



Interview Preparation

An interview should always be two way street. They are an opportunity for the interviewer to find out about you, your skills and motivations, and whether you are a suitable candidate for their position. In addition, it is your opportunity to find out about the organisation, and if their job will provide you with the challenge and satisfaction you are looking for. Make sure you make the most of the occasion, so you are in a position to accept the job when it's offered!

Relax, enjoy it, and be enthusiastic, and you shouldn't go too far wrong.

We have a few pieces of general advice, which it's worth reading over before the meeting, so you are in the best place to perform at your best and make the most of the opportunity.

1. Re-familiarise yourself with your career:

Please spend some preparation time looking through your CV.

All interviews will use your CV as the principle structure for the interview. Print off your CV off and sit down with a pen. Working up from the start of your career, look through your CV in detail and write notes in relation to the companies, roles, projects & technologies you have worked with. Re-familiarise yourself with your career and what you have actually done – you will have done a huge amount in your career and the aim here is to remind yourself about what you've done!

You are looking for the “war stories” – examples of episodes in your career you are particularly proud of, or examples of things which may be relevant to the job you are applying to. This can be things which have gone very well, things which have gone badly, examples of people you have worked with and what the dynamics were.

This exercise will also highlight what you enjoy and where your strengths lie, and it will allow you to focus on what it is you really want to get out of your next job. It will ensure you know exactly what you are looking for in a new role & new company.



2. Ensure you know about the company, and what the job will entail:

Make sure you get all the information from your consultant on the role that there is. Make sure you have any Job Specification, if one is available, and that you take the time to discuss it all with your consultant.

Have a look through the spec in detail - in the same way as your CV, print it off and make notes on where your skills and experience match to it; noting what real life examples you can talk about from your CV, and trying to match as many as possible. Make notes on any questions you might have in relation to the spec, which you can talk about at the interview.

Make sure you are familiar with the company website. Don't feel you have to go crazy – it's an interview, not an exam on the company – but ensure you understand who they are and what they do, and importantly who the people you are meeting are, and what they do for the organisation. You should be able to find out about them from LinkedIn, and discuss with your consultant how the relationships fit together.

3. Be enthusiastic, relax, and get there early

Make sure you know where you're going and get there in plenty of time. You should ideally be there calmly with 15 minutes to spare.

Often the decision to hire is made in the first 10 seconds. Greet the employer with a firm handshake; make eye contact, and smile. Try to relax, be self confident, but not cocky, and let your personality shine through – one of the more common complaints we here is about people being overly professional! Be polite and friendly – in fact, just be yourself.

It's a very well respected rule of thumb that you should ALWAYS wear a suit to an interview (or something suit-like for ladies if you like) – if you plan to wear anything different, please ask your consultant for advice.

Some interviews are very relaxed – more like a chat over a coffee, and some will be much more formal, panel based discussions, sometimes with technical or psychometric tests. We should be able to tell you what to expect. One final word of warning – no matter how well the interview is going, please don't swear! (You'd be surprised how often it can happen)

4. Competency based questions

Competency based questions can seem daunting if you are not quite sure what to expect, but really they are nothing new. The questions will be worded in such a way as to elicit a personality or work trait through how you have handled things in the past – i.e. “tell me about a time when...” (NB – there are examples of such questions at the end of this document.)



These questions may appear oblique, but they have their uses. Try to make your answers concise and to the point. Use your work and education as the basis of your answers.

Hopefully the preparation work you do with your CV should help you answer these questions - you should have some War Stories which might be interesting to talk about. If you want to pause before you answer – that’s fine, simply say you need a moment to think about it. Much better to take a moment and deliver an answer which is relevant, than launch headlong into a describing a situation which might not be.

There is a textbook way to answer these questions... That is to **briefly** describe the situation to set the scene, then talk in more detail about your actions, i.e. what **you** did, then to briefly describe the outcome or the result. It’s important to you about what **“you”** as opposed to what **“we”** did – they are interested in you, not your team.

5. Be specific

The interviewer will be interested in how your background and experience fit their specifications; so try to bring those points into your answers. Include **specific** factors that relate to the position. Use examples of past experiences and special achievements that will help the employer picture you successfully in the position. It’s often more effective to talk about specifics rather than hypotheticals - If applicable tell how you saved your past employers money or increased productivity, and try to construct your answers so the employer will see you in the job.

6. Asking questions

Many employers evaluate the candidate by the questions that they ask. Employers like specific questions about the job, or the company's plans and goals. This is not the time to ask about salary, benefits, vacations or hours. Employers like candidates who show a genuine interest and enthusiasm in them as employers. There is a list of questions people have asked in the past at the end of this document.

7. Salary/rate

The employer may ask you how much you are looking for. Just be open and honest, let them know your current salary and any benefits. It’s fine to ask for an improvement on what you’re currently earning. If you feel more comfortable then deflect the question back onto us – just tell them they would be better discussing that question with your consultant.

If you’re interviewing for a contract job, **never** discuss the rate! Obviously the charge rate to the client and our pay rate to you will be different! Just say that the rate is a matter for Cathcart Associates, and they should ask us.

If the employer makes a firm offer and you want the job, accept it. If you are doubtful or undecided ask for 24 hours to think it over. Never refuse an offer of employment until you have time to think it over and discuss it with your consultant.

8. Say thank you in person and in writing



Before leaving the interview thank the interviewer for taking the time to talk with you. Follow up with a personal thank you note or email stating why you are interested and that you can do and want the job – and send that to your consultant.

Good questions to ask at interviews

- What is the most important part of this job?
- What do you expect me to have achieved after 3 months, 6 months, 12 months etc
- How would you describe an ideal candidate for this position?
- What is a typical career path from here?
- Talk me through what I'll be doing on a daily/weekly basis?
- Talk me through the first month in the role
- What are the company's aims and goals?
- What are the short/long term goals for this department and how do they relate to the company as a whole?
- Where does this company see its self in five years?
- How would you describe the environment I'll be working in?
- How would my performance be assessed?
- Please describe the organization of the company?
- What do you like about working here?

Good things to do at an interview

- Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and a smile
- Make good eye contact
- Maintain good posture and don't fidget. Sit upright (do not slouch) in the chair
- Listen carefully and wait your turn to speak
- Dress professionally. Business suit only unless told otherwise
- Arrive 10 minutes before your scheduled interview time
- Research the company - know the current issues, news, and how they fit into their particular sector
- Know why you want to work for the company and how you can contribute
- Remember that anyone you come into contact with may have input into the hiring decision - always be polite
- Have relevant questions prepared for the interview
- Know what sets you apart from other candidates - what are your strengths
- Practice before going to the actual interview
- Send a thank you note to all the people with whom you have met – send this to your consultant so they can pass it on
- Remember firms are choosing from a number of qualified applicants: don't take rejection personally
- Talk with individuals who have previously worked in the company or industry you are interested in



- Have a clear understanding of what you want to get across in the interview
- Think about the interviewer's questions before you give just any answer, make sure it clearly answers the question
- Call if you are going to be late – either directly or to your consultant

Not good things to do before / at an interview

- Arrive late
- Wear heavy make-up, cologne or perfumes
- Smoke before your interview
- Focus on your perceived weakness or lack of experience
- Be critical of current employers
- Exaggerate or lie about yourself or your work history
- Ask questions for the sake of asking questions
- Ramble about non-relevant issues
- Show impatience with the interviewer, even if you have been kept waiting too long
- Assume that you know the outcome of the interview after it is over - you are not a mind reader
- Let the interview process stress you out
- Be afraid to use non-work experience to highlight a particular skill

Some example interview questions

Here is a list of tough questions. Always attempt to answer these questions with an on-the-job example or experience to support it.

Competency Questions – based on real world examples from your career:

Tell me about a time when....:

- Time you had to build a relationship with someone who was difficult and not easy to approach
- Time you've managed a challenging event and project to a deadline
- Time you've worked in a group and when your opinion was different from someone else
- Time you've had to influence or change someone's point of view
- Time you had conflict within a team. How did you respond? What could you have done better?
- Time you had initiated, and/or implemented a new idea to do something
- Time you had to complete a series of tasks to a deadline. How did you manage your time? what did you learn from this experience
- When did you lead a team to success? Why was it a success?



- Time when you have had to persuade a colleague or superior to your way of thinking.

Other popular interview questions:

1. Tell me about yourself
2. Why have you decided to change jobs?
3. Why are you looking for a new job?
4. Why did you leave your previous position?
5. What motivates you?
6. What would you consider to be your key skills?
7. Describe your ideal job
8. Describe your ideal manager/supervisor
9. How do you spend your free time?
10. What are your short, medium and long-term goals?
11. How do you react to criticism?
12. Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself?
13. What are the most important things you are seeking in a career?
14. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
15. Site some examples of your ability to be a team player
16. Why should I hire you?
17. How would you contribute to our organisation?
18. Why did you choose the university you attended?
19. Why didn't you go to university?
20. What do you know about our company?
21. Why are you interested in working for our company?
22. What extracurricular activities are you involved in?
23. Are you willing/able to relocate?
24. What type of a work environment are you seeking?
25. What do you know about the position you are applying for?
26. What do you know about our industry?
27. What are you proudest of in terms of your accomplishments at your present position or former position?
28. What do you think will be the toughest aspects of the job if you were to accept the position?
29. What will be the most enjoyable aspects of the job if you're successful? Or the least enjoyable?
30. What do you think your greatest contribution will be or what aspects of the job or the company do you think you would be able to make your greatest contribution to?
31. If you are selected for this position, how would you deal with the situation of individuals in the company who were competitors for the job for which you are being interviewed and who may feel that they are better qualified? (Some of them may be your subordinates)

