



How to nail that interview

Many job seekers unwittingly sabotage their own chances of securing that dream job by making common, easily avoidable, interview blunders. An impressive performance at client interview is essential to secure the role.

Generally, you will be competing against several other candidates at the interview stage, so you really need to 'sell' yourself – without overstating your skills and experience. Your resumé and consultant have got you this far, but now it is up to you.

Those who perform well at interview are made job offers ahead of sometimes more qualified applicants. Therefore, skill and experience alone cannot be relied upon at this point. How you demonstrate your competencies is crucial, both from a technical and a personal perspective.

Putting in a good interview performance can be learnt and practiced. Here we have broken down the key to successful interviewing into the following categories:

1. Understanding the interview objectives
2. Preparing for the interview
3. Commonly asked interview questions
4. Questions you can ask
5. Interview do's and don'ts

Understanding the interview objectives

The purpose of an interview is to broadly answer the following three questions:

- > Do you have the skills and knowledge necessary to do the job?
- > Do you really want the job? i.e. Are you motivated to do the job and is it in line with your desired career path?
- > How will you fit with the rest of the team/organisation? i.e. Is your style and values in line with those you will be working with, as well as the wider organisation?

The interview technique currently in favour is competency based interview questions, where you are required to draw on your previous performance in specific scenarios as an indicator of expected future performance. The interviewer is looking for real world examples, not hypothetical indications. Therefore, you must be prepared to provide specific scenarios, your actions and outcomes.

For a specific role, each applicant will be asked the same questions. This will enable the interviewer to make a direct

comparison between candidates. It also gives the interviewer the ability to rate or score the answer in a more scientific manner. Therefore, your ability to answer what was asked in a clear and concise manner is crucial.

Interviews do vary from informal with no apparent structure, to formal and highly controlled. The important thing to remember is that no matter what the interview style, you should always maintain professional boundaries. Often individuals are lulled into a false sense that all boundaries have been dropped, when in fact they haven't.

How to prepare for an interview

The key to successful interviewing is preparation.

What you will be aiming to demonstrate is how what you have learnt in the past can contribute to your success in this role. You will be probed about your past, so you need to be able to portray yourself in a positive and balanced manner.

Therefore, your first step will be to take an introspective approach by reviewing your career so far and making sure you identify your key skills and strengths, achievements and shortcomings. Have clarity around your reasons to move, as well as what you want to achieve over the short and medium term. These will be the key areas covered in the interview.

1. Research the job

- > Identify where your skills and experience match the role and ask yourself can you add-value to the company in this position.
- > Identify any aspects of the role that you need to have clarified and prepare your questions for the interviewer.

2. Research the company

- > By the time you get to client interview stage you will have been prepped by your consultant, but it is still important to do your own research
- > This will prepare you for the common question "How much do you know about our organisation?" You will be able to respond with a summary and your observations, which you will gain via Google searches, questions of friends and referees and other sources.



How to nail that interview – (cont'd)

Commonly asked interview questions

Q. Tell me about your career to date?

A. Be prepared to talk for about 2-3 minutes here and provide a snapshot of your most recent roles – unless recent, going back over your whole career is unnecessary and time consuming. Be concise and provide the highlighted details.

Q. Why are you leaving your present position?

A. Critical question. Don't bad mouth your current/previous employer or come across as being opportunistic. If there are clear issues, it is fine to mention them, but remember to be honest and objective.

Q. What do you consider to be your most significant achievement?

A. A good answer here could get you the job. Discuss hard work, long hours, pressure and important company issues at stake. Maybe a 2-3 minute detailed story, which outlines your personal involvement. Don't feel that you need to cover every aspect off. Give the client the opportunity to delve deeper into the areas they are interested in.

Q. Why should we hire you for this position? What kind of contribution do you feel you would make?

A. This is a good chance for you to summarise and address the key criteria/challenges highlighted. Don't be arrogant – instead demonstrate a considered, organised and firm attitude.

Q. Why do you believe you are qualified/suitable for this position?

A. Pick 2 – 3 main factors about the job and yourself that are most relevant. Include specific details in your answer.

Q. What are your career goals? Where do you see yourself five years from now?

A. Be realistic. One or two management/level jumps in 3-5 years is a reasonable goal. If your track record indicates you are in line for a senior management role in XX years, mention it. However, if you have had a bumpy ride so far, it is worth being a bit more introspective.

Questions you can ask

Never leave an interview without asking any questions. This suggests disinterest and a lack of preparation to the client.

Asking questions shows you have a keen interest in your potential employer. However, never ask a question that has already been answered during the interview. This demonstrates inattentiveness.

Have at least five questions prepared before the interview, which will show the client that you are taking this opportunity seriously.

To help you get started we've prepared the following list. Chances are you will think of further questions during the interview.

Question time

- > What are the key challenges of the position?
- > Why is the position vacant?
- > How would you describe the corporate culture?
- > What are the growth plans for the company?
- > What opportunities does the position provide for personal growth?
- > Why do you enjoy working for the company?
- > What is the next step in the interview process?



How to nail that interview – (cont'd)

Interview do's and don'ts

Do

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- > Strive to create a positive first impression by dressing professionally (conservatively), smiling, maintaining eye contact and extending a firm handshake
- > Be specific and concise when answering questions and use practical, real world examples
- > Take your time when answering questions. Don't feel under pressure to fill any gaps in the conversation by rambling
- > Be positive – both about yourself and the progress of the interview
- > Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you don't understand the question
- > Make sure you are tuned into the conversation and are listening effectively
- > At the end of the interview, smile and thank the interviewer for their time

Don't

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- > Provide monosyllabic or vague answers to the questions – be prepared to elaborate
- > Criticise yourself or previous employers
- > Oversell yourself
- > Think that your resumé alone will win you the job
- > Be too informal – it will be considered unprofessional
- > Ramble – your interviewer will lose interest
- > Leave your mobile on under any circumstances