

Interview basics



If you are offered an interview, it means that an employer likes what they have read in your resume and cover letter, and wants to find out more. Being prepared for an interview can help you to stay calm and focused. Here are some tips to ensure you give the best interview possible.

WHAT TO DO

- Arrive at least 20–30 minutes early. This may mean researching public transport times, or available parking before the interview day.
- Dress neatly and professionally at all times, even for roles where you get your hands dirty. First impressions count!
- Speak clearly and confidently, take a deep breath if you feel yourself getting stressed.
- Be enthusiastic and appear friendly and outgoing.
- Stay focused and keep to the question at hand. Don't ramble. Keep your answers to less than 1–2 minutes in length.
- Research the company before the interview, your effort will show throughout the interview.
- Find out what type of interview it is so that you can prepare i.e. one-on-one, group.
- Come prepared to answer key questions, jot down some answers the night before.
- Prepare some of your own questions to ask at the interview.
- Quote real examples of when you have used certain skills or training.
- Sell yourself, be positive and always smile!
- Turn your mobile phone off and remain attentive to the interviewer.
- Ask questions. Prepare one or two questions that you want to know about the job or company.



Sell yourself, be positive and always smile!

Sample Interview Questions

“How are you doing today?”

This question is designed as an ice breaker. Your response should be a positive one, such as “I’m doing well, thank you,” instead of saying you’re nervous or uncomfortable. Remember, from the moment you meet your interviewer, the interview has officially started, so start on a positive note.

“What attracted you to this job?”

Do some company research before the interview and mention specifics about the company and the role which you were attracted to.

“Tell me a bit about yourself ”

This is the classic, open-ended interview question and likely to be among the first. It’s your chance to introduce your qualifications, skills and experience in a way that you stand out. Keep it mostly work and career related.

“Why did you leave your last job?”

Be careful with this one. Avoid being disloyal to your last employer. Keep it positive.

Sample answer:
“I wanted to gain new skills. I wanted to make a career move. I wanted a new challenge.”

“Can you work under pressure?”

You might be tempted to give a simple “yes” or “no” answer, but don’t. It reveals nothing and you lose the opportunity to sell your skills. Use this opportunity to assure the interviewer that you can work under pressure. Give examples that support your claims. Be sure to choose anecdotes that don’t imply that the pressure you have faced has resulted from your own procrastination or failure to anticipate problems.

“How do you plan and prioritise your tasks?”

Planning is very important and note the steps you take to prioritise.

Sample answer:
“I always prioritise tasks by understanding the difference between urgent and important. I’ll liaise with my supervisor to clarify priority projects if unsure. I will break down the tasks into achievable units if feeling under the pump and engage other team members where possible.”

“How do you work under pressure and handle stress?”

Mention things that you do to relax like fishing, yoga, exercise, socialising with family and friends.

“Which adjectives would you use to describe yourself?”

Answer with positive and work focused adjectives.

Sample answer:
“conscientious, hard-working, honest, reliable and courteous, plus a brief description or example of why each fits you well.”

“What were the day-to-day responsibilities in your last job?”

Mention duties you did that relate to the role you are applying for and will be of interest to the employer.

Describe a situation where you had a conflict in the workplace and how did you handle it?


Provide a short example here. The key is to show how you reacted to the conflict and what you did to resolve it.

Sample answer:
“I’ve found that when I’m in a difficult situation, it helps to communicate with the other person, understand their perspective and try to work out solutions together.”

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“What are your strengths?”

Point out any positive attributes and skills that you have that relate to this job. Think back to the job description and what you have that they are looking for.


 Sample answer:
“I have great time management and organisational skills but my greatest strength lies in project management and managing a team of staff.”

“Did you have any problems getting here?”

This question is usually asked to relax you for the interview and allow you to answer an easy question. Keep your answer short but don't just answer “yes” or “no”. Be positive and make every effort not to let anything negative enter into any part of your response.

“What are your weaknesses?”

Don't spend too much time on this one. Focus on professional traits, not personal. Point out a minor weakness that you want to work on and describe steps you have taken to work on improving this.

 Sample answer:
“I am always working on my communications skills; I recently took a professional writers' course to improve my writing skills which has been helpful.”

“Would you like some coffee, tea or water?”

To avoid accidental spills, it is safer to decline invitations for drinks. However, sometimes a glass of water is helpful if you get a dry throat due to nervousness.

“Why do you want to work here?”

To answer this question, you should have researched the company and have some background and knowledge about the company. Reply with the company's attributes, as you see them. Offer one or two examples to explain why you're interested in working for this particular company.

“What was the last position you held?”

Employers want to know about your work history and the reason why you are currently looking for a job. If you were terminated or laid off, answer the question in the best possible way but keep your response positive. Regardless of the circumstances for you leaving a previous role, never criticise a former employer.

“Are you organised?”

Yes. Talk in detail about the organisational skills that you have developed, including time management, needs assessment, delegation, and how those skills have made you more effective.

“According to your resume, there are specific periods of time where you have been unemployed. Would you like to explain why?”

Most people do have some gaps in their employment history, due to various reasons. Explain to the interviewer what was happening in your life at that time and what occupied your time. If you were out of work for an extended period of time, point out your readiness to return to the workforce, and how you have been preparing for it.

“How did you find out about our company?”

Most businesses are genuinely curious about how you discovered them. It helps if you demonstrate your research skills through your answer. This is where your research comes in handy. Toss out a few notable (and positive) facts about the company and finish with a question of your own about the company, such as: “Can you tell me a little about this division and the position you're interviewing for?”

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“Why are you currently unemployed?”

Answer with a positive attitude and state the reason why you are currently looking for work. Make sure that whatever you say about a previous employer is positive and favourable. Many companies are downsizing and reducing overhead, which often requires staff layoffs. Focus your answer on the reasons why you left your previous job and anchor it with a positive reason why you would be a positive member of the company.

“You have changed jobs quite frequently. How do we know you will stick around if we hire you?”

The hiring process is expensive for companies and time-consuming for managers. The interviewer is seeking someone who can convince them they have staying power. Focus on the fact that you are sure of your future direction and that you left previous positions only after you realised you wanted to broaden your responsibilities and increase your experience.

“Do you work well alone, or do you require direct supervision?”

With this question the interviewer looks for a match between your need for feedback and your ability to work independently on your own. The interviewer wants to know if you are a self-starter, able to take direction and go with it. Show that you can carry a project through to its completion.

“Do you have any questions?”

Ask one or two questions to show your eagerness. Remember questions are a great way for you to find out things about the company or place that you can't find answers to elsewhere such as what the culture is like, or if there is a 'high turnover' which means lots of people have left.

Sample questions:
“What are the prospects for growth and opportunities?”,

“How would you describe a typical day and week in this role?”,

“Who does this position report to? If I am offered the position, can I meet him/her?”



Job Interview Don'ts

- Don't be late.
- Don't leave your mobile phone on or answer it during the interview.
- Don't smoke beforehand.
- Don't use swear words or use slang.
- Don't fidget.
- Don't criticise your former company or colleagues.
- Don't argue with the interviewer.



For more information about interviews and other useful resources visit konektempoyment.com.au