

Interview skills

Good interview skills are essential in today's competitive employment market. It might be years since you were last interviewed, and you may have no idea what you should say, and what the interviewer may ask you.

Job interviews could be likened to a visit to the dentist; you don't know quite what will be extracted, or how painful it's going to be!

Many of these concerns can be overcome by research, preparation and practice. Working with your Wise consultant will be particularly helpful to you when you attend job interviews.

Remember that even though it seems like it's you who's on show; the interview is also an opportunity for you to assess the potential employer.

This booklet will help you with your preparation for the interview, enabling you to make the most of yourself and to give your most striking performance - to get you the job you want.

The Basics

- **Read and re-read the job specification** - You may be questioned about aspects of it, and how your skills and experience relate to it.
- **Find out as much as you can about the company** - Your consultant will have details, however, your commitment is paramount, so use the Internet for your own research. If you do not have access to the Internet, check with libraries and careers advice centres. Interviewers will expect you to have carried out at least some research. It tells them that you take the job seriously, and that you show initiative.
- **Dress smartly and in accordance with the employer's policy** - Your consultant will provide you with this information. Do not wear too much perfume or after shave, and avoid excessive jewellery, and try not to show visible body piercing or tattoos. Some image consultants claim that darker clothes convey a sense of authority, and lighter ones, of creativity.
- **Familiarise yourself with the company location** - Do a test run prior to interview. Knowing where you're going and how long it takes should alleviate any stress on the day. Always allow time for traffic hold-ups; it's better to be early than rush into an interview late and flustered; remember the first impression is crucial.
- **Establish the format for the interview** - Is it structured questioning, a panel of interviewers, or is it a more informal approach? Will you have to take any tests? What will they be?
- **Make a list of the qualities the interviewer is likely to be looking for in this role** - Make sure you are prepared to demonstrate these.

When you arrive

First impressions count...

- Smile and give a firm handshake.
- Be polite and friendly to all staff you encounter, you never know who they might turn out to be!
- Be careful about accepting tea or coffee – for a start it might be the interviewer who has to make it for you! Stick to water. Water is not a diuretic (won't make you want the loo like tea or coffee) and will keep your mouth moist when talking.

Questions you may be asked

The questions below (or similar variations) are very often asked at interviews.

Why are you applying for this job?

Make sure you know in detail about the post and the company and how you, your experience, and skills relate to it.

What can you do for the company?

What do they really want? Find out in advance and relate what you have to offer to their needs.

What sort of person are you and will you fit in here?

Personality is a big issue with employers. Some say up to 70% of the final decision is based on perceived 'fit'. Assess yourself, your skills and personality and be prepared to discuss how they relate to the culture and demands of the potential employer.

What makes you different from the rest of the candidates?

You have to make yourself sound special without sounding too arrogant. Be honest and blow your own trumpet where you can back it up with facts.

Tougher Questions

The interviewer is not being tough for the sake of it, many jobs nowadays have a degree of pressure and the interviewer will sometimes ask tough questions to see how you cope with a little pressure, and to assess your ability to think on your feet.

Always be as succinct as possible in responding. If the interviewers want to know more they will ask. Try to emphasise the positive, and relate your answer where possible to yourself in the new post.

Tell us about yourself...

This is a big question. You can try to narrow it down a bit by asking which aspect of your life the employer would like you to discuss, rather than starting with, 'Well, it was a rainy Wednesday when I was born in Peterborough....'

Why are you applying to this company in particular?

To answer this properly you have to know about the company and what they are doing. Advance research is crucial here; they want to hear more than 'I saw the job advertised in the paper.'

Why did you leave/want to leave your last job?

Always put a positive spin on this and be gracious about your old employer and colleagues. Cite new horizons, new challenges and new opportunities. If you have been (or are going to be) made redundant, always say (and remember) that your *position* was made redundant, not *you*.

Where do you see yourself in X years from now?

You don't want to appear to be staying still. Yet please avoid the hackneyed cliché, 'I want your job.' Be specific and show that you have really thought about this in terms of your career development with the company. Be balanced in your ambition. You might like to say something like, 'Well, I obviously want to advance my career into (e.g.) management, and I'm always willing to learn, however it would be a little too early for me to be specific now about exactly what job title I want in X years time...'

What is your greatest weakness?

This question, or variations of it, is one of the hardest to answer. It is a test of a number of things:

- How prepared are you to be self-critical?
- How honest are you?
- How creative can you be about answering?

With this question an experienced interviewee is likely to have an advantage. The 'textbook' approach to this question is to:

Mention something that was either a weakness and is not any more, or something that you offer as a weakness but your interviewer will see as a strength.

For example, the subject of time management, you could say, 'ten years ago I'd have said time management, however after attending a number of courses and being more organised over my diary, my time management is now really good.' Or 'I suppose people could see me as impatient, but maybe that's just because I want things to be done by the deadline.'

You see what is happening here? In both cases you have not admitted a weakness. In the first case you have demonstrated a willingness to learn and adopt new, more efficient behaviour. In the second, you have demonstrated a preference for meeting deadlines. Most employers will see these as positive.

Nowadays, this question might be asked, 'If there was one thing you could change about yourself at work, what would it be?' or similar - it is essentially the same question.

What are your greatest strengths?

Like the weaknesses question above, this one can be a tripper-upper. The interviewer is inviting you to blow your own trumpet, however beware, and be honest. If you say, for example, that you are dependable, flexible, team-oriented, committed and a 'people person', the interviewer may later ask you to provide a specific 'at work' example of when you have demonstrated these qualities.

What are your hobbies / interests?

This question is often asked at interviews, sometimes as a response to what is on your CV, and the intentions behind it vary. It might be a cooling-down question, readjusting the focus of the interview after some tough, work-based scenarios.

You must however be careful about how much information you release here. All interviewers will have a slightly different opinion on what constitutes a healthy and balanced personal life, and if a happy coincidence (such as supporting the same football team) arises, then that's all it is, a coincidence.

Ways to deal with this question are varied, if for example you play a team sport, it might be useful to mention this, particularly if the job entails being part of a team.

However, solo activities or hobbies where the emphasis is on individual achievement might relate more to an individually targeted sales role. Likewise with leadership capabilities, if the job has a management or supervisory element, and you happen to be the captain of your hockey team, make sure you mention it.

Be careful over the subject of travel. Being seen as a potential job-hopper due to regular six-month backpacking 'sabbaticals' will do you few favours with employers looking for long-term commitment!

Likewise, listing a vast number of interests might turn off an interviewer if they wonder how on earth you find the time for work!

Your personality and life outside the job are important however, so try to work in how your personality, passions and interests relate to work and how they will enhance your performance. Try not to be overly passionate about hobbies or things you feel strongly about, to those who know you well it would be fine, but to others it could seem extreme

Competency Based Interviewing

Many employers use this approach. Put simply, it is a method of selection whereby the interviewer will ask questions specifically designed to test how you dealt with previous work-related experiences.

For Example:

- Describe how you approached a project where you had to manage conflict between team members.
- Describe how you dealt with a situation where you knew you couldn't meet a deadline.
- How did you go about integrating yourself in the team when you began your last job?

These approaches require you to think on your feet and give specific examples. The interviewer will have pre-planned questions that relate specifically to the desired behaviours for the role. For example, if the role requires good organisational skills and multi-tasking, be prepared for specific questions relating to this. If the examples you give 'fit' the profile they are looking for, it will be to your advantage.

You cannot prepare specifically for these questions because you do not know what they will be in advance, however you could try and think of some past examples that include:

- Organisational Skills
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Dealing with Conflict
- Industry Knowledge

Questions to ask the Interviewer

It is always a good idea to have questions prepared for an interview. It shows that you've thought carefully about what the job entails and are genuinely interested in it. Be sure when deciding which questions to ask that they are not already answered in company literature or on the web site. Asking these questions will show a lack of preparation.

Questions need to be selected carefully, not sounding trivial or irrelevant. Whether there is a coffee machine may be important to you, but the interviewer won't be impressed, and don't raise the issue of pay, wait until the subject is brought up by the interviewer.

Your questions should be tailored to the individual job and company, but there are some which can be used in most situations:

- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of the post?
- What are the most urgent duties?
- What are the company's plans for the next XYZ years?
- What is the management structure of the company?
- Are there any arrangements for training and skill acquisition?
- Are there any opportunities to travel/transfer as part of the company?
- How often are performance reviews given and by whom?
- In what way does this particular job contribute to the success or profitability of the organisation?
- You also need to be sure that the question hasn't been inadvertently answered during the interview. If it has, don't be afraid to tell the interviewer so, thereby explaining your fewer questions.

Salary Negotiations

In all applications for a job through Wise Employment, your consultant will normally specify your required salary with the company before the interview. In some cases however, salary is negotiable and although the consultant will indicate your salary requirements, the interviewer may raise the subject of salary. Points to remember are:

Avoid being the first to raise the subject. Let the interviewer bring up the topic.

If, early in the interview, you are asked to name the salary level you want, don't give a figure. Seek to have the matter deferred for later discussion, when the responsibilities and duties of the job have been discussed.

- Never talk of your financial needs or commitments – however big your mortgage - always talk of your *worth*.
- Never accept or reject an offer on the spot – unless you are 100% sure - always take it and think it over, and discuss it with your Wise consultant.

Remember to call your Wise Consultant as soon as possible following the interview, whether you are interested or not.

We will need to have your feedback, and you may have extra questions for us to ask on your behalf. The earlier we have your feedback, the earlier we can get feedback from our client.

Always be as frank as possible with your recruitment consultant. Voice any doubts you may have straight away. Your Wise consultant's job is to make successful career matches and to negotiate with employers on salary and benefits packages. If you are offered the position we want to be sure that you are 100% happy with the role. Remember, we are here to help.



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