

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Different types of interviews require different preparation. The first thing you should clarify, before doing interview preparatory work, is what type of interview you will be facing.

If you are not provided with this information, don't be shy; contact the person organising matters to get details. It's essential that you know this in order to prepare adequately. Outlined below are common interview types.

Screening Interview

This form of interview is used by employers and by recruitment firms in particular as a way of quickly identifying the most likely best candidates who will then be invited for a formal interview. Your CV is the first thing that gets filtered. If that is well received, you'll often then progress to a screening interview.

This form of interview is often done by telephone and you should be ready for one of these after submitting any application. Often, the interviewer will be seeking to quickly assess your match to what they are looking for.

Competency Based Interview

This form of interview is being increasingly used by large employer organisations and, as a result, it is covered in a separate dedicated leaflet.

Directive Interview

This is the traditional and most common form of interview with the interviewer(s) asking questions from a pre-prepared list that has been put together with the objective of learning more about all candidates being met.

Group Interview

This form of interview is almost never used in Ireland, except for graduates without experience and associated 'milk round' recruitment drives.

HOW INTERVIEWS ARE CONDUCTED

Employers usually utilise in-house expertise, external consultancy, or a mixture of both in order to approach interviewing in a structured and planned way. They start by defining the job, its requirements and demands. In considering candidates, they seek to measure their understanding of each person's capacity against those requirements.

To achieve a complete and balanced assessment of candidates, interviewers usually work within a framework that determines how long they meet people for and how they consider one person against another.

Increasingly interviews, especially in larger organisations with a HR function, are focused on competencies agreed beforehand as being key to effective job performance. Because competency interviews are used by large employer organisations at an ever increasing rate, a separate dedicated CareerHelp leaflet on this form of interview has been produced.

What Interviewers Look For

The effective interviewer will be focused on the key requirements of the job having prepared a person specification at the very start of the recruitment process. What they will look for at interview will be based on the contents of this specification - incorporating matters such as suited interpersonal skills, relevant work experience, leadership potential, motivation and ability to communicate.



"My hobbies are gardening and dairy farming.
I like to plant the seeds of success and milk my creativity!"

How Interviewers Organise Matters

They start with a clear idea of their objective. Effective interviewers then prepare well. They know what the job entails, how this interview fits into the overall selection process etc. They will make sure they are happy that:

- The meeting room layout creates an environment in which the candidate will feel comfortable.
- Questioning and interview techniques are appropriate, business-like and fair. The information sought from candidates should be relevant to the job.
- Candidates will be able to provide a fair picture of their capabilities and aspirations.



“How do you feel about letting your people work from home?”

Techniques Used By Interviewers

As well as using questioning techniques that are covered below, interviewers will use a range of other techniques when they interview such as reflecting back and summarising.

Reflecting on What You Say

Reflecting back is a technique used to keep you talking, without inferring any judgements on what you have said - but with a possible aim of letting you expand on an area of possible strength or weakness:

- ‘I’ve never come across that approach before’...
- ‘You seem to have a lot of experience in this area’.....

Summarising What You Say

Summarising allows the interviewer to confirm her or his understanding of what you’ve said.

- So what you are saying is.....
- Let me see if I understand this.....

Pretending

This technique is usually used to explore whether you know what you are talking about - in a technical sense - or to determine whether you can explain something complex. Make sure you can explain technical issues lucidly and without jargon.

- I’m not an expert, but.....

Questioning Techniques Interviewers Use

Interviewers use different questioning techniques. It is useful to understand these. Outlined below are the main questioning techniques that you will come across.

Leading Questions

These questions might give you some indication as to what the interviewer is thinking, and may be a veiled request to confirm the interviewer's prejudices. Sometimes this technique may be used in an adversarial context. The interviewer might want you to demonstrate disagreement and reasoned argument.

The interviewer may be telling you something about the organisation or the job role, or may be trying to persuade you to admit to something. The important thing is to remain objective: agree or disagree as you see fit, or ask what the organisation's view on this issue is.

- I think.....What do you think?
- Isn't it quite dreadful, the way that.....nowadays?

Open Questions

These are questions which cannot be answered adequately with a 'yes' or 'no' answer, and which do not prescribe the direction of the conversation too tightly. They are designed to get you to talk, and will encourage you to include feelings and attitudes alongside the facts.

- And how did you get on there?
- How do you feel about ...?

Hypothetical Questions

These questions try to place you in a 'what if' situation to see how you will respond. The question may illustrate an actual situation you might have to face, or the interviewer may want to test your ability to react quickly in strange situations.

- What would you do if an irate client confronted you?
- What would you do if a client's employees' union representative threatened a strike.....?

Technical Questions

These questions are designed to test your expertise. You may not be quizzed directly on your technical knowledge but be ready, just in case! You should be able to anticipate the type of question from your knowledge of the prospective role.

- 'How would you set about solving this kind of problem?'
- 'If the following happened, what would you do?'

Closed Questions

These questions are framed in such a way that theoretically you can answer with a yes or no. Don't fall into the trap! Take the opportunity to sell yourself, and elaborate your answers in a concise way. Offer more facts, talk about your achievements and give opinions.

- 'I see you have'.....
- 'Have your frequent changes been due to'.....

Forced Choice Questions

These are testing and challenging questions designed to put you into some sort of dilemma. You may be asked to address the interviewer's pet concern. You may find you can ask questions and engage in discussion. In a situation where you believe the interviewer may not appreciate the approach you would propose, you can first speak rhetorically - to set the scene.

- 'Do you think it is better to develop a first class website in order to market a company or to spend the resources to be used in some other way?'

Probing Questions

These are direct questions aimed at obtaining information, clarifying issues or persuading you to justify what you have just said. They are likely to be quite specific, and frequently arise from the response to the previous question.

- How did that affect the outcome of.....?
- What was your reason for..?

Multiple Questions

These questions can be confusing. Which bit do you tackle first? A good strategy is to explain how you will answer the question, or you can ask the interviewer for her or his preference for the order of your reply.

- Tell me about your time in college; what you do outside of work?



**"Yes, I think I have good people skills.
What kind of idiot question is that?"**

Problem Interviewers

Most people who interview people for employment have never trained in this area. HR people are trained but others rarely are. If HR people are involved, they will usually discipline matters with proper structure and procedures.

However, many interviews go ahead without planning and, in these circumstances, you can find yourself at the mercy of someone who is not up to interviewing effectively.

The Inexperienced Interviewer

There are very few good interviewers and most problems are down to inexperience. Do not become irked if the interviewer has no plan but use your own preparation to help the interviewer out. If questions seem unclear or complex, try to handle the points one at a time. An example of helping them like this might be to suggest a useful question while answering one that is not very relevant or otherwise appropriate.

If the interviewer runs out of questions, try to keep dialogue going by introducing new material. Two useful ways of doing this are:

- ‘When talking about my experience at ...was it clear that’...
- ‘When I was describing what I did at ... I should have added’...

Another way to help out a nervous or muddled interviewer is to think what a skilled interviewer might be concerned about and then make sure you cover these matters. This can help you to reframe the situation, focusing on what is important to the job. Referring the person to your CV can also help recapture relevance and direction. Focus on reassuring the interviewer that you are the frontrunner for the job.

Interviewer Monopolises the Interview

This situation calls for careful judgement. There is research evidence to show that some poor interviewers actually rate candidates in direct proportion to the amount of time they, the interviewer, talk. Thus the more they talk, the higher they rate the candidate!

Nevertheless, you still need to get some points across, so it is all the more important when you do comment that you are able to mention concisely your key prepared points.

Try not to encourage the interviewer by your nonverbal language or supportive comments. When the interviewer draws breath, you might say firmly, “I’d like to respond to what you’ve been saying”, and keep going. Without being discourteous, you can also sometimes tactfully ignore the cues that the interviewer wants to speak again.

Interviewer Asks Only Closed Questions

In this situation, recognise the limitations of the closed question and then treat it as an open question. For example, you might expand on the Yes/No example such as: “Yes, because, when etc...” Or avoid “Yes” or “No” completely and instead answer the question using a more detailed response.



Interviewer Asks Discriminatory Questions

In Ireland we have excellent employment equality legislation and it is against the law to ask questions that are discriminatory, especially around gender, family circumstances, age, disability, race, religion and sexuality.

It is important to note however that interviewers can ask questions around these areas; they just need to ensure that the questions are not discriminatory, either directly or indirectly. As a general rule a question can be asked if everyone being interviewed is asked it so you need to be careful about jumping to a conclusion that a question is discriminatory.

Notwithstanding that, blatantly discriminatory questions do get asked at interviews all the time and they can be very unsettling. Questions such as ‘Are you not afraid you’re too old to take on a job like this?’ are against the law. You can object and refuse to answer.

On the other hand, being pragmatic and seeing it as an opportunity to provide a clever response to this concern, may be a lot wiser.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Why are you interested in this position?

The interviewer wants you to show enthusiasm and conviction. Outline how well you match up to the job. Emphasise what you can contribute, rather than what you can take, for example, 'this job is a perfect match for my skills and aspirations. This is a win-win opportunity where I know I can be successful with your company and that my successes will be rewarded'.

What was your greatest challenge and how did you overcome it?

Have an example ready which moved you outside your normal comfort zone, or into a new area, but keep it focused on the job!

You don't have any experience in X do you?

If it was a problem, you wouldn't have been shortlisted. Resist saying "No, I don't". Talk about how you want to broaden your experience, how you are adaptable and quick to learn etc.

Why should we offer you this job?

You should talk about what you can offer the company, not the benefits to you. The best answer to this question revolves around your unique selling points, (USPs).

What are your strengths?

Tailor your answer to what you think would sum up the interviewer's ideal candidate. Bear in mind what most interviewers seek such as: an ability at problem solving, team working, motivation, flexibility etc.

Rather than list lots of matters, try focusing on selected ones and talking through them in a way interviewers will remember. By doing careful self appraisal beforehand you know what you have to offer and will be able to talk about it in a way that engages the interviewer.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

The interviewer wants to know how the job fits into your aspirations. Explain how the job is an opportunity for you to grow and develop. Don't bring up goals that are unrealistic.

Why did you stay so long with one company?

They were a good company and you were continuing to develop yourself.

What is your biggest weakness?

This question can sometimes be asked as, “how would your colleagues answer if we asked them about your faults?” This question is being asked to see if you are arrogant - “I really don’t think I have any weaknesses”, whether you know yourself, “I’ve never thought about that before” and also how you are working to overcome a weakness, “I knew my business knowledge was weak, so I took a business management course to bridge the gap.”

Or describe how you turn a negative into a positive e.g. “my biggest weakness is that sometimes I work too hard so my life can get out of balance” or “because I am a team player I can sometimes work too hard, I have to learn to step back and relax more!” You could also say “my colleagues have told me that I can be too focused on my work and I have to remind myself to lighten up.”

Do not be tempted to offer a real weakness or attempt to be funny. This question helps interviewers determine how you will handle difficult situations.

What would your last boss say was the area you needed to improve on?

This is a variation on you having to identify your development needs. You could give one or two examples and what you have done about them e.g. my boss identified my lack of broad business knowledge so I opted to take a management diploma and also set aside time to shadow people in other parts of the organisation.



“Don’t think of me as a 54 year old job applicant.
Think of it as getting two 27 year olds for the price of one!”

You seem to have done a lot of job hopping. Why?

You had to move companies to progress your career but would much prefer to develop it in one company.

Why are you looking to leave your current job?

You must have a reason, e.g. 'I am at a stage in my career where I want a job that is more challenging and rewarding'. Or you could say that the company is not stable; the journey to work is too long or you were underpaid for your skills and contribution. You may be seeking a greater challenge, more promotional prospects, the company values are a close match for you etc. Don't say anything negative about your current company.

Do you prefer working on your own or in a team?

If you know this is a team or individual job you can base your answer on that. Probably best not to have a preference but enjoy both.

What has been your greatest mistake?

Do not describe a mistake that was avoidable or your fault. You could discuss not pursuing academic qualifications but say how well you have done without them, or recognising that you put the job above the family.

Why should I hire you over the other people I have interviewed?

This is a key question for you to sell yourself. The interviewer expects you to be confident in answering this question so be assertive and proud of your efforts e.g. "you mentioned you are looking for someone with proven experience and who is motivated. I am ideal for this position because with my previous experience I can step in and make an immediate contribution".

Why did you choose this particular degree?

This is often asked of people without a lot of work experience. It provides insight into how a person thinks. They want you to show you have put thought into this decision and looked into the future e.g. "I chose marketing because I enjoy working with others and I am motivated by success. Marketing allows me to capitalise on my blend of creativity and ability to learn".

Can you give me an example of team work and leadership?

You want to give an example of working effectively in a team and also a time when you took the lead; you don't want people to think that you can only work with others, so give an example of working effectively alone.

How do you prioritise when you are given too many tasks to accomplish?

This question is asking about the way you plan and manage your time. Whilst you want to be seen as someone who is flexible on time, and does not stick to set hours, you will also want to show how you will prioritise your time.

What do you do in your spare time?

Describe some things you are involved in.

What are your short and long term goals?

This should link with the job you are applying for. If you want to be a buyer, a job as a sales assistant is a step along the way; but if you want to be a doctor, why are you applying for a job as a sales executive? For example, “my short term goal is to join a company where I will be challenged and have room to develop. One of my longer term goals is to grow with the company and move into management.”

What are your interests?

Try to keep interests listed somewhat in line with the job but don't lie; if you don't play golf don't claim to. It is best to think in advance and have a balance of team and individual pursuits, perhaps showing leadership in a voluntary organisation. In practice there is always interest in a person's ability to bring in business over time. To tick this box, outline active involvements you have in groups, clubs and associations.

What major problems did you encounter in your last job?

Whatever you say, make sure the problem was overcome.

What do you know about us?

Employers want applicants to have taken the initiative, courtesy and enthusiasm to find out something about them. What you know is not as important as just knowing something! You might, for example, refer to their annual report and comment on how they are expanding and go on to ask about associated opportunities.

Why do you want to work here?

Your response will be based on what you have learnt about the company. You will want to explain what you have found out and why it interests you. Perhaps you would like to include something about the company's reputation, and that the environment would help to bring out your best.

If you could choose any job what would it be?

Do not start discussing your fantasies. Describe the job you are being interviewed for.

Are you applying for other jobs?

Let them know you are in discussion with other companies. They will be reassured that other companies are interested in you.

Why haven't you found a job yet?

If it's taken you six months or more, they may think there is something wrong with you. This is why you should opt for an intensive job search campaign. The best response is to say how you are selective; you could have accepted others, but unlike this one you did not see them as a good career move.

What would you describe as your greatest achievement?

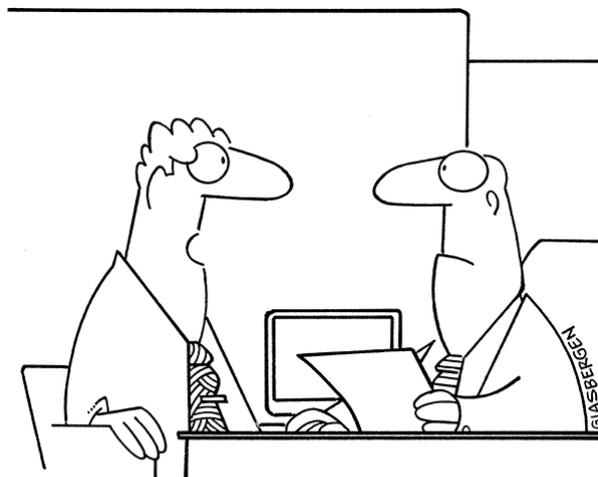
Be prepared to give an achievement that is relevant to the job you are applying for.

Are you ambitious?

You don't want to be content to stand still, but you don't want to be seen as climbing over everyone to get to the top. You could say that your ambition is to do well, but job satisfaction is the key.

What was your last boss's biggest weakness?

Do not be tempted to say anything negative. People expect loyalty e.g. "I have the highest respect for my manager. While we did not always agree, he supported and challenged me so I am now in a position to apply for a greater challenge."



"I didn't mean to fall in love with a coworker. The IT guys connected our hearts by Bluetooth as a prank!"

Has your career developed as you would have liked?

This is often asked of someone whose career has developed slowly. Say that the work was interesting, and you were gaining satisfaction. If you have been made redundant after 10 years you can emphasise your loyalty.

Would you be prepared to relocate?

You need to have thought this through in advance so you can answer honestly.

How would you describe your relationship with your subordinates?

If you have managed people you can answer these questions; just make sure to think this area through in advance of the interview. Give examples of a particular issue you have dealt with and the positive outcome and benefit to the subordinate and the company as a whole.

How would your colleagues answer if we asked them about your faults?

This is another way of asking you to describe weaknesses; see earlier question.

What have been your best achievements?

You know your strengths. Refer to those, making sure they link in with what the employer wants. Back up boasts with examples and quantify benefits to previous employers.

How would your last boss describe you?

This is another question to allow you to describe your strengths.

What can you offer us?

This is another question to let you sell your strengths.

Would you accept this job if it was offered to you?

Answer yes without hesitation. You can save the negotiations for later.

Have you ever failed in any job?

This is similar to asking about your mistakes, decide what to say, but be clear how you have learnt from it.

Give an example of when your work was criticised. How did you respond?

A good idea is to describe an idea that was criticised - not work you did. Consider saying that you suggested a new approach to your boss who told you what was wrong with the idea. You listened and realised she/he had valid points. You went away, reviewed your work and came back with a revised suggestion which was better received.

What qualities do you think the company require for this job?

Your research should have established what they will be interested in. Provide this information, linking it to your strengths.

What area would you feel least confident about if we offered you a job?

You are being tested on your self-confidence. Expand on your strengths and what you can bring to the company and how you are not afraid of challenges to upskill within the new role.