

Pre-Interview Preparation



Congratulations for Making it to the Interview Stage!

Talenza has developed this guide to help you nail this next step in the process.

Firstly, we'll take you through some standard interviewing tips to make sure you are set up for success.

Purpose

Remembering that interviews are two-way – they're an opportunity for you as candidate to work out whether this role and employer is right for you.

Refer to your non-negotiables to cover off your life and career needs. If there are gaps, get some questions together so you're best able to decide whether you want to work there, and if you actually have the skills and attitude to succeed in the role.

STEP 1

Do Your Research

Researching the company and the industry in which they operate shows initiative, enthusiasm and a keen interest in the role.

The fastest way to conduct research on a company is online. Start off with the company's website and then try expanding your search using a search engine. Try to answer the following questions:

- What are the company's core products and services
- How is the company perceived in the market place?
- Find out what you can about the company's financial situation
- Try to think like a client of the company and identify potential improvements
- Research the company's competitors and the industry as a whole

STEP 2

Preparation

You should ensure you prepare thoroughly so that you are able to talk comfortably about yourself, your experience and how it relates to the role.

Be familiar with your CV and prepared to answer questions from it. Similarly, ensure you have read any job description thoroughly and think of ways in which your experience will benefit your potential employer.

- Prepare yourself in advance for common interview questions. Refer to our interview questions section for some practical examples
- Conduct practice interviews with friends and family until you can comfortably answer each question without hesitation
- Prepare questions to ask the employer. Refer to our Interview Questions section for some practical examples
- Find out where the interview will be, obtain clear directions, and confirm the time

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STEP 3

The Interview

- Make sure your mobile phone is switched off
- Relax and have confidence in your research and preparation
- Dress professionally - choose clean, neat, and well-maintained clothing
- Greet your interviewer standing with a firm handshake and a smile!
- Good body language is vital
- Wait to sit until the interviewer does or until they offer you to your chair
- Sit up straight with both feet on the floor
- Speak clearly and confidently
- Try to maintain a comfortable level of eye contact throughout
- Don't rush to fill in silence, think before you speak
- Use practical examples to illustrate your skills and show how they suit the role and the company
- Avoid one word answers
- Show enthusiasm for the role
- Speak with clarity and confidence and articulate your answers in a clear and concise manner. Close the interview with a handshake making eye contact and a genuine thank you; make a positive last impression



Interview Questions that YOU can use

Before your interview, prepare questions you will want to ask the interviewer. 'Open' questions that begin with 'What?', 'How?', 'Will?' or 'Who?' should encourage your interviewer to talk and provide you with additional information.

We recommend that you consider some of the following questions:

- What will my responsibilities be?
- How has the position become vacant?
- How will you assess my performance?
- How does the role fit into the structure of the department?
- How does the department fit into the organisation as a whole?
- Who will I report to and are there staff reporting into me?
- Where does my line manager fit into the organizational structure?
- What encouragement/support is given to undertake further training?
- Who are your main clients? Industries, size, etc.
- Where is the company going/growing? Expansion plans?
- Where is the specific location of the position?
- Will the position entail travelling?
- How soon will you decide on the appointment?
- What is the next step?

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Questions to Consider

- How does your last/current job fit into your department and company? (Gives an idea of level of responsibility)
- How do you respond to working under pressure? (Meaning – can you?). Give examples
- How have you coped when your work has been criticized? (Give an example including the outcome.)
- How have you coped when you have had to face a conflict of interest at work? (Testing interpersonal skills, team and leadership opportunities).
- What are your preferred working conditions, working alone or in a group and why?
- How do you think you are going to fit in here especially as this organisation is very different to your current employer? (You may not be able to answer until you have established what your interviewer perceives as the differences).
- What are you looking for in a company?
- How do you measure your own performance?
- Which part of this role is least attractive to you?
- Why should I give this position to you instead of other people on the shortlist? (Go back to your strengths)
- What would your previous employers say about you and what would they consider your weaknesses?



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Types of Interviews

You will encounter a number of interview techniques during your job search. Approaches vary according to the nature of the role and the industry.



Unstructured Interviews

The interviewer will ask you to describe how you handled various situations in your previous role. The emphasis is on your experience and its relevance to the position for which you are being considered. Prepare by identifying four or five examples that show how you faced challenges and achieved positive outcomes in your previous role. In each case describe a specific task or situation that is relevant to the role in question.



Panel Interviews

These are very similar to behavioural interviews. The difference is that situational interviews pose hypothetical questions, rather than asking for specific examples of past performance.

Questions are based on the skills and personality traits that are required for the role. Use the job description to identify key responsibilities because the questions are likely to focus on these areas.



Unstructured Interviews

This style is conversational and information is gained through a free-flowing discussion. The interviewer does not ask a set of questions in a predetermined order. You are required to carry the conversation and the topics you discuss generally lead to subsequent questions. Rehearsal is important because the interviewer, although apparently casual, will be looking for details that reveal your skill, personality and cultural fit for the role.



Panel Interviews

These consist of multiple interviewers who are usually sourced from different parts of the business. Objectives are likely to vary between members of the panel and this will affect the flow of questioning.

Establish eye contact with the member of the panel asking the question and scan the other panel members during your response. Take particular care when answering technical or strategic questions as panel members may have specialist knowledge in these areas.

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Example Questions

Q: Tell me about yourself.

(The interviewer is really saying “I want to hear you talk”)

A: This is a commonly asked question designed to break the ice. Spend a maximum of five minutes to describe your qualifications, career history and your range of skills. Emphasise those skills that are relevant to the job on offer.

Q: What have been your achievements to date?

(The interviewer is saying “Are you an achiever?”)

A: Again, this is a common question so be prepared. Select an achievement that is recent. Identify skills you used in the achievement and quantify the benefit.

Q: Are you happy with your career to date?

(The interviewer is really asking about your self-confidence, your career aspirations and whether you are an optimistic person)

A: The answer must be ‘yes’ but if you have hit a career plateau or you feel you are moving too slowly, then you must qualify the answer.

Q: Tell me the most difficult situation you have had to face and how you tackled it?

(The interviewer is really trying to find out your definition of “difficult” and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving)

A: Select a difficult work situation that was not caused by you. Explain how you defined the problem and what solution you applied to overcome the problem.

Q: What do you dislike about your current role?

(The interviewer is trying to find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities you will dislike)

A: Be careful with this one. Don’t be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company such as its size, its slow decision making process etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your side, as part of the job.

Q: What are your strengths?

(The interviewer wants a straightforward answer as to what you are good at and how it is going to add value)

A: This is one question you will certainly be asked, so there’s no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four explanations of how they could benefit the employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency, ability to learn quickly, determination to succeed, positive attitude, team focus and your ability to work autonomously.

Q: What are your greatest weaknesses/areas of improvement?

(The interviewer is asking about your self perception and self-awareness)

A: This is another standard question for which you can be well prepared. Don’t say you don’t have any. We all have weaknesses. Either use a professional weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part of one area that is not vital for the job, or use a personal weakness and show the steps that you have taken to combat it.

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Example Questions

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Q: What kind of decision do you find most difficult?

(The interviewer is really saying, "I need someone who is strong and decisive but who has a human side")

A: Try to focus on decisions you have made without sufficient information. This will show your positive side. For example, "I like to make decisions based on sufficient information and having alternatives." When you have to make quick decisions you have to rely on "gut feeling" and experience.

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer?

(The interviewer is trying to understand and evaluate your motives for moving)

A: This should be straightforward. State how you are looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience and a change of environment and explain why you feel you are no longer receiving these things from your current role. For example, "I have been with my company for four years and feel I have learnt as much about their 'X' functions as possible and there is no opportunity for a more senior role at present". Other



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STAR Method

The STAR method is a structured manner of responding to a behavioral-based interview question by discussing the specific situation, task, action, and result of the situation you are describing.

Situation

Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.

Task

What goal were you working toward?

Action

Describe the actions you took to address the situation with an appropriate amount of detail and keep the focus on YOU. What specific steps did you take and what was your particular contribution? Be careful that you don't describe what the team or group did when talking about a project, but what you actually did. Use the word "I," not "we" when describing actions.

Result

Describe the outcome of your actions and don't be shy about taking credit for your behavior. What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn? Make sure your answer contains multiple positive results.

Make sure that you follow all parts of the STAR method. Be as specific as possible at all times, without rambling or including too much information. Oftentimes students have to be prompted to include their results, so try to include that without being asked. Also, eliminate any examples that do not paint you in a positive light. However, keep in mind that some examples that have a negative result (such as "lost the game") can highlight your strengths in the face of adversity.



Sample Star Response

Situation (S): Advertising revenue was falling off for my college newspaper, The Review, and large numbers of long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts.

Task (T): My goal was to generate new ideas, materials and incentives that would result in at least a 15% increase in advertisers from the year before.

Action (A): I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet and compared the benefits of The Review circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set-up a special training session for the account executives with a School of Business Administration professor who discussed competitive selling strategies.

Result (R): We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and five for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent over the same period last year.

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STAR Method

How to prepare for a behavioural interview

- Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; be ready to give details if asked.
- Be sure each story has a beginning, middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, including the task at hand, your action, and the outcome or result.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.
- Vary your examples; don't take them all from just one area of your life.

Sample behavioural interview questions

Practice using the STAR Method on these common behavioral interviewing questions:

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a time you were able to successfully deal with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa).
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of a time when something you tried to accomplish and failed.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.