

Preparing for success

1 Do your research

There's a lot of information you can use in both the job description and company information.

What are the organisation's target customer base, industry, unique selling proposition and their goals? What about their expectations based on the job description? Carefully paying attention for this key information can help you position yourself as the ideal candidate for the role.

2 Consider asking for a mid-morning, mid-week interview time

Ideally, you want to be interacting with your interviewer at a time when they're not preparing for the week ahead, finishing up before the weekend, or thinking about getting lunch or going home.

3 Get ready to answer these three main questions

Interviewers assess you as a candidate with these questions in mind:

- Do you have the necessary skills to do the job?
- Do you have the necessary mindset and motivation to do the job well?
- Will you fit in?



4 Get in the zone

We all have our different ways of preparing for an important event. Whatever yours is – meditating, breathing exercises, exercising, listening to upbeat music, talking to a supportive friend – schedule time to do it before your interview so you're in a positive frame of mind.

“The best way to avoid performing poorly at an interview is to be well prepared. Find out as much as you can about the company and the role, think about the story you're going to tell about why you're the best person for the job and prepare for possible interview questions.”

Kate Robertson

Director Leadership, Coaching and Career Transition Services
Hellomonday

Making your entrance

“Your first impression of a thing sets up your subsequent beliefs.”

Daniel Kahneman
Psychologist

5 You've got one-tenth of a second to impress

Experiments conducted at Princeton University suggest interviewers size up candidates in the blink of an eye, forming an impression in one tenth of a second – and not significantly altering that impression even when they've had more time to look them up and down.

6 It's not what you say but how you say it

Non-verbal cues heavily influence how your message is interpreted. What you mean to say can change depending on your tone, speed and even hand gestures.

When your words and tone don't, people believe your tone and body language, not your words.

7 Use mirroring and matching

When two people become comfortable with each other they will start 'mirroring' - mimicking the way the other person has their legs, arms and even facial expressions.

You can kickstart the process of building rapport with your interviewer by consciously copying their body language.

8 Have your shake and smile down pat

A firm handshake creates an immediate positive impression. You should also start smiling as soon as you enter the room.

A study by Fujita Health University confirms what we all intuitively sense – smiles are usually reciprocated and create positive feelings in the two parties beaming at each other.

Keep your body language open and receptive by maintaining eye contact, sitting up straight and leaning in towards the interviewer to signal your interest and enthusiasm. Under no circumstances cross your arms, tap your foot or fidget with things like a pen or phone. Speak expressively and confidently and avoid verbal tics such as adding “you know” to sentences.

9 Colour code yourself

In a study done on colour psychology and career apparel, it was found that wearing certain colours in the workplace can impact others' emotional states and behaviours.

According to the study, blue (navy, dark blue) builds trust and authority. Green reduces stress and anxiety. Warm colours like red and orange encourage communication and extraversion. Meanwhile, bright yellows signals openness and friendliness.

Establishing you and your brand

10 Use their name - it creates instant connection!

Sprinkling the interviewer's name naturally (not excessively) shows confidence, respect and presence. Aim to use each interviewer's name at least once.

It signals you're engaged with them, not just delivering rehearsed answers.

11 Be authentic

Authenticity doesn't mean oversharing. It means showing the real professional you: your judgment, mindset, principles and approach to work.

Modern interviewers are looking for self-awareness, not perfection. Instead of performing, focus on:

- Being honest about what you know and what you're still learning
- Speaking to your strengths without exaggeration
- Letting your genuine style and values come through
- Owning the decisions you've made and what you learned from them

People can spot a rehearsed persona instantly. Authenticity builds trust — and trust influences hiring decisions.

12 Sell your story

Show your value by measurable achievements and facts. What have you done in the past that might help you sell yourself as the right candidate to the interviewers? But selling your story isn't just by citing data - how you present your story also matters.

Here is an example of how you can structure your story:

I was hired to turn around a department that was suffering from high turnover, low morale and below average productivity. Just like in my previous roles, I was able to boost both the team's productivity and engagement by X amount over the course of six months by introducing initiatives A, B and C.

13 Use eye contact

Maintaining regular eye contact with everyone in an interview is one of the strongest ways to demonstrate confidence, presence and interpersonal awareness.

If more than one person is interviewing you, make sure not to give all your focus to whoever is asking most of the questions.

Mastering behavioural interview questions

14 Use CAR to structure your responses

Interviewers ask behavioural interview questions to see how you've handled certain situations in the past. This is based on the premise that the best predictor of future behaviour is past performance.

Interviewers are likely to be impressed if you consistently use the CAR (Context, Action, Result) method to answer their questions. What this means is you:

C

CONTEXT

Describe the relevant context or situation

A

ACTION

List the Actions you took to complete that task or resolve the situation

R

RESULT

Finish with a description of the results of your actions.

15 An example question and CAR response

Here is an example of a behavioural interview question:

Q: How did you handle conflict with a co-worker in the past?

The interviewer is trying to find out if:

1. You're self-aware enough to realise when a workplace conflict exists and should be addressed.
2. You're able to devise a strategy to deal with the conflict and implement it.

You can answer this question by discussing a significant but not too serious issue you had with colleague. Remember to explain how you maturely and rationally worked out a way to resolve it.

Here's an example of the answer using CAR:

C: As a project coordinator, a colleague and I disagreed on task priorities, which created tension and started slowing our progress.

A: I asked to meet with them one-on-one so I could better understand their perspective. I listened and asked questions to clarify anything I didn't quite understand. I shared my own perspectives and I answered all the questions they had. We realised we wanted to prioritise according to what was easier. We reviewed our objectives and agreed we would prioritise according to the client's needs.

R: That one-on-one was all we needed: it helped rebuild trust between us, and our tasks were completed ahead of schedule. And because we collaborated effectively, the client specifically requested us for their next project.

What to avoid in interviews

16 Mistakes to avoid when answering behavioural questions

Describing team actions

The interviewer wants to know what actions you took so talk about 'I' instead of 'we'.

Theoretical statements

Don't describe what you 'would' do; instead, describe what you did do in an actual situation.

General statements

Be as specific as possible and avoid generalisations.

Opinions

The interviewer is interested in facts and situations, not your personal beliefs or judgments (unless the question pertains to these).

17 Five things that you should never do in an interview:

Swear

Four-letter words might be much more common and socially acceptable these days but they remain jarringly inappropriate in the context of a job interview.



Veer into over-familiarity

Establishing a warm rapport is good; overstepping professional boundaries is not.



Overshare

Ideally, avoid bringing up your personal life at all. If it can't be avoided, don't go any further than referring to 'a personal issue' – a job interview is never the place or time to discuss the impact a relationship breakdown had on your career path.



Leave your phone on (or, even worse, look at it)

Make sure you're free of any potential digital distractions before entering an interview. Double-check that your device is switched off.



Complain about your manager

You may have your reasons about disliking a past manager, but interviews are not the place to talk about it. Complaining about your manager raises red flags, and can make you look unprofessional and difficult to work with.



“ My alarm bells start ringing if a candidate turns up late, underdressed or underprepared, or if they denigrate a previous employer or manager.”

Dean Davidson

Chief Executive Officer,
Hudson

Answering tricky questions

18 Recovering from a misstep

If you realise you've fumbled an answer, first off, don't panic – it happens to the best of candidates.

Secondly, frankly acknowledge that you probably didn't provide the information the interviewer was seeking and ask if you can answer the question again.

If you've drawn a complete mental blank it might be best to just allow the interview to move on and, if it's feasible, email the interviewer later with the response you would have liked to have given.



19 Make or break questions

It's possible to recover from answering many questions poorly but there are a few that affect your application if not handled appropriately. Here's how you can deal with some of the more difficult questions:

Q: Why did you leave your last job?

If you were made redundant due to reasons unrelated to poor performance (e.g. company restructure), be sure to articulate that. Otherwise, try to reassure the interviewer that the issue that resulted in your previous employment being terminated won't recur.

Q: Can you explain this gap on your CV?

Explain, rather than try to hide, any gaps in your employment – you took some time off to spend with your family, further your studies or travel. Be sure to mention if you engaged in activities such as volunteering for a charity or doing some consulting work.

Q: Isn't someone with your background overqualified for this role?

If you're making a sideways move it's advisable to explain that you're not doing it out of a lack of other options but rather because you're keen to move into another industry or develop a new skill set. You'll also need to highlight your transferable skills.

20 Answering other tricky questions

Q: What salary would you be expecting?

Research what the industry standard is so you know your market worth and can ask for a fair and appropriate, but realistic, rate.

Q: Why do you want to move on from your current role?

Many people move on from a job to a poor relationships with a coworker or their manager. Even then, disclosing this can give you a negative impression to interviewers.

The best way to answer this question is to actually find something positive to say about your employment situation and explain you need to move on. This may be about broadening your skillset, or progressing your career.

Q: What are your weaknesses?

Honesty is still the best policy so identify a weakness, but preferably not one that's going to impact greatly on your ability to get the job done. For example, not being a people person is going to be less of a problem if you're applying for a position as scientific researcher than it is if you're applying for a job in sales.

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Q: How would your colleagues describe you?

Reflect on past projects, feedback and performance reviews. What would give a well-rounded description of you in the workplace? Describe these strengths and indirectly reference the job description's keywords.

Also, remember to base this on real-life events. Employers can use reference checks to look further into what you say.

Q: What do you think you can improve on at work?

This question tells interviewers about your level of self-awareness. List areas of improvement you genuinely may need to work on (e.g. time management, a technical skill, familiarity with a certain software) and describe what you've been doing to work on it.



Closing the interview

21 Three questions you must ask

Towards the end of an interview, you will be asked if you want to pose any questions to your interviewer. The answer to that query should always be “yes” and these are three questions you should ask.

Q: What are the top three challenges for a person in this role?

If you're lucky enough to be offered the role you want to know what you're getting yourself into. This question will give you some idea of the issues you will have to confront if you get the job and what kind of resources will or won't be made available to you to deal with them.

Q: What does success look like six months into this job?

As well as reassuring the interviewers you're the motivated, goal-orientated type, this question will clarify what the KPIs are that you might be judged on and what you'll need to prioritise if you are offered and accept the job.

Q: What are my next steps?

You want to avoid either inappropriately pestering the recruiter or missing out on a valuable opportunity because you failed to follow up. Ask the interviewer how long you should wait before following up if you don't hear back and whether they would prefer to be phoned or emailed.

22 Close on a positive note

The end of an interview is your last chance to sell yourself. While remaining mindful of the interviewer's time it is expected and appropriate that you aim to leave a positive impression by:

1. Briefly mentioning any of your relevant achievements or skills that haven't come up
2. Thanking the interviewer for their time
3. Emphasising your interest in the job (you're much more likely to miss out on it for appearing too indifferent than you are for seeming too eager)

You're also more likely to end up the successful candidate if you send a courteous email or make a polite phone call, reiterating your interest in the role and asking how things are coming along than if you don't bother.

