

How do I prepare for an interview?

The purpose of the interview is for the assessors/interviewers to find out as much as possible about a candidate's suitability for the role. From the candidate's perspective it is his or her opportunity to present themselves in the best possible light.

About the interview itself

1. Interview details – prior to the interview

- You will be sent details of when and where the interview will take place, which will explain where you need to report to prior to your interview.
- Plan your journey to the interview and leave yourself plenty of time to get there.
- The interview is likely to take up to 45 minutes to an hour.
- You should dress smartly for your interview.

2. The interview location

- The interview is likely to be conducted in a meeting room or office. Phones should be turned off in order to minimise interruptions.
- The chairs are likely to be laid out in a group around a small table, rather than the interviewers being sat behind a desk.

3. The interviewers

- The interview panel will be made up of at least two interviewers.
- Just as you would expect, the interview panel will introduce themselves and one of them will welcome you, giving you an explanation of what will take place, i.e. that you will be asked a series of questions, some of which have a number of parts, that you can ask for any questions to be repeated, etc. The intention of the interviewers is not to make you feel uncomfortable; they want you to do well.

4. The content of the interview

- The questions you will be asked will be set standard questions, based around the job role that you are applying for. Each interviewee will be asked the same standard questions.
- Questions may have a number of parts and/or have a lot of detail, for example, scenario questions.
- It would be rare for the panel members not to probe into your answer more deeply by asking some supplementary questions. Do not take this as a failing, they are simply allowing you to give as full an answer as possible. If, however, the probing continues for an unnaturally long time then you may surmise that you haven't answered the question appropriately. In this instance, **do not panic!** Take a moment to listen to the question or perhaps ask for the initial question to be repeated and try to establish what they may be looking for in the answer. Listen to see if they emphasise any particular words in their questioning, which could indicate where the focus is needed in the answer.
- At the end of the formal standard questions the interviewers may ask if you wish to return to a question or have anything else you would like to add. This is a chance for you to add to a question that you feel you didn't answer fully, and also to make a closing statement if you so wish. Have a few sentences prepared in advance to support your application in case you get the opportunity.

5. During the interview

- The interview does tend to be less conversational as the interview questions are standardised. The interviewers will be reading the questions and will need to note your responses throughout the interview. Therefore, please bear in mind that even if the interviewer is not looking at you they are listening, as you may find that some interviewers are more practiced than others in trying to ensure taking notes does not interfere too much with eye contact.

- It is likely that the interviewers will take it in turns to ask the questions. Even if a question has been asked by one interviewer you should not focus on that interviewer when answering as this may exclude the other interviewer. You should aim to make eye contact with both interviewers when answering a question.
- As the interview panel will be introduced to you at the beginning you will know their background, which will help you when answering questions, as whilst you will not want to make your answers too basic, equally you should be mindful of not excluding an interviewer by using jargon that a non practitioner may not be aware of.
- Keep your answers concise, don't waffle!
- If you feel that you have waffled, end your answer with a concise summary to make your points clear.
- Use the STAR model when giving examples; describe the Situation, Task, Action, Result. For example if you were asked the question 'Tell me about a difficult situation you resolved', you could use the STAR model and say: *'The situation was...; The task or objective that I had to achieve was...; The approach and actions that I took to achieve this were...; and this resulted in.....'*. Practice articulating these responses before the interview.

6. Knowledge and preparation

- Interviewers will expect the interviewee to know what the role will involve and to have thought about what makes them the best person for the role.
- You will have a copy of the job profile, so when preparing make sure that you go through it and think of the knowledge, skills and experience you have that are relevant for the role, and prepare examples of how you have demonstrated these and the competencies. Your PDR and evidence you are collating for your next PDR will be helpful if your current role requires similar knowledge, skills, experience and behavioural competencies to the one that you are applying for.

Standard Interview techniques

These can be found almost anywhere, but below is a condensed version from various literature, that offers guidance on this area.

- ⇒ Be smart.
- ⇒ Smile.
- ⇒ Be enthusiastic – 'I like my work; I want this job'.
- ⇒ Listen carefully to the questions. Make sure you understand the question before offering any answer. Allow the interviewer to finish asking the question before offering an answer.
- ⇒ If you miss the question or are not sure about it, rephrase the key words and ask the interviewer to clarify. Do not attempt to answer without fully understanding the question.
- ⇒ If you do not anticipate a question and have not prepared an answer for it, pause and think before offering one. It is better to think carefully for an appropriate answer than to offer an inappropriate one in a hurry. And don't be tempted to subvert the question by giving an answer to a question that you have prepared for instead!
- ⇒ You need to take the initiative in providing useful information for the interviewer in order to evaluate your suitability for the position. Do not give yes/no or one-sentence answers only. Give your answer directly and support it with relevant evidence from past experience.
- ⇒ Although you should prepare your answers for interview questions beforehand, you should not recite them directly from your memory in front of the interview panel. You should memorise the main ideas and offer the answers in a natural and spontaneous way.
- ⇒ It is important to maintain eye contact with the person asking the question and give an answer with an example to support it. Always acknowledge the other interviewers' presence by making eye contact while answering rotating questions. Direct your attention at the beginning and end of your response to the person who asked you that question.
- ⇒ Sell yourself. You need to show the interview panel how your skills and abilities can positively impact the organisation within the role. The four categories of selling yourself are:
- ⇒ **Enthusiasm, Sincerity, Tact, and Courtesy.**

- ⇒ Be aware of what your body is saying. Avoid closed postures. Sit upright, but not stiffly. Try to find a comfortable position as that will make you feel more relaxed.
- ⇒ Don't fidget, wiggle your foot, or 'talk with your hands'. Try to maintain a relaxed, open manner. Keep your voice level at an appropriate volume. If you speak very softly, this may be interpreted as shyness or a lack of assertiveness. Speak clearly and in complete sentences.
- ⇒ Relax!

Candidates tend to make the same common mistakes; examples of these are listed below:

- Giving a short answer.

For example, saying that you would be the best person for the role because you were a police officer for 20 years and listing the roles you carried out. Whilst this might be a good opening for your answer you need to expand on this to detail what it was about these roles that you can bring to the role you have applied for, eg knowledge and skills gained that are relevant to this role.

Regard the question as the opening of a doorway to your knowledge. Remember that you can only be assessed on what you say, therefore use this as an opportunity to demonstrate to the panel your knowledge, experience and skill. Bring in as many relevant points as you can.

- Not sufficiently selling yourself.

Modesty has no place in an interview. Each answer to each question has to have an element of confidence and strength without being arrogant. Be enthusiastic, sincere, tactful and courteous.

- Repetition, rambling, waffling and irrelevancy.

These are all signs of nerves and discomfort and so are difficult to avoid. Preparing your examples for each of the areas under the knowledge, skills and experience section of the job profile can assist with this. The more used to an interview situation you are, the less likely these will come to the fore. Remember, if you feel yourself waffling end your answer with a concise summary to make your points clear.

- Not answering the question

The panel have a list of anticipated or required responses. Some of these will be essential, some desirable. This allows a degree of flexibility in the answer. Due to this the candidate should take care not to drift off the question, as obviously this would reduce the chance of the list in front of the panel being ticked off.

- Badly structured answer.

Another sign of nerves or bad preparation is an answer to a question that focuses on one area, which then changes tact or goes off on a tangent. This gives a sense of clumsiness, which will make you and the panel frustrated. This can be avoided by careful preparation. Your answer should ideally contain an introduction, some prepared points and a conclusion. Long enough to cover the essential points, but short enough to be interesting.

- Inappropriate non verbal communication

The more obvious non-verbal communication points to avoid are folding your arms, cracking knuckles, shifting position too often, folding and unfolding legs, giggling, sniffing - all are stress indicators and if you are aware of them they should be worked on before the interview.

- Inappropriate language.

Avoid referring constantly to 'he' or 'she' (unless it's about a specific person) try to use 'they'.
Avoid the use of slang.

- Assuming that the panel knows you and your performance level, and that should be enough.

The panel can only assess you on what you say on the day.

- Being too glib

Confidence is good, but when it borders on arrogance with sweeping statements of over-confidence, this will hinder the panel's perception of you.

Other less common and possibly more obvious things to avoid are:

- Scruffy attire.
- Asking, "Did I do okay?"
- Slouching and looking too relaxed bordering on bored, and sighing a lot.
- Making throw away comments such as "oh I shouldn't have said that" and "this is what I *should* do", "oh you've got me there", "ask me an easy one", "can I ask a friend".
- Making inappropriate gestures (winking).
- Criticising a person by name or the Force as a whole.
- Adding an inappropriate joke or quip.
- Cracking knuckles.