



# How to conduct a successful interview

Assuming that you have submitted a good CV, you will hopefully be invited in for interview. In certain circumstances, such as applying for an overseas job, you may conduct this over the telephone, but interviews are generally held in person with yourself and several recruitment staff.



## On the run-up



Always, always prepare for an interview. Make sure you know what the company is involved in, and something of the company's history and background. If you walk into an interview knowing you have prepared yourself well, you will feel all the more confident, and this will come across when you talk. Look into what the company has been doing of late and research their current projects. If the company has been in the news recently, they will probably expect you to be aware of it. Larger companies have PR departments you can contact, and smaller ones will provide you with some information. Many companies have websites-hunt around on the Internet for useful information. If you know anyone in a similar post have a chat to them about what it entails.

Make sure you have thought about answers to all the obvious questions. Don't sound too rehearsed in the interview, but make sure you won't stumble if they ask you why you applied to the company, or what you enjoyed about your mathematics degree, for example.

Interviewers will often ask awkward questions just to see how you handle them. Be especially cautious of self-reflection questions, such as, "If we asked your colleagues or boss, what do you think they would say about you?" This is an interview so you need to promote yourself and not be overly modest, but you don't want to come across as arrogant either. It is a thin and difficult line to tread.



If they ask you about your weaknesses, pick one and explain how you are taking steps to overcome it—turn a negative into a positive. For example you may say that sometimes you can be hasty in making decisions, but are currently working on ensuring that you always take the time to think carefully first.

If they ask you an analytical question don't immediately leap in with an answer. Talk them through how you would go about finding a solution, state any assumptions you are making, or figures you would need to use in calculations. One favourite is, "how many piano tuners are there in Oxford?" To arrive at a solution you would need to make an estimation of the population of the city, what percentage own a piano, how often they would need to be retuned, how long it would take a tuner to fix one piano, and so on.

## The day before



Ensure you know the time, date and location of the interview. Put a post-it note on your bedroom door if you need to. If you've been told, memorise the name of the person interviewing you. It's very impressive greeting them by name as you enter the interview room.

Do not under any circumstances allow yourself to arrive late. Leave especially early—a train delay is simply no excuse. Make sure you know how to get there and won't get lost and arrive flustered. Do a practice run the day before if necessary.

When it comes to deciding what to wear, always err on the side of professional smartness. This will usually mean wearing a suit, but if in doubt, you can always phone beforehand to check. Make sure that your outfit is clean and well presented.

It is often a good idea to prepare a few things the night before. Have your clothes ready in advance. Get out any references, certificates or any other documents you may need so that you don't forget them. Always take a copy of your CV into the interview with you so that you can refer to it if need-be. Read through it before you go in so that it is fresh

in your mind when they start asking questions about it.

## The interview day

When you arrive make sure the receptionist knows you are there and who you are seeing. Relax whilst you wait to be called in. You've prepared for this and you're confident. All you need to do now is show them that you're right for the job.

Introduce yourself and make good eye contact when you shake the hands of the employers.

There is sometimes too much emphasis put on body language during interviews. As long as you appear relaxed and attentive you will be fine. Obviously don't slouch, look down constantly or fidget. Sit comfortably with your hands in your lap (never cross your arms) and remember to smile.



Don't worry about being nervous; everybody will be. Take deep breaths to help relax, and try to turn your nerves into an enthusiastic energy.

Don't speak in a bored monotone. Sound interested and keen. Talk slightly slower than you would normally, and be sure not to mumble or nervously jabber away. Listen carefully to the questions and don't interrupt. Pause before answering to show that you're being thoughtful. Often your interviewers are more interested in your thought processes in arriving at an answer, rather than the answer itself. The recruitment staff will be looking for someone that is articulate, competent, and can think on their feet. They will be testing you on these grounds during the interview. The employer is looking to fill a specific post, so make sure you angle your answers to show how ideal you would be for this particular job specification.

Have a few questions in mind to ask them at the end of the interview. But don't show up your ignorance of things that you could have found out for yourself with a little research. Don't ask something silly just for the sake of it. The interview is not just to see if you're suitable for the job, but also to determine whether the position and company are right for you.

And remember, the interview does not need to be the place to discuss the fine details of a position such as salary, holiday entitlement or other benefits. You can ask general questions about the company's policies on these matters, or what facilities are available to staff, but the finer details can be sorted out when and if they offer you the job.

However, if an interviewer brings up the subject of salary, try and be non-committal. Say that you would rather wait until the job is formally offered to you before discussing salary.



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