Interview preparation guide

As outlined in http://career-advice.careerone.com.au, although there is no set format that every job interview will follow, there are some questions that you can almost guarantee will crop up. Here’s a list of the most common questions and a guide to the kind of answers your interviewer wants to hear.

Tell me about yourself
This is usually the opening question and, as first impressions is key, one of the most important. Keep your answer to less than five minutes, beginning with an overview of your highest qualification then running through the jobs you’ve held so far in your career. You can follow the same structure of your CV, giving examples of achievements and the skills you’ve picked up along the way. Don’t go into too much detail – your interviewer will probably take notes and ask for you to expand on any areas where they’d like more information. If you’re interviewing for your first job since leaving education, focus on the areas of your studies you most enjoyed and how that has led to you wanting this particular role.

What are your strengths?
Pick the three biggest attributes that you think will get you the job and give examples of how you have used these strengths in a work situation. They could be tangible skills, such as proficiency in a particular computer language, or intangible skills such as good man-management. If you’re not sure where to start, take a look at the job description. There is usually a section listing candidate requirements, which should give you an idea of what they are looking for.

Describe your most recent work related achievement. Detail why it was an achievement including outcome. This is important for all candidates to think about. What, why, when, how, and outcome. Keep this answer specific, should not be a drawn out, long answer. Executives interviewing that have not interviewed for a long time can struggle to articulate answer so the key is to draw all of the important and relevant information out so the interviewer can clearly understand why this was an achievement and your level of knowledge, experience and communication skills. Practice makes perfect so write down a couple of achievements and read back to the mirror or rehearse with a trusted advisor.

What are your weaknesses or where do you think you require further training?
The dreaded question, which is best handled by choosing something that you have made positive steps to redress. For example, if your IT ability is not at the level it could be, state it as a weakness but tell the interviewer about training courses or time spent outside work hours you have used to improve your skills. Your initiative could actually be perceived as a strength. On no accounts say “I don’t have any weaknesses”, your interviewer won’t believe you, or “I have a tendency to work too hard”, which is seen as avoiding the question.

Why does this role appeal to you and why should we hire you?
What can you do for us that other candidates can’t? - What makes you special and where do your major strengths lie? You should be able to find out what they are looking for from the job description. “I have a unique combination of strong technical skills and the ability to build long-term customer relationships” is a good opening sentence, which can then lead onto a more specific example of something you have done so far in your career. State your biggest achievement and the benefit it made to the business, then finish with “Given the opportunity, I could bring xxxx experience and xxxx skill set to your company for a successful relationship.”

What are your goals?
Where do you see yourself in five years’ time? - It’s best to talk about both short-term and long-term goals. Talk about the kind of job you’d eventually like to do and the various steps you will need to get there, relating this in some way back to the position you’re interviewing for. Show the employer you have ambition, and that you have the determination to make the most of every job you have to get where you want to be.
Why do you want to work here? What do you know about our organisation?
The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you’ve given this some thought. If you’ve prepared for the interview properly, you should have a good inside knowledge of the company’s values, mission statement, development plans and products. Use this information to describe how your goals and ambition matches their company ethos and how you would relish the opportunity to work for them. Never utter the phrase “I just need a job.”

What are three positive things your last manager/employer would say about you?
This is a great time to brag about yourself through someone else’s words. Try to include one thing that shows your ability to do the job, one thing that shows your commitment to the work, and one thing that shows you are a good person to have in a team. For example, “My manager has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can always rely on me, and he likes my sense of humour.”

What salary are you seeking?
You can prepare for this by knowing the value of someone with your skills. Try not to give any specific numbers in the heat of the moment – it could put you in a poor position when negotiating later on. Your interviewer will understand if you don’t want to discuss this until you are offered the job. If they have provided a guideline salary with the job description, you could mention this and say it’s around the same area you’re looking for.

Researching the organisation:

- Thoroughly read the organisations website and parent company website. Learn the mission statement, locations, heritage and products/services.
- Google search for latest news/developments
- Ask friends or family what their knowledge is of the organisation (however don’t buy into negative opinions, form your own after interview)
- Location – how to get there on time (www.whereis.com.au www.131500.com.au) and ensure you are only 10 minutes early to the interview – no earlier. It’s always great to give the receptionist a warm welcoming as if they have time, they may even talk to you about the company and offer insight.
- Parking – where can I park for the interview
- Security – do I need to bring my identification to go through company security at street entrance
- Ask your Recruitment Specialist for further information or assistance if you are unsure or are unable to research certain areas.

Additional questions to ask – examples (no more than 3 at the end of the interview)

- What experience does the ideal candidate have and what are you ideally looking for?
- The last person that was most successful in this role, what was their background and why were they so successful? (how/why)
- Why do your employees enjoy working here? What learning & development, career management, employee benefits do you offer your employees?
- Why is this role available and what is the recruitment process? When are you looking for someone to commence?
- How many people have you interviewed for this role to date?
- What is the size of the team and how is the team structured, workflow managed?
- As my manager, what is your expectation of me/the role within the first 6 months and how will I know I am meeting this expectation? How do you manage your team?

At the end of the interview:
It’s always great to end the interview on a positive note and express your interest (if you are interested) and ask when you should hear back from your Recruitment Specialist and next steps.
Dressing for success:

The general consensus is that dressing to impress for that first job interview not only tells the interviewer you are serious about the job but also that you're serious about yourself!

Even in cases where the company culture allows casual dress every day or where the role requires you to wear work denims, it's still a good idea to dress in formal office gear for the initial job interview.

For example, for an office-based corporate role, a suit and tie for men and pants or skirt suit for women would be a good idea. Bright colours underneath the suit work really well. For a trade role, process worker, entry level role or job in a less formal office environment, a crisp, clean shirt/top and jacket with either trousers or pants and closed toe shoes for a woman or shirt and tie and jacket for a guy with dress shoes and business socks is fine.

As a general rule, take extra care with your appearance for a job interview. Think about what you are going to wear a few days before hand so you can check for stains, loose buttons and stray threads. Make sure your clothes are clean and ironed.

Avoid visual distractions such as loud ties, chipped nail polish, heavy makeup, sheer fabrics, heavy ear rings, jewellery that jangles and unwashed hair or hair that flops into your eyes or needs to be constantly pushed back.

Women should avoid too much cleavage or legs - you want people listening to what you are saying - don't you? Also, both women and men should go light on the fragrance and aftershave. And don't have a cigarette just before going to an interview or that, will be your fragrance.

If in doubt, do a full dress rehearsal before the interview and get a second opinion from a friend or family member.

Remember, Interviewers enjoy a positive, engaging, professional candidate with superior communication skills. Try not to twitch, fiddle, tap, make poor eye contact or cut off the interviewer talking.

Post interview:

- Call your Recruitment Specialist as soon as you are free to talk quietly and give detailed feedback. It is important to share feedback whilst ‘fresh’ and your Recruitment Specialist can also immediately provide the client/organisation feedback. This will also demonstrate your level of interest, enthusiasm and professionalism.

- Write down notes from the interview and questions you would like to cover if successful for 2nd interviews. Discuss any concerns or queries you may have with your Recruitment Specialist to work through with you. The 2nd interview is more behavioural based questioning (Tell me about a time, give an example…etc) so you will need to continue the interview preparation to perform in 2nd interview.

- Get your referee’s ready! Ask your 2 x most recent direct reports to be available for a Recruitment Specialist to call and complete a reference check to validate your experience. It is best to have these done by 2nd interview stage to assist the interviewer with further questioning and to also move straight to offer, if appropriate.

- The process is not over until you are in the role! That’s right, some candidates sometimes miss out because they are made to feel they are the only candidate by the organisation/client, which could be the case, but you don’t know who else they may be meeting on the same day.

*Interview preparation is crucial for candidates. Unprepared candidates are obvious in interview and it is a waste of everyone’s time. Do your research, practice questions and answers and do speak with your Recruitment Specialist if you require further assistance with interview preparation as we are here to help!*