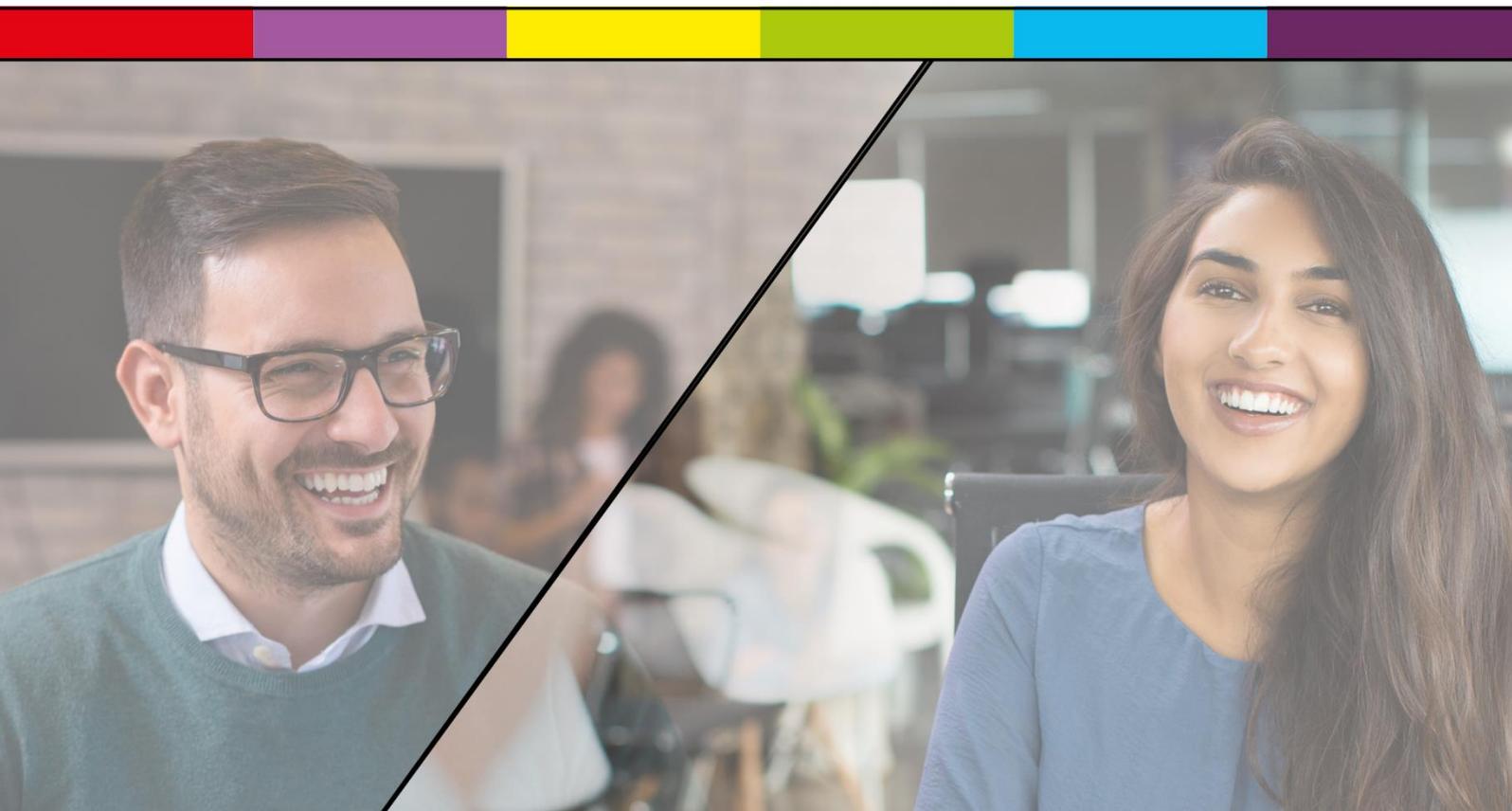




Unicorn
RECRUITMENT

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back into recruitment**

Interview Skills Guide



How to Prepare for an Interview?

Plan, plan, and plan. You are certain to be asked specific questions about your potential employer, so make sure you've done your homework on things like their last year's profits and latest product launches, what are the companies' values? What is the history of the company? Nothing is as disappointing as when a candidate oozes enthusiasm and then doesn't even know the most basic facts and figures about a company. Look at the company website, do they have social media? Make sure you do your research.

Here are a few places you can find some useful information.

An online search

The company's website is the best place to start. It shows the company as it would like to be seen and the products and services they offer. You will get a feel for the corporate style, culture and tone of voice.

Check out their Annual Report and look for a press or company news page. As you filter all this information, consider how the role you're applying for relates to the company's mission. You may also be able to use the site's search facility to discover more about the person or people who will be interviewing you. You should spend some

time looking online for any other information you can find about the company. Put their name into Google News to see if they've had any recent interesting stories written about them. You could also discover some information written by their current employees on what it's like to work there.

Industry sources

It's not just information about the company you need – you should also have a good background knowledge of the industry so you can impress at the interview.

Browse through business publications and websites to see what they are writing about your potential employer and their industry. Have a look on the newsstands at the big magazine retailers - there's an amazing list of publications out there. You may find back issues of trade publications at university or public libraries, or you

might be able to access them online. Some journals are even available for free or by subscription through their own websites. If you're already in the same industry as your potential employer, it may be possible to discreetly ask colleagues or your suppliers if they know anything about the company you're interested in.

Preparing yourself

This is the bit most people forget to give enough time to, so don't get caught out. Just like when you're going into an exam, feel confident that you can field any question they throw at you, and try to feel as good about yourself as you can. It really does shine through.

Here are a few top tips:

- Have a mock interview with a friend based on the common interview questions you're likely to face.
- Be sure you know the time, date and location of the interview and the name of interviewers.
- Decide how you will get there and when you need to set off to arrive in good time, anticipating any delays. Do a test run to the location if possible.
- If you look good, you tend to feel good too. Avoid any last-minute panic by preparing what you're going to wear the night before.
- Don't go into the interview with lots of baggage - psychological or physical. Take the bare minimum with you so you can concentrate on the interview, and nothing else.
- If you are asked to bring certificates, references etc., get them ready well in advance to avoid having to chase around on the morning of the big day.

Be methodical

Sit down with your CV and make notes, just as if you were preparing for an exam. Study your work record and what you have achieved. How do you see yourself? What have you done? What ambitions do you have? Make notes and prepare and rehearse sound bites about yourself. Do this out loud, even if it feels a bit weird. Try to relate specific areas of your CV back to the job description. It will make it clear to the interviewer why they should hire you.

Remember, one of the most common interview questions is "Tell me about yourself". Prepare a balanced and succinct answer to this question, not a life history. Keep it business-like and don't stray into personal feelings or family relationships. Interviewers use this question to learn about your personal qualities, not your achievements - they should already have those from your CV. Try to include any hobbies you might have on the side or interests. If you're struggling, think about adding something you're interested in 'getting into' instead. For example: "Well I've always enjoyed cooking, so I've been looking into starting cooking lessons with my friends".

Common interview questions

These are the ten most frequently asked interview questions that you can expect to face:

1. What can you tell me about yourself?
2. Can you list your strengths?
3. What weaknesses do you have?
4. Why should I consider hiring you?
5. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
6. Why do you want to work here?
7. What is your salary expectation?
8. What motivates you?
9. What makes a good team player?
10. Is there anything that you would like to ask me?

It is fair to say that you might not be asked every one of these questions at an interview. You may be asked quite obscure/ unique questions such as, "If you were an animal, what sort would you be"? Such questions are designed to see how good you are at thinking on your feet so you cannot truly prepare for them. Just relax, take your time, and say something sensible. For the other common interview questions, consider how you might answer them before you get face-to-face.

“Tell me about yourself...”

A common opening question, partly because your interviewers want to know more about you, but mostly because they want to put you on the spot and see how you react. They've given you complete control here, and you should take full advantage of it. They have not, however, asked for your life story.

Keep your answer pertinent and try not to go off topic too much. You're here to interview for a particular position, and you shouldn't lose sight of this. Remember: the interviewer is not just making small talk. It is okay to discuss your personality and what ambitions you have. Ideally, you will give the interviewer a positive insight into how you would fit in as an employee.

“What are your strengths...?”

An exhaustive list of adjectives, such as 'capable', 'hard-working' or 'diligent', won't really portray you well because anyone can make such claims about themselves. Instead, think about three things that you do well and give concrete examples. If you are a strong organiser, for example, then talk about a project that you coordinated, or a new procedure that you formulated. If you are good with numbers, then talk about your skills with spreadsheets or financial matters.

“What are your weaknesses...?”

Never say that you have no weaknesses. Everyone who does this comes across like they have simply not prepared for the interview. Likewise, avoid giving yourself a back-handed compliment, such as, 'I work too hard.' Remember that being able to identify a weakness is a strength. Focus on an area of your work that needs to be improved. You might have been trained in something that you'd like to take to the next level, for example. Point out that this is a weakness, but something you have identified and are focusing on resolving. Interviewers want to understand that you have the ability to be honest about yourself and to seek self-improvement.

“Why should you get this job?”

This is unashamedly aimed at provoking a personal sales pitch. As there will probably be a number of other candidates having interviews, this is your chance to demonstrate why you want the job, and why you would be a perfect fit for the company. Essentially, the company is hiring for a reason (a brief summary of which can usually be found in the job description). You need to position yourself as the person to do this. Where do you see yourselves five years from now? This is your chance to talk about your wider ambitions and goals. It is okay to say you'd like to progress on from the position on offer in most cases. Bosses want to hire people with determination so don't be shy about sounding ambitious or hungry for success. Ideally, try to contextualise your ambitions within the organisation that you are applying to join because this tends to go down better.

“What makes a good team player?”

Many people say in their CV that they are good at working cooperatively or are team players, but few say what this actually means. Think about examples from your past that demonstrate your ability to build bridges, form networks

or simply get on with people. This needn't be from your professional life. You could cite any examples from clubs or organisations to which you belong. Answering this question well is especially important for people who want to be team leaders or to manage a department.

“What motivates you?”

Motivation is personal, so there is no wrong answer that you can give. It might be down to your desire to succeed and build a career, but it might also be because you want to provide for your family – both perfectly good answers if you choose to give them. In some professions, caring or vocational motivations might be worth mentioning, too.

“Why do you want to work here?”

This is your chance to show that you have researched the company you are applying to work with. Avoid saying anything negative about your current employer which makes it seem you are simply after any job at all. Typical things you might say are that the company operates in your chosen sector, that it provides a clearly structured career path and that the organisation has a good reputation. Ensure that you do your research on the company before making these claims.

“What are your salary expectations?”

When completing your preparations for the interview, always have this question in the back of your mind. Have a look at the average salary for someone in this industry, area, and who possesses similar skills to yourself, and you should get a basic idea. But remember: this is only the first interview. You haven't been offered the job. There's no need at this stage to be try and begin negotiations. Giving a broad salary range will usually be enough to move on, but be prepared to back it up if you need to. Just don't be tempted to sell yourself short.

“Where do you see yourself in five years' time?”

What the interviewer really wants is to see that you've thought about your future, and they can gauge your ambition. They also want to verify that this isn't just a stop gap position. Although all your answers should be tailored to the organisation and position you've applied for, this is especially the case with this question. If you're going for an entry level position, for example, explain how you'd like your career to progress (e.g. 'I'd like to progress to a Senior Software Engineer' or 'I see myself being a team leader...'). If you're going for a more senior position, explain how you'd be looking to move the company forward. Have a look at their business strategy or corporate objectives before the interview and explain how you can help in achieving them.

“Is there anything that you would like to ask me?”

Always have at least one question prepared in advance. This is your chance to drill down into an area of the business that might not have been covered in the interview. Alternatively, you may simply like to ask for feedback on how you have done in the interview. A good tip is to pick up on something that has been mentioned in passing by the interviewer about the job. Ask him or her to expand on this. Not only does it make you appear interested, but it shows that you have been listening attentively to what has been said. It should leave the interviewer with a good final impression of you. These ten questions are certainly not the only ones that can be posed, but they are the most common ones. Remember that you don't need to answer all questions at an interview if you feel they are too personal or you are not comfortable with them. Getting yourself prepared for common questions is

necessary prep work before attending an interview. Don't make the answer come across as rehearsed; rather, just remember the gist of your answer and then let the sentences flow freely during the interview, which gives the interviewer a much better impression of you.

Other potential questions to consider...

- Why did you leave your previous position?
- Why is there a gap in your work history?
- Why did you apply for this position?
- What's your dream job?

Whatever your answers are, don't be tempted to improvise or answer on the spur of the moment. It'll never come out as well as you'd hoped. It doesn't need to be scripted but knowing why you want the job and what your strengths and weaknesses are should be a standard part of your preparation process and just as important as your pre-interview research. It's also essential to consider that you'll not just be judged on your CV. Getting across your personality is of equal importance. In other words, don't just think about your answers, but think about what they say about you. Ultimately, you need to be likeable and display the parts of your personality that will make you attractive to prospective employers (engaging, dedicated, hardworking etc). Entering a competitive interview, with the right mindset can really set you apart. Finally, to avoid any awkward silences, and never assume that the hiring manager has a sense of humour.

Good luck! – The Unicorn Team