

How to nail your interview

✦ How do I prepare for an interview?

Remember perfect preparation prevents poor performance! We've all heard this but do we always remember to do it. This interview you are going to is going to have a major impact on your life - are you sure you want to work for them? How will you know if you don't find out the full facts about them?

There are many ways of finding out about a prospective employer:

- Phone them and ask for information to be sent to you - annual reports, brochures, press releases, etc. Speak with Reception or the Marketing department. Ask if they employ a PR company and if they do make them your first port of call.
- Look on the internet - at their own website, trade magazine sites for articles about them, look at www.companieshouse.gov.uk for financial and legal information about them.
- You can set up free Google Alerts to be made aware of online information and news about them.
- Look at the social media channels they use, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Google+ and YouTube.
- Talk to their competitors about them.
- Phone one of their Reps posing as a prospective customer.
- Talk to the relevant trade bodies.
- Ask your On Target Consultant for further information.
- Once you have got all your research together, make sure you use it. Show the interviewer what research you have done and ask questions based on your research findings. Take along any brochures you have. Write your questions down and take them with you.
- Prepare a "brag pack" - a list of your achievements. Include letters from satisfied customers, references, sales figures, articles about you - anything which demonstrates why you should be getting the job.
- Ensure that you find out who you are seeing, their job title and responsibilities and what their role is in the interviewing process. Perhaps review their profile on LinkedIn so you can see more about their profile and background.
- Prepare your close and ensure that you use it.



✦ What should I wear? What should I avoid?

People have made fortunes writing books about how to dress for business and still some people get it wrong. Remember the following golden rules:

- Dress appropriately and in context – don't wear that very fashionable purple shirt if all the company's employees dress soberly. (Perhaps you shouldn't be going for that interview!) Call the HR Department of the company to check on the company dress code. The main thing is not to dress too casually.
- You generally can't go wrong with a sober business suit, white shirt or blouse. Don't forget simple basics like ensuring your shoes are polished and you don't have stains on your tie.
- Ensure that you wear an appropriate amount of and type of jewellery or wear none at all.
- Avoid the comedy ties and socks!
- The thorny subject of personal hygiene – we all get a bit sweaty if we're stuck in a car for hours so make sure you've showered, washed your hair, brushed your teeth. If your interview is later in the day why not take a change of shirt and some deodorant with you - you can change at the nearest service station. Make sure that you've had a shave.
- Avoid the ten pints, the curry and the garlic bread the night before – they don't want to smell you before they meet you, and if you like to chew gum, make sure you remove it before the meeting.

✦ What should I do on arrival at the interview?

- SET OUT IN PLENTY OF TIME – you can always kill some time at the other end doing your emails. If you arrive more than 10 minutes early, waste some time before going into the building. Arriving too early can make it awkward for the interviewer.
- If you arrive late not only will it create a poor impression of your professional status but you will not perform at your best.
- Once you arrive at the place of the interview try not to carry too much with you but don't forget your briefcase or a folder along with a pen and some paper. You're going to need your hand free to greet your interviewer.
- Remember to switch off your mobile phone.
- Try to remain standing before you meet – there's nothing worse than clambering up from that low level seating beloved of receptions and knocking over the cup of luke warm instant coffee. How's that for a first impression?
- On initial meeting give a firm, though not bone crunching, handshake whilst making good eye contact.
- Only use first name terms if led to do so. NEVER use "mate", "love" or similar over-familiar expressions.
- If you are walking through to the interview avoid any embarrassing "after you...no, after you" encounters in the corridor.



✦ During the interview

Remember this is only another meeting and you've been through plenty of those.

- Take time to settle yourself down and make yourself comfortable whilst not being too laid back or slovenly. You may want to reposition the seating slightly – do this confidently without being overly aggressive.
- Follow the lead from the interviewer, e.g. don't take your jacket off unless they do and ask you.
- Don't be over-familiar.
- Remember you are there to sell yourself, it's your responsibility to ensure that the conversation stays on track.
- Take the opportunity to communicate everything you wish to about yourself and that you find out everything you need to know. "Do you have any questions" at the end of the interview will not leave enough time.
- Make notes as they are speaking, not only does this show your professionalism but it means that you will not forget what was said.
- A cosy chat about your mutual interests and acquaintances rarely leads to job offers.
- Use appropriate body language - good eye contact, open gestures, avoiding crossing your arms, touching your mouth/face whilst speaking (this indicates that somebody may not be telling the whole truth), don't fidget or tap your toes. Show interest when listening - a nod and a smile speaks volumes.
- Always tell the truth, you will eventually get caught out if you don't. If there are going to be awkward questions arising about you, prepare beforehand.
- Don't slag off previous companies and don't say anything that could make you sound disloyal.
- Save questions about salary, holidays, etc to second interviews. Remember, having proof of earnings with you will make it easier to get them to pay you what you are worth.
- Try to answer questions using a style and a language that the interviewer will relate to. If they are using short, to the point, questions avoiding technical language, answer likewise.
- Do not um, err, ramble, be obtuse or any of the other cardinal sins.
- CLOSE! Leave them in no doubt that you want the job; treat every interview as though it's the last one you'll ever get!
- At the end of the interview, close the interviewer down to find out if you have got the job or going to get a second interview. Find out about any reservations they may have about you so that you can offer some compensatory information.
- Find out how you compare with other applicants. Reiterate that you are confident that you can do the job and give the reasons why. Give yourself the edge!
- At the very end, thank them for their time, ensure that you leave them with a good impression by once again giving a positive handshake and maintaining eye contact but no winks. Leave the company in no doubt that you want the job, and that you can do it. Ensure that you have all your belongings with you before you leave.

✦ How should I follow up?

- Contact On Target to give feedback so that we can go back to the client and re-emphasise how keen or not you are, get some honest feedback from the client and confirm the next stage.
- Sometimes it is relevant to write to the employer following an interview thanking them for their time and take the opportunity to remind them about which particular skills and attributes will ensure your success in the role. Also re-address any reservations they had about you and put in a closing line about a second interview.