

Getting the best from your interview

Candidate interview tips and tricks



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Welcome to the world of the interview

The interview is about presenting yourself as the best candidate for not only the position, but the company. It gives your potential employer the chance to see you – in the flesh, or remotely over a video call – get to know your likes and dislikes, capabilities, and get an overall feel as to whether you will ‘fit in’ with the organisation.

Similarly, it gives you the opportunity to assess the environment you will be working in, those you will be working with and for, and make it clear in your mind whether the job and organisation are right for you.

First interview, second interview, face-to-face interview, telephone interview, video interview: whatever the type of interview they all have one

thing in common – you have the opportunity to shine. They allow you to reinforce the information that you have provided on your CV, showcasing your talent to prove you are the best person for the job.

This guide will provide you with tips and tricks on the interview process and how to make the most of the short time you have to sell yourself.

“

To be a great champion, you must believe you are the best. If you're not, pretend you are.”

.....
Muhammad Ali

Get to grips with the organisation you could be working for



1. Conducting research into the company you are having the interview with is vital.



2. Looking at the company's website is a good first step. Pay particular interest to the 'About us' page and the products or services the company offers.



3. It is also advisable to look at the company's social media channels – LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and even YouTube – to gauge more about a company, its tone of voice and how it interacts with customers.



4. Do a Google search on the company to see what is being said about it in the media, across forums and on other websites.



5. While you are researching the company, think of some questions you may have about any campaigns it is running or things it has done. This will show that you have a real interest in the position, and the company as a potential employer.



6. Also, studying the organisation before the interview could allow you to relate your experience to strategies it has already put in place, or aspects of your knowledge you could use to help strengthen its services. For example, if you have experience with SEO, do a short assessment of some of the content on the company website and make some suggestions as to what you would do to enhance its performance.



Dress code top tips

Although an interview should not be about the way you look, appearance can be everything. You need to dress to impress, yet still feel comfortable in your own skin.



Find out what your interviewers will be wearing

Ask your Reed consultant for some advice, as what you should wear can depend on the company you are going for an interview with. Your consultant will be familiar with the company and will help point you in the right direction. No matter what your personal style is, you do not want to look out of place.



Don't always go for a brand-new outfit

Above all, interview clothes should make you feel confident and comfortable, therefore you should be familiar with the way they feel. If you are going for a new item of clothing, or you do not already own anything appropriate, then wear it for a few hours before your interview to make sure you are comfy.



Layering is key

At your interview you are bound to be nervous, and often this makes us become slightly warmer than normal. As you do not know how hot or cold the environment will be, layering your clothing is the best option.



Different types of interview

Interviews can take many forms and the process will vary from company to company, but generally there are five main types of interview. These are as follows:

One-to-one interviews

These types of interview are the most common, especially in small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs). While they tend to be slightly less nerve-racking and formal than panel interviews, they are often directly with the Chief Executive or heads of departments, or generally those who are making the hiring decision for the role you have applied.

- ✓ **Pro:** You only have to impress one person and can work on building a good relationship with them from the start
- ✗ **Con:** You may be called back for a second interview if the interviewer is unsure about your suitability

Panel interviews

Larger companies tend to interview by panel, which can be a daunting experience for some, especially the first time around. Each member of the panel will put questions to you, and you would need to respond back to them individually while making eye contact with other members of the panel to involve them in the conversation.

- ✓ **Pro:** You have the opportunity to win the hearts of more decision-makers at the company – having a stronger backing for your application
- ✗ **Con:** You may not know who is in charge in a panel situation – meaning that you should address all panellists equally and treat them all as if they are the decision-maker

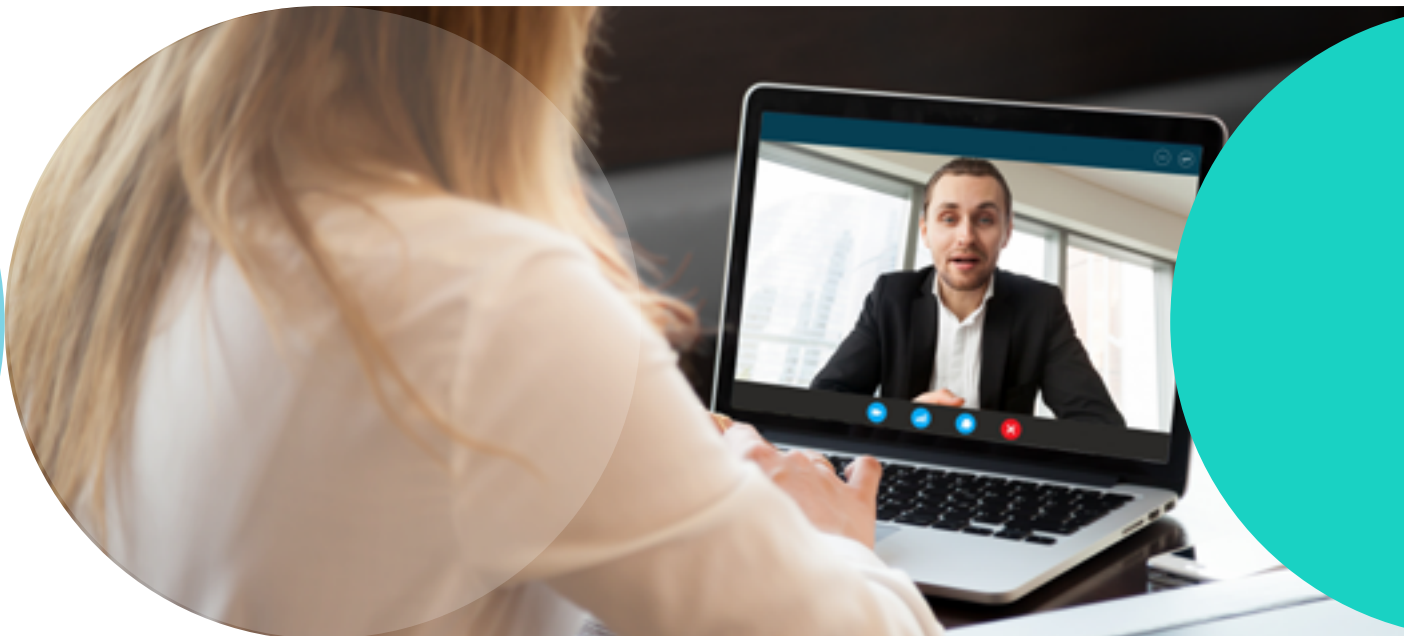
Competency-based interviews

This type of interview is also known as a structured, behavioural or situational interview. This style of interview does what it says on the tin and is designed to test your competence. These types of interview are often used when previous experience in an industry is not seen as essential, often for an entry level position.

Some of the competencies employers are looking out for in this type of interview include teamwork, responsibility, communication skills, decision-making, leadership, problem solving, organisational skills and goal orientation.

- ✓ **Pro:** The interviewer is looking for practical examples of key competencies that can either be demonstrated from previous roles or during your time in education
- ✗ **Con:** Questions can be challenging without preparation so study the job description well to plan some answers





Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews are rarely used as a single stage process, meaning you will not secure a position simply by doing one. This style of interview is often used as a fast and effective way to whittle down a large number of candidates.

- ✓ **Pro:** You do not have to worry about your body language and dress code, however, it will test your social and telephone etiquette
- ✗ **Con:** If you struggle to express yourself on the phone, then this could cause you problems

[Further reading --->](#)

Video interviews

This form of interview is growing in popularity, especially since the Covid-19 outbreak. It can be done using several platforms including Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams and Skype – to name a few.

Generally, a video interview is very similar to a face-to-face interview and can take the form of a one-to-one or panel interview. Overall, the same rules apply when being video interviewed to being interviewed in the flesh.

- ✓ **Pro:** You do not have to travel far to the interview and can be relaxed in your own controlled environment
- ✗ **Con:** You need to make sure you have the right technology to take part in a video interview – good webcam, microphone and speakers are essential

[Further reading --->](#)

Tackling common first interview questions

Interview questions can come in all shapes and sizes, and ultimately boil down to interviewer choice. However, some questions are much more common than others. Here are the ones which are most frequently used and how you can answer them:

1 Tell me about yourself...

It can be hard to talk about yourself. This question not only allows the interviewer(s) to find out more about you, but also puts you on the spot to see how you cope.

You are in control and can talk about what you want, but whatever you do, do not give the interviewer your life story. Keep your answer simple and to the point, and try to stay on topic.

Your answer should take no longer than two to three minutes and cover your education, your interest in the field, work history and experience. You should also add a little about hobbies, interests and family, but nothing too lengthy.

2 What are your weaknesses?

Some people may struggle with this question at interview – thinking that if they show weakness, they will certainly not be the best person for the job as they need to be ‘perfect’. This is not the case – everybody has weaknesses and the first part of succeeding at this question is realising that you have them.

The best way to answer this question is to pick one of your weaknesses and give an example of how you strive to rectify it. For example, if you are not well organised, highlight that sometimes you struggle to organise and prioritise your projects, but you use planning software such as Trello or Microsoft Planner to organise yourself and your tasks.





3 Why should you get this job?

This question gives you the opportunity to sell yourself – it is your own personal sales pitch. It is certainly your chance to demonstrate not only why you want the job, but how and why you would be the perfect fit for the company.

Examine the job description closely, look at why the position has been created and let the interviewer know how you can be the answer to the problem, giving examples of how you have already completed similar tasks.

4 What are your salary expectations?

This is a question that almost always comes up, it is an important question that you should be able to justify the answer to if needed.

To set yourself in good stead, remember that this is not the time or place to be negotiating salary, as at this point you have not secured the job. Look at similar advertised jobs, ask your recruitment consultant for some advice – Reed annually produces salary guides across most industries that will give you some indication of the banding you can expect for a desired role. At this point do not price yourself out of the role, be realistic and be able to justify the amount you are looking for should the interviewer ask.

5 Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

Do you have drive? What motivates you? Are you looking to achieve? These are all things an interviewer can take from asking you this simple question. And unless you are an uber organised person that has a definitive written plan, this can sometimes be difficult to answer.

Any answer you give here should be centred around the company you are being interviewed by. If the interview is for an entry level position explain how you would like your career to progress within the company.

If you are going for a senior role, explain how you would be looking at taking the company forward to increase profits and customer satisfaction. A top tip here - if you can - would be to look at the business strategy or corporate objectives before the interview and explain how you can help in achieving them.

6 Do you have any questions?

Whenever you are asked this question during an interview you should always answer "yes". This question is where the company research you conducted comes in. Base your questions on something relevant to the position you are being interviewed for. If you are applying for a finance position, maybe ask what the predicted turnover will be for the coming financial year, how that compares to the previous years and why the final figure is the case. On the other hand, if you were interviewing for a marketing role, you may want to ask how many downloads and leads came from a recent campaign and which medium the team found most effective for promoting the campaign to its target audience.

The possibilities are limitless, just make sure you have chosen a question which is not obviously answered on the company's website or social media channels.



Get more help with how to tackle the interview:

Prepare yourself for all eventualities with Reed Chairman James Reed's book:

'Why you? 101 interview questions you'll never fear again'



The big day

On the day of an interview, you may have butterflies, sweaty palms, and your brain may even be slightly cloudy, so here is a list of items you should try and remember to take with you:

Copies of your CV

While interviewers will have received your CV from your Reed Consultant, you should not presume they have had time to print it out. Print 4/5 copies of your CV – one for yourself to reference and then a copy for others who may be involved in your interview. If you know you are having a panel interview – and you know who the panellists are – make sure you have enough copies for all of them.

Top tip

Make sure you put these copies into a folder – this not only keeps them neat but will also make you look professional and organised.



Portfolio of work

This will vary depending on the industry you are in, however, it is always good to take along some examples of your previous work. This may be more prevalent in a creative industry such as marketing, design, journalism or fashion, but it should not stop you.

For example, if you are working in technology and have designed an app or software and are not going to breach any company data regulations, bring your computer to show the interviewer(s) what you have produced.

As another example, if you work in sales and you have some case studies or testimonials you have previously received from clients, print them out and take them along.

References

While these can be sent after the interview, sometimes you may be put on the spot at the interview and asked who they will be. Make a list and take it with you – you want to make the hiring process as fast and seamless as possible.





Pen and paper

This one is self-explanatory, taking notes at an interview will not only help you remember key points should you need them for your second interview, it allows you to engage with the interviewer and let them know that you are listening to what they are saying. You can also refer to the notes to send a follow up email.

Top tip

Keep eye contact even though you are making notes and explain to the interviewer what you are doing to get their permission.



Questions and talking points

Do not try to remember all the questions you have and talking points you have researched – write them down and take them with you, or you may forget or miss something. However, make sure that you do not just read a script off the paper, otherwise you will lose the interviewer(s) engagement.

Positive mental attitude

Even if you are having a bad day, smile, relax and think to yourself "I've got this", it can make a big difference to how you come across.



ID

This will really depend on where you are working, but to enter some buildings you may be asked to show some form of ID. In order to be safe rather than sorry, take your driving licence or passport if you have one.



The second interview

So, the interviewer liked you and you have secured a second interview, now you are getting very close to the role you covet.

A second interview gives the company the opportunity to call you back in, find out even more about you, and compare you to the other candidates that have been shortlisted.

As part of the second interview you could be talking to the hiring manager again, meeting the team you could potentially be joining, or even company directors/senior leaders. Often second interviews involve more senior members of staff.

If you have never had a second interview before, you may be worried that you are just going to repeat yourself over again, but like anything, if you prepare well, then nothing will stand in your way.

Second interviews may take many forms depending on the role and industry you could be working in. You may find you are asked to present on a certain topic, conduct tests or exercises, or it could be a competency-based interview.

Whatever the form of interview, go over any notes you made in the first interview and assess if there were any questions or key information about yourself that you missed – this is often a good starting point.



Common second interview questions

1 What are the main attributes you think are needed for this role?

This is another 'it is time to sell yourself' question that relies heavily on the job description. You will usually see at least a few skills highlighted as essential: indicate why you feel these may be important and think of one or two examples of how you can demonstrate them.

2 Why don't you want this job?

Is this question a trick? The answer is yes it could be, if not addressed correctly. It is designed to make it slightly harder for you to sell yourself. You may have some reservations about the role at this point, so make use of this and ask the interviewer anything you really need clarification on. Make sure you point out that so far it seems an amazing company to work for, but that you would like to know a little more on the area of concern.

3 What would you change about the company?

This question reverts to your initial company research and findings. Look at any campaigns that have been run or strategies that are in place and suggest how you would tweak them for the ultimate return on investment. This could be looking at anything from the company website to the company wellbeing policy.

4 What are your career goals?

This is similar to a "where do you see yourself in X years' time" question. What the interviewer wants to know here is how much you have thought about your future and if you are going to be committed to their organisation for the long haul. The top tip here is to be passionate about the industry the role is in and demonstrate how ambitious you are, and will be, within the organisation. Whatever you do, never tell the company that this is a stopgap – even if it is.

5 What salary are you looking for?

This may not have been discussed in your first interview, but often this question comes up at the second stage. All you can do, as previously stated, is your research – ask your Reed consultant for some information on this as we annually produce salary guides. Be realistic and do not price yourself out of the job or undervalue yourself. It may be better to give an idea of the range you are looking for, rather than a static salary.

6 What is your notice period?

If you are already in a role, check your current employment contract to see how much notice you must give your employer. If you have any existing holiday or know of any other impediments which may affect you starting the job, now is the time to let them know.

Preparing for a presentation task

You may be asked to prepare a presentation on how you would tackle a certain task. Presentations are common tasks set as part of a second interview, especially for higher level roles. Here are a few tips to help you produce a relevant and timely presentation that will make you stand out.

1 Get the objective clear in your head

What are you being asked to do? Read the brief thoroughly and understand what you are being asked to achieve. If you struggle or the objective is unclear, then your consultant will be able to advise you.

Make sure you know who your target audience is – existing clients, potential clients or colleagues.

2 Use your research

Utilising the research you have conducted is key here. Try to use the same tone of voice that the company uses. Consider the aims and objectives of the business and make sure your presentation fits well with achieving them.

3 It is not all about the slideshow

Make sure that your presentation follows a logical order – agenda, introduction, resolution and conclusion.

Keep the look and feel of your presentation professional and slick. Do not fill your presentation with gifs, clip art and images – and try to design it to the style of the company if you can (download the company's logo from their website, if possible, and use this on your presentation). Simple speaks volumes.

4 Remember it is about you

Overall, this is not about how your slideshow looks, but about your knowledge and ability to communicate.

Do not add reams of text to your slides. Keep to short concise bullet points on your slides so you are not tempted to read them word from word. Use them as a cue to expand on the content.

5 Practice your timings

If you have been asked to give a 10-minute presentation, then make sure it is 10 minutes. Timing is key at interviews so practice, practice, practice and make sure you leave some time to take questions.



On the day tasks or tests

You will be informed in advance if your interview is going to involve a test, however, you may not be given more information than that. Just remember to stay calm in this situation and take time your time. A few things to remember:



1. Plan your time

Make sure you give yourself enough time to complete each question or aspect of the task, spend some time doing this before you start.



2. Double check

If you find some time after completing the task at hand, go back through your answer(s) and check them thoroughly, also check for spelling mistakes and bad grammar.



3. Be able to back up your response

You may be asked why you completed the task as you did, or be questioned about your responses. Make sure you are clear on this and be confident in your answers.

Final thoughts

This eBook demonstrates a broad range of interview questions and task responses. Remember, your interview may take any form depending on the company or industry.

Whatever happens, the best piece of advice anyone can give is to be prepared, do your research into the company, study the job description and have confidence in yourself. Going into the interview with a positive mindset and a can-do attitude, will speak volumes.

At every stage of the interview process it is important you ask questions and take an interest in the prospective company.

And finally, as soon as your interview is over, no matter what the stage, you are often itching for feedback, but the interview process can take a while – there may be a number of candidates in for interview, and if a panel is involved they will need to debate their choices. Feel free at any stage of interview to ask the interviewer what the process timeline is and when you will be likely to hear back.

Food for thought: After an interview it will stand you in good stead to send a thank you email to the interviewer – this can be done through your Reed consultant. Research shows that only one in 20 candidates do this, so taking time to write one and sending it to your consultant gives you a great opportunity to leave a lasting impression. The email should be brief, thanking them for their time, emphasising your interest in the role and expressing your excitement to hear back from them.



Your Reed specialist is here to help you with every step of the process, reach out with questions and they will happily provide you with advice and support.



