

How to perform well at Interviews

Getting an interview is an achievement in itself. Only a small proportion of applicants are selected for interview (often about 10%) so you have already made a positive impression to have got to this stage! Many people have a fear of interviews, so here are some tips to help you make the most of this opportunity.

THE PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW

Firstly, it is for the interviewer **to see if you match the requirements of the job**. These will naturally vary with different jobs but are likely to include:

- Your personal qualities
- How well you express yourself
- Your motivation and enthusiasm

The recruiters will already have an indication of these from your initial application but now the interview will assess you in person.


It is also your chance to meet somebody from the organisation and assess them: are they offering what you want?

There aren't any right or wrong answers to interview questions: how you come across is as important as what you say. Be yourself – if you have to put on a completely false act to get through the interview, is this really the right job for you?

PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

Preparation is the key ingredient for interview success. Careful planning and preparation will make sure that your interview goes smoothly and will also help to calm your nerves!

- **Research very carefully the career area** for which you are applying.
- Remind yourself **why you are interested in this career, and this employer**: enthusiasm is important.
- **Re-read your application form** as if you were the interviewer. Try and **anticipate the questions** they will ask. Think about any awkward points that might be picked up on, and how you will handle them.
- **Prepare some questions to ask** the interviewer.
- **Plan how you will get to the interview**. Leave plenty of time in case of traffic jams or delayed trains
- **Dress neatly** and smartly.
- Take a small, neat **notepad** and pen to write down important information the interviewer may tell you, and after the interview, the questions you were asked, so you can work out better answers to any you fluffed.
- **Research the employer** - here are some things you may be able to find out from the employers web site or via Google.
 - What is the size of the organization?
 - How long has it been in business?
 - What are its products and/or services?
 - What sort of reputation or public image does it have?
 - Who are its main competitors?
 - Where is it based? Single or multiple locations? UK or multinational?
 - What is the organizational structure like?
 - What are its future plans and prospects?
 - What is the organisational culture?
 - What types of training, development and appraisal are offered?



I had been abducted by aliens who I persuaded to give up their aggressive exploitation of minor planets.

ARRIVING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Try to arrive ten or fifteen minutes early. This doesn't just give you the opportunity to visit the loo – time spent waiting in the reception area can be very useful if there are publications about the employer or their field of work to read. Be polite to everyone you meet, including receptionists, porters and security staff.

First impressions

These are very important - they set the tone for the rest of the interview. A survey of 273 managers by Monster.co.uk found that **interviewers take on average less than 7 minutes to decide if a candidate is right for the role.**

Factors influencing whether an interviewee is viewed as employable were

- A candidate's timekeeping (96% of managers agree this is influential)
- Level of a candidate's interview preparation (93%)
- Ability to hold eye contact (82%)
- Personal appearance (73%) (two thirds of employers said they were put off by tattoos)
- Quality of banter or small talk (60%)
- Strength of handshake (55%)

The five most important factors interviewers considered when hiring were:

- Work experience (36%)
- First impressions of the candidate (24%)
- Education (12%)
- Professional qualifications (10%)
- References (9%)

According to a survey of 1000 recruiters by Fly Research **three quarters of interviews are lost within three minutes of entering the room.** Research by [Springbett](#) found that 85% of interviews were decided in the first two to three minutes:

- 25% of interviewers were put off by a **weak handshake** or **lack of eye contact**
- 24% by **poor body language**
- 18% by **poor posture** (e.g. slumped shoulders suggests lack of confidence) or presence
- Only 20% waited until the middle of the interview to test a candidate on their [knowledge of the industry](#) and [aptitude for the job](#)
- According to [research](#) selectors make snap judgments about your trustworthiness, attractiveness, likability, competitiveness and aggressiveness and spend the rest of the interview confirming or denying these opinions.
- **Shake hands firmly** and warmly, but wait to be invited to sit down. Handshakes are also commonly given at the end of the interview. Handshakes originated as a way for knights to show that they didn't have concealed weapons. A firm handshake is perceived to communicate sociability, friendliness and dominance: normally desirable qualities in candidates whereas weak handshakes may communicate, introversion, shyness and neuroticism. Also as the handshake is at the start of the interview, it can set a positive tone for the rest of the encounter. [In practice interviews with 98 students](#), those who gave a firm handshake were more likely to be offered jobs. **Women who gave a firm handshake** were perceived more positively than men who gave a firm handshake.
- **Smile** and keep up good **eye contact** with the interviewer.
- **You may be offered tea or coffee.** If you feel this will help you to relax, then fine, but otherwise it is quite OK to refuse politely.
- **Try to relax** - don't perch on the edge of your chair, but don't slouch either.
- **Speak clearly** and not too fast. Give yourself a moment to think about your replies.
- **Don't fidget** and try to avoid meaningless phrases like "you know", "I mean", etc.

Interviews are, in general, poor predictors of job performance. [Schmidt and Hunter](#) found that standard unstructured interviews only accounted for 8% of the difference in performance and productivity over chance when selecting candidates by this method. However structured interviews where candidates are all asked the same questions had a 24% selection accuracy: three times as effective as unstructured interviews.

The standard method of selecting candidates for jobs is to make list of key [competencies](#) required in the job and then to match these to the candidate's application. However two US researchers ([Higgins & Judge](#)) followed 100 university students trying to get their first job. They analysed their CVs for qualifications and work experience and talked to the interviewers afterwards. Surprisingly **the main factor in deciding which ones were selected was whether or not the candidate appeared to be a pleasant individual.**

Research by [Sears and Rowe](#) has found that interviewers tend to favour candidates with personalities, attitudes, values, and backgrounds similar to their own.

The successful candidates had:

- **Smiled and made a lot of eye contact**
- **Shown a genuine interest in the interviewer** and given genuine compliments
- **[Praised the company](#)**: find something you genuinely like about the organisation.
- **[Asked interesting questions](#)**: for example "What is your personal experience of working for this company?"
- **Talked about subjects unrelated to job**, but that interested the candidate and interviewer. See the panel to the right.