



Winning ways to prepare for a job interview

Going for a job interview can be daunting, whether you've graduated from college or university or already obtained some work experience. But you've passed the first hurdle, your CV has risen to the top of the pile and you've been invited to come in for an interview.

Now it's over to you to draw on your past experience whether in class or at work, so as to make a positive impression.

Bear in mind that one third of employers will make a hiring decision in the first 90 seconds. Research shows that a positive, upbeat attitude when walk through the door accounts for 55% of the impact you make in a job interview, while confident communication accounts for 38%.

The critical factors you need to take into account in planning for your interview are:

Personal branding + Preparation + Effective communication = Interview success.

Personal branding

Personal branding is the way in which you present and market yourself as a prospective employee. To display your skills and abilities to their best advantage, you need to understand your strengths, abilities and areas for development. Most important, you need to know what value you bring to a prospective employer.

This self-knowledge is reflected in your personal brand, which includes the way you dress, the way you communicate and the 'tools' you use to re-enforce your brand.

Career branding tools include a well-structured CV that sells your core competencies, a professional appearance, a portfolio of work and social network pages which position you favourably with potential employers.

Preparation

Pre-interview preparation is critical. Interviewers design their questions to find out whether you will make a good employee and are a good fit with the company. The questions they are most likely to ask include:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What skills do you bring to the company?
- Why would you like to work for us?
- Where would you like to be in five years' time?

Make sure that you have the company's job description at hand before the interview, so you are able to draw on your previous experience and use examples to demonstrate why you are the best candidate for the job.



Winning ways to prepare for a job interview

Almost half of all candidates make the mistake of having little or no knowledge about the company to which they have applied for a position. Don't fall into that trap!

Start researching the company – this can often be done by visiting the company website, reading its annual report or conducting an internet search to find out about the company's products and services, its employees and clients and, if possible its corporate vision and culture. This knowledge provides you with an opportunity to market relevant skills and attributes that would add value to the organization.

Effective communication

Effective communicators pay attention to both their verbal and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication includes posture, gestures and the way you engage with the interviewer by making eye contact or shaking hands.

Common errors to avoid include arriving late, fidgeting with a pen or hair, or slouching in your chair.

Effective interview communication once again requires preparation. If you practise answers to the most likely interview questions, gather examples to motivate your experience against the job requirements and research the company, your confidence increases and the interview becomes more a fluid conversation than a question-and-answer session.

Be ready with two or three questions you have about the company and the position. This will help convince the interviewer that you are really interested in the position. Key questions include:

- Can you give me more detail about the position?
- What is your main expectation of this position?
- Where do you see this position going in the next few years?
- How would my performance be evaluated, and at what frequency?

Final tips

- Research as much as you can about the organization
- Role play interview question-and-answers with a friend or acquaintance who has experience in interviewing
- Always be on time
- Don't share your sentiments on the interview via Twitter or on Facebook - this could jeopardise your opportunity to land that sought-after job!