



## **Making a good impression at interview**

Most employers (and some university departments for courses such as Medicine) will include an interview as part of their selection process. The form an interview takes can vary hugely, from an informal chat over a cup of tea, to a recruitment programme lasting several days. The purpose of these interviews is not to put you on trial personally, but to find out what kind of individual you are and whether you have the correct skills for their particular workplace or study environment. The interviewer will want to establish that you are the right person to have on board.

At the same time, you should remember that this is YOUR chance to make your own judgement about the job or course on offer. In other words, the interviewer is as much under the spotlight as you are! You should feel free to ask questions and make your own judgements. That said, it is a good idea to keep all your options open - even if the job or university is not your first choice. Most people think it is much better to get an offer and then decide afterwards whether you want to take up a job/place.

### **Remember: First impressions count**

People form an impression, good or bad in the first 30 seconds. If you slouch into the room without making eye contact or smiling and offer a limp hand to shake, you are unlikely to do yourself credit! Studies show that when you meet people for the first time you only have a 30 second window, before they form an opinion about you.

- It can take a further 20 minutes to change their minds – so if you're in an interview situation you could have blown your chances before you have even started.
- Actual words spoken count for only 7% of the impression you make
- Tone of voice counts for 38%
- Body language and facial expression counts for 55%

*Albert Mehrabian Survey*

### **Speak out with confidence**

- Breathe slowly and deeply before you begin.
- Try to talk from the diaphragm, not from the base of your throat. The more you practice this, the easier it will become.

- Try to put expression into your voice by accenting the important words and varying the pitch a little (we call this “light” and “shade”). It helps if you remember to make eye contact from time to time.
- Remember that if you are being interviewed by a panel of people, you should try to include them all in the answer – don’t just concentrate on the person who asked the question.
- Do smile if appropriate. Smiling brings warmth to the voice that can be detected even if you can’t see the speaker.
- Remember to keep the volume up right to the end of the sentence. Some people trail away at the end, especially when they are unsure of what they are saying. This makes it difficult for people to hear them and doesn’t inspire confidence in the candidate!
- Finally, when someone asks you a question in a formal situation and you want to reply in the affirmative, don’t say “yeah” (with the sound trailing away at the end of the word...) Say “Yes!” with confidence.

### **Building a good rapport**

Remember that when you attend an interview, you are on show from the moment you arrive. The person who interviews you might well ask the person at reception what they thought of you. Make sure you are considerate and polite to EVERYONE you meet. If you are asked to have lunch or go for a coffee, do not assume the interview is over. You will still be very much on show!

It is helpful if you are able to make conversation with your superiors as well as your colleagues, peers or other students. You could be chosen for a job for your ability to get on with others or be “easy company”. A potential boss or colleagues might have to spend lengthy periods of time with you perhaps travelling, or on long shifts on the factory floor. This is especially relevant if the work involves meeting clients or members of the public. If faced with two equally qualified candidates, she or he is much more likely to choose the applicant who is entertaining and interesting company, than the person who makes no attempt at dialogue.

Try to put yourself in the shoes of the other people you are with and imagine what they might want to talk about and when they might not want to keep talking! There are some subjects which are common to almost everyone. Most people like to talk about themselves or their work. Have some questions up your sleeve, such as “What are you working on at the moment?” Try not to ask “closed” questions that can be answered with just a “yes” or “no” and avoid personal questions, like “do you have children?”

### **THINKING ABOUT YOUR “STORY”**

Before you go to the interview itself it is worth thinking about some of the questions that you might be asked. This doesn’t mean that you need to learn the answers off parrot fashion, but it is very helpful to work out what you think about certain subjects. Below are some ideas that you might want to consider. Perhaps put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer: What kind of employee or student do they want: Someone who joins in and

takes the initiative? Or someone who is longing for the end of the day and isn't prepared to go the extra mile?

You can illustrate your strengths much better if you have a good "story" to tell". Many interview candidates are asked: Can you tell me a little about yourself? This might seem an easy question to answer, but knowing yourself and articulating your identity in a few sentences can be a challenge. Remember that your interviewer may have seen dozens of other candidates (particularly if you are applying for a competitive role or course), so it might be helpful beforehand to think about how you fit with what is on offer and what is expected of you. You should try to make a positive impression and put some thought into what makes you stand out, in other words, what makes you unique?

### **Have a think about the following:**

- Why do I want to do the job?
- What kinds of skills are needed? (Think about things like: Reliability? Punctuality? Accuracy? Teamwork? Leadership? Integrity? Enthusiasm? Even temper? Creativity? Problem solving? Diplomacy?)
- What are my strengths?
- What are my weaknesses?
- What can I bring to the workplace?
- How can I prove I have those skills? Think about times when you have demonstrated these qualities, or when you had to overcome a challenge by using a particular skill: for e.g. you could say:

*I was asked to lead a team project for an inter-school competition. One of our group wasn't pulling her weight and the others felt resentful. In the end I asked to speak to her privately to find out what the problem was. It turned out that she wasn't really clear on the brief and felt that her designs had been dismissed by the others. We made a list of all the tasks she needed to complete and tried to incorporate some of her ideas into them. In the end she became quite enthusiastic and we were delighted to go on and win the competition!*

The candidate in the case study above needed to use various skills to overcome the problem faced, including diplomacy, tact, interpersonal skills, honesty and creative thinking.

### **Dare to be different!**

Certain characteristics are desirable, but they are not unique. The majority of students applying for jobs or further education can make claims such as these:

- "I'm hard working."
- "I'm responsible."
- "I'm friendly."

Of course companies and universities want students who are hardworking etc. but they often want people who can contribute something special to the workplace or academic

community. The interview is your opportunity to convey your unique personality and abilities. You should try to answer questions in ways that show that you are you, not a clone of other applicants, painting a colourful and detailed portrait of yourself.

What are your particular strengths or skills? How do they fit with the job or course you have applied for? Think of specific examples to illustrate your claims! (If you are an aspiring medic, see our soft skill guide [www.bussats.com/assets/fittobeadoctor-softskills.pdf](http://www.bussats.com/assets/fittobeadoctor-softskills.pdf) )

Do you have any weaknesses? There is a trick to answering this question positively. For e.g. you might admit that you can be disorganised, but you should qualify by saying something like this:

*In the past I have struggled to keep up with all my different assignments, but I have recently worked out a system of prioritising what is important and completing that first. I find that if I keep a list of what needs doing I can stay on top of everything and this has made me much more confident.*

### **Do your research**

1. Find out as much as you can about the course or job you are applying for. If possible visit the site beforehand and speak to students or employees who already work there.
2. Make sure you dress appropriately. A good guide is to see how others are dressed on site, but it is better to be too smart than too scruffy! It goes without saying that you should pay attention to personal hygiene before arrival...
3. If you have the name of the person or people interviewing you, find out what their role is in the company or what they teach (if it is a university). You might be able to anticipate the kinds of questions they will ask you if you know what their background interest is.
4. Think of 6 reasons why you would be the right candidate for the job or course. You won't need to recite them all, but it is a good idea to have them in the back of your mind if an opportunity arises to talk about them.
5. You will find it helpful to go to the university or company website, look at the facilities/ working environment and perhaps read the latest company bulletin or departmental blog.
6. Have a look at the buzz words on the homepage. They may for example claim to promote "independent thinkers" for example, or pride themselves on "customer service and attention to detail" – what traits do you have which fits with their particular philosophy?

Finally, don't forget to keep up with news and current affairs. If you are applying for a role outside your home country make sure you know a little about issues in the host country too!

### **Coping with Interview Nerves**

If you suffer (like many others) from stress or anxiety at the prospect of an interview here are a couple of ideas for you to work on a day or so before an interview.

**1. Positive Mental Attitude**

One of the ways many people damage their chances of success at interview is to focus on things that could go wrong. Here are two ideas for dealing with this:

**Make some Coping Cards:** These can be small index cards with a list of coping strategies you can use when experiencing anxiety. Prepare these at least a day ahead. Write a list of things that you think could go wrong on one side of the page and on the other side write some appropriate solutions.

<i>Arriving late</i>	<i>Check directions and location instructions. If possible you could do a “dry run” beforehand.</i>
<i>Not getting on with other candidates</i>	<i>Have some icebreaker questions ready. Try to think about “safe” rapport-building subjects that you might be able to chat about.</i>
<i>Nerves, racing heartbeat, dry mouth etc.</i>	<p><i>Try deep breathing techniques: If you take a few breaths before going into a situation where you need to communicate well, you will discover that your voice is strong and calm and your mind will be more focused.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Stand up straight, consciously lowering your shoulders, with your hands relaxed by your sides.</i></li> <li><i>2. Breathe slowly and deeply from the diaphragm.</i></li> <li><i>3. Try not to force the breath but let it in and out slowly and naturally</i></li> <li><i>4. Pause for a few seconds</i></li> <li><i>5. Repeat</i></li> </ol>
<i>Won’t know what to say in interview</i>	<i>List topics you might want to explore. Think of examples you can give to illustrate your answers. We call these “evidence-based” answers. For e.g. if you claim to be “well organised”, think of a situation where you had to be, how you coped and what strategies you adopted. If you don’t know what to say, be honest and admit it. You can play for time by repeating the question back or asking them to repeat it, but don’t waffle if you don’t know the answer. Interviewers are human too and if you are nervous or “dry up” you won’t be the first!</i>

### Positive Visualisation

Once you have done this, go through the interview day in your mind and visualise a series of positive mental images - meeting other candidates or employees, getting on well, having fun, and when it comes to the interview presenting a positive picture of yourself, answering questions and getting on well with the interviewer.

### Be aware of negative self-talk:

"This all going wrong." "The others are so much better than me." "I wish I'd never come."

When negative thinking takes over, you need a strategy to spring out of it. There is a Zen concept called "Monkey Mind", which describes a mind that suddenly starts jumping from thought to thought like a monkey jumps from tree to tree. The mind is unable to focus but rather is constantly distracted by the thoughts that pass through. Focus on your breath as a tool to remain in the present moment, rather than letting your monkey mind take over.

- Take a deep breath.
- Think to yourself "Stop. Relax."
- Say something positive to yourself like "I can handle this." or "I am strong."

### FEEDBACK SHEET FOR MOCK INTERVIEWS

If possible, try to arrange a one-to-one mock interview for yourself before undergoing the real thing. Your school should be able to organise this for you, or put you in touch with someone who can. You could also ask them to arrange a group interview/ communication skills session for your year group at school - see [www.bussats.com/assets/communicationskills.pdf](http://www.bussats.com/assets/communicationskills.pdf).

If you do have a mock interview, it is helpful to get some feedback afterwards. You could consider asking the (mock) interviewer if they would be prepared to fill in some details for you on the following form:

Name:
1. Ambition and goals: What you want to achieve from the session
2. Initial Impression:
Did the candidate make eye contact?
Did they shake hands?
Did they smile and appear confident?
3. Voice and Body Language.

How did the candidate sound?

Did they speak calmly and pause between ideas?

Did they express themselves well?

Did they seem tense or relaxed?

Did they make eye contact?

4. Answers and content:

Did the candidate answer the questions by using examples from their own experience?

Did they seem confident?

What did they do if they didn't know the answer?

How detailed were their responses? (Did they go on too long or answer too briefly?)

5. Final comments:

Have a look at these questions and see how you might answer some of them!

General Questions:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What was the last film you saw or the last book you read?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What would you do if you saw a close friend cheat in a public exam?
- What are your goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- What motivates you?
- Which tasks do you get the most satisfaction from?

For workplace interviews

- Why do you want this job?
- What do you know about our company and what we do?

- What skills do you have which would be useful to us?
- What makes a good team? Give me an example of a time you have been in a team?
- What makes a good team member?
- What makes a good team leader?
- If you were in charge what changes would you make?

For students applying to university or colleges of further education:

- Why do you want to come to this University?
- What do you know about the course?
- Why should we choose you over the other candidates?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- What would your colleagues and friends consider as your best qualities?
- What would you do if you saw a close friend stealing from the faculty?

The following have been asked at OXBRIDGE level for Law and Politics:

- If you were an animal, what type of animal would you be?
- What is truth?
- Should we stay in the EU?
- What do you think of the American gun control laws?
- What do you understand by the term "Muslim Fundamentalist"?

Medic/Vet interviews:

- Why do you want to be a doctor/ vet?
- What makes a successful doctor/vet?
- Do you possess the right qualities (give examples)?
- Why should the tax payer fund veterinary training for the treatment of pets?
- What have you done to demonstrate an interest in (veterinary) medicine?
- What are your medium/ long term goals?
- What is your greatest strength/ weakness?
- Is there a particular aspect of (veterinary) medicine that attracts you?
- Why are you applying to this particular university?
- What do you know about the course? Have you read the prospectus?
- What does the candidate know about work/research by interviewer? (ie have they done background homework on who is interviewing them!)
- What has interested you with regards to (veterinary) medicine in recent current affairs?
- What are the routine vaccinations for children (dogs/cats)?
- What personal qualities does a vet/doctor need? Give examples based on work experience?
- What is the difference between empathy and sympathy?
- How will you cope with making difficult decisions? Give examples?