



WMRC

**INTERVIEW
TECHNIQUES &
USEFUL TIPS**

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Objectives of a job interview

Job interviews are commonly used to ascertain a job seeker's suitability for a role. Just like any business meetings in which people attending them go with specific objectives in mind, it is likewise recommended to approach a job interview knowing what you want to get out of it.

Of course, you really want to do well enough in a job interview to be offered the job! After spending all your efforts in job search and sprucing up your CV, you really want to make sure you perform your very best in this final stage of selection.

Performance is key and it makes a huge difference to how your interviewers are likely to perceive you relative to other applicants. If you perform really well, there is a high chance of you outdoing your competitors who could be better qualified than you but lacking in interview skills.

Mastering interview techniques hence has a direct impact on your potential to secure a job offer. The better prepared you are, the more likely you will impress your interviewers and emerge successful in your job search.

You need to know what you want to gain out of a job interview. As much as you will be assessed by the interviewers, you want to also find out whether this is the right job, right company or people you want to work with.

Every interviewer attends a interview meeting expecting to answer three questions:

1. Whether can you do the job?
2. Whether do you want the job?
3. Whether would you be compatible with the existing team structure and members?

The first question looks at whether you possess the necessary skills and experience needed to do the role, and the interviewer will attempt to arrive at an accurate assessment of that at the end of the meeting.

The second question looks at whether the role makes sense for you. The interviewer will attempt to find out how badly you want the role, how well it would fit in with your overall career goals and whether there is further scope for growth if you were to take up the role.

The last question looks at soft issues, such as your ability to get along with the existing members and the corporate level appropriate for you if they were to offer you the job.

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Objectives of a job interview

For yourself, you should be equally prepared with the exact same questions but phrased differently:

1. Whether the role allows you to leverage on your skills and experience?
2. Whether the role matches well with your overall career goals?
3. Whether would you be happy working for them?

Throughout the interview process, you should be trying to find answers to these questions by clarifying any doubts you may have, and verifying certain facts or perceptions you may have on the role and the firm.

The first question looks at how much value you can bring to the role and whether it fully utilizes your skills and experience. The company might be great to work for and you have absolute chemistry with the interviewer, but if there is hardly any way you could contribute to the role, it is going to be difficult for you to land the job.

The second question looks at how well the role enables you to reach closer to your career goals. Does it provide you with progression within your existing area of expertise or position you to take advantage of exciting growth opportunities in another interesting field?

The last question boils down to how comfortable you are with the interviewers, the company culture and the business strategies they intend to take on in the near to mid term future. Are you convinced that this is a good company to join and do you see your marketability in the job market increasing after working with them?

Job interviews nowadays are getting more and more creative and employers come up with various methods and questioning techniques to find out the answers they want.

Besides the common method of one-to-one interviews, there are instances where you can be interviewed by a panel. Such interviews are aimed at testing your ability to handle stress and how adept you are at thinking on your feet and presenting yourself in front of several interviewers at one time.

Instead of trying hard to impress every interviewer, it is advisable to focus on answering each question well and then move on to the next. It is difficult to establish rapport with every interviewer, and a more effective way is to leave a positive general impression on the interview panel.

Employers are also known to engage group interviews to inject a dose of reality when selecting candidates with differing skill sets. Such group interviews are usually carried out with you being one of the interviewees, along with 4 – 5 other candidates.

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Objectives of a job interview

Through a real-life example or case study, your group would be tasked to work together to derive a solution to a problem. By observing how each of you perform during the teamwork, the employer then select the one whom they feel best suits the role.

It is recommended that you present yourself confidently and contribute your ideas freely in a group style of job interviews. Try to adopt good listening skills and come up with original and constructive ideas which are easily understood by your team members.

The purpose of group interviews is not about selecting the candidate with the most number of right answers to the case study. Rather, they are designed for the purpose of observing how each team members interact with one another and contribute their ideas.

For this reason, there is no need to try too hard to assert yourself too strongly or prove your views are better than the others.

Assuming you clear the first round of interview, you should thank the interview panel and acknowledge the efforts of your other team members as a gesture of appreciation and graciousness.

There is no standard number of interviews which employers conduct before making their final choice, but as you progress higher in seniority, the hiring cycle become longer and more people would be involved, as more would be at stake in your hire.

Do bear in mind that the way you project yourself should be consistent no matter how many rounds of interviews you have attended.

Candidates are selected based on fulfilling certain criteria and interviewers are known to share information among themselves to cross-check on your responses and reactions to questions.

To do well in job interviews, you must be aware of the consistency of your message and how you come across to different interviewers. If you have demonstrated the ability to manage project teams to interviewer A, there is a high chance that interviewer B would ask you similar questions to validate it.

As you progress closer to the final job offer, you could find that the defense level of the interviewer seems to drop progressively. This is typically the case when prior interviewers who have met you have 'screened' you and confirmed you as a good candidate. Subsequent interviewers see you to affirm those findings and to ascertain your fit in other soft aspects, such as your personality and ability to assimilate into the culture of the firm and the team.

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Preparing yourself for a job interview

In life, there is nothing more certain than being able to take personal actions in pursuit of your own goals. It's the same with job interviews – you can and need to take the right actions if you want to do well in them. Preparation is the key to excellent results, and the better prepared you are the more confident you will be and that confidence will show even as you enter the interview room.

We have outlined here three key points aimed at building your confidence level as you prepare for your job interview.

1. Define your Unique Selling Propositions (USP)

Just as a top salesman who knows his sales pitch at the back of his hand, you should prepare a list of USP containing your skills, experience and achievements you have gained over the years of your career that differentiate you from other job seekers.

It could be your technical skills that set you apart from others. It could be your knowledge which you have been able to consistently apply in real work situations. Or it could be your leadership abilities that have seen you overcoming many challenges at work.

Take stock of your USP and devise a core marketing pitch which you can use during the job interview.

Go through a mental rehearsal of what questions could be asked on various aspects of you and your work experience, and how you would tackle each one of them. The purpose of this exercise is to make yourself comfortable in selling yourself, so that you come across as being confident rather than being unsure or awkward about promoting your strengths and capabilities.

2. Research, research, research

Before walking into the interview room, you need to perform at least three areas of research in order to aptly equip yourself with the knowledge to ask intelligent questions. The three areas are research on the job role, research on the company and research on the interviewers.

Research on the job role is absolutely necessary even if you are not preparing yourself for an interview. By understanding thoroughly on what the Job Description (JD) says, you will have a better idea of what the role entails and whether you should apply for the job in the first place.

You could conduct your research on a role over the Internet or speak with friends who are familiar with the role. The Internet provides a great way for you to gain access to a wealth of information on job roles.

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You could visit the various websites of leading search firms to read similar JDs and find out their requirements. You could also look at the job surveys and salary information on those websites to get an idea of what salary figures you could expect across various seniority levels.

For certain professions with dedicated websites, such as accountancy or audit, you could visit those websites to gain better knowledge of the current issues confronting those professions or even visit an online discussion group to find out the general outlook and topics of interest among people working in those roles.

Research on the company can be obtained from the company website or through word of mouth. The company website would offer you a myriad of information relating to company mission/vision, business offerings, uniqueness, key strategies, clients, competitors, financial figures, and so on.

Most company websites also provide information on their corporate structure and key management personalities which would be very useful to know for a job interview.

Talk to your friends or people in your network who might have worked in the company or department before and ask them to relate their experience or feedback on the style of management.

In that way, you could form your own opinions of the firm and role and seek later on in the interview process, to verify or confirm any perceptions you may have.

Research on the interviewer is extremely useful but very often neglected. The most common reason is because many candidates often do not know the identity of their interviewer.

Make sure you find out the full name and job title of your interviewer from your executive recruiter or person arranging the job interview for you. If possible, try to find out more about the person such as the gender, nationality, age, race and personality traits. This will give you a good idea of the person whom you will be meeting with.

You could also try researching on the person over the Internet by keying in the person's name in a popular search engine. For senior executives, it is relatively easy to find public information on their press appearances, speeches or presentations. Go through those information to find out what issues they are currently concerned about and be prepared to be asked questions relating to them during the meeting.

If you can't find the information online, you might want to obtain word-of-mouth feedback of the interviewer. A word of caution is word-of-mouth feedback can sometimes be biased and should not be overly relied upon, especially if the source is unknown or limited to just one source. It is far better to approach an interview with an open mind and positive attitude that is conducive for you to make an impression on and form your own perceptions of the interviewer.

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Preparing yourself for a job interview

3. Presenting yourself for the job interview

The last step of your preparation involves dressing appropriately for the job interview, being punctual and mentally prepared to perform.

First, you should be appropriately dressed and groomed as though you were attending an important meeting. If you look good, you are likely to feel good about yourself and the interviewer will notice your confidence.

Make sure your attire is neat and well coordinated with shoes and accessories that are clean and relatively new. Most of all, be comfortable with how you dress and the 'professional image' you are going to project.

Besides creating a positive first impression, looking good for a job interview could earn you extra credits as the interviewer would appreciate the fact that you make the extra effort to look good for the meeting.

Be sure of how you could arrive at the interview venue punctually. Take note of any special traffic conditions that day that could disrupt your travel plans and be sure to carry the telephone number of the interviewer with you, in case you need to contact him urgently to reschedule the meeting.

Interviews in today's business environment are not restricted to being only in the office, as interviewers sometimes prefer to hold a casual conversation with the candidate over a cup of coffee, or to meet outside the office for reasons of discretion. Although it is in a relaxed setting, you should never let your guard down but behave as though you were being interviewed in the office.

As far as possible, schedule your interview during the time of the day in which you are the most alert and able to perform your best. Sometimes, it is difficult to agree on a convenient time slot especially if the interviewer has busy schedules. In which case, you could be asked to go in during lunch hour, after work or on a Friday evening. Be sure you present yourself well even if you were asked to attend an interview on those time slots.

Lunch hour interviews can last more than an hour, so try to have some food before the meeting so that you do not get distracted by hunger pangs. Likewise, an after-work interview is no excuse for showing up looking worn out from the day. Try to relax your mind and freshen up with a quick visit to the washroom before appearing at the reception. Remember to dress appropriately even if your interview is on a Friday and you are aware of the firm's casual dress practice on that day.

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Performing in a job interview

The time and effort you spent in preparing for your job interview will soon bear fruits as you approach the interview date. Just like preparing for an important exam, you want to make sure you remember all the facts correctly and be ready to handle surprises that could arise on that day. Take any surprise in your stride and deal with it calmly. Your goal is to do well in your job interview and any other disruptions are considered secondary.

Every job interview can be segmented into four main phases:

1. Initial ice breaking
2. Answering questions
3. Asking questions
4. Finishing the interview

We will discuss each phase in sequence and highlight the potential pitfalls and key areas you should take note of.

1. Initial ice breaking

You have done your research and have accumulated good understanding of the job role, the company and also know some basic information about the interviewer you are going to meet with.

Likewise, the interviewer would have read about you, your career history and achievements as well as some personal details of you. As both you and the interviewer meet for the first time, be sensitive to how you present yourself during the first five minutes of the introduction.

Beyond the usual handshake and greeting, you need to quickly analyze your interviewer's style and adapt your approach accordingly. If your interviewer is energetic and cheerful, you should also project warmth and enthusiasm. If your interviewer is serious and formal, you would need to tone down your energy level though being careful not to appear bored or lethargic.

Throughout the first five to ten minutes of the meeting, your goal is to quickly build rapport with the interviewer by projecting interest, trust and credibility.

The way you maintain eye contact, smile and listen makes a difference on whether your interviewer feels interested to engage further with you. What you are effectively doing is achieving and maintaining a level of interest with the interviewer so that he forms a positive first impression of you and wants to find out more about you.

Be mindful of distractions that could interrupt the meeting and maintain your composure even if the interviewer gets called to attend to urgent tasks. Wait patiently for your interviewer to return and if the wait seems too long, contact the receptionist to see that alternative plans need to be made. Always ensure your mobile phone is switched off or in the silent mode.

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2. Answering questions

After the initial ice breaking, you are ready to start the conversation proper with your interviewer. This phase of the interview usually occupies around 70% – 80% of the entire meeting and your interviewer will be asking you questions relating to your training, work experience, skills, achievements, motivation to leave your current job, etc.

Typical questions are:

- a. What made you apply for this job?
- b. How much do you know about our company?
- c. What is your current role and responsibilities?
- d. What relevant skills or experience do you have in order to do well in this role?
- e. What is your current salary and notice period?

These questions are relatively straightforward and you should be able to answer them with ease.

Question a seeks to understand your motivation for applying for the role. In the process of hearing your responses, your interviewer will observe how confident and convincing you sound, and whether your reasons are logical enough.

Question b would be easy for you if you have done your research on the company. This is the time for you to impress your interviewer with the knowledge you have about the company, and your positive feelings towards it. You do want to guard against sounding artificial and unnatural when talking about the positive aspects of the company. Again, practice would sharpen the quality of your delivery.

Question c enables the interviewer to know more about your current job and your responsibilities. Explain clearly your role, the reporting structure, and whether you have supervisory responsibilities. Share with the interviewer specific aspects of your duties and how well you have performed. Highlight the major achievements you may have, as well as the skills and experience you have developed in your current role.

Question d examines the relevancy of your skills and experience for the role. Rather than regurgitating your entire career history, focus on those few key areas that you could make a difference with in this role. Illustrate specific examples where you have delivered results using skills which are relevant for the role and explain how you could leverage on those experiences to add value to the company.

Question e seeks to understand your current remuneration package and how soon you can join the company if you were selected. Be upfront and accurate in your response and provide any salary breakdown if any, in terms of base salary, bonuses whether discretionary or guaranteed, commissions, etc.

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Performing in a job interview

After answering the typical questions, be prepared to answer the tougher questions which can be posed to you as you progress deeper in the conversation.

Tougher questions are:

- f. Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses?
- g. Why did you make the move from Company X to Company Y?
- h. What are your reasons for wanting to leave your current company?
- i. Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?
- j. What is your salary expectation?

Question f contains two parts which must be answered separately. You can choose to either talk about your strengths or your weaknesses first but it could be a good strategy to first relate your weaknesses especially if one or more of your strengths is able to effectively cover up your weaknesses.

In articulating your weaknesses, it is important to deliver your message confidently and in a serious tone. Make sure your weakness is not a problem associated with your attitude or one that could affect your ability to perform in this role.

You could turn your weakness to your strength by explaining how you have been working to reduce the extent of your weakness, suggesting your awareness of the problem and the proactive approach you are taking to change for the better.

Describe your strengths without sounding as though you are boasting. Be specific as you quote examples of how your strengths are demonstrated by the achievements you have garnered in a personal situation or preferably in a work setting. If possible, state in quantitative terms how your strengths have made a difference to the companies or people you have worked with and relate them to this role.

Question g examines those decisions you made behind your career moves. Employers are interested to know this as it gives them an idea of how logical you are and helps them understand the motivating factors involved in your career decisions. If your reasons are weak, they will be concerned as you could be motivated to leave their firm if you were again presented with similar circumstances.

Think carefully before giving an answer. If your reasons for moving stem from your motivation to assume greater responsibility or to acquire broader skills, you will be deemed positively. A career move motivated by higher salary, internal politics or change of job scope is usually seen as opportunistic, inflexibility or having limited staying power in a job.

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Being headhunted to join another company is not a valid reason for a career move, as it does not constitute your underlying reason for leaving a firm to join another. Being headhunted is just a means in which you were presented with an opportunity, much like any other job search channels.

Question h looks at the 'push factors' causing you to look for a new job. Let the interviewer know that you are motivated to move on as you want to progress further in your career. Your current job is either not providing you with career advancement opportunities or you could no longer find challenges to further hone your expertise and skill sets. In short, you have reached a plateau in your current role.

If you are currently unemployed, the interviewer may think that you could be dismissed from your last job due to poor performance or integrity issues. Make sure you address that fear carefully by providing evidence, such as a letter of testimonial or statement from your last employer stating you have been released for reasons such as corporate restructuring or retrenchment and not due to any performance-related issues or character faults.

Question i is a common question asked to find out what career plans you have in the medium term future. Interviewers are keen to know if you have thought through carefully what you want to achieve in your career, and if you are taking calculated steps to make things happen.

As much as possible, relate how this role would complement your 5-year Career Plan. You can start by describing the role and responsibility you are likely to assume in five years' time and explain how this role could help you get there, in terms of the skills and experience you could gain from it.

Articulating this well will undoubtedly impress your interviewer that your interest in this role is not opportunistically driven but motivated by longer term plans which you have considered carefully.

Question j is important as it is usually asked towards the end of the interview and signals some level of interest from the interviewer after speaking with you for the last hour or so.

You could start off by giving your current remuneration details and how you believe your current package commensurate with the value you bring to your firm. Although you want to seek as high a salary you can for the role, you also want to make sure it is within the market range for a firm to pay for a similar role like this. Ask if there is a salary budget for the role instead and indicate your receptiveness to a reasonable offer.

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Performing in a job interview

3. Asking questions

The next phase of a job interview typically involves the interviewer inviting you to ask any question you may have on the job or the company. Even though this is done near the end of the meeting, there is no need to rush through the process. Instead you should take this opportunity to impress the interviewer further by asking good questions that shows your thoroughness and professional approach.

As much as possible, ask questions in an open-ended manner and listen carefully to the responses as you may need to reposition your next question according to the situation.

Intelligent questions to ask are:

- a. How did this role come about? Is it newly created or a replacement to an existing position?
- b. What are the immediate challenges for this role?
- c. What are the performance indicators for this role?
- d. What is the reporting restructure like and is this a regional role/ any travelling involved?
- e. What are the company's vision and strategies for the business?
- f. What is the likely career progression within the company for a role like this?

- g. Can you share about your background and experience working with this company?
- h. What is the next step after our meeting and how soon would you or someone be contacting me with the outcome?

Question a gives you more background of the role and is good to ask as you will receive a direct response from the interviewer, which is far better than hearing it from someone else.

If this is a newly created role, the interviewer will explain the rationale for the new role and it would be good for you to also clarify the level of support and resources dedicated to the role. If this is a replacement role, try to understand the reason for the person's move.

Question b shows your enthusiasm for the role and will allow the interviewer to focus on the immediate tasks required of the role over the next few weeks and months. You want to be sure that those challenges are what have been described in the job specifications and which you are able to undertake and add value. If they are different from what was previously described, seek to understand the deviations and relevance to the role.

Question c helps you understand how your performance will be assessed and is a very important question to ask during a job interview. The more logical and greater clarity the interviewer is able to share with you, the less likely there will a mismatch of expectations in future.



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Question d clarifies who this role reports to and whether there will be junior staff reporting to it. The reporting structure will also give you an idea of the relative size of the team and the amount of workload you can expect. If there is regional responsibility, be sure to ask for the specific markets covered and the amount of travelling required. The reporting structure will also shed light on the complexity of the company, in terms of how the various functions and departments work with one another.

Question e serves more than just a confirmation of your findings gathered in your research during your interview preparation. What you have researched would likely be on a company-wide level, and especially if this is a multinational firm the vision and strategies would likely be assimilated to the local business context and requirements. You need to find out if there are clear strategies and vision in terms of growing the business and how those growth initiatives would impact the role.

Question f enables you to find out the company's commitment to staff and the career development schemes they have. How would this role enable you to progress to a more senior position within the department or to a position in another department. It would be great if the interviewer could share with you specific examples of such moves. Another merit with asking this question is you would have shown to the interviewer your strategic focus and longer-term interest in the company if you were selected for the role.

Question g is a great question to ask as it immediately connects you to the interviewer. Not only do you get to know more about the interviewer who is likely to be the person you will be working closely with, you get to hear his experience with the company and learn from it. Most people are glad to share about their background and experience, and in the process of sharing, you get to see the real person whom you can look up to rather than just another boss you report to.

Question h wraps up the discussion by understanding what will take place next in the selection process. You want to know how long it would take for them to come to a decision, though you do not want to come across as desperate or impatient for an answer. If there is someone whom you will be in contact with, or other information required of you as part of the selection criteria, make sure you know exactly what is needed or expected of you.

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Performing in a job interview

4. Finishing the interview

As much as creating a positive first impression is important in every successful job interview, the final impression that you leave with your interviewer is also important.

When you sense that the interviewer is ending or given indication by the interviewer, you should thank the interviewer for his time and reaffirm your interest in the role and the opportunity to work with him/ the company.

Let the interviewer know that you will await news regarding the decision/ outcome and that you are ready to cooperate and furnish any other details needed for them to decide.

Just as you started with a handshake and good eye contact, end your interview in a similar manner. Your handshake should be firm and your eye contact should convey sincerity and interest.

Remember to ask politely for a business card if you did not receive it at the beginning of the meeting, as you would need it later to send a follow up email or thank you note.

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Next steps

You have done your best for your job interview and felt you have a high chance of being offered the job. As you mull over what have been discussed during the meeting, you become even more convinced that the role and company is what you have been looking for in your career.

Even if you are not that excited with the opportunity, you should still send a follow-up note to your interviewer to thank him for his time and interest in your candidacy. It is always good practice to be polite in the business world, as you never know when your paths might cross again.

Try to send your follow-up note a day after the interview, as it would have given you sufficient time to ponder over what have been discussed during the meeting. Start your email or letter thanking the interviewer for his time and interest in you. You should next reaffirm your interest in the role and state briefly why you would make a strong candidate for it. If needed, you could also ask for feedback from the interviewer on how you have performed during the meeting in order to further improve yourself.

End by providing your contact details to make it easy for someone within the company to call you to make further meeting arrangements or to clarify any information needed for their assessment.