

# Interview Skills

Once you have secured that interview, make sure you give yourself the best chance to be selected for the job.

Fail to prepare, prepare to fail. Trite but true! It would be wonderful to think you could just show up to an interview, and let your experience and amazing personality do the rest. Alas, this is rarely effective!

Instead, you need to treat each interview as a mini campaign, prepare your knowledge, prepare yourself, and take some basic practical precautions to make sure you turn up on the day, relaxed, confident, and ready to demonstrate your ideal suitability for this opportunity.

## Tips to improve your interview skills

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### Do your research

Find out all you can about who is interviewing you, both the company and individuals. Make sure you have experience or knowledge of all of their products or productions – or at least the ones that are directly related to the work that you are being interviewed for. Check their website for news items they have posted and check the internet for news items they have chosen not to post!

If you have names, Google the people who will be interviewing you. Find out if they have obvious preferences or have done work you admire that you would be comfortable mentioning if an appropriate opportunity arises.

### Match their requirements to your skills

Go through the job specification and any other information you were given or have gathered about the job. Identify and make a list of all the key skills and experience that they are looking for. Make sure you can match skills and experience you have for each item on the list. If they have requirements you don't have, identify experience or skills that are comparable and be prepared to explain how such skills and experience can be easily transferred across to the new environment.

### Always say what you can do not what you can't

If an interviewer asks: 'Can you dice carrots?' and you answer: "No, I've never diced carrots but I used to make carrot sculptures for exhibitions." All the interviewer will hear is "No, I've never diced carrots."



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A better answer would be: “As the winner four years in a row of the carrot sculpting exhibition in London, dicing carrots would be very straightforward for me!”

## Practice talking about yourself positively

Few of us are used to talking about ourselves and our experience out loud. We save this for when we need to sell ourselves, usually in an interview type situation. Then when we start to talk about what was a great experience, we might struggle to order our thoughts and get the salient points across as clearly and succinctly as possible.

If you practice talking about yourself to friends, family or even a mirror, you can discover, in a safe environment, how to edit and structure your experience to illustrate your skills in the best possible light in an upbeat, coherent manner.

## Listen to yourself

It’s important that you know how you come across and it can be invaluable to record yourself. What is the volume of your voice like? Do you vary the tone and pitch? Do you speak too fast or too slowly? Do you sound relaxed or terrified? Practising out loud will help you sound better in both content and intonation.

## Use lots of relevant anecdotes

If you only list your skills and keep saying that you can do everything, the interviewer(s) will forget what you say quickly. Worst case they could even nod off.

Think of examples of where and how you have demonstrated the skills and qualities required and demonstrate your value by telling interesting and relevant stories that show you and your skills in a good light.

For example, instead of saying: “I work hard, use my initiative and meet deadlines”, you could give an account of a time that you pulled out all the stops to meet a difficult deadline of a specific job when disaster struck but you solved the problem: “I rose to the challenge, did this, solved that, and the job got done, and there were sighs of relief all round!”

Use all of your experience (that is related to the job specification) not just work. If you met deadlines, used your initiative and worked hard in a voluntary capacity or as part of a school or college project, use that.

## Be confident and enthusiastic

Remember that some of the people interviewing you are likely to be your colleagues in the future so they are checking out whether they would like to have you on the team.



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Never moan about past or present employers. If you have been through a bad time such as being made redundant, resist the temptation to discuss it. Have a well thought out phrase to move the conversation on from this such as, 'being made redundant was really unfortunate, I enjoyed working there, but on the other hand it has opened up all sorts of opportunities that I wouldn't previously have considered.'

## Prepare responses to potentially difficult questions

We all have questions that we would rather not be asked at interview. If you just cross your fingers that they won't be asked, you can guarantee, that they will be, so it is important to prepare a response to them.

If you are worried about a gap in your CV, find something positive that you gained from the time out of work that you can use to support your case as the ideal candidate. For example, if you had a period of unemployment, you could explain how you used the time to take training courses or how you learned to do something new on-line or supported local voluntary groups. Avoid sighing loudly and launching into how it was the worst period of your whole life, even if it was!

## Take practical preparation steps

Double and triple check the date, time and place of the interview. Plan your route, give yourself plenty of time to get there and include some contingency in case of unforeseen hold ups on public transport.

Much better to have to go for a coffee if you are early than turn up all hot and bothered as you arrive in the nick of time. Make sure you take their telephone number so you can phone ahead if you are unavoidable delayed.

Check out what the dress code is and dress appropriately. It is possible to be overdressed as well as underdressed for an interview.