

Interview Preparation

Good preparation is vital and many interviewees are unsuccessful because not enough time has been invested in it.

This checklist should help you plan your interviews effectively and help you avoid unnecessary pitfalls

How to prepare

- Check the details about when and where the interview is to be held.
- Make sure you are clear on parking/security arrangements.
- Check whether you are supposed to bring anything with you.
- Work out travel times – allow plenty of time for contingencies.
- Allow about 30 to 60 minutes for the interview, plus some time for overruns.
- Check that what you plan to wear is clean, ironed, fits you and is appropriate.
- Research the company – Find out about their products, their customers , their sites
- Research the job – try to speak to someone in the company doing a similar job; ask if a job description is available
- Print off copies of your application form and CV to take with you and read them beforehand to make sure you remember what you specifically put in this application.
- Make sure you have your diary and pen and paper to take with you
- Think about questions you may be asked and plan your answers, perhaps rehearsing them with a friend.
- Think about some questions to ask at the interview:

Three is a good number to prepare – if you only have one, you can bet the interviewer will have answered it in his introduction and you will then be left feeling uncomfortable as you will have nothing else to ask!

- Your questions should be well thought out and relevant
- Make sure they have not already been answered in the advert or pre-interview information
- Try to avoid questions based purely on pay structure or working hours – it can make you appear shallow and not really motivated to do the job. If you do need to ask about these, think about how you can phrase your questions so they come across positively.

When you arrive

- Make sure you park in the right space – it can be very embarrassing having to move your car part-way through an interview...
- Advise reception of your arrival
- A trip to the toilet may be a good idea as those interview nerves can play havoc with the bladder... While you are there, check your appearance
- Be prepared for your interview not to start on time – time management issues frequently lead to overruns, so it's OK to take something to read – but be aware that receptionists may later be asked to comment on what their impression of you was and they may well pass on that your reading material was somewhat distinctive
- If you bump into a other interviewees ensure you act professionally

Making a positive first impression

You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Most of us are familiar with this expression and nowhere is this more important than at interviews. You will be being assessed – possibly as soon as you set foot on the premises. In turn, you will be assessing the interviewer and the organisation.

It is essential that you make those first few minutes count.

Good interviewers should try to base their decision on factual evidence presented rather than on 'gut instinct'. However, we are all human and there will be times when they just do or do not take a shine to a candidate.

Here are some things that help make a positive first impression:

- If you are going to be late, ring and apologise in advance, explaining clearly what has caused the problem
- Smile
- Make eye contact – hold the person's gaze, but don't stare
- Shake hands warmly (avoid the bone crush or limp lettuce handshakes!). Be aware, though, of cultural or religious issues around handshakes. If for any reason you prefer not to shake hands, you need to decide how you are going to handle this, as it is accepted business practise in many organisations
- Be careful how you pronounce the interviewer's name; if you are unsure, ask for clarification on how it should be pronounced
- Use social pleasantries to build rapport.

Interview introduction

Those first few minutes normally follow a fairly standard format. The first thing an interviewer should do is to try and put you at your ease. They may do this by offering you coffee or refreshments. You may find it best to decline politely as it is very difficult to drink and talk. The interviewer should explain the interview process and may give additional information about the job. Listen carefully at this stage. Show that you are paying attention by nodding and smiling. Don't be afraid to write anything down that triggers a question for you to ask later. It's not etiquette for you to start asking your questions at this stage.