

Successful Interviews

by Neil Harris

You're invited to an interview. First you must get the basics right and abide by the 8 golden rules. They may seem obvious but applicants continually ignore them. They are:

- Research the organisation. Read any information they send you. Investigate their web site.
- Prepare to substantiate everything you said in your application
- Arrive early and in the right state of mind to be interviewed
- Dress to fit in. Make it easy for them to imagine you working in their organisation.
- Treat everything - from entering their premises to leaving - as part of the selection procedure
- When you first meet, look your host in the eye, shake hands and smile
- Sit up straight in your chair with open body language - no crossed arms, fiddling with your face or gripping. Use your hands to emphasise what you say.
- Never introduce a negative unless it is absolutely necessary. Always look for positive reasons for what you have done and why you have applied for this particular job.

Obey these rules and you stand a chance.

Next consider how to answer the different types of question.

1 The 'Why' questions

Be ready to explain positively why you did what it says you did on your CV or application form. Go further and prepare to say why this particular career is attractive, why you want this job and why you are keen to work for this organisation. Look for things you have in common - interests, expertise, location, etc. Don't simply tell them what they already know.

2 The 'Experience' questions

Think hard about your experience and how it can add value to your prospective employer. Consider which areas of your previous work relate most strongly to the job you have applied for and be ready to supply the evidence that this is the case.

3 The ‘Competency’ questions

Often, when you apply for a job, you will receive a job description and person specification. The latter will outline the skills you need to be successful in this role and lay down competencies that are essential. Teamwork, communication and initiative are often part of what recruiters call ‘generic skills’, essential in many jobs. Be prepared to relate how you have exhibited these skills and use STAR- situation, task, action, and results to provide a full answer.

4 ‘Scenario’ questions

“What would you do if...?” Naturally these scenario questions are different for each type of job and relate to real situations you would face. Think about what you will encounter in the job you’re being interviewed for and be ready to answer them.

5 Bolts from the blue

Especially in customer/client facing roles, it is essential that you are not phased by what seem to be ridiculous questions. Some interviewers ask these to see your reaction. For example, you might be asked, ‘If you were a car what make would you be?’ Slow down. Think. Then try to find a logical answer.

6 Who else have you applied to?

Employers want to know that you have a sensible job seeking strategy. Not a haphazard one. It should demonstrate a motivation to adapt to their type of organisation.

7 Where do you see your career going from here?

Be ambitious but emphasise what you would contribute and how you can progress.

8 What skills do you need in this job?

Where is the evidence that you have them? Often these can be discovered if they show you a job description. If not think hard before you attend the interview and write down the evidence that you have these skills so that it easily comes to mind.

9 What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Think of your weaknesses as areas for development. Don’t say that you are a perfectionist - it’s something of a cliché.

10 Why should we recruit you?

Show how you could add value to the organisation if appointed.

11 Have you any questions to ask us?

Use this to express a real interest in what they do, not to find out about the perks of the job.

Assessment Centres

Many employers now use other techniques in addition to interviews to help them select the best candidates. These include:

Giving a presentation/lecture

These are often used for academic jobs. Think about pitching it right for your audience. Never go over time. Use bullet points for notes and maintain eye contact with your listeners.

Aptitude tests

For verbal, numerical and diagrammatic reasoning or logical thinking. Practise these. Examples are available on websites such as www.SHLDirect.com

Discussion groups

Facilitate the group. Participate. Contribute ideas. Build on the ideas of others. Don't shut people out, interrupt, talk over, dismiss the ideas of others out of hand or take the discussion off topic.

Team activities

Enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of the event, no matter how crazy you think it is. Apply the same for discussion groups.

Case studies

Read the case study and underline the important factors. Write these on some paper to get them firmly into your brain. Then re arrange them into pros and cons, a logical sequence or timeline. Then write your report. Consider whether a bullet point executive summary is better than lengthy prose.

In-tray exercise

This is all about taking decisions and prioritising. Faced with several courses of action you have to decide which are most important.

Personality questionnaires

If asked to complete a personality questionnaire, just be yourself. Attempts to swing the result in favour of what the recruiter may want are likely to be unsuccessful