

INFORMATION LEAFLET

This leaflet covers a wide range of important interview matters. If properly attended to, these matters will enable you to significantly improve at interviewing leading to more job offers and being offered a more generous salary and other benefits. We deal with how best to prepare for an interview, how to do well on the day and how to follow up afterwards.

SUCCESSFUL PREPARATION

It is essential that you plan carefully for every interview. You cannot rely on the charm of your personality and quick wit. You should commence your preparation as early as possible. You don't need to wait for an interview invite. You could get called for interview at any time, and a request from even a recruiter to, 'come in for a chat' needs careful preparation.

Self Appraisal

Self appraisal is the foundation on which everything in job seeking is built. The key to successful interviewing performance is to be clear on what you have to offer an employer, what you want from your next job, and where you're heading.

Interview Objectives and Strategies

Impress the employer as a serious contender for the job. Glean as much information on the position, you may be called back for a second interview or asked to do a presentation.

When you establish what your objectives are, you then need to start considering how you can communicate that message in clear and easy-to-remember terms. These are your strategies and they should frame everything that you will say and how you will behave at interview.

Research Employer, Sector and Job

A question that many people stumble on at interview is: 'Where do you think our sector is heading?' Particularly in management and professional positions, you need to be able to show that you keep abreast with your profession and/or industry.

Prepare For The ‘Tell Us about Yourself’ Question

At the start of most interviews you will be asked to, ‘tell us a bit about yourself’, or to, ‘talk us through your career to date’, or some such open-ended question. Very few people can deal with this type of question without preparation and practice. You need a concise summary of yourself, your experience and achievements that takes less than five minutes to complete.

By rehearsing your answer to this common, context-setting, open-ended question, you can avoid the risk of delivering a rambling, boring response that starts the interview off badly. Best advice is to draft a summary of around 300 words, which outlines matters in a way that is interesting for the interviewer.

Be Able to Talk About Your Strengths

Think of what you have achieved. Either refer back to preparation you did when you drafted your CV or take the time now to list successes you have had. You will also need to be able to answer the question ‘why should we hire you?’ comfortably and briefly. To do this, you will need to be able to tell stories about yourself that back up the claims you make.

Understand the Transferability of Your Skills

High performers at interview get an understanding of what the interviewer is looking for and focus on those matters and related experience and achievements they have. They use information on their education, skills and aptitudes to make a case as to why they can succeed in the job.

Pivotal to all that is being able to understand how experience in a particular environment can be relied upon and used successfully in perhaps quite a different setting; and how that experience or skill may be used to address a very different set of challenges.

Decide How To Deal With Shortcomings and Complications

Many people have a medical condition or something else that might impact or perhaps, be perceived as likely to impact on their ability to do a job. Child care responsibility is a typical example. Consider how you should respond to related questions you might be asked. Then, practice how you answer these in mock interviews beforehand. Consider too whether you should bring the matter up, if you are not asked about it.

REHEARSING & DOING MOCK INTERVIEWS

The number of people who undertake interviews without rehearsing beforehand is quite remarkable. Few would stand up to do an after dinner address without rehearsing it. Although more private, an interview is almost always of greater importance.

Rehearsing Hints

Consider questions and prepare winning answers – especially to the ones you fear most. Rehearse these answers and time how long it takes you to answer them. Never talk beyond two minutes straight.

Don't try to memorise answers word for word - you will come across as stiff and will be unable to function off the cuff. To help remember the content of answers, underline and remember key words.

Mock Interviewing

To facilitate you to do a mock interview, questions are laid out below. Get someone to interview you in a formal way, asking you these or questions of their own.

To get best value out of this exercise, review the questions beforehand and work out effective answers to them as part of your preparation. For best results, you should record the interview - so you can play it back later.

As with a real interview, the interviewer needs to thank the person for attending, explain the format that will be followed and then launch into questions.

Questions for Mock Interview Number 1

- Tell me about yourself.
- How did you get your position with your last employer?
- How did you find your last employer to work for?
- What makes a 'good' employer?
- What have you been doing since you left your last employer?
- Tell us some of the things which you enjoyed doing in your last job.
- What do you see as having been your greatest strengths as an employee?

- What has been your best achievements?
- What are the qualities needed to be a good customer services executive?
- What were the circumstances under which you left your job?
- What are the greatest assets you have to offer us?
- What would be the area you feel least confident about if in this job?
- How would your colleagues answer if we asked them about your faults?
- What do you feel you gained most from your time with your last employer?
- How would your last boss describe you?
- What do you see yourself doing here in 5 / 10 years' time?
- How did you become office manager in your current job?
- How did you spend your vacations from school/college/ university?
- Please tell me about your leisure interests.
- Why do you want this job?
- Why should we offer you this job?
- Are you considering any other jobs at present?

Questions for Mock Interview Number 2

- Please talk me through your career to date.
- What did you do most in your last job?
- What is your family background?
- Do you know much about the job we are interviewing for here today?
- What do you want to know about our construction company?
- What qualities do you believe will make you a successful social worker?
- How would you describe your ideal job?
- What skills have you developed as a result of your experience to date?
- What goals have you set for yourself and how do you plan to achieve them?
- What's the most useful criticism you ever received, and who was it from?
- Describe the work or situation that allowed you best demonstrate your skills as a tutor?
- Tell me about an idea you have developed and implemented that you consider was particularly creative or innovative?
- What specialisation of medicine are you interested in?
- What interests you in this advertising agency?
- Tell me about your ties to this geographic area.
- What was your favourite course during medical school?

WHEN INVITED FOR INTERVIEW

When invited to interview you need to know details such as the following:

- Who you will meet.
- Who you will be interviewed by and their position in the organisation.
- Whether there will be any psychometric or other type of assessment.
- Whether you will be given a tour of the organisation.

If you don't get this information, it is fine to ring and request it. Larger organisations will often send an information pack with the invitation to interview, or at your request when the interview is arranged. This may contain documents such as an annual report, a job description or outline company details and a map. It may contain details of the conditions of employment. Be proactive and ask if it isn't sent.

If they do not send you a copy of the job description, request one. You want to know about the job so that you can prepare well. If you have the opportunity to choose the time of your interview, seek a slot as late as available. That way you maximise the chances of an effective interview and of standing out in the interviewer's memory.

Confirm by letter or e-mail the interview place, time, day and date - to avoid any mistake, as a courtesy and to record a good impression. It is often worthwhile telephoning the employer in advance of the interview. For instance you might call beforehand to obtain exact directions or, if you have any special needs or disabilities, you might phone to forewarn the employer.



"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!"

Pulling Everything Together

Re-read the advertisement, application form and letters. Consider what you have to offer by way of experience and strengths. Maybe memorise your five or six most important points. Do

not assume the interviewers will have read everything in detail – or that they will be able to remember your career details.

Your preparation should include a thorough analysis of your motives and interest in the specific appointment. Taking into account what you know about the job role for which you are being considered and the organisation, think through your responses to the following questions:

- What qualifications do I have, what jobs or assignments have I done, and what achievements do I have which fit with what I know of the position?
- What other unique selling points do I have in relation to this appointment?
- What are the areas where I do not seem to fit the job description and where I might be questioned? How will I deal with these questions?
- Will this be the right job for me?
- Why am I interested in this appointment?
- Why am I interested in this organisation?

Further Research

Most likely you will be asked, ‘what do you know about us’. Employers want applicants who have had the initiative, courtesy and enthusiasm to find out something about the organisation. The more senior the position you are aiming to obtain, the more important the research becomes.

Your research should include:

- The organisation’s recent history.
- The location of corporate headquarters and any other company sites.
- The names of the MD, other directors and functional executives.
- The type of ownership (PLC, limited company, partnership etc.).
- It’s place within the industry.
- Any developments at industry levels, which may have affected it.
- Its future strategy.

Good sources of information include:

- The firm’s / company’s website.
- National, local and specialist press.
- Sales brochures, catalogues, etc.
- Listening and talking to people.
- Promotional materials.

ON THE DAY

The importance of being on time for the interview cannot be overstated. It is crucial for you to find out the exact location beforehand. This may mean asking for specific directions if you are unfamiliar with the area. Ask if there are any parking regulations around the building you should know about.

Getting to the Interview

If possible, drive to the interview site a day or so before the interview at the time you will drive there on the day. This way, you can adequately estimate how long it will take you. Can you get to the building via another route? You will want to allow for any contingency that could occur along the way. You don't want to rush into the interview hot and sweaty.

- Make sure you know where to go and how you are going to get there.
- Eat a while beforehand. Sometimes interviews are delayed or go on longer than expected.
- Allow extra time for the journey going wrong.
- Take a mint to freshen your breath.
- Aim to arrive with time to spare, so that you can be as relaxed as possible.
- Switch off your mobile phone.
- If you know ahead of time that you're going to be late, call the employer.



"We're a green company. I like the part where you describe yourself as biodegradable, organic and locally grown."

What to Take with You

Bring a watch and a bag, briefcase or folder. In the bag/briefcase/folder you can keep:

- Copies of all correspondence received.
- Spare copies of your CV.
- Notebook with your questions listed.
- Pen and something to read - in case you are kept waiting.

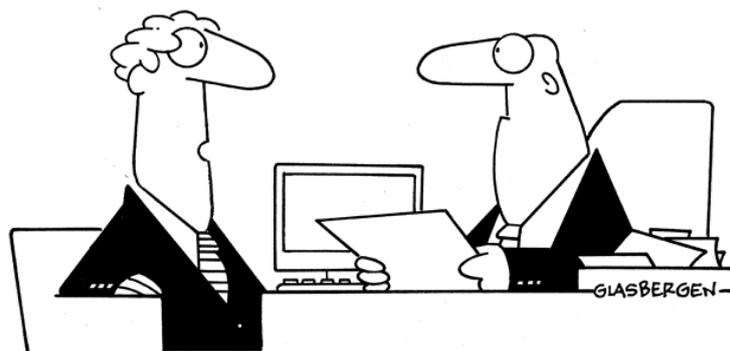
When You Arrive

Get to the general area well ahead of time. Don't just be on time. Spend some time outside in advance and arrive at the reception area 7 to 8 minutes before the appointment time in a small facility and 10 to 12 minutes ahead of time in a large facility, (where it could take time clearing reception and getting to where the meeting will take place).

Be friendly with the receptionist - but not over familiar. When speaking with receptionists and secretaries, remember that they may later be asked by the interviewers to comment informally on the way candidates handled themselves outside the formal interview.

Visit the toilet, if possible, for a number of reasons. Walking to and from the toilet will often take you past working areas of the office from which you can indirectly glean a great deal about a company, e.g., cleanliness, atmosphere, friendliness, efficiency, etc. While you are there, check how you look.

Be prepared to shake hands. Make sure your hands are dry. Interviewers prefer a firm handshake. It can reflect your confidence level and some personal qualities. Your handshake should never be too firm, nor should it be limp like a fish. If the interviewer does not extend his or her hand to you before or after the interview (this is rare), you can either make the first gesture by extending your hand or not shake hands at all. Do not hesitate however, to initiate the handshake.



**"Yes, I have leadership experience. Last week
I organized a street protest against your company."**

Do not accept a drink within 5 minutes of your interview time. You don't want to be burdened with a hot drink just as your interviewer arrives. Keep calm and keep your cool even if you are kept waiting. It can help to have a book or magazine to look at. Leave your overcoat, umbrella etc in reception so you won't need to worry where to put them in the interview room.

Remember that no interview is ever a formality. People may sometimes give you an impression that the job is in the bag. It isn't until you have it in writing. Whatever anyone says, go into every interview prepared for a rigorous questioning session - even if you have been told, 'we'd like you to see HR, it's just a formality'. Please remember HR can still pull the plug at any time and often do.

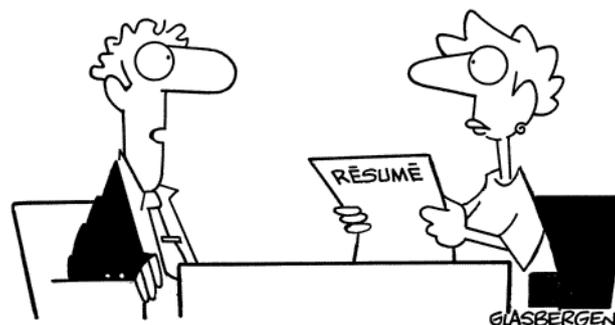
The Interview Itself

Aim to enjoy it, to stand out and impress.

Remember the adage, 'you only have one chance to make a first impression'. Many interviewers make up their minds about a candidate within seconds of meeting them. Research has confirmed this phenomenon often called the 'halo effect'. When we observe one good thing about someone, we assume all kinds of other good things about the person.

It's not fair, but we do it anyway. For example, if you are well dressed, many interviewers will assume you are probably responsible in other ways. This means that for everything you do right, many more good things can be assumed by extension.

Once an impression is made, then many interviewers subconsciously want to have that initial impression confirmed by the subsequent discussion. The opposite is the 'horns effect'. Start off badly and you have an uphill struggle to deal with.



"I don't have any references, but 4 out of 5 phone psychics say I'm destined for greatness."

Getting Started

Don't sit until you are invited to do so. If you are instructed to sit and find yourself in an awkward position, then ask "would you mind if I moved my chair?" and move it. Be friendly, confident and articulate. This involves standing and sitting with good posture. Grasp the

interviewer's hand in a firm and decisive handshake. Call the interviewer by his or her name, saying how pleased you are to be there. A positive attitude says a lot about you.

Demonstrate that you like the person. Expect to get on with your interviewer, and show you do through your verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Speak loudly and clearly enough to be heard. Make sure you stress your good points; showing how well informed you are about the company. Keep your attitude business-like and respectful.

Listen closely as the interviewer introduces themselves. You will want to address them by name at some point later during the interview. Sell yourself by outlining what you can do for them, given an opportunity. Make sure you recount things in an interesting and positive way so that the interviewer will remember you.

Take deep breaths, relax and act naturally. This is your opportunity to show the interviewer that you are the person they are looking for. Sit well back in your chair, in an upright but comfortable position. If you use your hands when talking, don't over do it. Make friendly eye contact with the person asking questions but don't stare.

If there is more than one interviewer make sure you also involve them by addressing the next part of your answer to them. For panel interviews address the main body of an answer to the questioner, but then hold eye contact with other panel members in order to involve them.



**"I like to come in at 11:00 and leave after lunch.
Surely a progressive company like yours
supports flex time!"**

Dealing with Questions

Think before you talk. Take a few seconds to collect and organise your thoughts, and then answer each question simply and directly. If you do not understand the question, or the motivation behind the question, ask for clarification. Every time you are asked a question, consider the following before responding: 'How can I answer that question in a way that will show how I can be of value to this employer?'

Mentally tick off, as they arise in the interview, those five or six key reasons why you should be considered for the job. Find opportunities to raise any issues which have not been touched on. You might be asked whether you would like to add anything; or you might make the point yourself: 'would it be helpful if I mentioned something else relevant to this job?'

Whatever the questioning techniques you encounter, take every opportunity to explain your achievements and your abilities within the context of the job role you are discussing. Never hesitate to ask the interviewer to repeat the question if you haven't fully heard or understood it. You can also use the technique of restating the question in different words to check your understanding.

Let the interviewer control the interview, but always be prepared to take the initiative. Have a strategy for handling interviewers who monopolise the talking, or ask only closed 'yes / no' questions, etc.

Be prepared for the deliberate questions which the interviewers occasionally ask knowing you cannot answer them. Such questions are used to see how you cope.

When the interviewer starts asking the 'how would you handle...?' questions, imagine that you are a consultant helping a new client with a problem. Adopt a probing approach so that you can understand their situation in sufficient detail before providing an answer. Relate that answer to their business objectives rather than to theories or models (unless specifically asked to do so).

Similarly, when they ask about your past achievements, relate them to issues your employer was trying to address and the organisational benefits they gained.

Use jargon or technical terms only if everyone involved fully understands them and if it will help show your knowledge of a subject.

Keep on your toes. Channel nerves to your advantage by keeping super alert; watch the interviewer(s) body language for clues on how much detail you should be giving them: are they attentive or bored?

Build rapport. The interview is often less about your factual knowledge, more about, 'what are you like to work with?' In these circumstances building rapport may be more important than impressing with expertise.

Give careful consideration to all answers. Don't be afraid to pause and think before replying and don't hesitate to say you don't understand something if that is the case. Giving questions their due consideration is also a good way to avoid interrupting the interviewer.

Stay natural. Wanting to give your best doesn't mean that you have to be unnatural. High anxiety about the outcome can lead to candidates trying too hard or coming over as dull and stilted. Aim to strike a balance between being, on one hand, comfortable and relaxed, while on the other, alert and incisive. Above all, show your interest by your natural enthusiasm for that winning future combination - you and the job.

Be Positive. Do not criticise previous employers. If you have made a mistake somewhere along your career, it is not a disaster to admit it; make sure you outline clearly the lessons it taught you. Admitting the odd mistake also gives you credibility when you start to talk about the positive things in your career.



"If diversity is important to you, I have seven toes on one foot and a mole that looks like Danny from The Partridge Family."

Body Language

Whether done consciously or subconsciously, your body language communicates a great deal to a person you speak to. Interviewers pick up on body language and it has a significant impact on their assessment of you.

Have you ever spoken with someone who won't look directly at you? The feeling you are left with about them differs considerably from the person who looks right at you. You are unlikely to feel much of a connection; you might wonder if they're interested in speaking with you and you will have questions about their confidence level. During the interview your body language plays a big part in the relationship building process.

Tips Regarding Body Language

Eye Contact

A crucial part - maintain good eye contact with the people you are meeting – yet do not go over the top and end up glaring at them. Avoid looking down, up, or to the side of people you are talking to. That, at best, suggests lack of confidence. Look at them in the eye in a friendly manner. Look directly at the person when you speak.

It is okay to look away for a few seconds especially when you may need to think about a response to a tough question. However only look away for a small number of seconds and then return your focus to the interviewer. If you feel uncomfortable holding eye contact with people, look at the forehead.

Posture

Maintain proper posture throughout the interview. Slouching and leaning down in your chair reflects laziness, lack of interest, and a lack of confidence. Being too rigid and tense will convey inflexibility and nervousness. Be comfortable. Keep your shoulders up and back. Put both of your feet on the floor. It's all right to lean slightly towards the interviewer.

Avoid having barriers between you and the people you are talking to. Be careful not to create defensive barriers between yourself and the interviewer(s). Don't leave your briefcase on your knees, or keep your arms folded or your legs crossed. It may feel natural to you, but it does create a defensive barrier between you and the interviewer(s).

Don't lean on the interviewer's desk or otherwise invade their personal space.

Gestures

Gestures, such as use of hands, eyebrows, etc., can enhance your message but don't overdo it. Raising your eyebrows at something interesting or exciting and using your hands to express a point and relay a story, all add to your presentation. However, if these things are overdone – and they regularly are at interview - they will distract the person you are speaking to and compromise what you are saying. If you tend to emphasise matters you are talk about using your hands, keep this in check.

Mirroring

Notice the tone of voice the interviewer uses. If they are very business like, do not be overly cheerful, but if they have a friendly tone, be cheerful and enthusiastic. Match the pitch, rate and volume. If the interviewer speaks slowly and softly, with a low pitch, don't talk in a loud and rapid manner, you will overwhelm them.

Keep Things in Perspective

The more natural you appear at interview, the better – so don't stress yourself about all of the things that you're supposed to be doing or not doing. Consider them beforehand and practice if necessary but at interview don't focus on your physical mannerisms and miss out on more important matters - such as what you're being asked.

Some interview trainers propose a whole range of tactics on this front such as mirroring the person who is interviewing you. Best advice is to be yourself and, in addition, without stressing yourself, just try to maintain good posture and good eye contact.

Asking Questions During The Interview

The technique of asking questions is a powerful tool in the art of discussion. Questions judiciously inserted into conversation keep listeners on their toes, can change the content or tone of what is being discussed and can even change its direction.

High performing interviewees understand the value of asking questions and most use the technique regularly to subtly manipulate how an interview proceeds.

You need to be careful however not to be perceived as trying to take over the interview. The interviewer will quickly reach that view if you ask too many questions or ask them at the wrong time and in the wrong way. To be effective with this technique, you need to understand what good questioning involves and practice the technique in your everyday discussions to become proficient at it.

Asking Questions at the End of the Interview

At the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. Too often people mumble about matters already covered and that makes for a weak ending. High performers often have a notepad available with questions listed and quickly choose two or three.

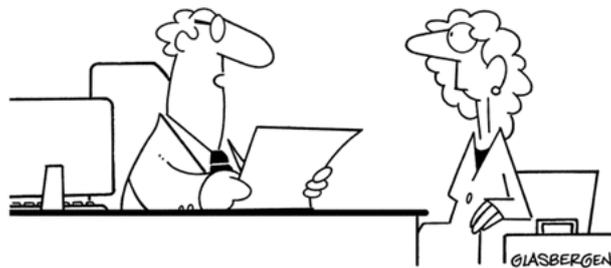
You should ask one question to demonstrate the research you have done on the company. Rather than a general question, link it to something you have read. For example 'I read in a recent news story that yours is one of the most highly competitive industries the country ...'

Don't drag out your questioning process and let them know you are finished by saying to the interviewer, 'thank you - I don't have any more questions at this stage'.

Finishing Up

Make it clear you would like to work for the company: 'I'm really impressed with your company and everyone that I have had the opportunity to meet. I'm confident I could do a great job in this position. When can I expect to hear back from you?'

Thank the interviewer, and ask about the next step. Failure to do this may leave the interviewer in some doubt as to whether you wish to proceed. If you realise that the job isn't a great fit, make sure you still leave a good impression. You may be considered for another vacancy. Say goodbye to the receptionist as you leave.



"On your last day of work, you get to keep all the returnable cans and bottles in the break room. That's our retirement plan."

If Things Go Wrong

It is worth considering what you can do if various problems arise.

You arrive late.

The situation is sometimes retrievable if you apologise and offer to come back another time. No matter how late, don't park in a reserved parking space and rush into the building.

You are kept waiting for a long time.

Do not complain, check regularly with reception.

Other candidates are in the room.

Read whatever you brought or company literature. Don't get involved in a discussion.

You cannot remember the interviewer's name.

Ask the receptionist but on no account admit your oversight.

You spill your tea or coffee.

Don't accept any drink beyond water.

The interview is regularly interrupted.

Offer to leave and come back at another time.

The Senior Partner or Chief Executive enters the room during the interview. Go with the flow - if you are introduced, stand up and shake hands firmly.

Your mind goes blank.

This usually occurs when people are extremely nervous. If it happens take a couple of deep breaths, (which will calm you down by getting oxygen to your brain). You can stall for time saying something like: 'I didn't quite hear you, could you repeat that?' You could come clean and say, 'I'm sorry: my mind has gone blank.' You can explain that you are prone to nerves in interviews and your disarming honesty will probably be appreciated.

You are asked a question you don't know the answer to.

If the question is a factual one and you don't know, then admit this with a smile and explain that this particular item is outside of your experience. If possible, offer to answer the more general case which the questions alludes to. If the question is a theoretical one then ask for a few moments to collect your thoughts so that you can give a considered answer. Preface any answer with 'not sure if this is exactly what you are asking, but...'

You find yourself rambling.

As soon as you realise you are starting to ramble, interrupt yourself by coughing, dropping your pen, scratching your nose or pausing. This will give you time to collect your thoughts and you can shake your head, and say, 'sorry, I'm rambling, can I start that answer again?'

A question doesn't make sense.

Ask them to repeat or rephrase the question. If you give a good answer in the end, they will probably forget a little bit of clumsiness along the way. But if you get hold of the wrong end of the stick to start with, your interviewers are more likely to assume that you are a bit dim.

You don't like your interviewer.

Don't let it put you off. Be as nice as possible during the interview. After the interview you should reflect on your interest in joining a company with people like you met, particularly if you would be working closely with the interviewer.

You know your interviewer.

Don't let this worry you. The interviewer may need to consider their position but the pressure to do something is on them, not you.

Thank You Email

Few candidates write a follow up email to thank the interviewer for their time. If the interviewer is still deciding between you and another, an email may just tip the balance.

A short and timely follow up communication can reinforce that you are professional and courteous and will make you stand out from other applicants.

Address the email to the person you believe the decision to hire primarily rests with. You can re-assure them about areas of weakness or concerns that arose during the interview but be careful how you do this and keep it concise.

Waiting to Hear

The interview went well - but that was six days ago and you wonder if you will ever hear anything. Emails are great in these circumstances.

Invite to Further Interview

When you receive an invitation for a further interview, deal with it immediately. If the suggested date is impossible, call the employer to arrange for a more convenient day. Confirm that you will attend, by email or in writing, as soon as you can.

Start doing further research on the role, the company and industry sector. You should expect everything to be elevated at the next interview. Most likely you will meet more people in the organisation, probably more senior than the last time, and they will want to be convinced that you will make a significant contribution.

High performing interviewees go into second stage interviews with more developed ideas and seek to build on their first stage performance rather than aiming for a repeat performance.

The format of second interviews will often involve you making a presentation in front of a panel and then being quizzed on what you proposed. For this you will probably need to do a PowerPoint presentation. Get someone to help you do this and to set a good deal of time aside to prepare your presentation and rehearse what you will say.