

Introduction

Here we look at some of the common interview types, including telephone and video interviews which are particularly relevant now.

No matter what type of interview you are going for, much of the preparation is the same.

- Research the organisation using their website and social media pages and research any news items.
- When invited for an interview, ask who will be interviewing you and research them - LinkedIn is a great asset for this.
- Ask what type of interview they will be conducting as this will help you prepare better.
- Know exactly where you are going, how you are going to get there and confirm the time.

There are a number of different types of interviews and methods by which employers assess candidates, from using assessment centres, psychometric testing, getting you to prepare a presentation or having your potential new peers or customers interview you - we will focus on the more common ones in this session and give you techniques on how to perform your best.

Whilst some of you may have had experience in part time jobs, for others you may have to dig a bit deeper to show examples of your strengths.

Competency Based Interviews

What are Competencies?

These are 10 of the key competencies, you may know them better as Soft Skills, which interviewers are often interested in. You can prepare for an interview by thinking about how you can demonstrate your experience in each of these by giving an example.

- Communication
- Decision making
- Problem solving skills
- Leadership
- Results orientation
- Teamwork
- Trustworthiness
- Responsibility
- Commercial Awareness
- Technical Skills

Competency based interview questions attempt to link together three parameters – knowledge, skills, and attitude. These competency-based questions will assess whether you have the right balance between great interpersonal skills, education or experience, and the right attitude for the role in question.

These interviews use questions which aim to find out how you have used specific skills in your previous experience and **how you approach problems, tasks and challenges**. They are often used in first interviews. Each candidate is asked the same questions to enable easier evaluation. Your answers do not always need to relate to work experience and life experience answers can be used by candidates who do not have much work experience. This means this type of interview is a great tool for recruiters of school leavers.

How to Answer Competency Questions

Using the STAR (situation, task, action and result) method to structure your answers is a useful way to communicate important points clearly and concisely. For every answer you give identify the:

- **Situation** - Provide Context & Background
- **Task** - Describe the problem and challenges
- **Action** - Explain what you did and how and why you did it.
- **Result** - Describe the outcome of your actions and its impact

If possible, try to relate your answers to the role that you are interviewing for. While you should have prepared responses to the questions, try to avoid sounding like you are reading from a script.

Avoid embellishing the truth - this can be easily checked.

Telephone Interviews

You will normally be given a scheduled time and duration for a telephone interview call. They are used because they save time and help to keep interview costs down.

They do have a downside. In most cases you will be answering questions under a strict time limit and this can increase nerves. Not being able to see the interviewer means you are unable to gauge their response.

Here are some tips that will help you perform well on the day!

Preparation

Research - Just like in any other interview situation you need to research the industry, organisation and job. Visit the company website, use the internet to search for news items.

Prepare - Plan responses to questions that might be asked by preparing a list of examples of when and how you have demonstrated each skill or quality listed in the person specification.

Practice – You may feel uncomfortable talking over the phone, but you can practice in advance to improve your confidence. Undertake practice calls with Friends or Family and give them questions to ask you - you may wish to record these calls.

Location - Use a quiet location, where you will not be disturbed by noises and people. Minimise background noise by closing windows and turning off televisions or radios. Turn electronic devices to silent to avoid distraction.

Appearance – Although the recruiter can't see you, you should dress for a telephone interview as you would for a face to face interview – it will help to put you in a professional frame of mind and will boost your confidence.

Be Professional - If you have pre-arranged an interview time, be prepared. Answer with 'Good morning/good afternoon, (your name) speaking.' Avoid using informal language and maintain a professional tone throughout the interview.

Speak Clearly - When answering questions be aware of the pace of your speech. Time is limited but do not rush or mumble. Be succinct and to the point. Smiling when you are talking helps!

Show Interest - The hardest thing about telephone interviews is that there are no visual clues from the interviewer to gauge your performance as there would be in a face to face interview. During a telephone interview you could say 'ok', 'I see,' and 'I understand' to let the interviewer know you are listening but you should be careful not to interrupt them when they are talking.

Notes - Having these to refer to is one of the main advantages of a telephone interview. But if you are rustling through papers the interviewer may hear – it is better to have a list of bullet points on one sheet as a prompt. You can also take notes through the interview if you need a prompt to ask questions later or at a second interview.

Do not be afraid to ask - if you don't hear or understand a question, politely ask the interviewer if they can repeat it.

Have a glass of water beside you – this will help!

Video Interviews

Video interviews are often used in the early stages of the interview process to filter out large numbers of candidates. They can vary in style and length. As well as saving time and money for both parties, it also means that the recruiter and their colleagues can watch the interview again rather than just relying on notes.

There are two different formats used for video interviews.

- **Live** - this is like a normal face-to-face interview. You will speak to the interviewer (or panel of interviewers) in real-time over a video connection using a service such as Skype or Zoom. This format enables the employer to recreate the traditional interview format. Try to behave as you would at a normal interview.
- **Pre-recorded** - this is a much less personal experience as you will not be speaking to a real person. You will be presented with pre-recorded or even written questions on screen, and then you will have to record your answer on video, often to a time limit. This helps employers who have lots of candidates, as they can simply watch your answers later at a time that suits them - but it can be awkward if you are not used to recording yourself. This makes practice even more important.

Location - Plan where you are going to be for the video interview. Use a quiet location, where you will not be disturbed by noises and people. Make sure the room you choose is tidy and use a clean and simple background so that the interviewer focuses on you. Think about lighting - try to use natural light from a window or use a lamp.

Appearance - You may be at home, but it is still a job interview, and this is your opportunity to give a professional first impression - this means dressing appropriately. You should wear the same outfit you would have chosen for a face-to-face meeting with the employer.

Body language - Avoid slouching or moving too much. Make eye contact, smile, listen and take an interest in what the interviewer is saying.

Test the Technology - Test the computer, camera and any software that you have been asked to use. Make sure the picture is clear and the sound quality is good. It is also worth checking your internet connection.

On the day of the video interview ensure everything is fully charged or plugged in as you do not want the battery to run down. Close any software on your computer that might play notification sounds and switch your phone to silent to guarantee you will not be distracted. Also, let everyone in the house know you are about to start the interview, so they do not interrupt.

If there are any technical hitches, for example if you cannot hear the questions very well, do not struggle through as you will not give your best performance. If it is a live video interview, mention the problem. It may easily be fixed, or the interviewer may be happy to end the call and redial.

Recording an Interview - if the interview is to be pre recorded, you should try to imagine you are speaking to a real person. This will help with your body language and maintaining your enthusiasm.

Assessment Centre Group Exercises

Some interviews will be carried out in groups, meaning that instead of answering questions one-on-one, you will be judged on your ability to contribute to a range of team tasks and activities.

These types of interviews usually start with an icebreaker, which involves group introductions and casual chats about who you are. To ensure you are not put on the spot, you should prepare for and practice this in advance.

Fun facts about yourself will almost always go down well, but choose these carefully and remember it will be observed by a potential employer!

Other tasks could include anything from role play exercises to practical tasks and questions that test your interpersonal skills, creativity and problem solving.

Follow – Up

After the interview, you should send an email to say you enjoyed meeting the interviewers and hearing more about the position and learning about the organisation. Emphasise that you are very interested in the job.

Typical Interview Questions – prepare your answers in advance

- *Tell me about yourself*
- *Why do you want this job?*
- *What are your strengths?*
- *Why should you get this job?*
- *Where do you see yourself in five years' time?*
- *Tell me about a time you have demonstrated excellent teamwork skills*
- *What motivates you?*
- *Why do you think you will be successful in this job?*

Examples of Interview questions and how to approach the answer

Use the STAR technique for your chosen example – Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

What was your biggest achievement at school?

There are two important factors here - the achievement you choose as well as how you explain it.

In choosing an achievement - look at the job description - does it talk about multi tasking - busy office - then use an example of where you needed to submit a number of pieces of homework in the same week.

An interviewer will want to know how you achieved it so in explaining it, think back to what your Maths Teacher always said - show your workings - you might pick up a few marks even if you get the answer wrong.

Example Answer 'My biggest achievement was when I had to submit six different assignments in the same week. I set up a plan for the month leading up to this and allocated time to each subject prioritising those that I felt weakest at, but also assessing the size of the assignment and the time required. It also helped me develop the ability to work well under pressure. I passed all assignments with over 70%.'

What was the worst part of school?

This is not a chance for you to have a moan about a teacher! It is a chance for you to describe a challenge you faced and show how you worked to overcome it.

Example answer: 'I didn't really like having to make presentations to the class. We had to do this in most subjects and even though I have done it a few times I still don't like it. I practiced a lot and this helped with nerves and I have taken part in school plays and this has helped build up my confidence.'

What would your friends say about you?

This should not lead to a discussion about your fun nights out with friends. You need to think about being in the classroom in a school situation and perhaps think about times you have worked in a group. Did your friends call you bossy? Did they congratulate you on solving the problem or coming up with an idea? Think again about the job description when choosing an answer - are they looking for a leader or a contributor - highlight your experiences to suit.

Example answer: ‘My classmates have seen me work in lots of different groups at school and I usually get voted to lead the group and present the team's findings . This is because I am organised and logical and like to work through tasks in a set manner, and am able to stimulate discussion by asking questions and including all team members.’

How many traffic lights are there in (your city)?

You may be asked questions that are not related to your education– and this one is a great example.

So, how do you answer it? Firstly, remember that the interviewer is not really expecting an accurate answer. What they *are* looking for is someone who can use logic, reason, and problem-solving skills to pick apart the question – and give a possible answer.

Example answer: ‘I can’t give you an exact answer, but I can tell you how I would approach answering it. I’d start by trying to estimate the number of traffic lights in a square mile in my local area, and then find out the total size of the city in square miles. I would think there may be more traffic lights in the city centre than the suburbs. It would probably be quicker to Google it though.’