

Interview Preparation – How to Prepare for a Job Interview

Considering the positive impact a new job can have on the life of a successful jobseeker in terms of increased salary, satisfaction and status, I am constantly surprised by the volume of candidates who arrive at an interview insufficiently prepared.

In fact, a recent survey showed that 9 out of 10 interview candidates failed to prepare properly for their job interview.

Not surprisingly they missed out on the job offer. HR will be looking for clues to see just how interested a candidate is in the role and will ask questions to determine this.

Very often poor preparation is revealed with the answers to these questions. Leaving the interviewer to wonder whether the candidate is really interested in the job or just at the interview for practice.

Why Interview Preparation is Vital

Preparation for a job interview is vital and is the first step towards success. With adequate preparation you will know

- exactly what the employer is looking for
 - you will have a good idea of the questions they will ask
 - you will have effective answers ready on the tip of your tongue.
- Interviews can be nerve-wracking for many people however by preparing in advance:-
- you can perform in a relaxed, positive and confident manner
 - The situation will be familiar to you
 - you will be ready for any question they can throw at you.

Thorough interview preparation is essential if you are serious about the job and there really is no excuse for just showing up to the interview without having done at least some very basic preparation.

How to Prepare for a Job Interview?

Well here are some simple and easy exercises which will help with your interview preparation and will boost your chances of interview success. Do spend time with these; the more time you spend on your interview preparation the higher your chances of success. This has been proven time and again and really is the key to success in your job interview.

1. Know Yourself

This is all about being familiar with your skills and what you can bring to the role. To help clarify what those are, spend time completing these exercises:

- a. Jot down what you consider to be your Key Strengths, your Unique Selling Points and your Positive Personal Qualities.
- b. Review your CV, becoming very familiar with all aspects of it.
- c. Select what you consider to be your Top Three Achievements and develop a 'story' relating to each, which demonstrates what you did, the steps or actions you took and very importantly the benefits you delivered.
- d. Finally, create a Personal Statement for yourself, starting with your name, your profession or job, your recent experience and achievements, your key strengths and how you can use your skills within the job you are being interviewed for.

2. Know the Job

When preparing for a job interview you must research the job fully. This may sound obvious, but it is surprising how many candidates do not have a clear idea of just what they will be doing in the job. This is a key part of your interview preparation and it is vital that you know what is involved in the job, which skills are prized and what key competencies your employer is searching for.

Make sure you have a copy of the Job Description, Person Specification and that you know all of the competencies required. This will help you practice and prepare for the questions asked.

3. Know the Employer

Early on in the interview, an interviewer will very often ask a candidate what they know about the firm and its services. If they cannot answer these questions well, it becomes very obvious they have not done any interview preparation and I would have to wonder why they want to work here in the first place.

As part of your interview preparation, you should also carry out research into the industry as well as the company. Look for news about recent events and continue the firms practice areas. Are they planning to expand? How many countries are they in?

While I would ideally recommend more time, just 15 minutes on a firm's website is all it takes to gather enough information to format a respectable answer to these questions and convince HR that you are genuinely interested.

4. Prepare for the Interview Logistics

Another vital part of your interview preparation and one that many candidates forget is to plan the actual logistics for the interview. Consider how you are going to get to the interview, which route will you take, how long is the journey. You might even want to make a trial journey in advance to be sure of all the details.

Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the interview

5. Personal Presentation is an Essential Part of Interview Preparation

You must dress appropriately as this could impact on your chances of success. While the clothing choice is somewhat determined by the job itself, it is always best to dress a step above what the company's employees wear. Clothing for the interview should be conservative, clean, pressed, and readily available the morning of the interview.

What to Expect in Administration/Secretarial Job Interviews

The interview questions asked in these types of jobs will vary depending on the employer, the level of job you are applying for, the amount of experience you have.

The recruiting policy and the personal preference of the interviewer will also determine the format and types of questions, however you should expect questions exploring the core competencies for secretaries. Core competencies required in Secretarial/PA jobs include:

- Excellent communication skills
- Planning and Organising
- Time Management
- Ability to achieve results
- Problem Solving
- Computer Literacy
- Flexibility and good team working ethic

POPULAR COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

- "Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult person at a work."
- 'How do you manage your own time and goals and objectives?'
- "What proactive steps have you taken to make your workplace more efficient and productive? Specifically describe a policy, project or system you created or initiated."
- 'Describe a time when you had to work exceptionally hard to provide outstanding service to a client. What did you do and what was the outcome.'
- "Can you give me an example of a problem you have encountered at work and the steps you took to resolve it"
- "Describe a high pressure situation you had to handle at work. Tell me what happened, who was involved and what you did in terms of problem solving."
- "Some situations require us to express ideas or opinions in a very tactful and careful way. Tell me about a time when you've had to use tact and discretion at work."

So, Prepare! Prepare! Prepare!

Use the STAR technique when answering questions to create a little bag of stories/scenarios that you can 'dip into' when answering Competency-based questions like the ones on the previous page

Describe the **S**ituation, then the **T**ask, then the **A**ctions and finally the **R**esults you attained. This will prevent you from answering interview questions vaguely, ensuring you get to the point.

Create three or four short stories that you can adapt - outlining your main successes for each employer you have worked for. It is useful to use the format of (Problem-Analysis-Result, or Situation-Action-Response). These also make great bullet points on your CV!

One of the most common lines of questioning at interview is to ask about your likes and dislikes about the role you are in or being a legal secretary in general. Be careful when answering these as they do give you more than enough rope to hang yourself! Personally I'd handle these questions like this:-

LIKES

Challenge, increased responsibility, The work, team involvement, client interaction, task complexity, learning opportunities and growth. Appropriate general answers about what you enjoyed can include meeting new challenges, dealing with diverse people, learning new skills, working as part of a team, meeting daily and weekly goals.

- Think of 2 or 3 specific examples to add to your repertoire that you can pull out when you are asked to expand in an interview.

DISLIKES

Keep it general and rather refer to the absence of something in your previous job such as insufficient challenge, lack of team spirit, lack of recognition or not enough work to keep you busy.

- Avoid dislikes that relate to working conditions such as overtime, office environment and pay.
- Criticisms of your managers, HR or colleagues raises red flags about your OWN interpersonal skills.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

Key qualities include planning and organising ability, oral and written communication skills, initiative, confidentiality, adaptability, integrity, reliability, accuracy and attention to detail.

YOUR STRENGTHS INCLUDE

Try and focus on three or four strengths that refer directly to the secretarial job requirements. Potential examples include organising and planning, adaptability, attention to detail, problem-solving, reliability, initiative, discretion, multi-tasking, prioritizing, as well as good technical skills.

- Back up your answer with specific examples that demonstrates your strength in the work context