

Interview Tips

Interview performance is often the deciding factor as to whether you get the job so it is very important that you are well prepared and confident.

There are a few things you should always do before any interview, as well as some common interview questions that you should be prepared to answer. The key to success is preparation, so you could also ask your teacher or parents to help you to prepare by staging a mock interview with you!

Things to do before your interview:

Research the company

Make sure that you have looked on the company website and have also conducted independent internet searches for other information such as recent news articles, so you know about their business and what they do.

Research the job specification

Why do you want this particular job? It is really important that you understand what the job involves and what you could bring to it. All of the information about the job itself should have been given to you beforehand in the 'job specification' – this is an outline of the role, responsibilities of the role, skills that are essential to do the job and others key skills. In the interview try to relate all of your answers back to the skills and qualities that they are looking for.

Know your CV

It sounds obvious but be prepared to answer questions about your CV, as well as provide a three to four minute talk about yourself, your key educational achievements, any work experience you have done and information about your current role. You will also be asked about your hobbies and interests, as well as any other relevant information that makes you stand out, for example, you may have learnt Spanish on a Gap year or volunteered during Summer holidays – all of this helps to highlight your skills to employers.



Top five interview questions:

There are lots of basic interview questions that you are likely to be asked, as well as specific ones that relate to the particular industry. For example, if applying for a job in a retail clothes store, you might be asked to pick out an outfit for an imaginary customer's birthday party, but this would not be the case in an office role.

It is important to think through the types of question that you might be asked so that you are prepared. The interviewer might phrase the question differently than you had planned but don't let that confuse you, think about what they have asked, think about the possible answer and give your answer clearly and confidently. If you really don't understand the question, you can ask them to rephrase it or you could repeat it back to them in your own words to make sure you have understood what they have asked you.

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Interview Tips cont'd

Five very common interview questions:

- 1 Tell me about yourself (see above 'Know your CV').
- 2 What are your strengths? List three key strengths/qualities that relate to the job you are applying for. Use the job specification to help you identify the main ones and give specific examples.
- 3 What are your weaknesses? This can be a tricky question; everyone has weaknesses but the key here is to identify one and turn it into a strength/positive. For example, 'I have learnt that I can sometimes be too focused on one job. To help me manage my time I have begun writing a 'to-do' list at the start of the day, which helps me to focus on all the tasks I need to achieve that day.'
- 4 Why have you applied for this role? Explain why this role interests you (i.e. that it fits in with your key skills and education) and why you want the job.
- 5 Why do you want to work for us? Think about things such as their history (when was the company founded, are there any important dates in the history such as takeovers, new product launches, etc.), their products/services and also about the industry generally. So if applying to a car manufacturer make sure you know something about the motor industry (for example, how it is performing as a whole, who the market leaders are, etc.) Explain why you want this role.

On the day:

On the day of the interview be sure to arrive ten minutes early and to be dressed smartly. Think about how you want to present yourself. So be sure to wear smart, professional clothes (e.g. shirt and tie or knee length skirt), to have clean and tidy hair and not to wear too much jewellery.

Take a hard copy of your CV (you may be asked to give this to the interviewer) and a pen and paper in case you want to make notes.

You should have been told who is interviewing you and for how long. Some interviews are one-to-one, whereas others might be panel interviews or might involve someone else coming in at some point. Be prepared for this and don't panic! Nerves are normal and the interviewer/s will expect this, but keep focused on making a strong first impression.

During your interview maintain eye contact and greet everyone you meet with a big smile and a handshake. The most important thing is to stay calm and confident, and to speak at a steady pace with a clear voice so that the interviewer understands you. Remember you are selling yourself so don't be too modest when you answer questions!

At the end of your interview you will normally be asked if you have any questions. Always have at least one or two questions pre-prepared, and during the interview make notes of anything you might like to ask later. Try to relate your questions to the role and the company, but avoid asking about pay or holidays at this point as you don't want the interviewer to think this is your only interest.

After the interview, if you are unsuccessful at getting the job ask for feedback on your performance (most employers will be able to give you some pointers and tips) so you can learn for next time. Interviews get easier with practise so don't be put off if you don't get this job, learn from the experience and prepare well for the next one.