

Advice on interviews: Preparing your CV:

Setting out your CV

On the desk of a potential employer, your CV is the first representation of you. In many cases the quality of your CV will be a major factor in achieving an interview. So take the time now to make sure it will say the right things.

- It should be clearly presented and easy to read, avoiding superlatives and jargon. The most frustrating of all is the use of internal terminology specific only to your current employer.
- Keep the language simple and self-explanatory to a broad audience. Remember that employers may be faced with many CVs, and their first objective is to filter out all of those applicants who are unsuitable for the job.

How can you ensure that your CV stands out in the face of tough competition?

Opening

- Employers need to know your contact details, date of birth, nationality and marital status; your availability; whether you are a driver.

Education and training

- List your appropriate qualifications beginning with your highest first.
- You do not need to explain trivial details of early education and employment.

Career objectives

- You should briefly give a description of your career objectives, not more than one or two sentences. This should include your anticipated next role and long-term career ambitions.

Employment history

Your CV should show a prospective employer your range of experience and your professional development, and also identify the key skills and responsibilities of each position you have held.

You should:

- List positions held in reverse chronological order (most recent first)
- For each position, clearly state company, job title, dates, responsibilities, duties, projects and achievements
- Think about the specific tasks and challenges of each position and your role in the company or project.
- Give more detail for your most recent positions - these will be given far more attention by employers.
- Account for all your time - don't leave gaps.

Hobbies and interests

- Give a brief summary of hobbies and interests - be selective, they should enhance your image and give employers a fuller sense of you as a person. Remember your target audience is potential employers, not new club members!

- Keep personal details brief and essential.

Design and layout

- Your CV needs to make the right visual impression. It should be clear and show a level of professionalism which immediately gives a prospective employer confidence.
- Your CV should be no more than two sides of A4 (except for senior management level, where three may be necessary).
- Use a simple layout that is easy to navigate.
- Choose a clear typeface (such as Times New Roman or Arial), font size 12.
- Bullet points, bold headings and clever typesetting allow you to present a lot of information without it seeming crowded.
- Overall, the design and layout of your CV should show an employer that you have put time and thought into it, but the clarity of the information rather than ingenuity in layout is the key. Should a recent photograph be required, employers will ask for it. You should not add this to your usual CV.

Preparation

The better you have prepared the more confident, competent and relaxed you will be at your interview.

Make sure you know:

- The exact time (and you should arrive a little early, 10 mins. is ideal)
- The location and how to get there.
- The interviewer's name and title.

Appearance:

Appearance is very important - dress smartly and appropriately
Typically this will mean:

- A dark suit with a pale shirt/ blouse
- A conservative tie (for men)
- Clean shoes
- Neat hair
- Clean hands/ nails.
- Remember it is not a fashion show or demonstration of your complete jewelry collection.

Think ahead:

- Take a copy of your CV with you
- Find out as much as you can about the company beforehand - the internet can be very useful for this.
Good research can impress the interviewer with your seriousness about joining the company. What does the potential employer do? Who are their competitors? What are their goals?
- Think about questions you would like to ask - most interviewers will give time for this and your questions should be relevant and well thought out.

Questions:

Interviewers want to get to know you, and they will ask you questions which are designed to reveal your character. They are looking for qualities such as reliability, initiative, confidence, communication, flexibility and independence. You should try to answer questions fully, but make sure you keep to the point. "Waffling" can be very off-putting to an interviewer.

Often the interviewer will begin by simply asking you to tell them about yourself. For them it is a chance to hear you talk and break the ice. For you it is an opportunity to summarise your qualifications, career and abilities, and emphasise those skills related to the position you are applying for. Most employers are looking to find the positives, not to try and "trip you up"

Your career:

The interviewer may ask you if you are happy with your career so far. You should always give a positive response - they want to know how you view yourself, to gauge your self-esteem and confidence. You can qualify your answer if you feel, for example, that your career is moving too slowly, but most importantly you want to appear as a positive, successful person.

Achievements:

You want to give the interviewer the sense that you are an achiever. Be ready to describe a fairly recent, work-related example, identifying the skills it demanded and its benefit to the company. Having work related examples to back-up your statements of capability is important and gives credence to your self-assessment.

Strengths and weaknesses:

You should be able to speak about both in a straightforward and honest way, communicating a good level of self-awareness and objectivity to the interviewer.

You should be prepared to discuss three or four of your strengths, such as technical abilities and personal qualities, and how they could benefit the employer, giving examples.

Speak about a professional weakness that you are taking or have taken steps to overcome - this shows your independence and your willingness to change and improve. Avoid trivial personal weaknesses. Your weakness may well have been formalised and tackled in a previous appraisal.

Reasons for leaving your current job:

You should be prepared with a straightforward and positive response to this question. Greater challenges, more responsibility, further experience and a change of environment are all good motivations for leaving, and will make a better impression than negative or financial reasons.

Final words...

At the end of the interview you should feel confident that you have communicated all the interviewer needs to know about yourself and your abilities, and have asked any questions you have. Ask the interviewer what the next step is and be sure that your interest in the role is made clear to them. You should ensure that you understand any reservations that the interviewer may have about you. Asking them directly how they feel about yourself demonstrates a high level of ambition and confidence. Most importantly this ensures that any issues which may jeopardise the outcome of the interview are brought out in to the open and can be addressed there and then.

Psychometric and Aptitude Tests:

Interviews may on occasion require candidates to take an aptitude or psychometric test. These types of test are rather less daunting than their titles imply and are best approached in a relaxed manner. The links on our Links page give you an opportunity to find out more about the origins and structures of such tests and the opportunity to try them at in your own time prior to facing them in an assessment environment.

Take a look; they may not be so daunting after all.