

8 Tips to Ace a Job Interview!

The good news is that 'Acing an Interview' is something you can learn to do! It requires thoughtful preparation along with the ability to be at ease in the interview room. And that comes from you feeling comfortable and confident in discussing why you are the best fit for the role.

Interviewing is a skill worth developing. Being able to interact effectively with the interviewer and to articulate your thoughts clearly are just as important in getting the job as the qualifications and experience on your CV.

1. Interview Preparation

Winging it is never worth it. Not only will your interviewer see right through it, but your answers (and your self-confidence) will seriously suffer if you don't invest the time to properly prepare. You should dedicate at least an hour to your preparation.

Here's an example, outlining a 60-minute preparation exercise:

- **5 minutes** re-reading and analysing the job description, focusing on the essential requirements and responsibilities, in order to tailor your answers and to home in on the most important aspects of the job.
- **5 minutes** re-reading your CV and cover letter to review how you pitched yourself in the first place.
- **15 minutes** researching potential interview questions specific to the position and the industry.
- **20 minutes** practicing answers to these questions and recalling specific examples from your work experience, such as major accomplishments, challenges, or milestones that will serve as anecdotes to strengthen your responses to situational and behavioural-based interview questions.
- **15 minutes** researching the company, looking into their history, people, mission and values, and recent projects.

As in all things, practice makes perfect. In addition to practicing these steps on your own, ask a friend or family member to pose as an interviewer so you can get used to answering questions in real time.

2. Dress Appropriately and Be on Time

Yes, people do judge you by what you're wearing, so dress appropriately! If you're concerned, go and watch people coming and going from their offices a few days before the interview, or see what you can pick up from their website. If their style is business casual, you should wear a smart dress or skirt/trousers with a jacket. If they are wearing jeans and flip flops, you're probably fine in business casual, but better to be overdressed than underdressed, in most industries!

There are very few (if any) excuses for arriving late for an interview. Do whatever you need to do to get there 10 to 15 minutes in advance, whether it's planning what you'll wear the night before, setting several alarms, or leaving extra early to account for potential travel disruptions!

3. Think Before You Speak

A well-thought-out answer is always better than a rushed one.

Of course, you don't want to sit there in silence for five minutes as you ponder an answer, but it is acceptable to take several seconds to think before you speak.

Avoid the "ums" and "uhs" and buy yourself time by repeating the interviewers' questions back to them, or by using a phrase like, "That's an interesting question!"

If you're really stumped, you can say, "What a great question. I've actually never been asked this before; let me just take a second or two to think about this."

4. Speak Clearly, Cohesively, and Calmly

Nerves can get you talking a mile a minute, and so can the simple desire to convey as much valuable information about yourself as possible. However, talking too fast can make you look rushed, flustered or anxious. Make a conscious effort to slow down, breathe steadily and speak calmly and clearly. It will help you avoid interview stress.

Lots of interviewers are going to ask you to "tell me about a time when ..." followed by something appropriate for your field and this particular job. Prepare your strengths and skills - having distilled the strengths and skills the organisation is looking for in your CV, have 1 or 2 examples for each that you can draw on. A useful format for preparing examples is Situation/Challenge - How you resolved it/Made things happen – Results.

Brainstorming a list of possible questions and working on your answers as part of your preparation will boost your confidence hugely on the day.

5. Actively Listen

Anyone can nod, smile, and say "Right" or "Exactly" over and over, but how many people actually listen?

Interviews are especially tricky because you do need to be listening to your interviewer's question while mentally preparing your answer. However, if you don't listen well in the first place, you might miss the entire point of the question, and as a result, your answer could fall totally flat.

Stay in the moment and don't let yourself zone out, even if it feels like the interviewer is endlessly blabbing on. Preparation will help tremendously (so that you have material ready to discuss and won't have to think it up on the spot), but good listening skills and the ability to stay focused are key.

6. Be Positive

No company wants to hire someone with a bad attitude. You're most likely going to be asked why you're looking to leave your current job or why you left your last job. Don't lie, but don't be super negative either. Prepare an answer to explain why you left your last job and how this new job is a great fit for you. Express your interest in the role and in the company, and passion for the work you do. Keep in the back of your mind that you are a valuable asset to any employer!

Relax, be yourself, and reply with confidence. Recap your experience and promote your most valuable professional assets: know how to discuss and emphasise your best qualities and strongest skills. If asked to talk about a challenging situation, include what you did to help solve it, and also what you learned that you could draw on in the future.

Everyone dreads that "what is your weakness?" question. Nobody is perfect, and the best way to prepare for this is to think about areas you are developing or where you may not fully demonstrate the experience. Ideally, managers will hire on potential rather than expecting you to have 100% of everything they are looking for. Be honest about how you are tackling any development areas or how you plan to gain the experience in the job.

Have questions of your own to ask the interviewer. Don't ask questions that could be answered by looking at the company website. Do ask questions about the challenges of the position, what success looks like, and how this position fits in with the team or organisation's goals. Remember, you want the interviewer to know you're really interested in succeeding in this position, and you need this information to do that.

7. Body Language and Being Yourself

Remember, your body language can matter as much as your words. Walk in with a smile on your face, offer a firm handshake, and sit up tall, leaning slightly forward to engage in the conversation.

Your mindset can make you more nervous. If you feel on the back-foot, that you have to be like someone else or are somehow inferior to the interviewer, that will probably come across in your body language or tone of voice. You might imagine that they have all the power and you have none. But don't forget that interviewers are looking to find talented people to contribute to their team. They may also be nervous, and hopeful that you are the right candidate for them. So go in feeling like an equal, and remember that this is a two-way discussion. Is this the right job and organisation for you? How does it align with your values? How can you fulfil your potential in this role?

8. Say Thank You and Ask for Feedback

Don't underestimate the importance of saying "Thank you." As soon as your interview concludes, thank your interviewer for their time and for the opportunity to learn more about the company and the position. When you get home, always follow up with a thank-you email, restating your interest.

If you are unsuccessful, there is often a good reason. Use it as a learning opportunity and make sure that you request feedback, ideally by telephone so you can get a clear idea of what they were looking for and how you might improve next time around, especially if this position matches the kind of role you really want.

Key Takeaways

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT:

Take time to practice your responses to the most frequently asked interview questions. Get really familiar with examples from previous roles that demonstrate you have the key strengths/skills the company is looking for.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE:

Interviews are less stressful if you get ready ahead of time, figure out what you're going to wear, know where you need to be and how you're going to get there.

FOLLOW-UP IS IMPORTANT:

Always follow-up after a job interview with an email or note thanking the interviewer for their time and ask for feedback if you've been unsuccessful on this occasion.

FINALLY: Don't panic at the thought of your next interview. Prepare in advance, and you'll do a great job!