

Interview Guide

If you have got this far then clearly there is something about you, your background and experience as well what your CV says about your capabilities and competencies that have the potential employers' attention. You will need to do a bit of homework before going to the interview – it is like any business meeting – better to be prepared. Interviews are always different, some formal, some informal. Prepare, relax, listen as well as talk and ensure that you, the real person, backs up the content and context of your CV.

Interview Preparation

Interviews can be tough – even for seasoned veterans. The interview is, however, your best opportunity to demonstrate your value and gain insight into the position and the company, and to determine how your experience and talent can contribute to the company's growth and profitability.

We have included a list of things that you can do to make your interview as successful as it can be. However only you can make the interview successful.

Do your homework – on the company. Find out as much about the company, its history, its current situation and its future as you can. Sources: their website, Google, Wikipedia, trade magazines, the library – for periodicals and trade journals, articles, annual reports, friends and business associates (keep the position confidential as you never know who your competition is for the role). Be prepared to ask good questions about the company and its direction.

Do your homework on the position. Have as good an understanding of the position as possible, its duties and responsibilities, and what's expected. Be aware that what was briefed or known to us or to the market may not be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So listening to what they really want is as important as selling them what you think they want. Be prepared to ask good questions: Who's been successful in the organization and why? What hasn't worked and why? Who will you report to and who will be your peer group? What needs to be done in the first 6 months, in the first year? Your recruiter will be able to provide some insight in these areas prior to the interview but don't assume we have been told everything on all the different people involved in your hirer's agenda.

Do your homework – on yourself. Review your career history thoroughly. Review dates, positions, duties and responsibilities, and accomplishments. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to ***cite specific examples of achievements and how your specific experience can help the company*** solve some of its issues. Concentrate on your most recent positions, but don't neglect your early career. Ensure that your personal summary matches your CV and you know the contents of your CV top to bottom.

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Information needed before you go in

Who you will be meeting, the date and time?

Company name, interviewer/title, full address, phone number, clear directions and where to park or the nearest station – that way you will not be late.

Try to research & find out a bit about the company and its history, maybe its philosophies, the type of people / personalities/attributes they like. Look at the company's web site for its strategy and mission statement and maybe a bio of the interviewer.

You need to have in your mind some prepared questions that demonstrate your understanding and interest in the opportunity. This shows that you are methodical, organized, have given thought and reason as to why you are going to that company – it does impress a client to go in with questions prepared.

Image and projection

By the time you have got to an interview, that interviewer knows your background and has considered your ability to do the job. The interview is not just based on the role but on personality, will you fit in, say the right things, will they like you and most importantly is their impression of you going to reflect well to others in the company involved in the recruitment process?

Don't be late - Get there early. (To be early is on time, to be on time is to be late and to be late is unforgivable).

Irrelevant of the level of the particular position always look professional enough to be capable of one or several positions above the grade you are being considered for. That means dressing appropriately – pressed suit, smart and well presented. Don't forget a tie and clean polished shoes, neat hair and professional business attire. Jewellery kept to a minimum, avoiding loud or overly patterned colours ties, nail polish, socks or stockings. Also avoid too much perfume or aftershave and remember that a quick smoke before an interview smells as would too much garlic.

FIRM handshake and clear greeting – “Pleased to meet you” but don't try the power hand shake.

Maintain eye-to-eye contact throughout the interview – If it is a panel of interviewers, look at all of them in turn. When one asks a question, look at them to begin you answer, look at the others during your answer and finish with the one who asked.

Communication skills

Remember that for senior or client facing roles you will be an ambassador of their business internally and externally. As such they have to be able to regard you as a really positive reflection of their standards, ambitions and business profile. Even for some internal roles you need to reflect positively on the hiring decision of your boss for them to have good face to their peers.

Vocally – don't be flat, ensure your voice has tone and pitch to it, especially for telephone interviews, sound motivated, up-beat, confident – ask your consultant for advice on how you come across vocally.

Keep your voice volume up - but don't shout. Keep your speech articulate and positive as it is one of the most important tools of your trade.

Body language - Face them. Keep upright, don't slouch. Don't sit on your hands, or fidget and even though you may be nervous, try not to show it. Don't however be over assertive and confident as it can come over as aggressive or arrogant.

Interview Styles

There are 3 basic interviewing styles but be aware that a good interviewer (particularly HR or a trained recruiter) may employ a combination of the styles.

The Criteria Based Interview

Every job role has essential and desirable skills, abilities and experience required of the candidate. Imagine the interviewer has a check list of these requirements and the purpose of the interview is to determine if you meet these requirements. This is the most basic of techniques, often called a skills interview, and is designed to determine whether you meet the criteria they have in mind. Questions tend to be quite direct and you either have the right answer or you don't. The question can be either direct "have you worked in Shanghai before?" or indirect "what countries have you worked in?"

Requirement – 5 years plus experience

Question – "how many years experience do you have?"

Requirement – Fluent in Mandarin

Question – "what level of Mandarin do you have?"

Requirement – Managed a team of 10+"

Question – "how big a team have you managed?"

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What they want to evaluate is specifically in the question, so just answer it. If you feel you don't quite meet the criteria then qualify your answer around it as best you can to re qualify.

"I haven't been based in Shanghai, but did have some clients there from when I was based in Beijing" or "I have had at any time 6 direct reports, but I did have 6 others regionally that were involved in one of my projects"

The Competency Based Interview

Competency – "An important special capability or expertise; especially that of a individual in a business affording it sustainable competitive advantage"

Somewhat more advanced than just criteria and designed to elicit much more information from you, the Competency style is much more common in larger organizations. HR and senior management will typically identify key competencies that they expect from employees in certain roles and at certain levels required to provide or maintain capability of the business.

Competency based interviews are designed to be quite an intelligent and quick way to find out about the attitude and mindset of the individual, not just their skills and experience. It is evaluating your Skills, Knowledge and Attitude.

These competency based interviews give the HR and other departments a brief idea as to how the individual performs. The answers to the competency based interview questions also provide a graphic portrayal of his or her attitude towards work, people and life in general.

Example competencies that could be evaluated could include:

- Ability to work in a team
- Ability to work on your own initiative
- Decision making
- Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Leadership Qualities
- Team-working
- Personal ethics and standards

Competency based interview answers

The questions that are asked are quite significant, and it is essential that you listen carefully to the essential context of the questions and answer them in the best way possible.

The competency they are investigating is usually obvious from the question.

Competency – Conflict Resolution

Question – “Can you give me an example of a situation where you had an issue with a member of staff?”

State the situation and the circumstances but in a positive manner.

Explain the thought process, options and why you made the choice you made.

Then give a positive summary of the **result or output**.

The best way to answer these questions is to be concise, crisp and to the point.

You should not meander away from the point while answering these questions, because meandering away from the question will imply that you are inventing an answer at best, or would mean that you are a person who has poor integrity at worst.

Firstly, ascertain that you make the interviewer understand the problem that you were facing.

Do not place the blame on anybody, or complain about anything.

Let the interviewer decide whose side he or she should be on.

Make sure that you inform the interviewer about the steps that you took as an individual and as a team to ensure that the problem was sorted out without any hitches.

You may also tell the interviewer about the success that you experienced with these steps.

You can also inform the interviewer as to how you would presently handle the situation as opposed to your handling method employed in the past.

The Behavioural Interview

Behavioural based interviewing is interviewing based on discovering how the interviewee acted in specific employment-related situations. The logic is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future i.e. past performance predicts future performance.

In a Criteria based or purely Competence based interview, you will be asked a series of questions which typically have straight forward answers like "What are your strengths and weaknesses?" or "What major challenges and problems did you face? How did you handle them?" or "Describe a typical work week."

In a behavioural interview, an employer has decided what skills and tendencies are needed in the person they hire and will ask questions to find out if the candidate has them. Instead of asking how you would behave, they will ask how you did behave. The interviewer will want to know how you handled a situation, instead of what you might do in the future.

Questions in a Behavioural Interview

Behavioural interview questions will be more pointed, more probing and more specific than traditional interview questions:

- Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
- Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
- Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
- Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
- What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handled it.
- Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
- Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
- Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.

Follow-up questions will also be detailed. You may be asked what you did, what you said, how you reacted or how you felt.

Preparation for the Potential Behavioural Interview

What's the best way to prepare? It's important to remember that you won't know what type of interview will take place until you are sitting in the interview room. So, prepare answers based on the skills, abilities and competencies appropriate to your background and the role applied for.

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Then, since you don't know exactly what situations you will be asked about if it's a behavioural interview, refresh your memory and consider some special situations you have dealt with or projects you have worked on. You may be able to use them to help frame responses. Prepare stories that illustrate times when you have successfully solved problems or performed memorably. The stories will be useful to help you respond meaningfully in a behavioural interview.

Finally, review the job description, if you have it and the company's Website . You may be able to get a sense of what skills and behavioural characteristics the employer is seeking from reading the job description and position requirements.

During the Behavioural Interview

During the interview, if you are not sure how to answer the question, ask for clarification. Then be sure to include these points in your answer:

- A specific situation
- The tasks that needed to be done
- The action you took
- The results i.e. what happened

It's important to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. The interviewer is simply trying to understand how you behaved in a given situation. How you respond will determine if there is a fit between your skills and the position the company is seeking to fill. So, listen carefully, be clear and detailed when you respond and, most importantly, be honest. If your answers aren't what the interviewer is looking for, this position may not be the best job for you anyway.

Closing the Interview

You have to be positive as you close the interview. You also need to know where you stand and if there is something you missed during the interview to create an opportunity to recover the ground. You can't blame anyone else if you left leaving negative thoughts in the interviewer's mind

"Is there anything about my background or skills that you have concerns about or anything you would like to cover again with me while I am here?"

Other questions to find out the current situation & where you stand are

What is your normal interview process?

Will there be a second / third interview as I am interested and want to make sure I am available.

When do you think the next interviews will be held?

Where / when are you planning to hold 2nd interviews?

Do you do psychometric & personality testing / assessment centres (may have to take time off for this?)

Have you seen many other people? How do I compare to your other candidates

Think about the interview once you have left. Consider what went well and what you perhaps did not handle as well as you should have. Feed back to the agent if you have one, but ensure you learn and apply all points where you think you should have prepared for better.