



JOB INTERVIEW

How to prepare for a job interview

The first step is done – you succeeded in arousing the HR department's interest and you have been invited to a job interview. For many students the personal interview represents a huge challenge, especially in case it is the first one. In this guideline we want to give some advice how you can convince the HR person with the appropriate preparation.

Before the job interview

A good preparation is essential for succeeding in the job interview. Inform yourself about the company by doing intensive research especially on the firm's website. You should be able to answer questions concerning the company's philosophy, core competencies and product range or services without any problems. On top of that you should do some research about the person who is going to be your interview partner. Shortly in advance take a final look on your application documents, to check which information the counterpart already received and which aspects you want to add or to illustrate in more detail during the conversation.

The first impression counts – so plan your arrival carefully and make sure being on time. You should always calculate a buffer time. As a rule of the thumb you should arrive 5 – 10 minutes in advance of your appointment. In case you are significantly earlier, please wait in a nearby café because showing up too early might mesh up the schedule of the interview person.

In order to achieve a perfect first impression the selection of the clothes also plays an important role. Basically, women should choose a pantsuit or costume in muted colours, men should wear a suit with tie. Depending on the company, the dress code might vary. So try to get some information on that in advance but as a rule of the thumb: it is better to be overdressed than underdressed.

The job interview

In every situation you should always try to be yourself. Listen carefully to what the other person says and keep eye contact. Behave self-confident and turn the focus to your personality as well as your achievements and experiences. Pay attention not to exaggerate and keep telling the truth as experienced human resources employees notices when you are lying.

The structure

Most of the job interviews are structured as the following:

1. Small talk (~ 5 minutes)
2. Self-presentation (~ 15 minutes)
3. Company presentation (~ 10 minutes)
4. Motivation (~ 10 minutes)
5. Individual questions (~ 5 minutes)
6. Closing (~ 5 minutes)

Smalltalk-Phase

The small talk phase is often underestimated by applicants. But this phase can influence the following conversation significantly. The decision whether we like someone or not is taken within the first seconds of contact. In order to achieve a positive first impression you should consider these behavioural guidelines:

- Appear self-confident and relaxed.
- Wait for the other person to shake hands for greeting. You should pay attention to a firm handshake.
- While greeting present yourself with your full name and keep eye contact with your opposite.

Self-presentation

Afterwards you will be asked to present yourself. As this is demanded in almost every job interview you should prepare yourself very well. The self-presentation should last about 5 – 10 minutes and should include the highlights of your career. You can assume that your interlocutor has seen your CV and application documents already. That is why you should focus on those qualifications and experiences which are most relevant for the job and explain them in more detail. By doing so it is important to have a clear structure. In this phase it is also essential to point out your personality. Try to make yourself as memorable as possible by telling interesting stories making your counterpart curious. At the end of the presentation you can also explain your motivation and your aims as well as answering the question why you are suitable for the position.

Presentation of the company

In this phase your interview partners are going to introduce themselves shortly and inform you about the company. They will provide details on the job and talk about the requirements for a career at this employer. Listen carefully even though you might already know some of the information and show your attention by nodding and keeping eye contact. You can also add information in order to prove that you studied the company before. But be careful in doing so. You should neither interrupt the HR person nor starting a monologue about the company. Keep in mind that the interview represents a two-sided application – you have the unique chance to find out if the employer meets your expectations and if you can imagine working in one of their teams. Therefore do not hesitate to ask any questions about the company helping you to make this decision.

Motivation

In the next step you will be asked about your personality and motivation. The interviewer wants to know why he/ she should choose you among several applicants. Be prepared for questions like “Why do you want to work for our company?” and “Why did you apply for this position?” With these questions they also want to find out if you fit to the company’s culture. At best you answer this questions by telling a story as long as it is credible. In this part the interviewer might also ask professional questions. Do not get afraid if you do not know the answer to a question. It is okay not to know everything. But be honest and state that you do not have a response to that question at the moment. Usually the interviewer also wants to test how you deal with such a situation.

Individual Questions

At the end of the interview you will get the opportunity to ask back questions. You should definitely use that chance! Asking questions proves your true interest in the job. Therefore you should by no means answer this question with “no”. Not having questions can be interpreted as shyness or disinterest. Think about possible questions you might pose in the end in advance. Nevertheless questions about the wage, holiday regulation or additional benefits should be avoided in the first interview.

Closing

In case the interviewer did not inform you yet, you can ask about the further application process. At which point of time can you expect a feedback? What will be the next step? When all questions are clarified make sure to thank for the invitation and the time taken for the interview and say goodbye to your interview person.

Further tips and links:

- Pay attention to your body language! Lacking eye contact or loose body posture can create a bad first impression. You can find further information on this topic on the following links: <https://resources.workable.com/tutorial/interview-body-language> ; <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/body-language-can-make-or-break-a-job-interview-hot-jobs>
- Which are the most popular interview questions? A selection of the most important questions and answers can be found here: <https://www.themuse.com/advice/how-to-answer-the-31-most-common-interview-questions#>!
- Do's and Don't's in a job interview. On this link you can find a check list with the most important aspects you should do or rather avoid: <https://www.livecareer.com/career/advice/interview/interviewing-dos-donts>
- How should you react to inappropriate job interview questions? What is an employer allowed to ask and what is forbidden? Answers to these questions are on this link: <https://www.interviewstrategies.com/how-to-respond-to-inappropriate-interview-questions/>
- What are the most common mistakes in a job interview? Which things should you definitely try to avoid? This link helps you to answer these questions: <https://www.thebalance.com/most-common-interview-mistakes-2061111>

We hope these tips and tricks will help you in your job interviews. We wish you good luck and hope that the advice will lead to a successful application.

Main source: <https://www.absolventa.de/karriereguide/vor-und-nachbereitung/vorstellungsgespraech-muster>