

What makes a good interview answer?

- Length – 3 – 4 minutes maximum for each answer (average 1.5 – 2 minutes).
- Demonstrates understanding of the question.
- Provides an overview of the answer and then some details.
- Gives relevant examples.
- Shows enthusiasm and confidence.
- Is honest.
- Answers the question (that was actually asked, not the one you wanted them to ask!!)

A useful guide to frame your answers within to ensure you cover all the bases is the “STAR” template.

Situation – a *brief* explanation of the situation

Task – what needed to be done

Action – what you did (note – you should be talking about *I*, not *we*!)

Result – it makes more impact if you show you weren't acting for nothing!



Handling the interview

Once you are in the interview you need to make it clear to the interviewers that you are capable of doing the job well and are in fact the best candidate for the job.

Practice and feedback are the best ways of improving interview technique. You can make opportunities to practice by asking colleagues or friends to help, or using a video camera or mirror.

What follows will be 'a conversation with a purpose', and that purpose is to find out whether you're suitable for the job and if that job is right for you. Here are some general pointers:

Create a good first impression by:

- Making sure you look clean, smart and crease-free
- Smiling, making eye contact and having good posture
- Using a clear and confident voice

Be a good listener. Let your interviewer know that you're listening attentively by nodding; using facial expressions that make you look interested, leaning towards the interviewer, picking up on key words they've used and asking them to expand on subjects that genuinely interest you. But never interrupt your interviewer.

Answer the question. This might seem like stating the obvious but it is a common downfall. Try to be concise but explanatory and use examples which are relevant to the specific question you have just been asked. Listen carefully to the wording of the question. It's easy to be misled by hearing a 'keyword' or 'trigger' that sets you off in the wrong direction. For example, not all questions that mention the words 'customer service' require you to talk about your experience or definition of customer service. If you aren't sure what the question is asking then ask them for clarification or to repeat it.

Be honest. If you don't understand a question, ask for an explanation. If you're faced with something you really can't deal with, be truthful about it - it's more impressive than pretending to have the answer to everything. Use get-out phrases like 'that's something I'd need time to think about' or 'that's outside my present experience' to give yourself a bit of a breather.

Be consistent. Many interviewers ask the same things in different ways as a means of checking you out. Listen to yourself as well as to them. If you feel you've made a mistake, put things right by saying, 'going back to what I said earlier about...what I really meant was...'

Know your stuff. Knowledge of the role, organisation and sector is vital and comes across in all sorts of ways, as does the lack of this knowledge! Research and prepare in advance as thoroughly as you can.

Avoid the temptation to talk too much. If there are awkward silences when you've finished saying what you want, don't fill them with nervous chatter. Some interviewers use silence to see how you'll react. Pass the lead back to them by pleasantly saying: 'Does that answer your question?' Also, stick to providing the answer requested and know when to stop! Don't inundate the interviewer with information they don't need.

Be aware of your body language. Stillness is reassuring and fidgeting is a distraction. Looking your interviewer in the eye is essential, but don't overdo it - take your cues from the interviewer. A smile sets everyone at ease, but a constant grin is unnerving. Try to sit up straight. Leaning forward makes you appear attentive and enthusiastic - being slumped conveys boredom. If you are inclined to fidget with your hands, keep them in your lap so they don't betray your nerves!

Be positive. Even if your last job wasn't enjoyable, if asked for your reasons for leaving, don't let a negative word pass your lips. Never say anything unfavourable about your colleagues, boss or job - it'll just make you look bad. Instead, find something positive to say such as: 'I genuinely enjoyed my last job, but I'm eager to move onto a different challenge and use the skills I've gained'. Then, impress them even more by stating how those skills match the job you're after.

Don't miss a trick. If you're not asked about something that you feel is important, raise the subject yourself. This is your one chance to sell yourself, so don't waste the opportunity. Remember the key messages which you want to get across; be memorable!