique

What to wear? – First impressions count, you have already impressed with your CV, so make careful choices on what you will wear to your interview and how it is perceived. Ask advice from your friends and family, try your outfits on and make sure they are ready the night before – a lot less stressful when you have everything to hand.

Do I have everything I need? – There is nothing worse than getting to an interview and realising you have forgotten a document or a completed form that is required. It is common practice to provide interviewees with instructions on items they need to bring along to an interview, however it's worth checking whether they need to see your exam certificates, or Proof of Eligibility to Work in the UK. Have them ready – with your clothes – the night before your interview.

Plan your Questions – Think about the questions that the interviewer may ask you and prepare how you will respond, these may include questions on your life outside of work. Also think about the questions that you would like to ask the interviewer, especially about the role or the organisation, an interview is a two way meeting, giving you chance to find out information about your potential career move, for example:

- How did this job vacancy come about?
- How do they see the role developing?
- What are the challenges facing the team/department/organisation?
- What would they expect you to achieve in the first three months after appointment?
- Are there any problems in this role that you should know about?

Improve that interview technique

The first few minutes of an interview are crucial as they strongly influence how the interviewer feels about you. Start with a firm handshake and use a positive voice and body language, speaking clearly and distinctly. Be enthusiastic about the job and the prospect of working for them by smiling and using hand movements and facial expressions to emphasise your enthusiasm and to support what you are saying. Make sure that you keep enough eye contact to establish sincerity.

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Use convincing STAR examples (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to show what you've achieved in previous organisations and what you could contribute to this one. Talk positively about results and benefits, profitability and productivity to convince the interviewer that you are determined to succeed

Remember that most interviewers don't set out to catch you out. It's their job to ask challenging, probing questions so they get to know you better, they need to find out about you and how you'd fit in with the job and organisation.

You can improve your interview technique by:

- Listening attentively to questions and thinking about your reply before you speak
- Answering questions with more than a simple "yes" or "no"
- Asking for clarification if you don't understand a question
- Using the interview to ask questions which successfully demonstrates your research into the job, the organisation and the market in which it operates.

Do not however;

- Criticise your previous employer or colleagues – it's unprofessional
- Negotiate your salary or terms of employment until you have been offered the job
- Pressurise your interviewer for a decision – nobody likes to be put on the spot

Closing that interview

Remember interview experience is never wasted, and you should treat all interviews as a positive experience, shake hands with your interviewer, and express your thanks at having the opportunity to explore the vacancy with them.

It is good practice after your interview to review your performance while it's still fresh in your mind by assessing where you feel you managed to promote yourself to your best ability, and where you feel you need to improve. It is useful to note your impressions of the organisation, the types of questions they asked and how you coped, so that if you are invited back for a second interview, you can build upon this information.



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