

## CV and interview advice

This page is intended to give you guidance and advice on writing your CV and preparing for job interviews. This is not intended to be prescriptive, these are only suggestions. It is always useful to talk you through your CV and job interview techniques with someone in person - but these guidelines should help you start.

### Preparing your CV

It's important to give your CV some thought and spend some time on getting it right. A well-presented CV which clearly details your skills and experience can make all the difference in getting the job you really want.

### Structure

Your CV should be between 2-3 A4 pages in length and include the following sections.

- Personal Details
- Employment History
- Education and Qualifications
- Key Skills/Strengths
- Referees/References on Request

### Format

- Make sure your CV is well laid out so that it is immediately easy to read and leave plenty of white space.
- Use a standard font size, which is easy to read, such as Arial 11.
- Keep it simple.

### Content

- Focus on information which is relevant to your own career goals.
- Use concise, unambiguous sentences, avoid exaggerations and a flowery writing style.
- Do not make false claims; honesty is always the best policy.
- Bullet points are useful to highlight relevant skills and experience and help break up continuous text.
- Stress your past accomplishments and the skills you used to get the results you achieved.
- Put your highest level of education first.
- Put your most recent job first and work backward chronologically in time.
- Ensure all dates are accurate and include months as well as years.
- If you are making a career change, stress what skills are transferable to support your new career objectives.
- Explain any long career gaps (i.e. travelling, maternity leave etc.)
- Keep to the same tense.
- Customise your CV for specific vacancies by focusing on previous experience or skills that are relevant to the role.

**Most importantly, always thoroughly proof-read your CV or ask someone to do it for you.**

## Job interview techniques

### General hints and guidelines

#### Think about yourself

It is important before a job interview to think about all the reasons why you are attending it and what you have to offer the organisation. Be ready to discuss both short and long term career goals in general terms.

#### Gaps in CVs

You will also need to explain gaps in employment. If you worked in a temporary capacity but didn't put it on your CV, know the details of which companies you worked with, what you did for them and the length of the assignments. If you did not work but did search for a job give some examples of the research you did regarding job opportunities and the process you went through to find the position.

#### Reasons for leaving

Prepare to discuss the reasons you left your previous jobs. If it was for a better opportunity, explain why it was better. If you left involuntarily, present the reason in the most positive light you can. Make sure your responses are honest and be positive.

#### Research the job

Before attending any job interview it is a good idea to research the organisation and familiarise yourself with the following:

- Size of organisation, number of employees.
- History, how long have they been operating – do they have any affiliated organisations or belong to an umbrella group?
- General information about their services/products/aims etc.
- Major competitors or other organisations operating in the same field.
- Job description – understand the skills required for the position.
- Relationship between the open position and other members of staff - have a sense for the department.
- Have some well thought-out questions that would help further your understanding of the organisation e.g. How will the organisation be affected by the new legislation on xyz... or How do you see the organisation developing over the next year/three years?
- Feedback to your adviser how you thought the interview went and tell them whether you would be interested in the job if it were to be offered to you.

### What is the employer looking for?

Employers use interviews to confirm that an applicant has the required knowledge, skills and willingness to contribute and fit into the organisation's culture. They also want to see if your career goals are in line with opportunities available with their organisation. They are looking for the potential in prospective employees to become valued, trusted, productive team members of their organisation.

You must try to consider how you can display your skills and experience in a good and honest light and provide employers with the evidence that you are the right person for the job. Here are some brief points to consider:

- Are you a self-starter, able to work without constant supervision?
- Can you be depended upon in critical situations and follow work through to completion?
- Are you enthusiastic and easy to work with?
- Can you work under pressure?
- Recruiters need to know what drives you to want the job and why you want to work for the organisation in particular.
- Can you manage your time effectively?
- How do you structure your day's work?
- How did you handle sudden unplanned work or crisis?
- Can you handle constructive criticism in a productive manner?
- Are you objective in evaluating yourself and others?
- Can you work well with a variety of people?
- What would you do to help a team of people work together better?

Recruiters look for an objective analysis of your abilities. For strengths, recruiters want to know why you think it is strength and where it has been demonstrated. For weaknesses they want to know what steps you have taken, or could take, to improve.

### Points to consider throughout the interview

- Be prepared with answers to the traditional job interview questions. Rehearse your answers with a friend who will give you honest feedback about the content of your answer and body language.
- Aim for clarity, brevity and above all, honesty. Give honest answers with a positive tone.
- Concentrate on the employer's needs, not yours.
- Emphasise how you can help the organisation achieve its goals.
- Describe your past responsibilities and accomplishments.
- Explain why you approached projects in a certain ways.
- Explain how the skills you bring will benefit the organisation.
- Don't downplay your accomplishments or attribute them to luck.
- Be specific in your answers. Avoid rambling or getting off on a tangent.
- Ask for clarification if you are unsure of the question.
- Take responsibility for communicating your strengths. Don't rely on the interviewer to pull it out of you.
- Explain your past successes, the more you can clearly describe the experience, the people involved, the challenge and the solutions, the more you'll stand out in the interviewer's mind.

### Types of job interview

There are several different types or styles of job interview that you may come across. It is important that to remember that no two job interviews are the same and that you can always improve your interview style and preparation.

### The traditional job interview - sample questions

Job interviews may follow a more traditional format. The following is a list of typical job interview questions which may arise in one form or another. It is a good idea to reflect on the sort of answer you might give before a job interview but it is unwise to memorise answers as you risk coming across as unnatural and not genuine. It is a good idea to back your answers up with examples taken from your own work experience.

- Why do you want this job?
- What qualities do you think this job requires?
- Why do you want to work for this organisation?
- What have you got to contribute?
- What can we offer you that your previous organisation cannot offer?
- How long have you been looking for a new job?
- What do you know about this organisation?
- What interests you about this organisation?
- What are you looking for in a new job?
- What sorts of jobs are you considering at the moment?
- What did you do on a day to day basis?
- What do you not like about the job?
- How did you make a difference to your last organisation?
- What was your greatest success and how did you achieve it?
- What has been your biggest failure?
- How did you progress in your last job?
- How do you handle criticism?
- How do you work with others?
- Are you accepted into a team quickly?
- What motivates you?
- Are you competitive?
- What are you like under pressure?
- What are your career goals?
- How did you get on with your last manager/colleagues?

### **The team job interview**

In an effort to get a well-rounded perspective on candidates, many companies ask numerous people to participate in the selection process. You may interview with an HR specialist, the hiring manager, the hiring manager's boss and even staff members who would be your peers. In small companies you may have to sell yourself to the entire staff.

### **Hints**

You will need to be sure to connect with each person. Make eye contact with the person asking the questions and glance at the other team members while answering to be sure that you are connecting with each individual.

Be sensitive to the dynamics in the team. If they seem to want to control the interview, relax and flow with it, on the other hand be sure to offer information and ask questions.

Take responsibility for ensuring that the group understands what you have to offer. Don't be overly aggressive and take over, yet do interact and show your enthusiasm.

Each person's opinion can be weighted equally; in some cases, just one team member's opposition can disqualify a candidate. Sometimes it is unclear what role or position each person holds so be respectful of everyone you meet.

### **The behavioural/competency job interview**

The interviewer asks specific questions seeking information about a candidate's skills, character and preferences based on examples of past behaviour. During the behavioural job interview, questions are directed toward specific experiences. Some examples follow:

"Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person at a work."

"What proactive steps have you taken to make your workplace more efficient and productive? Specifically describe a policy, project or system you created or initiated."

"Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work. Tell me what happened, who was involved and what you did in terms of problem solving."

"Some situations require us to express ideas or opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell me about a time when you were successful in this type of situation."

### **Hints**

The key in behavioural job interviewing is to paint a picture of the reasons and thinking about the decision or behaviour without bringing in unessential details. It is expected that forming an answer will take time. Think your examples through.

Be aware of the tendency to become too relaxed and reveal information that you didn't intend to share. You need to do your part to foster the conversational tone, but don't become so relaxed that you start straying from the point. Be friendly, stay professional.

### **Questions from you**

Try to think of some questions to ask at the interview. If you have researched the company well, you will be able to come up with some questions concerning the organisation. You may also like to find out more about your responsibilities in the role, the organisation's long and short term aims, training opportunities and what they would hope you achieve in the first six months.

### **Other things to remember**

- Find out what happens next in the interview process and express your interest. (if it is genuine!)
- Let you consultant know your feedback. It is important to know what you thought of the organisation, role and people you met and how you felt you performed. Please also let us know if you are interested in taking the job if it were offered