



INTERVIEW TIPS

The demand for skills in the IT sector currently exceeds supply, so now is a very good time to be seeking a career change. However it would be wrong to be complacent and expect an employer to recruit the very first person they interview. Invariably a prospective employer will wish to interview several candidates before reaching a decision. To give yourself the very best chance therefore, it is imperative that you prepare properly for the interview and give your best.

You will never get a second chance to make a first impression and because some interviews can be daunting we have put together a few helpful hints on how to prepare for that very important first meeting.

What to Expect

- Every company will have its own ideas on interviewing and assessment so try and establish from your agency what format your interview is likely to take.
- Unless informed otherwise, plan on about one hour for your first interview.
- First interviews may be on a one on one basis with either your prospective line manager or HR Manager or may be a panel interview where you meet several people, either jointly or separately.
- Some organisations will ask you to take tests at the first interview stage although these are more likely to be reserved until the second stage. Tests can consist of any combination of the following: psychometric, aptitude, technical, programming and case study/presentations.
- Most companies will invite shortlisted candidates back for a second/final interview. Often at this stage you will be able to meet other members of your prospective team and view the working environment.

Be Prepared

Having established from your agency the likely format of the interview the next stage is to prepare yourself thoroughly. This will include:

- **Reading up on the company.** We find that our clients are impressed with candidates who have taken the trouble to spend an hour researching them. The best source of information is the company's website. Reading through this will give you a better understanding of the role and company you have applied to, and also provides you with useful relevant information to drop into either your answers, or your questions at the end of the interview.
- **Reading up on the job content.** Your agency should have provided you with a detailed job specification. Preparing examples in advance of where you've gained the experience they're looking for will ensure that you are less likely to find yourself 'put on the spot' in the interview, reducing your chances of getting flustered.
- **Thinking about your motivation towards the role.** All too often, the feedback on candidates who have been rejected is that they did not seem interested specifically in the role or company applied to, but were just looking for a job in general. Preparing in advance some reasons why you are interested in the particular role and company may well set you apart from other candidates, and will make you seem more keen and enthusiastic.
- **Ensuring you have a location map** and have planned your journey properly, taking into account likely traffic hold-ups in the rush hour, and peak holiday periods etc. Plan to arrive at

least 10 minutes before your allotted interview time. Arrive too early and you can always do some last minute preparation in the car or across the street. Arrive late though and you will already have created a bad impression and put yourself under pressure.

- **Ensuring you have looked at your CV** and can talk confidently about dates of education and employment, reasons for leaving, etc. A sure way to fail is not to be able to reiterate or explain what is on your CV.
- **Preparing questions to ask at the interview.** Questioning the interviewer will demonstrate an active and enquiring mind which is a pre-requisite for most IT jobs. At the first interview stage it is better to restrict questions to job content, departmental structure and reasons why the post exists. Salary and benefit discussions are best left for a subsequent meeting.

Dress Code and Personal Hygiene

- Although there is a general trend to 'dress down' for work these days, particularly with US style software houses, the golden rule for dress code at interviews is 'smart business dress'. For men this would consist of a shirt and tie, with a suit or jacket. For women this would consist of a suit, or skirt/trousers and jacket.
- When it comes to personal hygiene, it really is common sense. We suggest you attend the interview well groomed, with little or no aftershave/perfume. Avoid anti-social food and drink beforehand.

The Interview

The interview is very much a two way process and the ideal interview will consist of the interviewer assessing your suitability for the job and you determining if the job and company can provide you with a challenging and satisfying career.

You will also have to bear in mind that interviewers will have their own personal style or technique. Styles can vary enormously and can include the aggressive interviewing technique where you are bombarded with rapid questions with little time to think, or the passive technique whereby the interviewer simply says 'tell me about yourself' and expects to hear a brief A - Z of education and work attainments.

Research has shown that more than 50% of communication relies on body language, and you may be sending out negative signals without even realising! There are several things to be aware of:

- Smile – show the interviewer that you are open, friendly and confident
- Maintain good eye contact – both with the person who asked you the question and any other people in the room
- Sit up straight, even if you are feeling relaxed! You will appear more keen and alert
- Try not to fiddle with your hands or any pens/pencils during the interview, as this is a classic sign of nerves, and can be quite distracting!

The secret at interview is to be prepared for any style or technique and don't be put off if you encounter a technique which is not familiar to you. The main point is to ensure that you are relaxed and confident and the best way to ensure this is by preparing thoroughly.

Here are some more do's and don'ts:

Do s and Don ts

- **Do** notify the company and/or agency if you can't make the interview or will be late.
- **Do** be confident, positive, polite and use a firm handshake,
- **Do** follow the interviewer's leads but try to get him/her to describe the job and duties at an early stage of the interview so that you can relate your background and skills to the position.
- **Do** answer questions as factually, completely and to the point as possible. Keep in mind that you alone can 'sell' yourself, so try not to answer questions with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Expand wherever possible and tell them those things about yourself which relate to the position.
- **Do** express an interest in the post if the opportunity appeals to you.
- **Do** be honest but not blunt. It is often unnecessary negative information which leads to an unsuccessful interview, i.e. do not make derogatory remarks about your present employer. You may be feeling bored, dissatisfied and unappreciated in your current job but it is better to put this in a positive way e.g. 'I have enjoyed my present position enormously but there are no further opportunities for advancement and I am now seeking a new challenge'.

- **Do not** interrupt or talk across the interviewer, or jump in whilst they are asking you a question, even if you are confident that you know what it is that they are going to say. Such behaviour can appear rude and arrogant, and you may not in fact have understood what they were asking at all.
- **Do not** be disappointed if no definite offer is made or salary discussed as the interviewer will probably wish to discuss your background with others in the company first.
- **Do not** show disappointment if you get the impression that the interview is not going well.
- **Do not** allow yourself to get rattled or defensive as sometimes an interviewer may seem to discourage you in order to test your reaction.

The Close

The interview may well finish with the interviewer asking you if you have any questions. This is a great opportunity to show an interest in the role and the company, and to establish whether or not both are right for you. It is a good idea to have some questions ready prepared and written down, as after a long interview, you may not remember them off the top of your head.

Good questions to ask include those about the opportunities for progression and development within the company, what training is provided, whether there are any company social activities/events, etc. It is best though at a first stage interview not to ask about salary, bonuses and holiday allowances as it may give the impression that you are only interested in the job for money and not for the work involved.

Common Questions

Below are a few examples of questions, which could come up during a typical interview. There is never any harm in being over-prepared, so it is a good idea to put some thought into how you would answer all of them:

What do you dislike about your current job? As discussed above, it is often negative answers that lead to an unsuccessful interview, so try to keep answers short and do your best to turn any negatives from your current role into positives relating to the new role.

Where do you see yourself in five years time? This can be a difficult question to answer well, so a good response can be to throw the question back, and ask them what opportunities exist within the company for development and progression? You can then blend their answer with your prepared one.

What are your biggest accomplishments? This is a great chance to sell yourself, and you should have several well-prepared answers ready, choosing those that are as relevant to the role as possible. Be conscious of time though and don't ramble – keep your answers concise and to the point.

Can you work under pressure? As with all closed questions, you could answer with a simple 'yes', but instead, give them specific examples from your work history to back up your answer.

What is your greatest weakness? As with the question above concerning the negative aspects of your current role, you should keep your answer short and end it on a positive note e.g. 'I like to give my work 100% and sometimes find it frustrating when others in the team do not give the same level of effort. I am aware of this weakness though and do my best to overcome it by encouraging those around me and by displaying a positive attitude that I hope will rub off'

What most interests you about this job? This is a great chance to show your enthusiasm for the role and to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Avoid generalisms such as 'it's a good opportunity', and instead, give specific reasons that relate directly to them i.e. 'I see from your website that you are prepared to support staff members in gaining Microsoft qualifications, which is something I'd be very keen to do'

What qualities do you think it takes to be successful in this field? If you have listened to the interviewer throughout the interview, and have read through both the job spec and website thoroughly, you will know what they want to hear!

Do you work better on your own or as part of a team? You want to be able to demonstrate an ability to do both, but by having researched the role, you should have a good idea of the balance required between team and individual working, so should focus your answer accordingly.

What have you done that shows initiative? As with all competency-based questions, it is best to prepare examples from your commercial experience that are best related to the role you have applied for, but use examples from outside your professional life if absolutely necessary. (For further information on this type of question, see our section entitled 'Competency Based Interviews')