

biz executive

INTERVIEW ADVICE

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OK so you now have an interview on the basis of a well conceived CV. In order to maximise your chances of success you must be well prepared for the interview stage. An exhaustive list of candidate qualities and preparation answers to interview questions is not always useful and a client is most likely to make their decision based on your personality and how closely you match their job remit.

There are several different types of interview that you should prepare for dependant on the type of industry you are applying to work in. These are:

- 1. One-on-one**
- 2. Panel interview**
- 3. Group interview (groups of candidates and two or more interviewers)**
- 4. Telephone interview**
- 5. Technical interview (one or more interviewers)**

Looking at these in more detail:

1. One-on-one

This type of interview can last from 20 minutes to an hour or more. The interviewer may be trained and experienced in recruitment interviewing techniques or may be doing their first one ever - and perhaps feeling a little nervous about it. Your interviewer may be the Personnel Manager, your departmental Manager or the Chief Executive. You may know in advance who it will be and you may not. This type of interview normally has various phases, including:

- Setting you at ease with polite conversation (How was your journey? etc).
- Detailed exploration/core of the interview (probing areas of your CV and responses on your application form; asking additional questions).
- Your chance to ask the interviewer questions.
- Bringing it to a close (they thank you for attending and usually explain what happens next and within what timescale).

Your interviewer may ask straightforward questions designed to help you relax and give the best of yourself, or may take an aggressive stance to see how you respond under pressure. Alternatively they may throw seemingly bizarre questions at you such as: “What flower would you like to be - and why”? Such questions are designed to test your ability to “think on your feet” and sometimes, to test your creative thinking and even sense of humour.

2. Panel interview

Expect anything from two to four or more interviewers. Each one will be there for a specific purpose, perhaps representing different departments or different management functions. They may all be sitting behind a row of desks, a long table or may be seated in an informal style i.e. semicircle, with you facing them. Expect also to feel more comfortable with some panel members than others - some may be smiling and easy-going, others more brusque or aggressive. As in the one-to-one interview, some will be trained recruitment interviewers, some won't.

The phases of the interview will normally mirror those in the one-to-one, with different members asking questions in the second core phase, probably in line with their own interests/responsibilities in the organisation.

3. Group interview

These are a common occurrence in assessment centres but may also occur in other interview situations. For example, you might undergo two interviews on the same day, one with a group of candidates (competitors for the job) with a subsequent one-to-one interview. Evaluation of your performance in both settings would determine whether or not you got the job. Putting candidates together for a group interview gives the interviewers a chance to assess skills such as: sociability, leadership, sense of humour, personality and teamwork...and, of course, to compare candidates against each other. Types of questions asked will differ from one-to-one or panel interviews in that they will focus on issues/hypothetical problems for the group to discuss, whilst the interviewers observe and make notes of responses and interactions.

4. Telephone interview

Not as common as any of the above types of interview and not as easy to prepare for, in that you may get very little warning of one occurring. Some telephone interviews result from you having made a conventional paper application whilst others follow on from you responding to a previous automated data-collection, i.e. a pre-recorded question and yes/no answer, telephone “interview” which may have lasted only a few minutes and which would have been computer-scored afterwards. Such computer generated conversations are rare in both the upstream and downstream industry but have been known to occur. The live telephone interview may last from 30-40 minutes and should be at a pre-arranged time - this may well be during an evening or at the weekend. The obvious drawbacks are: not being able to see your interviewer, not being able to gauge their reactions to your answers and having to convey all your skills, knowledge and personality over the telephone.

5. Technical interview

Expect one of these if you are applying for a technical position such as petroleum engineering or energy trading. One or more interviewers on the panel may interview you. Don't be surprised if you are asked fairly detailed technical questions and/or shown, for example, a seismic section or risk report, depending on your discipline, and asked to interpret it. If the job is relevant to your degree course or previous experience, expect in-depth, knowledge-based questions based on any part of your previous experience and/or education. Other general questions will of course accompany the technical kind.

Having now covered the types of interviews you can expect there are four areas which should be considered when preparing for an interview of any kind:

i. Contact names & directions to the place of interview

ii. Full candidate specifications & job description

iii. Relevant company information

iv. Interview question preparation

Looking at these areas in more detail:

i. Contact names & directions to the place of interview

You will need to know who you are meeting, at what time and date and how you will travel there. Ask your BIZ consultant for travel advice as they will have already visited the client at their offices. Alternatively use the tube planner (<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/tube/>) to find the quickest route across London and/or use the National Rail planner (<http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/en/pj/jp>) for UK wide train travel information. Online maps can be found at <http://www.streetmap.co.uk/> and <http://www.multimap.com/>. It is also useful to make a note of the title of your interviewer to better align any questions you may wish to ask them.

ii. Full candidate specifications & job description

It is vital that you are fully aware of the details of the position you are interviewing for. Preparation without this information is incomplete. At BIZ a full candidate specification and job description is available for every position on which we act as the recruitment specialist. It is always important to consider how your personal skill set is aligned to the candidate specification. Be prepared to answer tough questions on your suitability for the role, based on this information.

iii. Relevant company information

There are many different questions a client may ask you about their company so a thorough review of their information is essential. The best way to find this information is through the internet as the majority of clients will have a website. Other avenues to pursue include client brochures. Typical questions on the company may include:

- Who the CEO is and who the main department heads are
- What products and services the company provides
- What is the size of the company
- Who the company's main competitors are

Your BIZ consultant is available to help you through the whole of the recruitment process. Do not be afraid to ask the obvious questions as this is almost always better than asking your interviewer.

iv. Interview question preparation

You should always prepare for basic interview questions, some of which are listed below. Other questions will pertain to the role you are interviewing for. Again there is an almost infinite list of questions that can be asked. If you think on your feet and try to answer each question with relevance to your personal skill set and/or how you would be able to do the job effectively then you will be fine.

Sample questions include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to leave your current job? (Why did you leave your last job?)
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Which adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- Why should I hire you?
- What past accomplishments gave you satisfaction
- What makes you want to work hard?

- What type of work environment do you like best?
- Why do you want this job?
- How do you handle pressure and stress?
- Explain how you overcame a major obstacle.
- Where do you see yourself five (ten or fifteen) years from now?
- What qualifies you for this job?
- Give me an example of when you have shown leadership.

Towards the end of your interview you will usually be given the opportunity to ask your interviewer(s) some questions. The nature of your questions will help to show your insight into the company. Be careful not to repeat information that was given to you in the interview.

Sample questions about the job:

- What are the long-term objectives of this job?
- Who would be my immediate supervisor and where does he or she fit into the organisation?
- Would you please describe your management style?
- What are my potential co-workers like and how many are there?
- How much autonomy would I have in making decisions?
- What would be my budget and spending authority and responsibilities?
- What level of input would I have in determining my objectives and deadlines?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?

Sample questions about the company:

- How does XYZ Company acknowledge outstanding employee performance?
- What are this department's goals and how do they fit with XYZ Company's?
- How does this department fit in with XYZ Company's five-year plan?
- Is this department responsible for its own profit and loss?

- Does the department or XYZ Company face any major challenges?
- Do you foresee any significant changes in XYZ Company?
- What's XYZ's policy about employees advancing their education?
- Does XYZ offer employee training?

Any interview guide cannot cover every eventuality but it is often useful to consider a list of do's and don'ts to avoid making that interview faux pas.

DO:

- Dress appropriately for the industry; err on the side of being conservative to show you take the interview seriously. Your personal grooming and cleanliness should be impeccable.
- Know the exact time and location of your interview; know how long it takes to get there, park, find a rest room to freshen up, etc.
- Arrive early; 10 minutes prior to the interview start time.
- Treat other people you encounter with courtesy and respect. Their opinions of you might be solicited during hiring decisions.
- Offer a firm handshake, make eye contact, and have a friendly expression when you are greeted by your interviewer.
- Listen to be sure you understand your interviewer's name and the correct pronunciation.
- Even when your interviewer gives you a first and last name, address your interviewer by title (Ms., Mr., Dr.) and last name, until invited to do otherwise.
- Sit still in your seat; avoid fidgeting and slouching.
- Respond to questions and back up your statements about yourself with specific examples whenever possible.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Be thorough in your responses, while being concise in your wording.
- Be honest and be yourself. Dishonesty gets discovered and is grounds for withdrawing job offers and for firing. You want a good match between yourself and your employer. If you get hired by acting like someone other than yourself, you and your employer will both be unhappy.

- Treat the interview seriously and as though you are truly interested in the employer and the opportunity presented.
- Exhibit a positive attitude. The interviewer is evaluating you as a potential co-worker. Behave like someone you would want to work with.
- Have intelligent questions prepared to ask the interviewer. Having done your research about the employer in advance, ask questions which you did not find answered in your research.
- Evaluate the interviewer and the organisation s/he represents. An interview is a two-way street. Conduct yourself cordially and respectfully, while thinking critically about the way you are treated and the values and priorities of the organisation.
- Make sure you understand the employer's next step in the hiring process; know when and from whom you should expect to hear next. Know what action you are expected to take next, if any.
- When the interviewer concludes the interview, offer a firm handshake and make eye contact. Depart gracefully.

DON'T

- Don't make excuses. Take responsibility for your decisions and your actions.
- Don't make negative comments about previous employers or professors (or others).
- Don't falsify application materials or answers to interview questions.
- Don't treat the interview casually, as if you are just shopping around or doing the interview for practice. This is an insult to the interviewer and to the organisation.
- Don't give the impression that you are only interested in an organisation because of its geographic location.
- Don't give the impression you are only interested in salary; don't ask about salary and benefits issues until the subject is brought up by your interviewer.
- Don't act as though you would take any job or are desperate for employment.
- Don't make the interviewer guess what type of work you are interested in; it is not the interviewer's job to act as a career advisor to you.

- Don't be unprepared for typical interview questions. You may not be asked all of them in every interview, but being unprepared looks foolish.
- A job search can be hard work and involve frustrations; don't exhibit frustrations or a negative attitude in an interview.
- Don't go to extremes with your posture; don't slouch, and don't sit rigidly on the edge of your chair.
- Don't chew gum or smell like smoke.
- Don't allow your mobile phone to sound during the interview. (If it does, apologise quickly and ignore it.) Don't take a mobile phone call.

To conclude, you should use your initiative and recap any job requirements the interviewer may have mentioned earlier in the interview, then, point by point, match your skills, attributes and qualifications to those items. Your interviewer has liked what they have read about you on your CV. All that remains is to fill in the gaps. This is your chance to shine in person so follow this brief guide, do some careful research and with a little bit of luck that job will be yours.