



Interview Skills Guide

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1. Overview

Interviewing purpose

Job interviews are a two-way assessment process. The interviewer assesses multiple factors of the candidate, such as their skill, experience, motivation, attitude, interpersonal skills and fit into the company's values and culture. Similarly, the candidate assesses whether the role is what they expected, development opportunities, career pathways, and the company's culture. As such, it is important for both parties to develop appropriate questions relevant to the position and, important for candidates to prepare for questions they may be asked.

Addressing misconceptions

A common notion is that candidates should tell the interviewer what they want to hear. Therefore, many candidates try to 'learn the answer' to interview questions. Trying to learn the answers is not the appropriate strategy as it presumes you know exactly what the interviewer wants. Also, you cannot prepare for every single question that could possibly be asked and, non-authentic responses are often detected. Further, commencing in a role that is not the right fit is not beneficial for either party.

How to approach interview questions

It is best to think about what attribute each question is attempting to measure (e.g. a specific skill, motivation, or personality attribute), and to then give a response that is both authentic to you and, considered to the specific role. To do so, you will need to understand the types of questions that can be asked, reflect on what attribute the interviewer is trying to measure, and practice answering these questions with evidence to support your responses. Preparation is key. Practice answering questions, however, avoid memorising responses as you will appear robotic.

In this information sheet

We will start by outlining the types of questions that can be asked during an interview and their general purpose. We describe standard, behavioural, and situational questions, then we move onto providing a range of practice questions. Subsequently, we provide a checklist of the things you want to consider before attending an interview and, last, we discuss preparing for video interviews.

2. Standard & Open-Ended Questions

Many interviews start with open-ended questions. While some of these questions are quite easy to answer, it is important for candidates to take opportunities to differentiate themselves from other applicants. Often these questions require quite a bit of self-reflection.

E.g.

- Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years from now?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Preparing for Standard & Open-Ended Questions

When preparing for standard and open-ended questions, it is important to:

- Consider aligning your answers to the requirement of the position based on selection criteria
- Give the impression that you are the ideal candidate they are seeking
- Consider what your top 3-4 selling points are to differentiate yourself from other candidates
- Review practice questions on page 4 and search for more questions online
- Prepare your answer in advance and have multiple examples (e.g., strengths & weaknesses)

3. Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions are based on the finding that past behaviour is a strong predictor of future performance. You will be asked to provide specific examples of how you have used a skill to achieve a desirable outcome.

Behavioural questions often start with:

- Give us an example of ...
- Tell us about a time when ...
- Describe a situation where you had to ...

The STAR Approach

When answering behavioural questions, the STAR approach is an effective framework to use. Describe the **situation** (where were you, what was the project or your position), the **task** (the problem or challenge), the **action** (how you solved or overcame it), and the **result** (the effectiveness of your action).



E.g. Describe a time you have effectively demonstrated organisational skills?

[S] I have shown strong organisational skills as a project assistant while assisting an Event team.

[T] One time, I helped the team to schedule an art event.

[A] That involved booking facilities and lighting equipment plus arranging for participants to attend. I developed a spreadsheet where I recorded feedback efficiently.

[R] Doing this ensured the event ran smoothly, despite the tight schedule. I was invited to join the team again when they received funding for a new event.

Preparing for Behavioural Questions

- Prepare specific examples for each selection criteria using the STAR approach
- Avoid just giving a definition of the skills required
- Ensure your examples are recent, relevant and, if possible, unique
- Choose a variety of examples from academic, extra-curricular and employment experiences
- Focus on your individual contributions when describing a team experience
- Be prepared for negative questions
- Be prepared for follow-up questions

4. Situational Questions

Situational questions seek to gain an understanding of how you approach problems by presenting you with a *hypothetical situation* and, gauging how you would respond in that situation. These questions can also be used to assess the candidate's technical knowledge.

Situational Questions tend to be prefaced by "What would you do if...?" For example,

- If you were given a task of developing a marketing strategy for ..., what process would you go through?
- You are managing a customer service team in a team of four. One of your team members is frequently missing the reports' deadlines. What steps will you take to address this situation?

Answering Situational Questions

When answering situational questions, you can **make assumptions** when describing your course of action. For example, "Assuming A, this is what I would do and why. However, if A were to change then my response to the problem would change in this way". The thing to remember with situational questions is that there is not necessarily a definitive (right) answer. Most of your points will be gained through the reasoning. It is therefore important that you explain "**Why?**" and "**What?**" you would do.

E.g. **Question:** What would you do if you thought your supervisor gave you incorrect information in a staff meeting?



Answer 1: I would tell them they were wrong.

Answer 2: **It depends.** In this situation, I would consider the magnitude of the error and I would be very careful not to damage my working relationship with my supervisor. If it was a trivial mistake, such as stating slightly inaccurate sales figures, then I think it would be the best not to correct him/her in front of other staff. However, if it were a more serious mistake which would affect the team's next course of action, I would try to tactfully point out the error to save the team wasting time working from the wrong information.

Often starting your answer with the phrase '**it depends**' can be a good prompt to help you consider the array of factors that are impacting the situation. By considering the multiple factors (e.g., size of error, importance, work relationships), you show a considered approach to problem solving and presented multiple solutions, rather than rushing into the first, and perhaps not best, solution that comes to mind.

5. Practice questions

Try answering these questions and consider a follow-up question to your response (e.g., why did you take that approach? What was the outcome? What would you do differently?)

Open-ended questions

- Can you please tell us a little bit about yourself?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years from now?
- What motivates you?
- What are your career aspirations? or Why have you chosen as a career?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Give us a brief overview of your previous employment.
- Why are you interested in this position?
- How much do you know about our organisation / institute?
- What can you bring or contribute to our organisation / team?
- What have been your main achievements?
- Tell me one of your achievements that have given you major satisfaction.
- Do you prefer to work independently or in a group?
- What sorts of people do you find difficult to work with and why?
- What was your worst mistake and what did you learn from it?
- How do you feel about working long hours and weekends from time to time?
- What does (skill or attribute - e.g., leadership) mean to you?
- Who / what has played the most significant part in your career development?
- Describe how you like to be managed. Why?

Behavioural questions

Adaptability

- How do you cope with change?
- Tell me about a time that you have had to adapt to a new set of circumstances



Attention to Detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give me an example of when your attention to detail was effective (ineffective)
Analytical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe a task when you have analysed a set of complex data?
Communication & interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you conveyed ideas to others from diverse cultural backgrounds? • Describe a specific example when you had to deal with a difficult person • Describe a situation in which you developed a relationship with a client
Customer Service Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe a situation in which you exceeded a customer's expectations. How? • Describe an interaction with a customer that you wish you could change • Tell me about a time you managed an unhappy customer
Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the toughest decision you made at work? • Describe a time you deliberated over a decision for a long time. • What kinds of decisions do you make rapidly and which do you take time on? • Give me 2 examples of good decisions you have made recently
Leadership Management / Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe a situation in which you delegated tasks. • Describe a time you had to performance-manage a team member. • Have you ever had to set goals and targets for individuals? • Give an example of when you had to give constructive feedback to someone
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you manage / sustain your motivation at work (or others)? • Describe a time that you had targets or goals to work towards. • Describe a situation in which you felt quite motivated at work. • Tell me about a time that you demonstrated initiative.
Negotiation, Influencing, persuasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe a situation in which you had to persuade people to accept an idea. • Describe when you did/didn't overcome a customer's objections. • Tell me about a time that you have had to negotiate.
Personal Standards & Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever had to compromise your standards to get the job done? • Describe a situation where your ethical standard was being challenged? • Do you think it is ever ok to break the rules? Describe a time when you did.
Planning, Organising & Time mgmt.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you go about managing your time at work? • Describe the planning process you undertook for a project you completed • How have you managed conflicting deadlines of equal importance?

Problem Solving, creativity

- Tell me about strategies you use to prevent problems before they arise
- What has been the most difficult / complex problem you have had to resolve?
- Describe a creative or innovative solution you developed and implemented

Team or independent work

- Give me an example of how you have added value to your team.
- In what ways have you assisted co-workers to improve their performance?
- Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult co-worker.
- Describe how you have collaborated effectively with an interdisciplinary team
- What skills do you possess that enable you to work with minimal supervision?

Resilience

- What was the biggest obstacle you overcame to get where you are today?
- Is there an experience whereby you gained something from persistence?
- Describe an experience in which you felt you might have been too persistent
- Tell me about a time that you felt you gave up too soon
- What are you doing to address areas that need development?

Working under pressure

- What sorts of things cause you pressure at work? Or most stressful aspect?
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you felt pressured at work?
- What strategies do you apply to manage stress?

Situational

- What would you do if you had 2 competing deadlines to meet by the end of this week?
- What would you do if a report you sent to a client was found to have errors?
- What would you do if an angry customer was demanding a refund?
- You notice a colleague breaches an ethical/OHS policy. What would you do?

Closing questions

- Why do you think we should offer you this position?
- Are there any reasons why we should not offer you this position?
- What can you bring to our organisation?
- What will you do if you are not successful with this application?
- Do you have anything to add before we finish this interview?

Some questions you could ask

- What are the main challenges of this position?
- What are some of the projects you could see me working on?



6. Interview preparation checklist

Find out as much about the interview as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who are the interviewers? What are their names and job titles?• How long will the interview be?• What format will they use?• What do you need to bring on the day?
Conduct further research on the organisation and the position	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expect questions to assess your knowledge<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>How much do you know about our organisation / unit / expertise?</i>• Consider the reasons for joining the organisation<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>Why do you want to join us? Why are you interested in this role?</i>• Prepare 4-5 questions to ask the interviewers
Review your cover letter, resume and selection criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be ready to elaborate on your experience<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>Can you tell me more about this experience?</i>• Consider the links between your previous roles / research projects with the new position<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>How is this experience relevant to the new role as a ...?</i>
Revisit the selection criteria for the role	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare examples for each criteria using the STAR approach<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>Can you give me an example of when you demonstrated ... skills?</i>• Consider the ways you would handle a negative question<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>Tell us about a time when you have worked with a difficult person</i>• Consider what are your strongest criteria or your “selling points”<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>What can you bring to our organisation?</i>◦ <i>Why should we offer you the position among all the applicants?</i>
Explore common interview questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare your answers for questions such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ <i>Tell us about yourself</i>◦ <i>What are your strengths and weaknesses?</i>◦ <i>Where do you see yourself in 3/5/10 years?</i>

Professionalism at the interview

- Make a positive introduction: handshake, build rapport, small-talk, body-language and eye contact
- Plan how to get to the location arriving 30 mins early, then enter the office 5-10 minutes before schedule
- Bring a copy of your application, pen, notepad, supporting documents
- Dress appropriately
- Turn off your mobile
- Be polite and professional with everyone you meet
- Be aware of non-verbal cues – is the interviewer interested in your answer or seeking more clarity?
- Listen attentively, show interest



- Never exaggerate your achievements
- Never complain about anyone you have worked with
- Always thank the interviewer at the end
- Do not discuss salary unless asked. Provide an expected range based on the industry average for that level of experience

7. Video Interviewing Tips

What is a video interview?

Video interviews are becoming a more popular form of screening candidates in the recruitment process. These interviews can be a two-way dialogue between an actual interviewer and candidate (e.g. using Skype or Zoom). However, it is becoming more common for one-way video interviews to be conducted, whereby candidates are given questions to answer through a software platform that records their responses. Companies invite candidates and send an email link for them to access and complete the questions using their personal computing device. The company provides a deadline for the video interview to be completed (e.g. 1 week).

Benefits

One-way video interviews are not in real-time, allowing flexibility. Candidates can complete the recording and, the recruiter can review responses at times suitable to their schedules. Another benefit is time saved. One-way video interviews allow the recruiter to ask direct questions in a standardised format, allowing them to quickly assess candidate suitability.

How do I prepare?

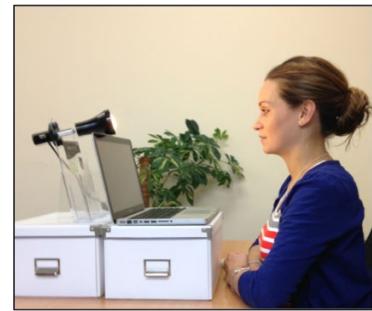
- Research the organisation (interview process, projects, strategy, have they been in the news lately?)
- Dress professionally (just like you would for a business meeting)
- Find a suitable location (quiet, private, professional, comfortable) where you will not be disturbed
- Test your equipment and ensure that the technology is working
- Practice answering interview questions whilst recording your response, then make adjustments
- Bring essentials you may need (pen, paper, glass of water)
- Remember they want someone prepared, yet authentic. Don't forget to smile and breathe

Set up the shot

There are simple things you can do to improve your video quality, even with basic webcams or mobile devices. Getting your background, your lighting and your presentation right can make a significant difference.



- Choose a bright room with soft background light
- Move around to find a simple and tidy background
- Raise the camera to eye level (put laptops on a box or similar)
- If using a mobile device, have it resting on a support
- Have a desk light in front of you to light up your face
- If possible, wear white to enhance the picture quality and contrast
- Dark images use more data. Keep it bright for low-bandwidth
- Be close enough to see your head and shoulders (look at the camera view)
- Watch this video on how to prepare: [Video interview set up tips](#)



Additional Support

- Book a [career consultation](#) to discuss your interview preparation and practice a mock interview with a career coach.