



INTERVIEW TIPS

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWS

Behavioural interviewing is based on the idea that past behaviour is the best indicator of future performance in a similar situation. Employers develop a position description that defines the competencies and attributes required for the position. A list of questions is designed to elicit details of your behaviour in past circumstances (similar to circumstances you would encounter in the new position), indicating the level to which you possess these key attributes. All candidates are asked the same questions.

To do well in a behavioural interview, prepare examples of particular situations that you can discuss without having to pause too long for thought. Consider possible questions and answers in advance to maximise the positive impression you make, reinforce your interest in the position, and develop strategies for dealing with any more 'difficult' questions that you may encounter. A typical question used in a behavioural interview is: "Tell me about a situation where you had two important deadlines to meet, and could only achieve one within the timeframe. How did you decide what to do? What was the result?"

A simple way of crafting a good response to a behavioural question is to use the STAR model.

The **STAR** model provides a sound, behavioural-based response to each criterion, and clearly outlines the situation, the role you played, and the outcome. Use this format to structure your response:

Situation – provide a brief outline of the situation or setting, and at which company the situation took place

Task – outline what your role was, and what you had to do

Approach or action – outline how you did it

Result – describe the outcomes: what did you achieve and what was the end result?

PANEL INTERVIEWS

These speed up the selection process by enabling all involved parties to meet you, and because they promote balanced and objective assessments by using feedback from all panel members rather than relying on the decision of an individual interviewer.

A panel interview may consist of two to six interviewers and can be intimidating for candidates as they are rather formal. Interviewers may take turns to ask you questions, or ask you a set of questions on different areas in turn, or one may do most of the talking while the others take notes. Be confident, don't panic and try to maintain eye contact or speak directly to everybody all the time. Try to look at everybody present at some point during your interview, while focusing on the questions you are asked and on your replies to these questions.

STRESS INTERVIEWS

Here an employer tries to induce stress in candidates, through challenging or awkward behaviour or inappropriate or difficult questions. The purpose is to assess how you react to stress, and is used chiefly for high-pressure positions. It can mean an unpleasant interview experience and is generally seen as being inappropriate for most positions, particularly as thorough training is required in order to ensure the interview is well conducted. Consider how you would react if you were exposed to stress techniques or to inappropriate questions. Sometimes a cool but pleasant and professional refusal to answer the question, or a request for clarification of why the question is relevant, may be exactly the response the employer is seeking.

GROUP INTERVIEWS

Group interviews bring together a number of candidates and ask them to work together on a task, or to discuss a particular topic as a group. The goal of employers in this situation is twofold — to see a large number of applicants in a short period of time, and to assess applicants for various qualities (frequently communication, management and problem solving) and for compatibility as a team and with organisational goals. Concentrate on finding the best ways to achieve the set tasks or on contributing to the discussion, all the time bearing in mind the qualities that employer is seeking. Make sure you contribute even if you agree with an idea or comment that has already been suggested, explain why you support it rather than quietly agreeing. Ensure your voice is heard.

COMPETENCY-BASED OR 'FOCUSED' INTERVIEWS

These focus on key competencies and attributes required for the position. Candidates are asked questions designed to elicit examples of past experience that exhibit behaviour indicative of these competencies. The STAR model should also be used in response to these questions.

Some examples of behaviour or competency-based questions:

Attention to detail:

Tell me about a project that has required a high level of attention to detail.

Change:

Tell me about a time when you had to adjust quickly to a change in organisational, departmental or team priorities. How did this affect you? What steps did you take to manage this situation?

Communication Skills:

Tell me about a time when it has been a challenge to get your point across to a client. How did you persuade them?

Customer Service Skills:

Can you tell me about a time when you have had to deal with a customer who was emotional, angry or distressed. How did you feel? What did you do and what was the outcome?

Decision Making:

What were the most difficult decisions you have made in the last 12 months? How did you formulate these decisions?

Leadership Skills:

Tell me about some of the people who have become successful as a result of your management? What was your role in their development?

Negotiation:

Walk me through a negotiation of which you are particularly proud.

Pro-activity:

Tell me about a time you wanted to change a system or a process in your current role. What did you do? What was the outcome?

Sales Skills:

Give me an example of when you were successful in identifying and developing business opportunities outside existing business.

Team Skills:

Describe a situation where you wish you had acted differently with someone in your work group. What happened? In hindsight, what do you wish you had done?

Time Management:

What are some of the things that you do to ensure that your time is being used effectively?

Work Ethic:

Give me an example of when you worked the hardest and felt the greatest sense of achievement.

UNPATTERNED INTERVIEWS

These start off an interview with "So tell me about yourself" and then follow up on areas of your reply which interest them. They may be doing this to test your ability to 'perform' and think on your feet, or because they are disinclined or unable to take a more structured approach. This type of interview is difficult if you are shy or caught off guard but can also be a good opportunity to focus on all your most relevant experience and outstanding attributes.

GENERAL STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Some interviewers may discuss your career history first, then move on to discuss other areas such as your personality, motivation and character. This kind of interview is steered by the interviewer but an awareness of the qualities that the employer is seeking can help you maintain a focus on the relevance of your skills and experience to the position.

BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEWS

The interviewer reads your resume and talks to you about your history from your education though to your various jobs, discussing them in turn. It is a good opportunity to show the range of your talents and experience and to reveal your personality, but can mean that you are unable to focus on your skills and experience that are most relevant to the position for which you are applying. Make sure that you communicate all important information.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews can take a variety of forms and it is important to be ready for them, as frequently they are not pre-arranged and in order to perform well you need to be prepared. They are used as part of an initial screening process before arranging appointments with the most promising candidates or employers may arrange more in-depth telephone interviews as an integral part of their selection process, particularly when the employer is pressed for time or interviewer and applicant are in different regions of the country.

AD HOC TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Many employers and recruitment agencies will respond to a faxed or mailed resume with a phone call asking a few basic questions to confirm details of your CV. You may not think of this as an interview but it is vital that you are aware that it is a test. The questions may not seem significant, but the employer is using the opportunity to make an initial assessment of your manner and professionalism and to confirm whether your resume is an accurate reflection of your experience and abilities.

BE AWARE OF INAPPROPRIATE OR DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Q: "So, tell me about yourself"

This question is used to assess your personality, preparation, communication skills and ability to think on your feet. Prepare a list of what you do (your current or last job), your strengths (stick to job-focused skills), and a summary of your career path, linking your experience to the job at hand.

Q: "Why did you leave your last job?"

Respond positively — "...for better career advancement or promotion opportunities, increased responsibility, greater variety at work..."

Q: "Why do you want to do this job / work for this company?"

Demonstrate your knowledge of the company and re-emphasise your suitability for the position.

Q: "What do you think you have to offer this company?"

This is a chance highlight the skills you have that are required for the position.

Q: "What do you think this position involves?"

This question is designed to reveal if you have thought about the position, done some research, listened to the interviewer, and can summarise all of this information clearly.

Q: "What do you know about the company?"

Demonstrate your interest in the job, and your understanding of the organisation and industry. Talk about the research you did into the company's key areas of interest, its size, its main customers or current status, making reference to your source of information.

Q: "Do you have any questions you would like to ask?"

Always prepare a question to ask the interviewer. Ask about the position, request clarification of general information about the company, or summarise your understanding and request confirmation. If they have already answered your questions tell them (be specific) so they know that you have thought about the position in preparing for the interview.

Q: "What do you believe are your key strengths?"

Prepare responses that give specific examples of your strengths at previous positions that will support your job application.

Q: "What do you believe are your weaknesses?"

No-one readily admits real weaknesses in an interview situation. It is general knowledge that this is an opportunity to turn the question into a positive. Think of something that relates to your experience of work that is plausible as a weakness but is not really a negative point.

Q: "Why have you had so many jobs?"

If you have had jobs in different industries or several positions in a short period, describe the positives — that you were learning new skills, following different career paths, and travelling overseas. Refer to the experience you gained in past jobs that relates to the position under discussion.

Q: "What do you enjoy most about your current / last job?"

The key to this question is to list what you have enjoyed about work that strongly relate to the key competencies of the position in question, and mention that you are looking forward to expanding your experience / scope in these areas.

Q: A question requesting confidential information about a previous employer

This may be a testing of your discretion and professionalism. It is best to reply that you would prefer not to divulge any confidential information (sales figures for example), citing the fact that you are sure your interviewer would expect the same discretion from their employees.

Q: "Where do you see yourself in five years time?"

This is an assessment of the extent of your ambition and career planning. You should demonstrate that your long term goals are appropriate for the position being discussed and your commitment to them.

'DIFFICULT' QUESTIONS

If you have had a negative experience with an employer (retrenchment or redundancy, sexual harassment, or clashes with colleagues), prepare to be asked about them in job interviews. The best strategy is to be honest and positive and avoid criticising former employers or expressing grudges.

Q: "Can you give me an example of your creativity / managerial / organisational skills?"

Think of some examples that prove that you possess the key attributes and competencies requested in the job ad and description. These are probably the areas on which your interviewer will probably focus.

Q: "Do you work well under pressure?"

Answer with a 'yes', and give a specific example of a time when you were under pressure and how you rose to the challenge.

Q: "Tell me about when something went wrong"

Q: "Tell me about a time when you have encountered conflict in the workplace"

Q: "Have you ever had to deal with conflicting deadlines? How did you decide which task to complete?"

These are behavioural questions designed to elicit information about the required competencies for the position. Cite experiences in your past jobs, and always try to inject a positive note into your answer (e.g. that you learnt from the experience).

INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Equal Opportunity (EO) guidelines limit the questions that can be asked in job interviews. If asked a question that you consider inappropriate or that you suspect may be the basis for discrimination, you are under no obligation to answer it. For example, an employer may ask whether you have children as part of idle chatter, or they may be motivated by their prejudice that working mothers are not able to commit fully to a full-time position.

Alternatively, in asking about your childcare arrangements they may be trying to assess your level of preparation and professionalism. If you are uncomfortable with any question, politely and professionally refuse to answer it or request clarification on its relevance to the position.