

INTERVIEWS – Tips and Techniques

Introduction

You may be able to increase your success at interviews by using the basic techniques described below.

Telephone Interview

Top tips: ensure your mobile battery is fully charged, find somewhere quiet, say your name when you first answer the phone, speak slowly and clearly, mirror their language (if friendly then you can be friendly, if business-like then copy this), ask for clarity if you don't hear/understand the question, have your application in front of you, draw a mind map of the key points you want to refer to (rather than a long list), and if you need to think about an answer then tell them this (avoids silences in the conversation).

Understanding the question

Sometimes an interviewer asks a question that you don't understand, especially if English is not your native language, so here are some tips to deal with this:

- Ask the interviewer to rephrase the question
 - it is better to do this than give an answer that doesn't relate to the question
- Ask the interviewer to clarify the question
 - understanding the question exactly will help you to provide an example or an answer that directly relates to the question
- Paraphrase the question and check if your understanding is correct
 - that is repeat the question back to the interviewer in your own words, if you haven't understood the question the interviewer will correct you

Unsure how to answer the question?

If you find that you are unable to answer a question, rather than not answering it try the following:

- Before you start answering take a deep breath
 - Sometimes giving yourself a few seconds to think about the meaning of the question can help you to come up with an answer.
- Repeat the question to yourself (either quietly or so that the interviewer can hear)
 - Again this gives you a little bit more time to think of an answer. It might sound strange to repeat the question to yourself, but it sends a message to the interviewer that you are thinking about the question and that you've heard them correctly.

These two techniques will give you a few seconds in order to gather your thoughts and work out how best to answer the question.

- If you really can't think of an answer then ask if it is OK to return to the question at the end of the interview.
 - Doing this sometimes gives you a lot more time to think of an answer, and some of your other answers may trigger an idea.

Describing your skills – use the STAR Technique

This is a very useful tool to help you describe your skills, it stands for **S**ituation, **T**ask, **A**ction and **R**esult. See the separate Top Tip guide for a full description.

- **Continued over the page....**

Do you talk too much or not enough?

Sometimes when nervous you may find yourself talking too much, or maybe you are shy and don't talk enough. The disadvantage of this is that the interviewer may not get to ask all their questions or they don't have enough information from you. The following are techniques to help you to deliver more concise answers:

1) 3 Point Plan

- Prior to the interview try to guess which questions might come up (use the job description and person specification to guess the questions)
- Try to think of the answers and then write them out in full
- For each answer highlight 3 or 4 key words or phrases that will help you to remember your answer
- Write out the questions again and then the key words on a piece of paper or blank post card
- Practise answering the question out loud by using the key words as reminders
 - It seems strange to do this but eventually you will be able to answer questions just using key words
 - Don't worry about trying to answer the question in exactly the same way each time, it is fine if it is different as long as you say the key words.
 - The benefit of this technique is that you will have less to remember (trying to memorise answers is a key element in being stressed in an interview)
 - It also keeps your answer on track and means that you are much less likely to talk too much
 - Your answer will sound more natural and not rehearsed
- **IMPORTANT:** Remember that the panel won't know what you are going to say, the order in which you plan to say it, or if you forget to say something. As long as you mention the key words you have got the important points across.
- Remember to stop talking after the 3rd key word – very important!

2) Structure Your Answer

- Using the following structure will help you to keep track of your answer, but it will also help the panel to do the same:

Introduce → Describe → Summarise

For example, if the question is "Tell me about your main strength", you might answer:

- **Introduce:** this is simply telling them what you are going to say using part of the question, e.g. "My main strength is communication."
- **Describe:** Here you describe your answer, e.g. "Using my communication skills I'm able to help customers with their problems, for example when I first listen to their complaint ...". (See the "3 point plan" above for a description of how to structure this part of your answer.)
- **Summarise:** Here you are simply reminding the panel of the main points of your answer: "So my main strength is communication."

You don't know how to stop talking

- Not being able to close down your answer, i.e. stop talking, means that you talk for too long and sometimes you can "talk yourself out of the job".
- So when you feel like you have given enough of an answer, then to stop you can simply repeat the question, e.g.
 - If the question was about how you work in a team, then you simply say "And that's generally how I work in a team".
- Alternatively you can ask the interviewer.....
 - "I feel like I'm talking too much, have I answered your question or should I continue?"

The interviewer asks you a very long question

- Break the question down and paraphrase back to the interviewer, this will help you to remember the question and also make sure you have understood it properly.
- Answer the first part of the question and then ask the interview to repeat any subsequent parts of the question.

Following these simple steps will help you to become more successful at interviews and help you secure your ideal job!