

# Master The Interviews

A Guide on What to Say & Do.



**Selection**  
PARTNERS



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# MASTER THE INTERVIEWS

## A Guide on What to Say & Do

### INTRODUCTION

If you are learning a new sport like tennis or squash, you wouldn't expect to pick up the racquet and start winning matches on day one. There would be lots of things you would need to learn first, like forehand, backhand, how to position your feet. Then you would need to practice, maybe get some coaching then practice again before you became any good.



To be successful at interview is pretty much the same. You need to get advice, coaching and view each interview as practice for the next. Great interviewees see interviews as an opportunity to sell themselves for a specific position. Whilst many people are uncomfortable with the thought of selling themselves, it's important to realise like tennis, this is something you can learn.

The reality is if you can't sell yourself in an interview it doesn't matter how good you will be in the actual job! The job is more likely to go to the person who is better prepared and more confident in selling their ability to add value, or solve problems and who presents as a good culture fit for their organisation.

When it comes to success at interview never ever forget that the interview is a game. No sports person, not even the world's best, ever play without practice. Thorough preparation and practice is essential to success!! Ask any champion sports person. They all practice. People who prepare well, interview well - people who do not prepare well do not interview well. It's as simple as that.





## BE PREPARED

### Before the Interview

- ☐ Practice
- ☐ What to Bring
- ☐ Plan the Journey
- ☐ Salary Expectations
- ☐ Energy Management
- ☐ Dress for Success

### Practice

- ☐ Role Play with a Friend or Family Member
- ☐ Video Record
- ☐ Audio Record



### What to Bring

- ☐ Pen
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Resume, Cover Letter (extra copies)
- ☐ Interview Notes, including interview email (location, interviewer Names & Phone Numbers)
- ☐ Intelligent Interview Questions
- ☐ Job Advertisement
- ☐ Umbrella
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Portfolio

### Plan the Journey

- ☐ Allocate Time
- ☐ Review Maps
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Have a Plan B

### Energy Management

- ☐ Food
- ☐ Water
- ☐ Exercise





## WHAT TO WEAR TO YOUR JOB INTERVIEW

### Interview Attire for Men:

- Clean shaven face or neatly trimmed beard
- Two-piece suit**
  - Cleaned and pressed
  - Conservative colors like navy and dark gray
- Long-sleeve shirt, even in summer**
  - White or light blue solid color
- Empty pockets to eliminate bulges**
- Conservative tie**
- Belt matching color of shoes**
- Leather shoes, black or cordovan**
  - Polish night before
- No earrings**
- Clean, trimmed fingernails**

### Tips

- ❗ Lay out your interview outfit the evening before and check for stains, tears or missing buttons.
- ❗ Make sure your interview clothing is clean and well pressed.
- ❗ Except for women's earrings, avoid body-piercing jewelry.
- ❗ Avoid perfume, cologne, and aftershave.
- ❗ Men should be clean-shaven. A carefully trimmed beard or mustache is also acceptable. Avoid stubble that looks like a few days of growth.
- ❗ If possible, cover your tattoos.
- ❗ Wear clothes that fit.
- ❗ Do not wear flashy jewelry or watches.

### Interview Attire for Women:

- Two-piece, matched suit**
  - Skirt should cover thighs when seated
  - Navy, black, gray or dark brown
- Tailored blouse, shell or knit top**
  - Do not show cleavage
  - Avoid gaping at chest
- Leather Shoes**
  - No stilettos or platforms
- Carry only one bag or tote**
- Avoid perfume**
- Avoid heavy makeup**
- Clean, trimmed fingernails**

**You only get one chance to make a good first impression with a potential employer. The clothes you wear are the first part of that first impression, so dress to impress. A business suit says you mean business, even though it may make you feel overdressed and uncomfortable. It shows that you care about making a good first impression. Thousands of people are eliminated as job candidates every week merely because they were not dressed appropriately for the interview, but a business suit is always appropriate.**

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## THE INTERVIEW

### During the Interview

- ☐ The First Impression
- ☐ Confidence
- ☐ Listening
- ☐ Talking
- ☐ Body Language
- ☐ Intelligent Questions
- ☐ Finish on a Positive Note

### The First Impression

- ☐ Handshake
- ☐ Eye Contact
- ☐ Tone of Voice
- ☐ What to Say
- ☐ Dress
- ☐ Smile
- ☐ Receptionist





## Confidence

- ☐ Positive Attitude
- ☐ Professional
- ☐ Focus on the Outcome You Want
- ☐ Energy & Enthusiasm
- ☐ Be Happy & Smile
- ☐ Be Yourself!

## Listening

- ☐ Eyes & Ears
- ☐ Write Notes
- ☐ Paraphrase
- ☐ Be Present
- ☐ Leaning Forward
- ☐ Listen to the Question
- ☐ Allow the Other Person to Finish Talking
- ☐ Clarify the Questions

“ Every Good Conversation Starts with Good Listening ”

## Talking

- ☐ Sell yourself in every answer
- ☐ Use the STAR technique
- ☐ 30 secs to 2 minute rule
- ☐ Be Positive
- ☐ Tell a story
- ☐ Be Passionate
- ☐ Be Energetic
- ☐ Be clear



## WHAT HIRING MANAGERS THINK

- ☐ Can you do the Job?
- ☐ Will you do the job?
- ☐ Will you fit in?
- ☐ Will you cause me any problems?
- ☐ Can I afford you?





## SELLING YOUR UNIQUE SELLING POINTS

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**What is it you can bring to the role that's unique to you?**

Attitude, competencies, skill, drive, live locally, passionate about the industry/company etc.

**How will you demonstrate you will fit in, work well in the team, not cause problems?**

Where have you done this before? Part time job, volunteering etc.

**What is it you can bring to the role that's unique to you?**

**How will you demonstrate you will fit in, work well in the team, not cause problems?**

### Body Language

- ☐ Arms open
- ☐ Hands open
- ☐ Posture
- ☐ Lean forward
- ☐ Eye Contact
- ☐ Smile
- ☐ Nod

### Finish on a Positive Note

- ☐ Use a personal statement
- ☐ Give the interviewers a copy of your work or Value Proposition
- ☐ Eye Contact
- ☐ Handshake
- ☐ Smile

“ I’ve really enjoyed meeting you & I can see how I can add value to this role and your organisation. ”



## INTERVIEWS – PRE THE INTERVIEW

### Calming Your Nerves When Waiting for an Interview

Waiting in reception for the hiring manager or recruitment manager to meet with you to conduct the interview is one of the most nerve racking times in the whole job search process. This is when we start to doubt our capability or if kept waiting too long, we start imagining that the person being interviewed whilst we wait is a superior candidate than our self and all sorts of doubt creeps in.

This is perfectly normal and the best way to manage this is to acknowledge these feelings then try to change them into more helpful feelings. Remember that if you tell yourself positive things, you will feel more positive. Take deep breaths, this will help to physically relax your mind and body (plus no-one knows you are doing it; it just looks like you are breathing normally).

Focus on what you've learnt in your research about the organisation and the job. In your mind practice answers to the common interview questions you have prepared and most importantly don't worry about anybody else apart from yourself. Remember the reason you are at the interview, is because you are good enough to be there!

### What to do When You First Meet the Interviewer

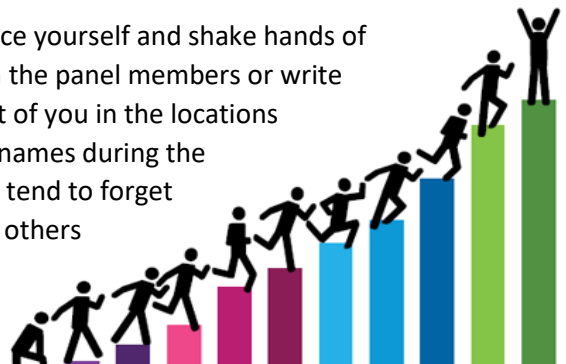
Once the interviewer appears, shake hands in a friendly manner and make eye contact. As you shake hands hold your head high get good eye contact, smile and say “pleased to meet you” or “hello Phil” or “hello Mr Parker”, according to how the interviewer has introduced themselves. Never forget the likeability factor and the fact that from then on everything you say and do will be assessed by the interviewer.

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### First Step in the Interview

If you're being interviewed by a panel, remember to introduce yourself and shake hands of the other panel members. Either collect business cards from the panel members or write down the panel members names on a piece of paper in front of you in the locations where they sat. It is really impressive to call people by their names during the interview and this builds likability. When we are nervous we tend to forget names so following this tip will positively set you apart from others and this is exactly what we want to achieve.

If you have researched (and we suggest you do) take out your notes. You may want to say something like “I have some notes here that I may refer to, is it okay if I take them out”. If you take in a file with notes, remember to use them. I have seen people prepare great questions based on their research, then completely forget to bring out the information. After the interview they kicked themselves for missing an opportunity to engage in a dialogue based on their research.



If you are offered water or a drink, if you want one, it's fine to accept. I recommend that you ask your interviewer if they are having one and follow their lead. If they have a drink you have one, if they are not, then you don't either.



## How to Handle the Small Talk in an Interview

The first questions usually asked during an interview are small talk questions such as "Did you find a parking space okay", "How did you travel here" or "Did you find us okay?"

Always answer questions like these positively or at the very least in a neutral manner. The interviewer is already starting to assess your suitability and likeability so don't say anything negative that could blow the interview. If it did take you a long time to find a carpark or to get to the interview don't complain to the interviewer about it. Just keep that to yourself.

When asked the question "Did you find us okay?" A great answer I heard about was when a candidate said "yes thank you, I am very interested in this role with your company, so I drove past last night so that I knew exactly where to come. "

This was a great response because immediately the candidate was able to demonstrate forward planning and attract attention to himself as a potential candidate. In addition, he mentioned that the interview was important to him.

## What is Important to Nail During the Interview?

The good news with an interview is that the hiring manager or a panel of HR and hiring managers want you to be the right person for the job. They want to hire you! All you need to do is give them the evidence to make it easy for them to make that decision.

You do this by demonstrating that you're capable of fulfilling the job requirements in a manner consistent with their culture and able to effectively add value to their organisation. They will be asking themselves these 5 interview questions whether consciously or unconsciously.

1. Do you understand the job?
2. Can you do the job?
3. Do you want to do the job?
4. Will you fit into the culture or cause problems in the team?
5. Do I like you?

Everything you say or do during the interview must address these questions.

Your job in the interview is to eliminate any fear doubt or uncertainty they may have about your suitability for the role. Often a hiring manager will make no decision and leave the job unfilled rather than take a risk and get it wrong. It is your job to understand if they have any doubts about your suitability for the role and address these before you leave the interview.

## Comparison Exercise – My Suitability for the Job!

Prior to the interview make sure you complete a comparison exercise. This is when you compare your achievements and accomplishments against the employer's needs. This prepares you to be comfortable to talk about your achievements, your goals as well as your strengths and weaknesses in the context of the specific job you're interviewing for.



Most people don't spend enough time thinking about how their skills and experience relate to the job until they are asked the question at interview and then it's too late. If you haven't prepared a succinct answer that responds to the needs of the organisation that you're interviewing for, you have blown a great opportunity to sell yourself.

### **So how did you conduct a comparison exercise?**

This exercise helps you to draw on your strengths. Draw a line down the middle of the page, on the left-hand side list all the employers needs and on the right hand side, your skills and accomplishments to prove you can do the job. In the interview you'll be able to point out these achievements and the value you can offer the employer. This will help you to stand out as organised and prepared. This is also a great document to take with you to the interview.

## **How to Answer the “Tell Me About Your Strengths and Weaknesses?” Question**

### **Strengths**

Preparing for the “Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses” question is a must for every interview. Tailor your response based on the job requirements. Once you've completed your comparison exercise, on a piece of paper, list all your strengths. Then tick which strengths support the job that you're interviewing for.

Do you think that's enough? Honestly based on what you'd written would you hire yourself? If you are unsure or think 'no' then do the exercise again until the answer is yes! It's important you feel confident that you have at least five strengths that support the job requirements. The more you do this exercise the more comfortable you will become with answering this question.



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### **Weaknesses**

Never ever tell an interviewer a weakness that relates to a requirement of the job. If they want someone with great attention to detail and yours is not terrific, just keep that to yourself. Tell them a weakness that won't negatively impact on your job performance but also one that you've been working on. For example, “I used to not understand social media and how we could use it to promote our products. But I thought it was important for me to know so I went on a course, bought a webinar package and got hands on experience creating a blog, now I am really comfortable with it”

This demonstrates that you have been proactive to overcome a weakness.

An alternative approach and most commonly used is to provide a weakness not relevant to the job. For example, “I am only intermediate using excel”, where basic excel would be sufficient for success in the job and so is not relevant. Other examples include;

“I sometimes spend too long at work” - where working long hours might actually be seen as a benefit

“I can be a perfectionist at times, but I've learnt to balance detail with the need for results”

“I can be too helpful at times, sometimes I take on too much, but I am aware of this & I'm working on it”



### Weaknesses to avoid at all costs

Whilst honesty is important in the interview, there is no need to be too honest. Never mention any of the following as weaknesses, I have explained why next to each.

Weakness	Reason to Keep it to Yourself
I find I often have conflicts with people in my team.	Organisations want to hire people who will 'fit in' to the team and culture. This answer will screen you out, as a potential trouble maker.
I wasn't up to the job	If you are applying for a similar job, then you have just confessed you don't have the skills. If you are applying for a more junior role, this is more acceptable but even then, would you want to hire someone who has told you they failed?
I can be disorganised	Even if this is true, no one wants to hire someone disorganised. If it is true, work hard to improve in this area.
I talk too much and get easily distracted	Whilst many of us talk at work, no one wants to hire a self-confessed annoyance and someone who can't focus.
I tend to take things too much to heart and get upset easily	Resilience is an important trait regardless of the level of role you are applying for. Managing a highly emotional person requires more effort by the hiring manager, therefore is often avoided.





# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## 1. “Tell me about yourself?”

This is a question which allows the interviewer to assess how structured and focused you are in your approach. The way you answer this question is often as important as the answer itself. Often interviewers ask you this to find out things that are not on your resume. Often people reply by saying “I’m a mum, I have a child, I like tennis etc” – wrong!! Don’t give away personal details such as these.

If you are asked this question you could ask, “Is there a particular aspect of my background that you would like more information on?” to give you guidance. This will enable the interviewer to help you find the appropriate focus and enable you to avoid discussing irrelevancies. However, ensure you tie into the answer skills, competencies and achievements you want the interviewer to be aware of. Ensure you’ve read the job advertisement or job descriptions and reference the competencies they are looking for in your response.

This isn’t a question that you can answer effectively off the cuff. Take some time in advance to think about yourself, and those aspects of your personality and/or background that you’d like to promote.

*An example might be. “I am a friendly and team orientated person: My background has centered around preparing myself to become the very best Lawyer I can become. I studied at X university. I have had a part time job in a law firm. I really enjoy using 123 skills and now I am excited to take the next step in my career”.*

## 2. “What do you know about us and why do you want to work here?”

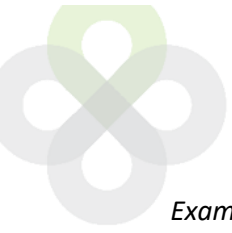
The employer asks this to assess if you have been proactive and conducted your due diligence. They want to see that you are truly interested in their organisation based on the work you have put into your research. They also want to know what you have discovered and how well you are able to communicate that with them. In essence, they want to know if you just applied to an advertisement or if you are genuinely interested in their organisation. If the latter is true they want to know why.

Interview Q & A :

**WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?**

To answer this question, reply with the research you have found and outline the company’s attributes as you see them. Talk about how this fits into your career plan, why the role appeals to you and what you feel you can offer them. Talk about shared values, aligned culture fit and anything else you feel is important. Remember not to just focus on what they can give you but what you can give them. Communicate that you have made a conscious decision to target this company because of the great things that you know about it (as long as this is true). Tell them you are looking to work hard and contribute, and that you see their company as being the right place for you for the foreseeable future.





*Example “I have heard so many good things about your company. From my research I learnt about your recent acquisition and the direction you are going and I believe I can make a positive contribution to your goals, including the need to increase sales and customer loyalty. I have done this in my last two positions and this is where I derive the most satisfaction. I also know you focus on development and I love learning and personal development so I am excited to be able to contribute through my skills development.”*

### 3. “Why should I hire you?”

This question is designed to see if you fully understand what the job role is asking for and if you can sell yourself as the ideal candidate. It’s essential that you have fully understood what the hiring organisation is looking for and what they need the person in this job to achieve.

Your answer should be short and to the point. It should highlight the areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. If you can, focus on how you can increase sales, save money or increase efficiency (time) - all employers are interested in one or all of these areas.



*Example “I am the type of person who loves change and thrives in an environment which allows me to implement process improvements. I have great skills in process mapping and I see that these would enable me to be really successful in this role. Furthermore, I know that your culture would suit my style so that I will be able to do some great work for you and add real value to your organisation.”*

### 4. “Provide an example of something you achieved and / or are proud of and something you failed at in your last role.”

The purpose of this question is to see if what motivates you is what their organisation provides. If the culture or environment you enjoy is not what the organisation provides you are less likely to be enthused in the role. When you answer this question ensure you match your response to the culture and environment of the hiring organisation.

When answering what you failed at, make sure the answer is something minor and that you turned it into a positive.

*For example, if you were working on a project that was behind deadline, explain how you adjusted the workload and the timeline to get back on track and ahead of schedule. Or if you were late producing reports because you were slow using the software, explain that you went on a course out of hours to upskill. If you want to give an example of something more fundamental, ensure that you add what you learnt. Sometimes employers want to know you have taken risks, made mistakes but learnt from the process. It’s often the process of reflection and development that’s important to the interviewer.*

## 5. "What makes you better than the other candidates we are meeting?"

*Your answer should articulate how your skills and experience will contribute to the company's success. You could say, "I offer a unique combination of skills, experience and knowledge, that will address the challenges your organisation is facing". Your response should then highlight a number of problems the organisation is facing and define how your involvement with the company will address these issues. If you have completed your homework, you will be confident in your skills and achievements and be able to easily articulate these.*

## 6. "Where do you see yourself in 5 years?"

This is an opportunity to demonstrate your motivation and ambition. Employers want to know if the job you are applying for now will still be of interest in 5 years from now or if you are more ambitious and career orientated. Employers also want to ensure that their new hires don't start with one foot out the door. Unless this is a temporary position, you want to reinforce that you will at least be there over that time frame.

*As an example: "In 5 years I hope to still be doing the work I enjoy every day, but from a role that pertains greater responsibility. I am motivated on a daily basis by work that requires complex analysis and correction of problems. I enjoy having flexibility in the job role, and having work which is financially rewarding to both the company and myself. From what I have learned about your company, I believe I am a strong fit for this organisation, both now and 5 years from now.*





## COMPETENCIES & BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWS

### What are competencies?

Competencies can be described as personal characteristics such as skills, knowledge and attitudes that differentiate levels of performance in a given role. See below for sample competencies, description and behaviours.

Competency	Description	Behaviors
Achievement orientation	Having the sustained energy in the face of obstacles or challenges to set and meet objectives and deliver required business results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows optimism by demonstrating enthusiasm and energy</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on the positive in situations</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Clarifies what is expected and does not give up at the first obstacle</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Breaks down projects into manageable steps to deliver results</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates future risks and plans accordingly</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Respects the rights of others whilst achieving own goals</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Aims to exceed expectations</li></ul>
Effective Communication Skills	Communicates messages effectively and persuasively to build relationships and achieve desired outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Speaks clearly, articulately and confidently</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Checks for understanding and adapts communication style to suit specific situations, people or the response of the listener</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Establishes and builds strong long-term relationships</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Shows sensitivity towards others, listens attentively and avoids interrupting</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Can be persuasive when required</li></ul>
Teamwork	Working co-operatively and flexibly across roles, teams, cultures and organisational boundaries to achieve shared goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Knows what needs to be done and does more than is on the job description</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Supports others when they need help by putting in the extra effort</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Fosters a collaborative team environment</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Balances team goals with individual goals</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Effectively co-ordinates multiple tasks and projects</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Is open to and embraces change initiatives</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Understands why people act the way they do and shows sensitivity towards others, using diplomacy and tact</li></ul>



Competency	Description	Behaviors
Innovation	Thinks outside the square with a focus on innovation on short and long term strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Thinks through the short and long term when solving problems and taking action</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Identifies and creates opportunities for competitive advantage</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Approaches tasks and problems creatively</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Thinks of ways to continuously improve the role and service provision</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Asks why things are done in a particular way</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Challenges established thinking</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Gathers ideas from a variety of perspectives, builds on other's ideas and inspires others to be innovative</li></ul>

### Example Questions

Competency	Behavioral Questions
Achievement orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> It is important to show optimism and enthusiasm even when under stress. Can you give a specific example of when you were able to do this?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe how you were able to translate an organisation's strategic goals into either your own or your teams' goals.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Tell us about a difficult project you had to work on and how you went about that.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of when you thought a project was going off track or not going well. What did you do? What was the outcome?</li></ul>
Effective Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Tell us about an experience in which you had to speak up in order to get a point across that was important to you or your team.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe a situation in which you were able to effectively "read" another person and guide your actions by your understanding of their individual needs or values.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe a situation when you were able to strengthen a relationship by communicating effectively. What made your communication effective?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? Tell us how you did that and what the result was.</li></ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Tell us about a time when you went above and beyond what you felt was expected of you.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give an example of how you have been successful at empowering a group of people in accomplishing a task.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Please give your best example of working cooperatively as a team member to accomplish an important goal. What was the goal or objective? To what extent did you interact with others on this project?</li></ul>





Competency	Behavioral Questions
Teamwork (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Tell us about the most difficult challenge you faced in trying to work cooperatively with someone who did not share the same ideas? What was your role in achieving the work objective?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> When is the last time you had to introduce a new idea or procedure to people? Tell us how you did it?</li></ul>
Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Walk us through an example of a time when you used your creativity to improve the effectiveness of your role, the team or the business.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Describe a time when you came up with a creative solution/idea/project/report to a problem in your past work.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Tell us about a suggestion you made to improve the way job processes/operations worked. What was the result?</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> When was the last time that you thought “outside of the box” and how did you do it?</li></ul>

## HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To be successful in answering a behavioural interview question, you need to have thought through what the potential employer wants to learn or see from your response. If they ask you about team work for example, they want to know about how you worked in a team. Always answer the question in the following format – SITUATION, THINKING, ACTION AND RESULT. This is the STAR process. Some people miss out the THINKING part, but I know this is important to share with the interviewer.

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## SUCCESS STORIES – HOW TO BE CONFIDENT AT INTERVIEW

One way to appear relaxed and confident during an interview is to know exactly how your previous experience, skills and competencies can be used to answer interview questions. This simple strategy will help you to identify situations where you have been successful in the past and understand how these relate to questions you are likely to be asked during an interview. I suggest you spend time with this exercise, as it is one of the single most helpful strategies for interview success.

I recommend you follow this approach for each job you are interviewing for. After you have worked through this a few times, you will start to build up a library of relevant and useful information.



### Step One

Read the job advertisement or job description for a role you are interviewing for. Highlight the key areas of importance for the job.



## Step Two

Think of about three or four times in university or in your recent career where you have felt proud of your achievements. Think of times when you knew you did a great job or where you added significant value to your team mates, fellow students or employer. Spend some time here. These are your success stories.

Give each success story a title, then write down the story in the STAR format (situation, thinking, action, result). When you are writing about the situation, always explain why there was a need for what you did.

Link the example to something relevant to the organisation you worked for that added value or the task you were undertaking. Always chunk up to think about the ultimate benefit of what you did.

### For Example:

**Title:** Training in the new system

**Situation:** My employer was implementing a new IT system. The last time this happened it was badly managed resulting in three days down time in my department.

**Thinking:** I knew it was important the system was implemented smoothly so that it didn't disrupt the workflow of the team. If we had down time it would cost the company \$XXX per hour, plus I knew that the people in our team would be anxious about the change. I realised this was really important, so I decided I'd like to volunteer to do some training with the software supplier before it was implemented. I then became our companies champion to help avoid the issues we had last time.

**Action:** I spoke to my Boss about my idea, he loved it, so I went off for a day's training course with the IT vendor. I then came back and spoke to my team about how they would prefer to be trained. I wanted to be sure they got what they needed. They said they preferred a group presentation pre implementation followed by individual sessions post implementation. I then designed the PowerPoint slides and ran a group session followed by individual sessions.

**Result:** The result was that the team felt comfortable with the new system before it was implemented and they all got the opportunity to ask questions and have more individual attention, which reduced their anxiety. The team commented on how well I trained them and how smooth the transition was. My boss was delighted that we had no down time, and we had no disruption to the work flow which would have negatively impacted the bottom line.

Write another few examples of success stories.



### Step Three

Create a table with the information you have read from the job advertisement or the position you are interviewing for in step one. At this stage focus on behavioural competencies, not technical skills or expertise. Based on the advert of Human Resources Officer, lets imagine we could complete the worksheet as below.

Position		Human Resources Officer					
Competency	Engaging Teams & Stakeholder Management	Interpersonal & Communication Skills	Customer Service	Planning & Organisation	Analytical Skills & Problem Solving	Dynamic & Proactive	Hands On

### Step Four

On the left hand column now write the titles of your success stories. See below

Position		Human Resources Officer					
Competency	Engaging Teams & Stakeholder Management	Interpersonal & Communication Skills	Customer Service	Planning & Organisation	Analytical Skills & Problem Solving	Dynamic & Proactive	Hands On
Success Story							
Training in the new system							
Story two							
Story three							
Story four							



## Step Five

Now decide if you demonstrated the competencies important for the job in your success story. If you did make a tick in the relevant box. For the success story entitled 'Training in the new system'. We could tick the following.

Position		Human Resources Officer					
Competency	Engaging Teams & Stakeholder Management	Interpersonal & Communication Skills	Customer Service	Planning & Organisation	Analytical Skills & Problem Solving	Dynamic & Proactive	Hands On
Success Story							
Training in the new system	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	

Let's fill this in for three more stories to demonstrate the point.

Position		Human Resources Officer					
Competency	Engaging Teams & Stakeholder Management	Interpersonal & Communication Skills	Customer Service	Planning & Organisation	Analytical Skills & Problem Solving	Dynamic & Proactive	Hands On
Success Story							
Training in the new system	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Story two		✓	✓				✓
Story three	✓				✓		
Story four			✓	✓		✓	



Using the above worksheet, when asked an interview question to demonstrate your competence in engaging teams & stakeholder management, you could provide either the example of 'training in the new system', or story three.

If asked for an example to demonstrate your interpersonal & communication skills, you could select 'training in the new system' or story two.

If asked for a customer service example you could use story two or four and so on.

This process allows you to easily recall multiple examples where you have successfully demonstrated your expertise. When you answer each question tailor the answer slightly differently to demonstrate the specific competency the interviewer wants to see.

By way of example, look at the different emphasis (when using the 'Training in the new system story'), to demonstrate the different competencies.

Success Story	Training in the new system
Engaging Teams	<p><b>Situation</b> - as above in the example given</p> <p><b>Thinking</b> - I knew it was important to get the buy in of the team and manage the stakeholders, so I met with the key influencers in the team to ask their opinion about how I should implement the training. I had my own strategy, but I knew it was essential to get two people in particular on board.</p> <p><b>Action</b> - I approached them first, because I knew if I had them on my side they could help influence the others. I positioned the training as something that will make their life easier and that of the team. When I then presented to the team. I presented the vision of what happened last time and how challenging and costly it was. Then I painted how it could be with their help and the reasons why I had volunteered to do it, was to help support the team</p> <p><b>Result</b> - the result was the team got right behind me and even did some training outside of hours, which was the first time ever. The feedback was terrific and we had zero down time.</p>
Planning & Organisation	<p><b>Situation</b> - as above in the example given</p> <p><b>Thinking</b> - I knew that the team would be anxious so I sat down and listed all the issues they would have and my own areas of concern based on my experience of the last implementation. I then spoke to some key stakeholders to hear their concerns.</p> <p><b>Action</b> - With this information I created an implementation strategy, which was accepted by both the team and management. I then scheduled the training for myself, and then the flow of training for the team that involved pre and post training. I also coordinated for the software provider to create some information based around typical questions asked. I forwarded this to the team in plenty of time to familiarise themselves before the training.</p>





Success Story	Training in the new system
Planning & Organisation (continued)	<b>Result</b> - the result was the team knew when they were being trained, how they were to be trained and what was expected of them. The feedback was terrific, management were very impressed it was so well planned and executed and we had zero down time.
Dynamic & Proactive	<p><b>Situation</b> - as above in the example given</p> <p><b>Thinking</b> - I always look for proactive ways to add value. When I realised that we were getting a new system installed.</p> <p><b>Action</b> - I put my hand up to get trained first so that I could be the company champion then train the team. I really enjoy learning new skills and implementing strategies that improve our efficiency at work. So I approached my manager and explained why I thought I would be a good champion. I designed and implemented the training system. I even asked the software company to create some information for us to help with the implementation, which they are now using for other clients.</p> <p><b>Result</b> - Everyone was delighted that I have taken the initiative to provide more training than that offered by the software company. We implemented the system with no down time, and so the bottom line was not adversely affected.</p>

When you know which success stories apply for each competency, you can easily emphasise the action you took that demonstrates the competency. Behavioural competencies demonstrate if you are likely to behave in the way the hiring organisation values. This is culture fit!

## QUESTIONS TO ASK AT INTERVIEW

Based on extensive interviewing experience, candidates who ask intelligent and relevant questions during and at the end of the interview tend to be the people who position themselves as the better candidate. When a hiring manager says “that’s an interesting question” or you have caused them to pause and really think of an answer, that’s when you are starting to engage at the level you want.

Ask questions about areas of the role, company, industry. Be curious.

### For Example

#### About the Role

- ☐ In what way has the role changed since the last person was in it?
- ☐ For me to be successful in this role what would I need to achieve?
- ☐ What do you expect me to accomplish in the first 60 to 90 days?
- ☐ What are the common attributes of your top performers?
- ☐ What would someone have to do to make them be a superstar in the role?





## About Company & Industry

- ☐ Who owns the organisation? Is it part of a larger group or does it have subsidiaries?
- ☐ What is the turnover and profitability?
- ☐ Discuss the range of current and future products or services
- ☐ Ask about competitors and market ranking
- ☐ Enquire about the Executive team and their plans and vision
- ☐ Discuss future plans for development
- ☐ Probe into the challenges the company or industry faces
- ☐ Ask their views and opinions on any Industry news you have researched
- ☐ What are a few things that really drive results for the company?
- ☐ What do employees do in their spare time?
- ☐ Discuss the recent share price movement (if applicable)

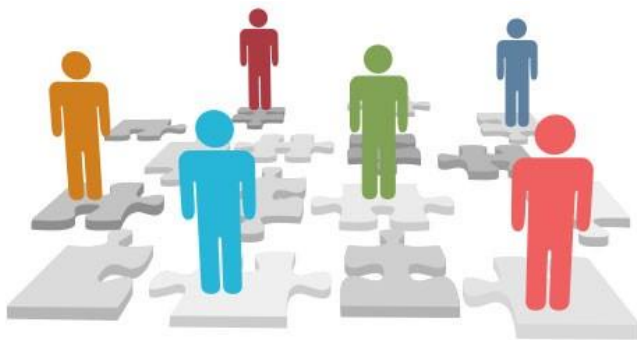
## The Hiring Manager

Ask them about themselves. People like to talk about themselves. This will give you an insight into their backgrounds, views and future plans.

- ☐ What are their goals as a manager?
- ☐ What they like about the company?
- ☐ What their challenges for the future are?
- ☐ The type of person that works best with them in terms of attributes and competencies.

## DIFFERENT TYPE OF PEOPLE YOU WILL ENCOUNTER

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### Hiring Managers

Hiring managers are the people you will work for directly. They are interested in how what you've achieved in the past can translate into success for them personally.

Hiring managers will be interested in your technical competency, your overall general

business intelligence and also your emotional intelligence. How well you will fit into their team and work with them.

### Human Resources

Human resources will be concerned about hiring people who fit with the organisations core values and culture. They will also be looking at whether you are a fit for the current and future job roles. They will assess how your skills will complement the strengths and weaknesses that already exist within the team. They are more likely to be the ones who ask behavioural interview questions.



## Corporate Recruiters

In many organisations, but not all, internal corporate recruiters are relatively junior staff. This is often an entry level role to move into Human Resources. The corporate recruiter will be interviewing you based on your response to an advertisement they placed. They are likely to be the first person in the shortlisting process. Their role in the interview process is to assess your qualifications and compare you against a list of other candidates that they feel suit the role.

Unfortunately, many corporate recruiters do not fully understand the job roles they are shortlisting for. Many are woefully undertrained and many are unable to fully understand and read between the lines of the resume. Therefore it's vitally important that you present your resume in the way that even the most junior corporate recruiter can assess. Our section on creating a resume will tell you exactly how to do this.

At the interview with the corporate recruiter they'll be assessing your personality fit - do they like you. They will assess your communication skills, how you look and present so ensure that you dress well for this interview. Often more junior people are impressed by a smart suit or tasteful dress. They will be further impressed if you know lots about their organisation and the role and are able to succinctly communicate that. The most important thing to do however during the interview is to explain how your experience fits with their opportunity. You have to spell it out to them and tailor your response to exactly what the job advertisement is seeking. The easier you make it for them to understand that your skills are what they are looking for, the more likely they will be to shortlist you for the next stage of the interview, which will be with the line Manager.

One of my clients was offered a job on the spot because not only did she make it clear she had the skills and experience necessary in a personable manner, but she had also researched the organisation where she was interviewing thoroughly. She was aware of the company share price and of relevant recent company acquisitions. She was comfortable to discuss this during the interview process with the hiring manager. My client was only 23 years of age. The role was relatively junior but she demonstrated initiative to research the organisation, curiosity and desire to understand the business and the ability to communicate on a strategic level based on her research. This positioned her above the other candidates who hadn't done their homework and who weren't prepared to have an intellectual conversation about the organisation and their culture, values and strategy of the business.

It is amazing how many people still attend an interview without having done research into the company, the division, the product, the hiring manager or the role. There is no excuse for that.



## UNDERSTANDING 12 DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS



Organisations use many different types and styles of job interviews today to select what they perceive to be the best person for the job.

To be successful in all types of job interviews, you must first have a clear understanding of the different interview styles and what is expected of you during each of them. Regardless of the style of interview, to be successful you need to research the company and the position, anticipate questions, develop your answers, prepare questions and practice, practice and practice.

Each is an opportunity to sell yourself, your skills and expertise, your qualifications and job fit.

Following is an outline of 12 different interview styles.

### 1. Screening Interview

The screening interview is generally a brief interview used to quickly and efficiently eliminate unsuitable, unqualified or unaffordable candidates. The screening interview is often carried out over the telephone and focuses on clarifying and confirming information contained in the application. This strategy can also be used to assess communication skills and the person's ability to think on their feet. Be mindful that unless a recruiter books a time to call, you may be caught at a difficult time, or be unprepared. This might impact on your ability to perform.

**Recommendation:** This screening interview is very important, if you don't perform well here, you will not progress in the selection process. If you are caught unprepared, it is best to tell the interviewer, that unfortunately it's not a convenient time, and ask for them to call you back at a more suitable time. This gives you time to read the advert or job description and prepare.

Try to keep your job search details close so you can refer to them if you prefer to take the call.

### 2. Webcam / Skype Interviews

These interviews are useful when the interview is to be carried out remotely when the applicant is not able to attend an interview in person due to distance, time or cost constraints.

Due to the global nature of the workforce, many businesses use video as a great way to speed up the interviewing process and reduce costs of flights and management time.

**Recommendation:** If you are to participate in a skype type interview, ensure you know how to set up the computer and practice with a friend beforehand so that you can get feedback on how you present. Have notes if you need them so you can refer to them during the interview.

Be aware of what the interviewer sees via the camera. A background of an untidy apartment with dishes in the sink does not leave a good impression.

### 3. Traditional / Structured Interview

This is when one person interviews an applicant. The style can be formal or informal. The more experienced and comfortable Managers you are interviewing with, the less they tend to rely on documented questions or structure. Having a set of standard questions helps to reduce the risk of interviewer bias and reduces the risk of the interview going off track. Some managers however use little structure with one interview being quite different to the next. Traditional interviews are vital as a means of collecting essential information such as previous job experience, career history, skills, qualifications, and career aspirations.

This type of interview can be conducted at the company site, or offsite in a more relaxed environment such as a coffee shop or over lunch. If you are interviewed off site, whilst the setting may be more casual, everything you do and say will still be scrutinised. You must develop common ground and rapport with your interviewer to eradicate any awkwardness the informal setting may bring. Always remain professional and treat it no differently to a standard formal interview. Limit or avoid alcohol intake and remember table etiquette.

**Recommendation:** Unskilled interviewers tend to ask basic questions. If you prepare for the most common questions these are likely to cover the majority of questions asked. You will then appear more confident.

### 4. Behavioural Interview



Behavioural interviewing can also be called Behavioural Event, Situational or Competency Based Interviewing. This style of interviewing is becoming increasingly popular and is used in an effort to make the interview process more valid and objective.

Behavioural interviews are based on the premise that a candidate's previous job behaviours and performance are the best indicators of their future performance. Past performance however is not always a true indicator of future performance, as work performance can be influenced by many factors such as company culture, knowledge of the job, manager support, peers, industry etc. Behavioural interviewing is nevertheless, one of the best ways to assess if an interviewee possesses the type of competencies and behaviour that an organisation requires.

In order for the behavioural interview to be performed at its optimum, it needs to be based on competencies. Competencies can be described as personal characteristics such as skills, knowledge and attitudes that differentiate levels of performance in a given role.

As an example, two people may have completed a management degree at university; one may have great customer service whilst the other cares more about making money than making the customer happy. There is nothing wrong with either of these motivations, however, if you were hiring someone to run your front desk at a hotel, you might want the person who values customer service and for whom it comes more naturally to be hired.

Competencies go a long way to explain 'why some people fit in' and others 'just don't work out' in certain jobs and workplaces.





## Examples of competencies

“If you don’t know what you want, how will you know when you see it?”

Competency frameworks identify the competencies desirable in their employees. These competencies can be company-wide or, specific to a team/department or job. Human Resources will be responsible for developing the framework in

conjunction with the Senior Leadership team. If organisations have a competency framework, using it at interview will enable them to make more robust hiring decisions.

Competencies therefore vary according to the job role you are applying for. The competencies required for a graduate accountant may be very different to those required for a digital marketer. Similarly, the competencies required for a person in one industry or company will vary from those required in another.

**Recommendation:** Prepare for these types of interviews by looking at the competencies for the job you are applying for and practicing the answers against the STAR format.

## 5. Panel Interviews

In this type of interview an applicant is questioned by several people who make up a ‘panel’. The actual number of interviewers can vary, but a panel may be any size from two upwards. On a panel, there is often a person who coordinates the questions and a specialist who knows about the job in detail. This type of interview is common in public sector or government roles where three panel members are typical. The interviewers may use behavioural questions or straight probing questions. In this interview, direct your responses principally to the person who asked the question but aim to encompass the group from time to time.


**Recommendation:** As the panel members will compare their opinions about you, ensure you look at all panel members even if only one person directs questions to you. Try to remain relaxed, this type of interview is often designed to get the most appropriate people to meet you at the same time in order to expedite the recruitment process, it is not normally designed to intimidate you. Take notes in and refer to them. Make sure you call each person by name.

## 6. Group Interviews

Larger businesses like to utilise group job interviews as a way to interview a number of potential candidates at the same time. Often multiple personnel from the hiring organisation interview you as part of a group of potential candidates for the same job or jobs.

**Recommendation:** People often act out of character during group interviews, many become more assertive and talk in a more rushed manner in order to be heard. It is best not to act out of character, however if you have access to the competencies the hiring organisation is looking for in the job, then demonstrate those behaviours.





For example, if problem solving skills are a requirement, as part of the group, you might like to generate ideas and invite ideas and discussion. If teamwork is required, ensure you ask other members of the group for input and work collaboratively.

## 7. The Sequential Interview

Sequential interviews occur, when an applicant is interviewed in stages on the same day. For example, an applicant may have several interviews with different interviewers. Generally, each interviewer will have different questions, but sometimes they will ask similar, or the same questions. This can be exhausting for the person being interviewed, as you may be working through the interview process for many hours.

**Recommendation:** You may find yourself answering the same questions over and over. If this happens, make sure you answer each one as fully as the time before. Don't be afraid of repeating yourself. Often the interviewers will not compare notes; they will assess you through their own set of criteria. Ideally each person should focus on different criteria, however this often doesn't happen.

## 8. Stress Interview

Stress interviews are less common today however some people still value this form of selection technique. One type of stress interview is where the employer uses a succession of interviewers (one at a time or enmasse) whose mission is to intimidate the candidate to throw the interviewee off-balance. The reason for this is to evaluate how the candidate handles stress.

Stress interviews might involve testing an applicant's behaviour in a busy environment. Questions about handling work overload, dealing with multiple projects, and handling conflict are typical.

Another type of stress interview may involve only a single interviewer who behaves in an uninterested or hostile manner. For example, he/she may keep you waiting for a very long time, the interviewer may not make eye contact, may roll his/her eyes or sigh at answers given, interrupt, turn his back, take phone calls during the interview, be sarcastic, or ask questions in a demeaning or challenging style. The goal is to assess how the interviewee handles pressure or to purposely evoke an emotional response.

Example stress interview questions can include the following:



**Challenging Situations:** "If you caught a colleague stealing product, what would you do?"

**Putting You on The Spot:** "How do you feel this interview is going?"

**Being Antagonistic:** "(deep sigh) Well, if that's the best answer you can give ... (shakes head) Okay, what about this one ...?"

**Bizarre questions:** "What would you change about the design of the bicycle?" Questions like this are designed to throw you, and see your reaction. If this happens, ask the interviewer to repeat the question, and make a note if it is complex. Ask questions about the question. (Does that include all types of bicycles like racers, mountain bikes or are you interested in one particular design of bicycle?). They are trying to understand if you have an ability to work through a problem



**Recommendation:** Don't take any of these actions personally. The interviewer is acting in a role, deliberately and calculatedly trying to "rattle your cage." Simply stick to your agenda and showcase your skills and accomplishments calmly. Better, try taking back control of the interview by ignoring the stress. Some experts suggest even getting up and walking around the room so that you take control by being the only person standing, therefore if there is a board or flip chart in the room, an option is to get up and draw or diagram parts of your answers.

## 9. The Presentation Interview

Candidates may also be asked to deliver a presentation as part of the selection process. This involves making a presentation to both the selection panel and/or other candidates for the same job. This is obviously highly stressful and is therefore useful as a predictor of how the candidate will perform under similar circumstances on the job. The company will also look for knowledge of the topic and how clearly you articulate the information. Selection processes in academia, training, airline, legal and teaching circles frequently involve presentations of this sort. Presentation interviews tend to be reserved for either second or third stage interviews, but can also be used as an effective screening mechanism at the first interview stage.

**Recommendation:** It is best to confirm prior to the interview how they would like this information delivered, i.e. by using PowerPoint, handouts etc. so that you are prepared. Also determine how many people will be attending the presentation, so you are not shocked when you arrive to see six people instead of two! The best tip when delivering presentations is to practise, practise and practise.

## 10. Role Plays

As part of an interview process the company interviewer may ask you to role-play with them to demonstrate your skill and competence level. This is common in sales roles when the interviewer asks you to 'sell a product' or role-play a sales scenario. Typical role-plays may include the interviewer picking up a pen and saying to the candidate. "Sell this pen to me".



This allows the interviewer to assess their abilities in a real time scenario. As this type of interview puts candidates under extreme pressure, if you are in a sales role, its best to ask prior to the interview if any role-playing will be involved.

**Recommendation:** If presented with a role play scenario, relax and pause to think through what you need to say based on what you think the interviewer wants to see and hear. Don't panic and react immediately without thinking.

## 11. Case Interviews

The case interview is employed primarily by management-consulting firms, as well as investment-banking companies, and is increasingly being used by other types of corporations as part of the job-interviewing process. During the case interview you are given information about a business dilemma facing a particular company. You are then asked to analyse the situation, identify key business issues, and discuss how you would address the problems involved.



Case interviews are designed to scrutinise the skills that are especially important in management consulting accounting, finance and related fields: quantitative skills, analytical skills, problem-solving ability, communications skills, creativity, flexibility, the ability to think quickly under pressure, listening skills, business acumen, keen insight, interpersonal skills, the ability to synthesise findings, and professionalism. This interview demands that you think on your feet with limited time available.

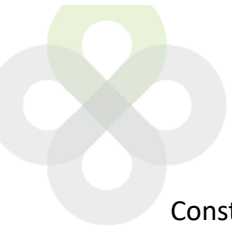
Practice before going to a case interview. Often employers have examples of case questions and advice on how to answer the questions. Good sites are Boston Consulting Group or Vault.com

When participating in a Case interview - listen carefully to the question. Paraphrase it back to the interviewer to ensure your understanding. The interviewer expects you to think about the question before you answer, so some silence is fine. Don't get stressed if you have to spend time thinking first to collect your thoughts. This is what they expect. It is polite however, to ask the interviewer if it's OK to take a moment to ponder the case. Try not to take more than 4-5 minutes.

You may also want to take notes; generally, the interviewer will allow you to do so.

Remember that rarely is there one "right" answer for analysing a case. Your process for reaching your conclusions is equally important to the interviewer as is the conclusion itself. In fact, the interviewer wants to observe as much of that process as possible, so it's important -- once you've taken the time to gather your thoughts -- to "think out loud" as you're working through the case.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. The case interview is meant to be interactive, with lots of back and forth between you and the interviewer. Questions are expected, especially as the information provided about the case will likely be incomplete. The interviewer will be looking at your resourcefulness in collecting information. Make sure you ask your questions in a logical progression. Act as if you are a consultant trying to learn about the assignment, failing to ask questions is a fatal error in the case interview. Be sure, also, to listen carefully to the answers to your questions.



Construct a logical framework with which to explore the critical issues of the case. Examples include, the SWOT analysis, Value Chain Analysis, Porter's Five Forces, brainstorming and the Four P's of marketing. Ensure you draw on applicable situations you've encountered in your career. Make sure your conclusion is grounded in action, not just theory. Be able to explain and defend your reasoning.

Prioritise the issues and objectives. Don't get bogged down trying to deal with every aspect of the case. As you ask questions, you should be able to pick up clues as to which issues are most important. Some of those clues might be meant to lead you back on track if you've gone astray, so listen carefully. If direction is not forthcoming, don't be afraid to take control of the conversation. Types of case questions:

- ☐ Calculation/estimation/guestimate/numerical/market sizing case
- ☐ Problem case
- ☐ Probing case
- ☐ Business operations case
- ☐ Business strategy case
- ☐ Resume case (case based on a company at which you worked)
- ☐ Brainteaser/logical puzzle/IQ question

**Recommendation:** Don't get rattled if the interviewer wants to know why you want the information you're asking for. It's all part of understanding your thought process. Project confidence. Your ability to work the case confidently, without getting flustered or frustrated, is key. Behave like you are having fun, be enthusiastic and positive. These are traits required for success in the job.

## 12. Assessment centres

Assessment centres are a combination of a number of the above interview types conducted over the course of between half a day to two days. Typically, assessment centres are used when companies are recruiting a number of the same types of position, as in the case of graduates or call centre positions.

Some organisations now utilise assessment centres for single management or leadership roles, due to the thoroughness of the assessment process.

If you are required to participate in an assessment centre, you will take part in a variety of specially designed exercises that allow the organisation to evaluate how your skills and aptitudes correlate with those required to perform in the role. Each of the exercises simulates aspects of the job description and work environment. You might have to work through:

- ☐ In tray exercises (this is where you usually assume a particular role as an employee of a fictitious organisation and work through correspondence in your in-tray. The in-tray exercise items will be specifically designed to measure job skills such as: ability to organise and prioritise work; analytical skills; communication with team members and customers; written communication skills; and delegation)
- ☐ Group interviews
- ☐ Case studies
- ☐ Comprehension assessments
- ☐ Presentations
- ☐ Behavioural interviews
- ☐ Debates or group discussions and
- ☐ Psychometric assessments



The assessors will watch and evaluate:

- ☐ What you can do
- ☐ How you react to situations and
- ☐ How you relate to others

**Recommendation:** Practise your presentation skills, psychometric tests and interview questions.

### Information Provision

During the interview it is really important to have some great success stories for the competencies or behaviours the hiring person is looking for based on the job description. Rather than just answering a question - provide a story that highlights the experience or competency you have. Interviewers are better able to remember rich colourful stories than just dull responses to interview questions. Let me give you an example, if the hiring organisation is looking for someone who has great communication skills, then tailor your great story to include communication skills (you can find what they are looking for from the advertisement or the job description).

Compare the following:

**Interviewer:** “have you ever implemented any new systems?”

**Answer one:** “yes I have, I helped change over the finance system from one accounting package to another that contained a payroll module. This was a huge success because it reduced the amount of time it took the Accounts Manager to pay the staff. I completed the implementation in time and on budget”.

On the face of it this sounds like a great answer – however. It didn’t really tell a memorable story and it didn’t tap into what the hiring person was looking for, in terms of communication skills.

**Answer two:** “yes I have. Every month I would see Kelly our payroll manger literally running around the office trying to enlist people to help her with data entry for the accounts whilst she did the manual payroll. She was always stressed. She always had to work late on payroll days and I would hear her swearing under her breath at the system. This was funny because she was normally quite a mild mannered person. I asked her why she was in this situation every month, because I wanted to understand why she was under so much pressure, to see if there was anything I could do to help.

She explained to me that it was because the accounts system didn’t have a payroll module. I asked her what difference it would make to her if they did have the payroll module. She almost cried and told me it would mean she would get to leave on time and that she would get to pick her son up from school rather than having to put him in afterschool care and then go to someone else’s house for dinner. I found out she was a single mum. I did some research on new systems, then talked to her about the new system I had found that would work. She and I then presented this to the Directors and highlighted the cost saving in terms of overtime payments and increased efficiencies. They agreed that it was a great idea, so with Kelly’s help I implemented the new system on time and to budget. Kelly was so delighted, I think I’ve made a friend for life, but it was really my pleasure.”

See the difference in the answers? When a hiring manger is interviewing many people the interviewees tend to blend into one another and you forget people. However, a story such as the one above is hard to forget because he painted a picture and brought in emotion which is a great memory anchor.





## What Information to Give

At interview many people don't want to patronise the interviewer by providing information they believe or think they will already know - this is a mistake!!! Never presume the interviewer has the experience or knowledge you think they have. It's flawed logic to decide not to tell interviewers what you think they should already know. After all, the interviewers know the answer to nearly every question they ask. The reason they ask is to give you the chance to show that you also know the answers.

If you have a second interview and the person who interviewed you at first is also part of a panel of interviewers at the second, it is OK to repeat the great answers you gave at the first interview. The new person in the interview won't have heard the response and if you made it to the second interview – what you said during the first interview must have been good. If you feel awkward, you might like to say “sorry John, you may have heard”, then provide your answer.

## BODY LANGUAGE

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Whilst what you say is vitally important in an interview it's equally important the manner in which you say that. The mehabrian principal suggests that over 70% of communication comes from body language including emphasis. Eye contact, tone, emphasis, facial expressions and gestures. Body language is just as important to consider in preparation for success in the interview process.

People often believe body language first before they believe what you say. If you stand with crossed arms and looked down and say I'm very excited, you don't give the impression that you are so people will believe your language body first before your verbal language. The same is true in an interview if you looked disinterested people will think you are disinterested.

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### Sitting

Sit upright in the chair leaning slightly forward with your arms unfolded. If you need to cross your legs, then perhaps just cross them at the ankles. This is the best position to display enthusiasm commitment and desire. Even if you are feeling nervous do not fold your arms. When you meet someone always give a firm handshake and look them in the eye. Firm not knuckle crunching and don't hold the interviewers hand for too long, that's creepy!!

### Voice

The tone of your voice is another factor that makes a huge difference at an interview. If you speak in a monotone you will sound boring and dull. This is easily improved with practice. If you don't believe tone makes such a difference read a bed time story to a child in a monotone voice and hear how quickly they complain.



## The Pitch

We'll talk about pitch in terms of the level of formality in the dialogue during the interview. A mistake that many people make often due to nerves is that they make the interview more formal than it needs to be and they tend to talk at the interviewer rather than having an authentic relaxed conversation with the interviewer. Don't use a phoney kind of interview voice in an interview.



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## Eye contact

Even competent experienced candidates present poorly at interview because they're shy and so find it difficult to maintain eye contact. If this is you, if you feel self-conscious or shy my advice is just to pretend to be confident. All you need to do is to appear confident, and let's face it some of the best actors in the world are not confident people, they just act so that's what you need to do during the interview. Practice and practice and you will become more confident.

## Gestures

At interviews when we are nervous we tend to overuse gestures or underuse gestures. The secret is to use gestures appropriately to try and be natural or at least try to appear natural.

## Dress

Many work environments are casual. However, my advice is always dress one level up from the environment.

## WHY LIKEABLE GETS YOU THE JOB

Behavioural interviews, Key Selection Criteria and testing are all designed to help hiring managers make the right decision. However, those hiring are human and humans are not able to make purely objective decisions about much. Particularly when they may have to work with a person.

Often hiring managers hire people because they were 'a nice guy' or the interviewer just 'clicked' with the candidate. Organisations are prone to changing the selection criteria to suit a candidate they like. They are more open to overlook deficiencies in their application if they develop a good feeling about them.

Whilst Human Resources Managers try very hard to make the selection process as fair as possible, they get frustrated that Line Managers. They often hire people simply because they liked them and they felt they were the 'right' person.

If you can't beat it let's learn how you can make yourself more likeable, because you can learn it!

### Understand Likeability

Let me paint a scenario so that you get to experience what I mean first hand. Meet two potential applicants for a job. The guy in the light suit on the left is called Allan, the guy in the dark suit on the right is called Carl.




Let's imagine that you are interviewing both people. You need to select one person to work with you in whatever role type you are looking for. The role is irrelevant to illustrate the point. Let's assume that both have suitable experience and qualifications, both are able to start in 2 weeks, both are looking for the same salary level.

You meet Allan outside at reception to take him into a room where the interview will be conducted, you have kept him waiting for 15 minutes. He stands up looks you in the eye, smiles broadly and shakes your hand firmly but not too firmly. He says "Hello, pleased to meet you". You say "sorry to have kept you waiting". Allan says "No problem I took the opportunity to read some of your company information, it was really interesting".

After you both sit down in the room where you are to conduct the interview, you ask "did you find our offices OK?". Allan had gotten lost en-route. He answered honestly saying "Actually, I did get a bit lost, but I left plenty of time so it was no problem".

During the interview Allan listens whilst you speak then answers the questions honestly and humbly. He talks about his skills and achievements, but he also laughs about areas that he is not great in a way that exudes authenticity.





He asks you a number of questions about you and your career and what you love about the company and your role. He demonstrates he has researched the organisation. At the end of the interview he says “thank you so much for your time, I really enjoyed meeting you and learning more about your company. I would love to work here and with you, I know you have others to see, but fingers crossed we get to meet again.” He smiles broadly and leaves.

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You then go back to reception to meet Carl, who you have kept waiting for 15 minutes. He stands up, doesn’t look you in the eye, has a small smile that doesn’t reach his eyes and shakes your hand quite firmly. He says “Hello, pleased to meet you”. You say “sorry to have kept you waiting”. Carl says “No problem”.

After you both sit down in the room where you are to conduct the interview, you ask “did you find our offices OK?”. Carl had also gotten lost en route. He answered honestly saying “You know what, I did get lost, this is a difficult place to get to, perhaps you could send people a map when you book them in for an interview”. You are not sure if was joking or not, it was hard to tell.

During the interview Carl gets animated when you talk and talks over you a little cutting you short. He talks about his skills and achievements and only talks about his strengths. His tone is quite serious. He asks you a number of questions about the role, and the company nothing about you. He demonstrates he has researched the organisation. At the end of the interview he says “thank you for your time.” He smiles and leaves.

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**Both candidates can do the job, but who did you *like* more? I liked Allan.**

Likeability has to do with developing rapport but it also has to do with how someone makes us feel. Likeable people make us feel good about meeting them and about ourselves. You can work to develop your likeability. When you do I guarantee it will help in your interview success.

### Likeability Checklist

Get serious about being likeable and ask a friend to role play and interview with you and rank you according to the criteria below. If you can improve in even a couple of areas, this could be the difference that makes the difference to your job search!

1. Be friendly. How good is your ability to communicate liking and openness to others? Do you appear genuinely pleased to meet the person standing opposite you? Does your smile reach your eyes or is it forced?
2. No BS, that’s no Bull s\*\*t, everyone has a radar for a faker. Do you demonstrate integrity? Are you authentic in what you say? Are you confident with a splash of humility, or do you appear arrogant?
3. Do you Listen? Many people are so busy thinking about what they want to say, especially in an interview situation that they talk over the person who is interviewing them, or finish their sentences. Likeable people take the time to listen more than they talk.



4. Are you positive? Likeable people are optimists who radiate energy and enthusiasm. If they are thrown lemons, they make lemonade. They never criticise or talk negatively in an interview. Even if they were retrenched, they talk about the opportunity it now presents.
5. Are you interested in others, or is it all about you? Very few people demonstrate genuine interest in other people. But likeable people are the ones that are really interested in you. Let's face it we like people who are interested in us. We feel appreciated and valued when someone takes the time to really listen and ask questions about us.
6. Are you a show off or are you a tiny bit self-deprecating admitting small vulnerabilities? People like people who can laugh at themselves.
7. Are you polite? It may seem a small and very basic thing, but saying please and thank you shows you respect and appreciate the other person.
8. Do you treat others as you'd like to be treated and make them feel comfortable?
9. Do you genuinely compliment others? If someone compliments you, can you accept it gracefully?
10. Do you have a sense of humour? People like people who are competent, but don't take themselves too seriously and have a spirit of fun.

Work on your likeability. Decide if you want to be Allan or Carl (Allena or Carla, if your female). Once you decide, then adopt the behaviours of a likeable person. This has nothing to do with your skills and experience and everything to do with your attitude. As a graduate – your attitude is one of THE most important factors in selecting a new hire.

## STRANGE AND TRICKY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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### **If you were an animal, what kind of an animal would you be?**

Choose an animal that is strong, intelligent and often perceived as a leader – example: “lion, tiger or elephant.” Relate the animal to the skills needed in the position you are applying for. No snakes, no teddy bears, no koalas – nothing fluffy or cuddly.

### **If you were a tree, what kind of a tree would you be?**

Choose a tree that is strong and long-lived – example: “oak.” No weeping willow or drooping elm.

If you were a Star Trek® or Star Wars® character, which one would it be? Pick a character that is a leader and a risk-taker. Say: “Captain Kirk, Han Solo, Luke Skywalker, Spock. If you really are a risk-taker: “Darth Vader.” Be prepared to justify your selection.

### **Why are manhole covers round?**

The interviewer is testing your imagination and creativity. Microsoft was the first to make this question famous by asking it as a job interview question. You can answer as follows: “1 – A round manhole cover cannot fall through its circular opening. 2 – A heavy, round manhole cover can be more easily moved by being rolled. 3 – If a car rolls over a dislodged manhole of another shape, the sharp corners could puncture a tire, but a circle doesn't have corners.”





### **What is your favourite drink?**

A colleague once shared that he was interviewed for a senior position at Pizza Hut and later learned from an inside contact that he didn't get the offer because he asked for a Coke when offered a soft drink. At that time Pizza Hut was owned by Pepsi Cola. Seems they felt he should have done more in-depth research. If you are asked this question (and you have done your research), specify a soft drink or energy drink. Otherwise your answer may indicate whether you drink alcohol, and there's always a possibility that the company may try to hire non-drinkers to keep health insurance costs low.



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### **If aliens landed in front of you and offered you any position on their planet, what is the first thing you would do?**

The most creative answer I ever heard was: "The first thing I would do is go change my pants because they scared the crap out of me. Then I would ask to travel with them so I could scare the crap out of others." Creative? Yes. Appropriate? No. Offering to be the Travel Director is imaginative.

### **If someone wrote a biography about you, what do you think the title should be?**

Your answer will be interpreted as a clue to your personality, creativity, accomplishments and degree of humility.

### **What would your mother say is your greatest weakness?**

Be aware that it isn't your mother responding; it's you. Another negative question to trick you. Repeat a strength that appears to be a weakness but really isn't. It's also fairly safe to use something she might have told you as a child: "Stop drinking orange juice out of the carton. Use a glass."





## What kind of people do you dislike?

Do not name members of any political party, religion, ethnic group or minority. Say: “There are no particular people I dislike, but I do find some behaviours annoying – such as not completing work assignments on time, gossiping, laziness ... “

- ☐ Did you ever have a group leader / lecturer you disliked? Why did you dislike him/her?
- ☐ How would someone who dislikes you describe you?
- ☐ Talk about a group situation in which there were problems. How did you handle the situation and what was the outcome? What role did you play in the group? How could the group improve its performance?
- ☐ Tell me about a time when you experienced a failure and how you reacted to it.
- ☐ Tell me about a time when you were under considerable pressure to meet one or more goals.
- ☐ Describe a situation where you had to resolve a problem at work and explain how you resolved it.
- ☐ Give me an example of how you are a risk taker.
- ☐ If you could have any job in the world, what would it be?
- ☐ What motivates you?
- ☐ Why do you want to work for us and not for our competitor?
- ☐ Why should we hire you over everyone else we spoke to today?
- ☐ What do you think is the most important/difficult ethical dilemma facing corporations today?
- ☐ Give a one sentence positioning statement of yourself.
- ☐ How do you go about deciding what to do first when given a project?
- ☐ Tell me about an experience you have had in a working environment (school, work, or community).
- ☐ Describe a situation where you did not agree with something your boss asked you to do and how you resolved the problem.
- ☐ Can you work under pressure?
- ☐ What did you like/dislike about your last job?
- ☐ What would you like to be doing five years from now?

## SAY THANK YOU AFTER THE INTERVIEW

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Writing a thank you email after an interview might be the one thing that sets you apart from the rest of the candidates and gets you the job. Since hiring managers usually make decisions fairly quickly, communicate your appreciation and interest within 24 hours.

Remember to keep your email businesslike.

**For Example:** Follow-up to our July 23rd interview or July 23rd interview follow-up

Both examples leave no question as to the subject of the email.

**The Salutation:** Address a male interviewer as follows: Dear (first name)

Start the body of your note with some form of “thank you.”



Personalise and use one of the following quotes to begin your thank you note:

- ☐ I appreciate the time you took yesterday to talk to me about \_\_ (the job title) \_\_.
- ☐ Thank you for giving me the opportunity to meet with you yesterday.
- ☐ I really enjoyed our conversation today.
- ☐ Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to discuss your open position.

Develop that thought with one of the following comments:

- ☐ Everything I learned made me even more excited about working for \_\_\_\_ company.
- ☐ I would like to reiterate my interest in working for you (or the name of the company).
- ☐ Our conversation reaffirmed my interest in working with you (or the name of the company).

Expand on something said or learned; repeat how your skills will fill the needs of the company.

You can also address any faux pas from the interview or bring up an issue you forgot to mention.

- ☐ Since I did not have a copy of (some paperwork) with yesterday, I am attaching a copy to this email.
- ☐ One thing, I did not have a chance to tell you is \_\_\_\_\_ (something that pertains to the job or a skill that solves a problem).

Close with some comment about continuing your relationship:

- ☐ I am really looking forward to discussing this with you again.
- ☐ If you have any further questions, I would be happy to meet with you again. Feel free to call me at 02 123 4567.

The final line should be “Thank you, once again” and close with sincerely or Kind Regards, and your name.

## INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

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Here is a checklist to practice your interview skills.

Practice these skills in a safe environment where making mistakes and goofing up doesn't matter. Work with a friend to provide you with input.

### Interview Practice Checklist

Use the following scale

- ☐ Needs to significantly improve in this area
- ☐ Competent, with more practice could be even better
- ☐ Terrific, an area of strength



Area of Assessment	Rating 1 2 3	Feedback / Notes
Ability to develop rapport, appear relaxed and confident in the interview situation		
Ability to maintain good eyes contact and positive body language		
Use of appropriate words, appears positive and articulate		
Appropriate volume and tone of voice		
Appropriate speed of speaking		
Appropriate use of hand gestures		
Ability to answer the questions succinctly		
Ability to sell your unique selling points, (the value you offer & your suitability)		
Ability to demonstrate relevant job experience for the role		
Ability to address the concerns of the interviewer relating to your experience		
Ability to address any concerns relating to education & qualifications (are you able to demonstrate past work experience to overcome any qualification deficiencies?)		
Ability to demonstrate technical competence		
Ability to describe relevant leadership / supervisory experience		
Impression of how motivated & enthusiastic the person appears		
Ability to answer basic questions – Strengths & weaknesses		



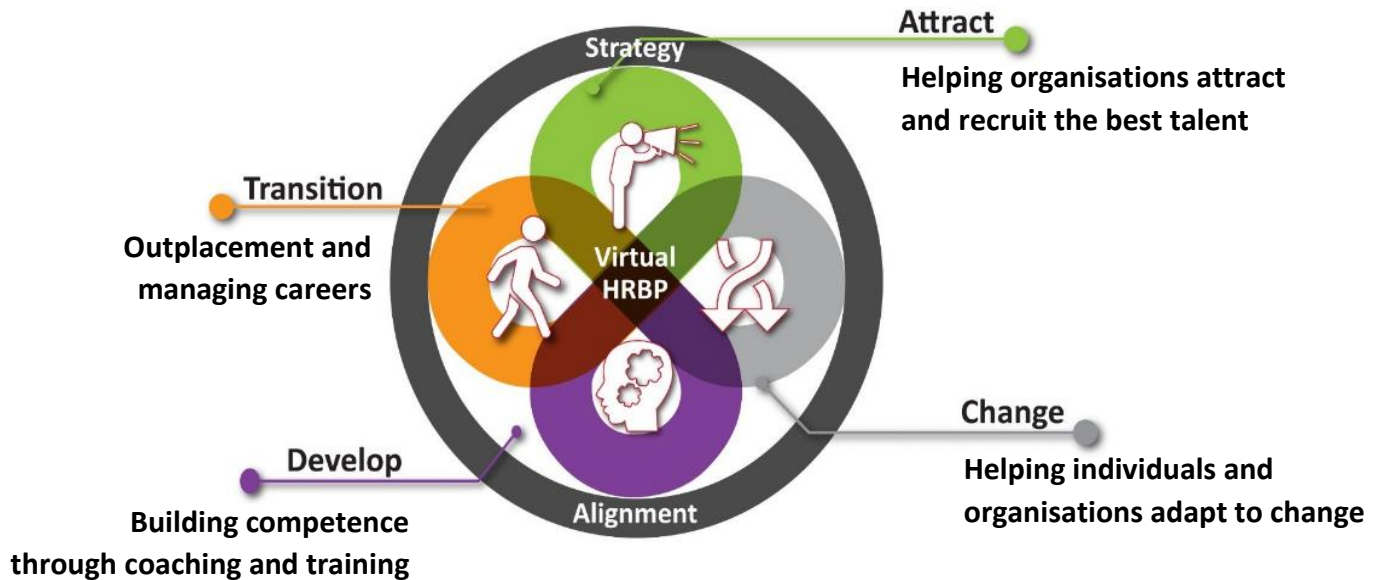
Area of Assessment	Rating 1 2 3	Feedback / Notes
Ability to answer basic competency questions, in the STAR format <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Initiative</li><li>• Problem solving</li><li>• Leadership</li><li>• Others relating to the role you are applying for</li></ul>		
Overall communication skills		
Ability to convey confidence and credibility		
Overall impression created		

All the best with your interviews.



# ABOUT Selection Partners

Selection Partners is a talent consulting firm. We work with organisations and individuals through all areas of their careers via our four service areas:



Our approach is to partner with organisations nationally to help them achieve their talent objectives. We focus on *'the difference that makes the difference'*.

***Written by June Parker, Director Selection Partners.***

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