

JOB HUNTING ADVICE

INTERVIEW PREPARATION





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Interviews can be nerve-racking but with the right preparation you can keep those jitters at bay and make sure you feel as confident as possible.

Our Stopgap consultants have given their advice and support to thousands of candidates over the years, helping them find their perfect new job. Here are their top tips for a successful interview.

Before you start

Before you start, make sure you're sure why you want this job. Are you clear about your career objectives and goals?

It's important to be able to reassure and convince the client that you know what you want, so consider:

- Fit with your skills
- Exciting/interesting
- Career opportunities/learning
- Ability to impact results
- Broadening of responsibilities
- Salary
- Life/work balance

Once you're convinced that it's the job for you, prepare well, use these tips, and give us a call for any support or advice you need...good luck!

"KEEP THOSE PRE-INTERVIEW JITTERS AT BAY!"

The interview prep topline top 10

- **Do your preparation:** Make sure you have reviewed your skills and accomplishments ahead of the interview and can summarise them succinctly.
- **Dress appropriately:** For the culture of the company you are applying to.
- **Do your research on the company before the interview:** Know what questions you want to ask.
- **Develop a positive attitude:** Be polite and personable to everyone you encounter from the moment you walk in the door. The receptionist can have an input too! Demonstrate enthusiasm and project optimism. Be an interested listener and observer. Take a positive view of things - never talk to an interviewer about personal problems
- **Avoid premature salary discussions:** Don't talk money until your value has been built and understood, do not seem primarily concerned with salary
- **Always protect the confidence of a past employer:** If you can't be nice about a past employer the future employer won't trust you.
- **Be yourself and not what you think someone else expects:** You will develop confidence if you have really spent the time reviewing what you have done well in the past.
- **Be efficient:** Bring extra copies of your CV. Prepare questions in advance. Check out the venue so you arrive in plenty of time.
- **Listen as well as talk:** Pay attention to your interviewer. Make sure you are answering the question he/ she is really asking and reading between the lines. Make sure your answer is understood.
- **Be specific:** Illustrate what you say with examples of your achievements and skills. The more specific you can be the easier it is for the interviewer to see how well you will fit into the company.

**“DRESS FOR THE CULTURE
OF THE COMPANY
YOU’RE APPLYING TO”**

First Impressions count:

30 seconds

The amount of time it takes us to judge economic and educational levels, social position, level of sophistication and success.

240 seconds

The amount of time it takes us to make decisions about trustworthiness, compassion, reliability, intelligence, capability, humility, friendliness and confidence.

40%

Of interviewers made up their minds about a candidate in less than 20 minutes, while nearly 20% had made up their minds in less than 10 minutes.

7%

Content – what you say

55%

Body language (non-verbal communication)

38%

How you sound (how you say it)

“Tell me about yourself”

Scary, huh? Most interviews start with an opener like this, especially in marketing jobs where the ability to articulate yourself well and convince others are often important qualities.

It can be quite daunting to just start talking about yourself straight off the bat, but the impact you have in the first few minutes of the interview is hard to shift so make sure you make a good one. It is useful to be able to summarise your background, achievements and objectives in between thirty seconds and three minutes, and here are some tips to help you do that:

Focus on three areas

- Your background
- Your achievements
- Your current career goals

“BODY LANGUAGE IS 55% OF COMMUNICATION”

Career Highlights

When it comes to editing your career highlights into a manageable pitch, it helps if you start by filling a whole page with what you would want to say to a potential employer.

Cut that down to half a page. Keep cutting until you get to a quarter of a page. Then pull out your bullet points that give a snapshot of your career.

Try to cover

- Your most recent role
- Your key achievements and responsibilities
- Your USP
- Your skills / strengths
- What you want to do next

Practice, practice and practice some more

Always rehearse out loud, in front of a mirror, to a friend or into a tape or video recorder. Force yourself to sound enthusiastic.

Too often job candidates recite their pitches in a monotone or rush through them without passion. Remember – your tone of voice and body language have a greater impact than the words you say!

The first few times you try out your pitch may be a bit uncomfortable, but it gets easier. After a while it will become second nature to you and, when it does, you will be glad you practiced.

Example 30 Second elevator pitch

I have 5 years' experience in retail marketing. My principle skill is managing a team to deliver against business and marketing objectives. I have worked for companies in the UK and France.

At my last company I was responsible for a profit rise of 30%. I also set up a team of four people who I trained and managed.

I'm looking for a marketing manager position with hands on e-commerce and website management as part of the role, using my team building and leadership skills as well as my marketing experience.

"REHEARSE OUT LOUD IN FRONT OF A MIRROR"

What do Interviewers want to know?

Putting yourself in their shoes makes it easier to understand what you should be putting across.

CAN you do the job?

- Can you do the job now or be trained to do the job?
- Can you be trusted?
- Do you have the skills, experience, training to match the job?
- Are you fit enough?
- Do you have the learning potential?
- Your strengths
- What did you learn from your last job?
- What do you know about our products and services?
- Have you done this type of work before? (if so, how long and at what level)

WILL you do the job?

- How motivated are you?
- Will you work non 9-5 hours?
- Would you travel abroad – maybe for prolonged periods?
- Would you work to different processes than you're used to?
- Will you stay in the job for a reasonable time?
- Will you find the job a challenge?
- How interested are you in the company?
- What's your work ethic?
- What are your energy levels like?
- How enthusiastic are you?
- Are you interested in this type of work?
- Do you want a life outside work?
- Are you prepared to relocate?
- Will you get bored in 6 months?
- Will you learn?

What's your FIT like?

- Do you fit with the company culture?
- What are your relations with existing team members like?
- Do you have hobbies outside work?
- Does the interviewer like you?
- Chemistry
- How, and how well do you communicate?
- What's your style like – formal, relaxed etc?

- What's your dress/appearance like?
- Will you work as part of a team?
- How do you get on with people?
- How do you react to change?
- What are your values and needs?
- Shared vision

Answering interview questions

Talking about achievements:

STARS

S First describe the **Situation** you were in

T Describe the **Task** that was involved

A Next describe the **Action** you took (be certain to say 'I' not 'we' when explaining this – interviewers want to know what YOU did, not the wider team)

R Then explain what the **Result** was

S Describe the **Skills** you used in your achievements

Practice questions

CAN questions

- Your skills / strengths
- What you want to do next
- What can you offer us?
- What did you achieve in your last job?
- Can you give me an example of an achievement – when/where/how did you do this?
- What was your role in relation to this?
- What skills did you use?
- What was the result?
- What are your strengths?

WILL questions

- What do you look for when seeking a new job?
- Why do you want to join this company?
- What hours are you willing to work?
- Can you work under pressure/tight deadlines?

FIT questions

- What is important to you in your next job?
- Would you prefer to be a big fish in a small pond or a small fish in a big pond?

- Why should we employ you?
- How do you feel about looking for another job?
- What have you been doing since your last job?
- What are your hobbies & interests?
- How do you get on with other people?

"Any questions?"

Even if you feel you already have all the information you need from your interviewer, the 'any questions?' question is a great opportunity to add to the positive impression you've already given. Before you pick and choose from the following top 10, be sure to consider the culture of the organisation you are hoping to join and the nature of the person doing the selecting. Adopt the right tone and convey a positive attitude – you want to ensure this opportunity works for you, not against you.

What are the most enjoyable and the least enjoyable aspects of the role?

This can show that you like to know what sort of challenges you are going to face and that you like to be properly prepared for it, all in the expectation of being able to rise to it.

What types of training opportunities can you offer?

This is one of the classic questions as it can highlight that you are keen to advance your skills and add further value to a company.

Is there a chance for promotion in the future?

This is another classic question, and in a similar vein. It can emphasise a determination to make progress and to do so over the long term.

Can you please tell me how the role relates to the overall structure of the organisation?

With this question you are drawing attention to a preference for teamwork. It looks as though you want to know where you would fit in and how your contribution would affect the rest of the company.

How would you describe the work culture here?

Here you are signalling that you want to be able to operate at your optimum and understand that for this you require a positive environment. In turn, this can indicate you are a good self-manager who is aware of how to get the best out of yourself.

In what way is performance measured and reviewed?

This question can flag up that you appreciate the importance of delivering real results. You can be seen to be someone who understands the value of commitment, reliability and returns.

What are the most important issues you think your organisation will face? Or, You have recently introduced a new product/service/division/project; how will this benefit the organisation?

These variations both show that you are interested not just in the job but in the employer behind it. It will be apparent you have done some research, done some thinking, and are now eager to hear their analysis.

May I tell you a little more about my particular interest in communicating with clients/developing new ideas/implementing better systems ..?

Okay, so this is a cheeky and obvious way of getting permission to blow your own trumpet but then that's what this interview is all about.

Do you have any doubts about whether I am suited to this position?

This is a rather more brazen way of emphasising some of your strengths. It suggests you are open to constructive criticism and willing to learn from the experience of others. In addition, it gives you a real chance to address any weaknesses the interviewee may think you have. Finally, it allows you to finish on a high, re-stating why you think you are the right person.

You mentioned there will be a lot of presenting/researching/liaising; what do your most successful people find most satisfying about this part of the role?

This question can serve two purposes. It can demonstrate your listening skills. Also, it can associate you with being successful in the role and finding it satisfying.

Best of luck - and remember, the more you prepare and practice, the easier it'll be.



There are loads more helpful guides, hints and tips for your job search in the candidate area of our website, and our blog. You'll find it all at

www.stopgap.co.uk