



Interview Guide



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1) Introduction

Welcome to the Critical Recruitment Interview Guide!

In this guide we will help you to prepare for your interview and give you the confidence you will need to be more successful.

What is the point of an interview?

An interview is done simply to ascertain whether a candidate that looks suitable for the job on their CV is right for the job in real life.

The interviewer is hoping with all their fingers crossed that you are the right person for the job! Although, sometimes it might seem as though they are interrogating you, in fact they are desperate to find somebody to fill their vacancy! They just need to make sure you are made of the right stuff and have the right knowledge, skills and experience to do the job they are trying to fill, or at least can be trained easily to their standards. You are there to prove that you can do the job if they just give you the opportunity.

So, the idea of this guide is to help everyone whether they are used to interviews and just need a few pointers or are new to the world of interviews and what is expected from them.

So, not everything in this guide will be relevant to everyone. The best way to use it is to look at the section guide on page 1 and work out which bits you are weaker on. Then scroll down to that section for help. If you feel you need help from start to finish then use the whole thing!

At the moment, because of the current economic climate, companies are trying hard to save money and are increasingly using news paper and online adverts to advertise their jobs. There are jobs out there but there are a lot of candidates/job seekers. This of course means that the competition is fierce and you may find you are competing with a large amount people when going for a job!

Now, this makes things worse for you if you are not confident about interviews. Don't worry, you are not alone, many people find interviews scary and nerve racking! With so many people going for the same jobs the companies have a lot of choice. So people who impress them in the interview are most likely to get the job! The interview is your time to shine and so often people miss out on jobs that they are fully qualified and capable of doing but struggle to get that across to the employer.

Let us tell you that the key to confidence is preparation!

Even if you don't remember everything you read in this guide, if you remember just 50% of your preparation then you will be more confident to deal with the rest of the interview.

So, let's get on with the guide and move to section 2, Interview Preparation!

2) Interview Preparation

As we already know, the key to confidence is preparation. If you have done your research about the company and have rehearsed your answers then even if your mind goes blank or nerves take over, you will be surprised at how much you do remember. Also, if you are ready for it then you have much less to be nervous about.

You can never be sure exactly what questions are going to be asked during the interview, however, many questions tend to overlap each other. One question can be asked in at least 10 different ways! So if you prepare your answers for the usual questions asked then you should have things covered. Any questions that haven't practiced already will probably require a similar answer to one of the questions you already rehearsed.

So, let's get started...

Do your Research

A) Essential Info

The first thing you need to do before you go to an interview is get all the information before hand about the actual meeting (interview)

You need to confirm the following

- Time & Date of the interview
- The name of the person or people you are meeting (the interviewer/s) and their job titles.
- The address of the office/premises including directions or a map (use Google Maps or www.streetmap.co.uk)
- If using public transport make sure you know the bus/train times and ensure that it will get you there nice and early.
- Make sure you have the Job Description.

B) Research Company's Website

Firstly, allocate some time to do this. Try to get access to the internet.

If you know the company or organisation's website then go on it or Google their name and see if you can find the website.

What to get from their website:

- Find out exactly what it is that they do or sell. If they sell a particular product then make a note of the rough details. If it is a service then find out what they offer to customers/clients.
- Find out about the history of the company, when they were founded and any key facts or interesting points to their background.
- See if they have won any awards etc for what they do and make a note of at least a couple of the biggest/best ones.
- Make a note of any recent news or announcements on the site.
- Write down the name of the Director or owner etc if listed on the site
- Find out if you can who their biggest competitors are.
- Check how many people they employ and how many offices they have.

If you can't find everything on the website then you may be able to find info about them on www.google.com if you have a look on other websites.

Why is looking at the Website so important?

They like it when you have done your homework!

One of the first questions you will usually be asked is 'what do you know about the company/organisation?'

If you don't know anything then it shows that you haven't made any effort to find out about them. This says to them that you either couldn't be bothered or you don't care! Why would they want someone to work for them that can't make the effort?

Even if you can only find a couple of things about them on their website then that's fine, they don't want to hear a long story about a company they already work for! They just want to hear you say 'Well, I've had a look at your website and noticed that you were founded by X in 1979 and you now have 10 offices employing 200 people internationally etc.

Don't be afraid to admit that you found it all out from the website, it shows them that you have initiative.

If the company doesn't have a website or there is little info about them on the web then try phoning them or popping into their office and explain that you are attending an interview and just want to find a little more info about them.

They will usually be more than happy to help!

If all of this fails then the best thing to do in the interview when the question is asked is to tell them that you tried to find them on the web and get info but found it difficult. Firstly it shows them that you at least tried and also may point out to them that they need to improve their public info. Now you can just sit there and let them explain all about the company.

If they don't ask you the question 'what do you know about them?' then you can use your knowledge by dropping it in during conversation. The interviewer/s will still be impressed by this.

C) Job Description

In most cases you should have been given a job Description before the interview, if not from the recruitment agency then direct from the organisation or at least from the advert about the vacancy.

*Think of the job Description as a check list for the interviewer. Their goal is to match you to as many parts of the job spec as possible.

Read the job spec thoroughly and then take note of the following –

- Make sure you fully understand what the job involves
If there is anything you don't understand, make sure you ask them to explain it in the interview.
- Take a look at the key responsibilities and write down some ideas of what you could give them as an example of experience that you have had where you've had similar or the same responsibilities before and coped well with them, be it in the work place, in education or even at home if applicable.
- Next check what skills are required. What software they use (Ms Word/Excel etc) Out of the list, write down which ones you have knowledge and/or experience of.
- Now look at desirable or essential skills/requirements on the spec.
Write down key words i.e 'the candidate must be self motivated, organised and trustworthy.

*Make sure you use these key words in the interview. If you can drop them in to your answers then that's great.

If asked the question 'What are your strengths' then you could say

'I am very loyal person, in my previous role I learned to be self motivated and had to be very well organised to keep up with the busy workload'

- Looking at the 'Experience required' section of the job spec, take a note of what is required and write down examples of similar experience that you have had.
For example, if the job requires you to have experience of telephone based customer service, think about all of the jobs you have had previously where you have had

experience of this that you can use as an example in the interview.

If you can't use a previous work based example then think back to your education. Did you do something at school or university that proves you have the required skills?

Try to do this for all of the previous experience required.

It is unlikely that you will have all the experience required on the job description as the description is based on the 'ideal' candidate. However, recruiters live in the real world and they know that it is unrealistic to expect to find someone who has done everything that they are looking for! They just want you to prove to them that you have what it takes to do the job. Anyone can say to an interviewer that they have what it takes and they are capable of the job and this may be true, however, the interviewer doesn't know you and just needs proof and examples to make him/her feel confident about hiring you!

D) Dress to Impress

No matter what company or organisation your interview is with and regardless of how formal or informal their office dress code, you should always go to every interview dressed smart.

It doesn't matter what the interviewers are wearing, whether it's a temporary assignment or working in a sports shop, dressing smart or 'suited & booted' as they say, shows your potential employer firstly, that you are serious about getting the job and also that you know that it is common practice to wear a suit to any interview. Once you start your job you can wear whatever they wear, but in the mean time you need to make sure you get this job! We really can't stress this enough. First impressions count for a lot! We have seen so many candidates rejected by interviewers for turning up to the interview in jeans!

- Men need to wear a suit, ironed shirt, tie and polished shoes
- Woman need to wear a suit or smart dress or blouse/skirt & conservative shoes
- Make sure you have washed and brushed your hair and slapped some aftershave/perfume on...not too much though!!

We don't mean to sound patronising with these pointers, we know that you probably already know how to dress for an interview but we just want to cover all bases! As we said before, it's surprising how many candidates get turned down for what seems like common sense.

Just make sure you pay attention to your appearance, it counts for between 60% and 80% of the overall impression you make!

3) Interview Questions

It is not possible to guarantee questions in any interview, but you should consider asking yourself the following questions so that you will be fully prepared during the interview. As mentioned earlier in the guide, many questions tend to overlap. One question can be asked 10 different ways.

If you make sure that you have answers prepared before the interview, you will find that you can use these answers and adapt them to similar questions during the interview. It's surprising how well you can handle different questions on the spot when you have a load of answers prepared.

You don't want to answer them in a parrot fashion. Just remember key words and phrases and then let your brain piece it all together in the interview.

You will find that the interviewer's questions will trigger your memory and the answers stored away in your mind.

When practicing your answers, you are best probably best placed to know your own shortcomings and where you might fall below the expected standard. Focus on your strengths and what skills you can bring to a position. The interview is a prime opportunity for you to sell yourself to the interviewer. Don't be scared to show off a little about your achievements. Be proud and confident of what you have achieved!

It's time to sell yourself!

You need to make sure that when you give your answers that they are full and comprehensive but to the point. You need to let the conversation flow and give them a full picture of what you are about without rambling on or going off on a tangent!

Never answer a question with just Yes, or No!

QUESTIONS

Typical Ice Breakers

Why did you apply to us?

Don't say 'because the agency sent me'. Make sure you make it clear that you saw the position and have a genuine interest in the job or working for the company

What do you know about our organisation?

This is your time to shine! You can now show off about your research you have done. Make sure you keep it to between 3 – 5 points and don't go on for more than 30 seconds unless you are discussing something.

Tell us about yourself?

This a good starting question that helps the interviewer(s) assess whether a candidate is able to confidently talk about themselves and project their personality. Naturally, you will need to be familiar with your CV, giving them a slightly more detailed insight into you and your background. Try to keep this in a nutshell form no longer than 1/2 minutes. You don't want to bore them, so just explain your education/career to date including maybe a bit of detail about your previous job roles and what you enjoyed about them as well as any other achievements in work and out of the workplace.

Why do you want to leave your current job?

Another typical interview question. It is perfectly acceptable to give an answer based on a need for challenge and career progression. Be enthusiastic and tell the interviewer part of your reason is to work within their organisation. If you've researched the organisation sufficiently, mention something about the organisation which makes you want to join them and play a part.

Do you know anyone who works for us?

If you do, make sure you don't mention anything negative that they may have said.

What interests you about the position?

Before the interview think about what it is that has attracted you to this role (apart from the money!)

What do you think we have to offer you as a company?

What is it that they can offer you? Good career prospects? An interesting job role?

Career Ambitions

What are your long/short term goals?

Try to explain a goal within this company, if you got the job. Give them a 1 – 5 year rough plan of where you would like to be, what job you would like to be doing.

This will show them how ambitious you are. Perhaps you want to move into a management role or another department could interest you further down the line. Don't be afraid to display your ambitions & goals as long as they are related to this job or company/organisation!

Sometimes the role will not be one that is a long term career or has any scope beyond what it currently is. The employer should be honest about this and if you are happy with this kind of role then that's fine. The employer will not be looking for you to show ambition in this answer. It might be a good idea to express that you are looking for job security or job satisfaction instead. They are likely to want you to express that you wish to stay in the job for quite a long time! This way they won't have to refill the position, hopefully for a few years.

Tell me about your career aspirations

Very similar question to the one above. Perhaps don't speak about the plan time scale in so much detail.

What are you looking for in a career?

Sense of achievement? A good salary & benefits? Long term stability?

Work out what it is that you want.

Do you have plans to gain further qualifications?

If you do, then as long as they are relevant to the job or if they are not and they won't interfere with your work life, then mention any intentions you have to gain further qualifications.

Where do you see yourself in 2/5 years time?

Again, similar question to above, just worded differently.

Describe your ideal employer.

Try to describe what you know to be the ethos of the company. Basically, you need to describe THEM in a nutshell.

Skills & Requirements

Why should we hire you? - Give me three reasons.

The best way to answer this is to use previous experience in either a previous job or education.

Don't just say 3 words as your reasons. Back them up with evidence and examples.

Use keywords or requirements listed on the job description. Remember, you need to tell the employer what they want to hear without lying obviously!

What have you got to offer the company? - What skills will you bring?

Similar question to above, just different wording. Again, always give evidence!

How do you work best? - Leading a group, in a team or alone?

You need to answer this with the job in mind. What does the job you are being interviewed for require?

If it requires all 3 then the best answer to give is: I am able to work in all 3 situations.

I have previously lead a team whilst working at XXX and enjoy motivating and influencing others as well as working alongside other as part of a team. When working at XXX (or during my degree/studies) I had to work on my own often when doing XXX. I had to use my own initiative to make my own decisions and self motivated. I did this by setting myself personal short term goals within my role.

Are you prepared to travel?

If the job requires you to travel and you really want it then YES!

Are you looking for a position with training?

Ideally, most of the time jobs will give some kind of training. It is a good idea to express that you would like training if it is on offer. Use this as an opportunity to ask a question about what kind of training they offer.

What has been your main career achievement to date?

Sit down and work out what this is beforehand. Whether it be winning a million \$ contract or implementing a new procedure for the office, it is all important. Try to think of something that will relate to the role you are being interviewed for. It could be something you could bring to this job.

If this question isn't asked, you can always use it during the interview. For example, if they ask you about yourself or your previous employment background then drop it in there!

What was the most difficult problem in your current/previous position - how did you find the solution? You say you have xxx skills...how did you demonstrate these in your previous position?

This is a chance to show them that you have the 'problem solving' skill.

Use an example of a problem you resolved from start to finish. If it is a funny or strange story, then all the better!

It's a good thing to make your interviewer/s laugh during the interview!

For example, perhaps you had a problem with a customer. Explain how you resolved a situation that

ended with the customer being happy and satisfied.

If you are struggling with this one then do note that there is nothing wrong with embellishing a little and making the story more than it really was. Whether it is completely true isn't as important as the fact that you display that you know how to deal with a problem and how to solve it with a good result.

Personality

How would your friends describe you?

Again, use the job description! Use key words that are essential or desirable that friends might realistically say about you. One tip we would give is to use the words Loyal & Trustworthy. Employers always want employees with these personality traits.

What motivates you?

Think about what would need to be a motive in this job.

If you are applying for a Sales job then it's a good idea to say that you are motivated by money, as that's what they are going to want to hear.

Think about what you will need to be motivated? Personal goals? KPI's (Key Performance Indicators, often used to measure your performance)

What are your strengths/weaknesses?

Strengths...easy!

Just use the job description. Pick 3 or 4 essential requirements and use them in your answer.

Make sure that you can back each one up with evidence or examples even if they are brief.

Weaknesses...more tricky! But you can turn this into a strength.

When asked about weakness, you need to project it as a positive trait. This is not a confessional time, so do not be candid. Do not say that you do not have any weaknesses either as you will be taken as conceited and unrealistic.

For example you might be a little short tempered sometimes. Do not say, 'I often lose my temper', instead you can say, 'I get fairly upset with sub-standard work or undue delays. I have to make sure I'm not too vocal about it as this can just add to the problem. I have to focus on helping my team member/co-worker by communicating where I think there could be some improvements made to the process etc instead of getting upset with it'

How do you spend your spare time?

This is important. Employers want their employees to have personalities, especially if they are working as part of a team.

Pick your key interests and talk about them. It's useful if they relate to the company or job in some way but this isn't essential.

Try to make it more interesting than just saying 'I go to the gym and I like to socialise'.

Use anything 'quirky' or interesting without sounding like too much of a handful.

Tricky Questions

What salary or benefits are you looking for?

If you know the salary that they are offering then just say that you are looking for that salary.

If there is a salary range then be careful, if you say a figure too low then they may think that they can get away with paying you a bit less.

On the other hand, you don't want to price yourself out of their range, especially if there are other candidates competing for this role that may work for less money than you.

It's always a difficult one, so have a good think before the interview about how much you want and need from a salary. What was your last salary? If you are staying in the same industry/job sector then you can expect the same salary or more in a new job. However, if you are changing a career to the extent that you are moving industry or job sector then you should expect a pay drop.

Try to find out the going rate for the job in question. Especially if you are a school or university leaver, as you have nothing else to really go by.

Why are you changing your career?

If you are changing your career then you need to explain why. You don't want them to think that you are just applying for their job simply because you need a job!

If you are changing career then you need to express to the interviewer/s that you have an interest in, or a passion for their industry or the job sector and you are excited to move into this area.

You will also explain what skills you can bring from your previous background to this new career path.

Explain the gap in your employment history.

If you have had a gap in your employment history then this will need to be covered.

Check through your CV before your interview and make sure you know your reasons for any gaps in employment. Whether it be travelling, temping or job searching you need to either put it onto your CV or explain it in the interview. They will not like it if you can't explain why you haven't been doing anything.

World Travel - Explain how the travel was self-funded enabling you to experience total independence and how you sought part-time and temporary employment in the countries that you visited if necessary. The experience provided you with an invaluable insight into different cultures and has enhanced your ability to integrate into a multi-cultural environment.

Long-Term Sickness - This is never something that should be discussed with any feeling of shame or embarrassment. Feel free to talk about your illness as openly as you like and explain that you used the time at home as productively as possible, for example by reading literature relevant to your profession.

General Unemployment - Sometimes, the right job is not available at the right time and there is nothing that you can do about this. Make sure that the interviewer understands that you were proactive in your job seeking during this time making use of the internet, local recruitment agencies and jobs papers to help find the most suitable job for you. Also, perhaps indicate that the reason it has taken you so long to find a job is that you are waiting for an appropriate position to come along rather than leaping into an unsuitable role simply to remain in employment.

Given your career plans, how long do you expect to stay with our organisation?

You need to tell them what they want to hear, and that is that you wish to stay with them for the long term.

They don't want to have to train somebody again shortly after recruiting you. It takes time and costs money. Offering you the job is an investment for them.

You need to make it clear that you intend to work for a strong and stable company who will support you and your career path in the future.

Can we contact your current employer for references ? (this question is usually only asked after an offer letter has been sent - nevertheless be prepared).

This is unusual. If you are still working for your employer then you need to say that you are happy for them to request a reference from your current employer once you have been offered a job and have given your notice.

Most companies will understand that requesting a reference from your current employer isn't fair to you. If they can't respect this then perhaps they are not the kind of employer you will want to work for.

Tell me about your last boss:

Never badmouth your ex-boss. You will come out the worse from it. Even if you didn't get on with your previous boss, it's important not to be negative here as your new employer will get concerned that this could happen again! Remember, they don't know you yet, bringing up the past isn't worth it, even if you were in the right!

Why did you leave your previous position?

It is essential here that you do not give a negative impression of your previous employer as this can be seen as a sign of disloyalty. The obvious and most positive answers to give here will be along the lines of:

- Seeking further advancement
- Wanting to diversify
- Hoping to achieve greater training opportunities
- Looking for a new challenge

However, in some circumstances, you may have actually been dismissed from your previous role and this is probably the hardest reason to put a positive slant on. Be honest when answering this question, acknowledge responsibility for the causes of your dismissal but say that you have learnt a great deal from the experience and know exactly how you should behave if similar circumstances occur in the future. Explain the reasons for your dismissal and how you know now that you were in the wrong.

Another potentially negative response could be if you left because you were being bullied. Depending on how you explain this, it can open you up to expressing bitterness or recrimination, traits that are not necessarily attractive to a potential employer. Where possible, try to demonstrate forgiveness and show that you have become a stronger and better person as a result of your experience and do not feel tempted to be apologetic about the situation.

4) Competency Based Interviews

(Also known as Situation Based Interviews)

Competency Based interviews are designed to test competency. Questions range from past experience to hypothetical situations. The object is to assess an applicant's skills in terms of practical responses to situations. It's a very common interview technique. Job applicants need to be aware of the methods, and deal with the questions through preparation.

Interview questions

Some questions are standard:

- Describe a situation where your communication skills were important in dealing with the problem.
- Describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult customer.
- Describe a situation where your mediation and conflict resolution skills solved a problem.

Obviously, these questions are targeting specific skills. There's a variation on this approach, which is more generalised.

Some of the questions sound similar, but they're not. Always listen to how a question is phrased.

- Describe how you solved a difficult problem.
- Describe what you did to deal with a customer complaint.
- Tell us how you manage your workload.

Again this is competency based, but the questions are looking for a range of skills, not just one. They also target problem solving skills, in context with situations.

Competency based testing is actually a good way of forming a picture of an applicant's abilities, and testing their capacity to deal with specific issues.

Because the "problem solving" question itself deals with a situation, the applicant must first explain the situation, which requires communication, a description and of both the problem and the solution. It's a actually a multiple question.

The "customer complaint" question relates to your client-handling skills, and how well you can demonstrate the necessary skills.

The "workload" question involves your organizational skills, how you prioritize work, and your understanding of competing priorities. It's a fundamental situation in many jobs, so this particular question really does have a lot of applications.

HANDLING COMPETENCY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

IMPORTANT: Understand what the question is trying to achieve.

In a job where you're very competent, the only real difficulty may be how you answer the question.

You may need to rehearse your answers, preferably with a friend, making sure you're giving comprehensive, clear answers, and finding any gaping holes in your responses.

EXAMPLE ANSWER

"How do you manage your workload?" is a fairly representative question.

Start from the beginning, and give a clear picture of your workload and where your work fits in the chain of processes.

"I work as a registry clerk. There are five of us. Work is received daily and distributed by our supervisor, for processing same day.

We check documents for information, and enter the completed documents on a database, and we issue a receipt for their fees and documents.

In addition we get customers at the counter lodging documents, which are supposed to be completed and entered on the database while the customer is present."

As you can see, the process is now understood. Now you can describe how you handle the workload:

"There are thousands of documents per week. We have to maintain a high rate of processing. So we prioritize by date, usually, working on turnover times.

Sometimes a document has to be processed urgently, because of the laws relating to the documents, so those are taken out of the main workload and given to us for special processing.

It's a pretty simple system, and we're expected to deal with the workload as efficiently as possible, because of the volumes. Usually I process everything which can be done immediately, and separate documents which need more information. Those can't be processed anyway, and we have to send letters or emails to the customers.

That means I can get moving all the documents which are ready to go, and then deal with the others, which use up more time because they all have different things which need to be addressed.

Really, it's a time management issue, because I have to be sure I can deal with the applications that need further work, without holding up the processing of other work. This method means I can do both efficiently. Separating documents also means I can find and keep track of the ones with problems."

There's no room for doubt in the above answer.

Everything about the work, the workload, and the processes involved, is described.

What you do, why you do it, and how you do it, are all clear.

This answer also simplifies answers to any related questions.

A very probable question in relation to the workload question would be
"How do you deal with competing priorities?"

You've explained the workload, and how it works. The interviewer has a clear picture of your work.

You can now say,

"I have to deal with whatever level of priority is given to the work. My boss usually tells me what needs doing first, and tells me the order of priority. If I'm not sure, I have to ask, to make sure I'm doing the right thing."

**** This is common sense, and the basic principle of competency based interviews

What needs doing, Why it needs doing, and How it's done,

Applies to many competency based interview questions. Somebody has to decide priorities. If it's you, you explain why you give priorities, like "customer needs, statutory needs, account issues", etc.

"Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task or project on time, despite intending to do so?"

In your response your interviewer will want to find out how you manage your time during difficult tasks and the reason why you failed to meet your deadline on this occasion (and consequently a reason why you may fail to meet deadlines in the future).

Interviewers using behaviour-based interviewing techniques such as competency questions are likely to probe for additional details during your responses. Always make sure you provide concise, highly specific answers that are well explained, thought out and detailed.

Although your interviewer will at times ask you to give examples of past failures (such as the question above) rather than achievements, you must adequately justify why you failed to complete tasks, and defend the reasons for your failure. Clever candidates will justify failure by giving examples of positive personality traits. Consider the following answers:

Hypothetical questions

These are the same kind of questions and issues, but they deal more with your ability to think on your feet with any given situation.

"What would you do if a really angry customer demanded service, wasn't happy with your service, and wanted to lodge a formal complaint about your work?"

This is a real "situation", and happens regularly in customer service. It is highly relevant to any job in this field.

Examples of Competency Based Questions

Question	What is the interviewer trying to discover?
<p>Describe a situation in which you and your manager worked well together in order to overcome some challenges.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you respond and relate well to bosses? • Are you easy to challenge and develop? • Do you need minimal direct supervision from your boss? • Do you understand your goals and objectives?
<p>What has been your most successful experience in presenting formally, or communicating ideas to others?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you understand how others think and work? • Can you determine the best way to get things done with them by talking their language? • Can you craft approaches likely to be seen as appropriate and positive? • Can you adjust your presentation style to the audience?
<p>Walk me through a situation in which you pursued a successful compromise to a disagreement.</p>	<p>This question may be asked to discover if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can step up to conflicts, seeing them as opportunities • Read situations quickly • Are a strong, open and focused listener • Can find common ground and achieve co-operation
<p>Describe a single time when you delivered service in a way that clearly showed care and concern for your customer.</p>	<p>This question may be asked to discover if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are dedicated to meeting the expectations and requirements of internal and external customers • Use first hand customer information for the improvement of products and services • Establish and maintain effective relationships with customers and gain their trust and respect

<p>How do you keep your team motivated and informed when everyone is very busy and facing a tight deadline?</p>	<p>This question may be asked to discover if you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are good at establishing clear directions • Can set stretching objectives • Maintain two-way dialogue with others on work and results • Bring out the best in people • Are a clear communicator

Here are some more questions. Make notes on what you think the interviewer will be trying to discover, and what you should include in your answer to give the interviewer confidence in you.

	Question	What is the interviewer trying to discover?	What should your answer include?
1	<p>Tell me about a time when you had to establish effective relationships quickly.</p>		
2	<p>From time to time we come across people whom we find difficult to deal with. Describe a particular occasion when this happened to you.</p>		
3	<p>Tell me about a situation in which you have taken the time to support and/or coach others.</p>		

4	Describe a time when you have influenced others to your way of thinking on a particular issue.		
5	Tell me about a situation when you created an impact on others with your clear and concise communication of ideas.		
6	Tell me about a time when have you confidently defended your viewpoint from the majority.		

Competency based questions are an excellent opportunity to demonstrate to the interviewer what your capabilities are, and how you have performed in real-life situations. As far as possible, your answer should always be based on your actual experience and include real-life examples.

5) Telephone Interviews

The majority of telephone interviews are conducted in the early stages of the recruitment process so that an employer can assess how serious you are about the job before inviting you to attend a face-to-face interview. They are also commonly used as a way of whittling down a large number of applications in a cost effective and less time consuming way. The telephone interview is therefore of vital importance and can be the deciding factor in whether or not your application will be taken any further.

The process of telephone interviews can vary dramatically with some employers asking you to call them on a specific date and time and others preferring to call you either at a prearranged time or out of the blue.

If you are asked to call the company yourself, it is important that you do so at exactly the specified time. You do not wish to appear tardy but you also do not want to seem over keen.

Be absolutely sure that you have the correct telephone number and that you know the name and title of the person you need to speak to. In the event of the interviewer being unavailable when you call, make sure that you leave a polite message asking for them to contact you to reschedule. This way, they will at least be aware that you did try to call at the appointed time.

Sometimes, this method of telephone interview can involve a touch-tone system whereby you press particular keys in response to automated questions or statements. This is usually timed to ensure the integrity of your responses. Alternatively, the interview will be with a manager and will follow a standard question and answer format.

When an employer has arranged to call you, it is important to provide them with a telephone number that you are guaranteed to be able to answer. If there is the possibility of this telephone being answered by someone else, make sure that they are aware that you are expecting a call so that the telephone will be answered in an appropriate manner.

Whichever type of interview you are expecting, there are certain preparations that you can make which will improve your chances of success. Firstly, research the company and the job role in the same way that you would for a face-to-face interview.

You may well be asked why you are applying for the role and how you meet the essential requirements so it is important that you are able to provide well-informed responses. One of the advantages of telephone interviews is that you can prepare notes and even have a copy of your CV and application form with you. You may also wish to have a list of questions that you want to ask the interviewer.

It may help to practice some standard interview questions with a friend to ensure the effectiveness of your responses and also to assess your tone of voice. First impressions are equally as important in a telephone interview as they are in a face-to-face interview and, because there are no visual indicators for the employer to assess you on, how well you articulate yourself becomes critical. One of the keys to success is to make sure that you sound energetic and enthusiastic and, by smiling throughout your interview, your tone will improve dramatically.

The interviewer will be assessing your overall communication skills and this means not just how well you speak but also how well you listen. If in any doubt as to the last question put to you, do not be afraid to politely ask the interviewer to repeat it as this is much preferable to giving an irrelevant response.

You should always address the interviewer as Mr or Ms unless they have specifically requested that you call them by their first name. Use their name regularly, although not too frequently, throughout the interview to help establish a rapport between you.

It is important to conduct the interview in surroundings that are comfortable and relaxed. Try to minimise any background noises and avoid eating during the interview. You may want a drink of water but you should try to do this discreetly. If possible, sit upright or even stand up as this will help your breathing, but make sure that you are comfortable because fidgeting can be distracting.

It may be helpful for you to take notes during the interview so have a pen and paper to hand. Also, you must be prepared for the interviewer to want to book a face-to-face interview so have your appointments diary at the ready.

At the end of the interview, if no further interview is arranged, try to find out when you can expect to hear from them next. You do not want to appear pushy but you do want them to know how keen you are. Arrange to contact them on a certain day if they have not called you back before then. It is also important that you thank the person who has interviewed you.

6) Second Interviews

If you have been invited back for a second interview then things are looking good! You have obviously managed to impress your interviewer in the first place or else you wouldn't have been invited back for another go.

Don't get complacent here though; it is just as important to do your preparation prior to the second interview as it was your first. Your interviewer has probably invited you back to get a little more information about you or it may be that at second interview stage a more senior member of staff wants to meet you to ask you some questions.

It may have been that the interviewer has decided that you are the best candidate in his opinion but needs his superior to meet up with you and Vito his decision – who knows. Many employers use recruitment agencies to carry out the first set of interviews on their behalf to save them time and get a pre-qualified shortlist of candidates, they will have briefed the agency as to what type of candidate they are looking for, qualifications, interpersonal skills etc, etc so this interview may be the first opportunity you have actually had to meet your potential new boss.

If you have not already sat a psychometric test or aptitude test then it may be that this will be a requirement at the second interview although, again, if this is to be the case then the chances are that you will have been briefed about it before you attend your second interview.

Sometimes time may have been against an interviewer at the first meeting and there may well have been more questions that needed to be asked so this could be another reason you have been invited back for a second interview to clarify any outstanding points that your interviewer couldn't ascertain in the first place.

Remember that the second interview shortlist may have several other candidates on it and you're your interviewer may want to explore your experience or interpersonal skills in a more in depth manner. One thing is for sure though if you have got this far things are looking positive so you will want to be giving this next meeting your very best.

Your second interview therefore is unlikely to follow the same format as the first. If another more senior member of staff is attending this second interview then the chances are that the interviewer will have already briefed them as to your background and shared any thoughts or concerns with them however there may be one or two questions asked that you answered at the first interview.

It could be that there are certain specific areas of concern that your interviewer has and it may well be that they will address these questions in a straight manner. There are going to be specific questions your interviewer is looking to find answers to or clarification of and they are likely to be questions aimed at your ability to do the job should they offer it you or questions based around your past performance with your present or previous employers.

So it's a fair assumption that some of the questions will be along the lines of "give me an example of a project you have undertaken to increase your sales turnover" or "how did you manage to increase your weekly output from x to x". These questions as mentioned are likely to be aimed at specifics.

It is fair to say that most second interviews usually follow a more informal approach than the first interview. In addition, the chances are you will already have met your interviewer once and you therefore may feel a little less nervous than on the first occasion so if you didn't accept a beverage when it was offered the first time because you were worried you would throw the cup up in the air 6 foot whenever you were asked a question, you may feel confident to accept one in a less informal environment.

Sometimes your interviewer may decide to conduct the second interview outside of the office in either a pub or restaurant. This can be done for a couple of reasons – it may be that the interviewer feels if you are in a more relaxed environment you will let your guard down and he feels that any questions he asks you may attract answers that are more truthful as it appears you are now his friend.

Secondly, it could be that your interviewer wants to assess your interpersonal and communication skills outside of an office environment – something that may be relevant to the interviewer if the job role is going to entail entertaining clients socially.

Whatever happens don't get lured into a false sense of security, keep professionalism at the forefront of your mind and only say something you would be prepared to say if the interview was being conducted back at the office.

If you are offered an alcoholic drink by all means accept one if you think the circumstances are right (obviously if you don't drink you can say so) but try and keep it to one – alcohol is a natural relaxant and if you do drink too much you may let your guard down and you might end up saying something you regret – like telling a joke that was perhaps not really suitable for the occasion!

7) Psychometric Testing

Psychometric testing is becoming more and more popular now to vet potential candidates and you can use these in your favour. If you've never taken one before it can be a little bit worrying, it's a bit like going back to school and sitting an exam doing those multiple choice questions with puzzles!

These need not be a worry and are not once you understand what they're for, how they work and what they are set out to achieve. In our experience it is really no wonder why companies have taken to using these tests to gauge applicants as nowadays there are some many well qualified applicants for each job that if you were to interview them all you would be there until doomsday.

These tests are a good way to assess which candidates are most likely to be the best for the job. If you are the right person for the position then it will just give reassurance to the interviewer and you will be in a good position. On the basis that you have never sat a psychometric test or heard of one for that matter I will give you some brief information about them.

A psychometric test isn't really a test and that is because you cannot really fail one. It is called a test because - well in all honesty how else can you categorise something where you are asked to carry out a task which you will then be assessed on. What these do is ascertain how you think and whether you think in the same format as the company you are applying to but these tests don't tend to be used on their own in the interview and selection process.

Basically psychometric tests – are split into four areas and can include one or all of the following; An Ability Test, A Personality Test, An Aptitude Test and Motivational Test. Each test speaks for itself really, the ability test is looking to assess your overall general ability, the personality test is assessing what type of personality you have, the aptitude test is carried out to test the skills you have that are specific to areas of the job that you are applying for and the motivational test which is set to find out what motivates you.

Don't panic if you are on your way to an interview and you suddenly get a thought go through your head like "oh no I wonder if I will be asked to sit a psychometric test at this interview". It is very unlikely if you haven't been informed that a psychometric test will form part of the interview that it will be sprung on you – after all that would be a bit of a dirty trick to play on an unsuspecting candidate. These tests are often carried out on the same day as the interview but generally speaking you will be given advance warning if this is going to form part of the day.

Should you be asked to sit a test as part of the interview then the chances are your interviewer or the HR manager will brief you beforehand as to what the test is about, what you need to do to complete the test and which type of test you will be asked to complete. If they do not brief you (which is fairly unlikely) then you might want to ask them a few questions about the test – things like how will the test be taken, what type of test will you be taking and what will the information be used for etc, etc. There is plenty of information readily available about psychometric tests on the internet so if you want examples or more information on this subject just go to Google and search for "psychometric tests". If you know you are going to be taking a test then make sure you have everything you need before attending (it's just like going into an exam without a pen or your glasses) make sure you are prepared you don't want to add to your worries by leaving something important at home that's going to hinder you. You should use the same type of formula when taking the test as

you would if you were taking an exam – for those of you have been left school or University for a while and forgotten then here are a couple of pointers:

1. Sit down, keep your cool and follow all of the instructions given on the paper. Read them thoroughly and take them in. If you rush you may misunderstand the way in which the test is being set and end up answering questions incorrectly.
2. If at the start of the test there is an area that you are unsure of or do not fully comprehend then ask the assessor for help.
3. As with any exam you need to answer as many questions as possible correctly so be careful if the time spent on each question. If you are not sure of the answer or don't understand the question don't get flustered, leave it and move on, you can always return to the question again at the end if you have time left over.
4. Finally, if when you have finished all of the questions there remain some unanswered ones go back and have another go and by all counts if you still don't know the answer just guess – you might come out lucky!

I will try and give you some insight into what you can expect from the different types of tests and how to answer them, I am no expert at the end of the day I can only go off my past experience and information I have read up on the subject.

Ability/Aptitude Tests:

Ability and aptitude tests are set to assess your specific skills. You will sit the test and the resultant mark you get will indicate to your future employer your overall level of ability. The content of the test may be general questions set to see how you think, how you deal with specific circumstances and what type of logic you are using to come up with your answer.

These tests are frequently designed using multiple choice questions (or what we called multiple guess questions in my day at school!). Sometimes these tests will be set using far more questions than can possibly be answered in the allotted time but it is quality not quantity the examiner will be looking for as your overall score will be a percentage of the right questions answered not how many questions have been answered.

It is fairly easy to do some preparation for aptitude tests, most of these tests are based around logical thinking which is something that we all do in everyday life. If you really want to try and increase your logical thinking you could try the doing the daily crossword in your newspaper, Sudoku which you can get from most local shops (or even play it on the internet for free) or you could try buying one of those puzzler magazines from WH Smiths or Sainsbury's. What we getting at here is that you need to get your mind working in a logical thinking way and by carrying out exercises that involve mathematical puzzles and problem solving you will give yourself a good start. Remember the more practice you get the better you will become at doing these tests.

Motivation Tests/Personality Tests:

Motivation questionnaires are set to specifically analyse what “motivates” or “drives” you as a person and how you are likely to integrate that into your work, how much stamina you have or how much enthusiasm you dedicate to a project.

These tests are likely to set using a question followed by several possible answers. Personality tests are very similar to Motivation Tests and are designed to assess what type of person you are, unlike Aptitude tests which are created to analyse what type of logic you use to address problem solving.

There are no right or wrong answers to Personality tests because everyone thinks differently and these tests are designed more to see if you will fit in with the companies way of thinking or the type of job you will be doing. Generally speaking there will be no time limit set at a personality test so they are not as pressurised as aptitude tests.

It is not possible to analyse what sort of information the employer is looking for when you take a personality test as different employers will be looking for different qualities and they may be aimed at how well you are going to fit into their team and company. However, the general type of areas your employer may be looking to quantify are what your attitude is to your work life and personal life, how well you communicate with others, what drives you and how you deal with sorting out and solving problems.

8) Questions for you to ask

During the interview, you will usually be given the opportunity to ask questions of your own. If these questions are intelligent, thoughtful, and relate to the job, they will count very much in your favour. Examples of these kind of questions include:

- Why is the position available?
- What are the company's development plans for the future?
- What is the company's strategy for the future?
- Are there any areas which could be a threat to the success of this strategy, both within and outside the company?
- What results will I be expected to achieve?
- To whom will I report?
- Can you show me the company's organisation chart and how this position fits into it?
- Are there any particular challenges associated with this job?
- How is the department perceived by the rest of the company?
- How do you see the successful candidate progressing within the company?
- Do you have any concerns about my ability to do the job?
- How much scope (autonomy, flexibility, career growth, responsibilities) is there within this position ?
- What kind of software do you use?
- What kind of training program do you have in place?

You should be able to think of more questions as you do your pre-interview research on the company. Do not be afraid to take a list of your questions into the interview to act a prompt.

9) Body Language

1) Eye Contact

There's nothing more off-putting to an interviewer than the interviewee being unable to make regular, good, strong eye contact. The interviewer may think that because you're unable to do this, you either have something to hide or you may not have the conviction of your beliefs. If you're struggling to concentrate when looking straight into someone's eyes, then try looking in-between their eyes. They won't be able to tell that you aren't looking straight into their eyes, but you'll find it easier to maintain focus.

2) Smile

You need to practice a strong, sincere, smile. A good smile has the power to say, "I'm a happy, confident person and I'd love to work here". Try practicing smiling in a mirror. Practice a smile that puts people at ease. It's just as much your responsibility to ensure that there is a relaxed atmosphere during the interview.

3) Open Body Language

Try practicing this with a friend first. Make sure that your legs are slightly apart if you're a man. Place your hands apart, on your thighs is good. Open body language is even more important when the interviewer is talking. It demonstrates that you are receptive to the question and actively listening. Remember when you practice your body language with a friend to take a note of what to do with each part of your body. Unless you do that – and remember – you're leaving it to chance that your body language comes across well at your job interview.

4) Don't slouch

This is especially prevalent if you're asked to sit in a large, soft seat. Try not to appear too relaxed. Not sitting right back in the seat is a good idea. If you sit forward, it makes you look more attentive and more interested. Some people slouch because they're not very interested. Other people slouch because they have bad body language. Either way an interviewer isn't going to be too impressed. Try practicing in a mirror at home.

5) Don't be too erect

If you're too erect then you won't appear too relaxed. If an experienced interviewer is interviewing you then they might put this down to stage fright. They might just judge you on what you're saying rather than how uptight you appear. However, if your interviewer isn't very experienced then they might not feel relaxed either because of your posturing. They could leave the interview with a feeling that you weren't as good as the other person simply because you were too erect. Try to relax... but not too much!

6) Mirror the interviewer

Mirroring is the key. If you're able to subtly copy the your interviewer's body language, you'll find it much more easier to communicate because you'll be speaking the same silent body language. Now obviously we don't mean copy every move they make, but if they are sitting forward in their chair, then try to do the same. If they are sitting back then you sit back a little too. This puts the other person at ease and works for any situation.

7) Be engaged

It's important to be subtly positive at your job interview. You need to demonstrate that you're actively taking part in the interview. When your interviewer is telling you about the job role and company, make sure that you nod subtly. This shows that you are listening and are interested in what they are saying. It shows that your are engaged in the discussion process and want to be part of the organisation.

8) Breathe deeply

One of the best ways to relax before an important interview is to breath deeply. If you breathe deeply, not only are you relaxing by slowing your rapid, nervous heartbeat, you're also ensuring that your brain has as much oxygen as possible. This means that you'll be able to think clearly at your interview and be able to respond to difficult questioning more rapidly. Breathing deeply before an interview will provide you with the effective combination of being relaxed and alert at the same time.

9) Accept an offer of a glass of water

You may not feel like a glass of water, but taking a sip from a glass of water can have a calming effect on your interview performance. It can give you an opportunity to collect your thoughts while refreshing you. It will also give you a chance to get used to the surroundings while the interviewer is out of the room getting the glass of water. This will also give you're the opportunity to gather your thoughts and decide upon any amendments to your interview strategy as well as reviewing your prepared responses to questions.

10) Practice your handshake

So many people haven't got the right 'professional' handshake. Remember that this is part of the first and last impression that you leave at the interview. If you have a weak, limp handshake then this tells the interviewer that you may not have the ability to deal with confrontation. On the other hand, if your handshake is too strong, then you may not be a good listener. You may be quite confident about controlling a situation, but you may be less likely to be democratic in approach. To demonstrate the happy medium, have a firm but not hard grip, make good eye contact at the same time and mirror the style of the person whose hand you are shaking.

10) Interview Do's & Don'ts

The Do's

- DO: Dress to impress
- DO: Know the exact time and location of your interview
- DO: Arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the interview start time
- DO: Take a copy of your CV with you
- DO: Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and maintain eye contact
- DO: Sit still and upright in your seat throughout the interview
- DO: Ensure that you appear keen, positive and enthusiastic
- DO: Ask when you should expect to hear from the company next
- DO: Thank the interviewer for their time
- DO: Make sure you're answers are full, concise and relevant
- DO: Relax (or look relaxed) and just be yourself!

The Don'ts

- DON'T: Turn up late for the interview
- DON'T: Make negative comments with regards to previous jobs
- DON'T: Give the impression you're only interested in the job for the money
- DON'T: Act as if you're desperate for a job
- DON'T: Chew gum
- DON'T: Smoke before the interview
- DON'T: Leave your phone on during the interview
- DON'T: Slouch in your chair
- DON'T: Ask about salary or benefits, until after the job offer or on second interview
- DON'T: Ramble on – just back up each answer with relevant examples