



gateway 
CAREER MANAGEMENT

Gateway Guide Interviews

Gateway Career Management is a team of career coaches and development specialists based in the South East.

GATEWAY GUIDE TO INTERVIEWS

So you have an interview. Well, you are only half way there. Don't deceive yourself at all that you have got the job or that you have a divine right to it! The next stage is the hard one. Interviews today are fiercely competitive and you have to be on top form and smarter than the competition.

Remember - an interview is a meeting about a job. It is a two way communication. They are selling the job to you but, equally, you have an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to do the job and your interest in the organisation. Are they right for you? You can always turn them down – but only when you have the offer letter in your hand!

It is also about three things:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| Competence | “have you the skills and experience that we need?” |
| Compatibility | “will you fit in here?” |
| Commitment | “do you have the drive and self motivation both to succeed and add value to us?” |

Here are our top tips to ensure that you are successful

1. Preparation is vital. If you don't prepare expect to fail.

There are five areas to prepare:

- **General preparation**

Here are some basics to think about.

- *Plan the journey, leave plenty of time*
- *Find out all you can about who you are going to meet and research them online – Google, LinkedIn, Facebook*
- *Consider the format of the interview*
- *Dress smartly and professionally*

- **Paper preparation**

Take with you

- *The letter confirming your appointment.*
- *More than one copy of your C.V.*
- *The completed application form - if required and if not already sent.*
- *A list of your relevant achievements (if they are not in your head) with examples.*
- *A copy of the job / personal specification, if provided, and other research material you have compiled relevant to the company or position.*
- *A portfolio containing examples of your work – where this is required.*
- *A list of prepared questions for which you might need answers (where not covered during the interview).*

- **Mental preparation**

Here are some facts about yourself which you should be aware of and which you may be asked. Think about your answers in advance:

- *The exact talents required for the job.*
- *Experience you have already gained which is relevant to the job specification.*
- *Where you exceed it.*
- *Your key attributes and what stands you apart.*

- *Concrete examples of where you have used these in the past in your career.*
- *Your key achievements in summary and in detail.*
- *The reason for leaving or wanting to leave your last or current position.*
- *Good descriptions and reasons to account for any rough passages in your career.*
- *Why they must hire you given your track record to date.*

Most of these are common sense but many people overlook them.

- **Preparation about the organisation**

- Products/services
- How long in business
- Ownership/success
- Size
- Location
- Employees

This is the absolute minimum required. With the internet there is no excuse for not knowing detailed information about the organisation, its core values, what stands it apart and its financials – and much more

- **Preparation about the role**

- Skills/knowledge/attitude required
- Responsibilities
- Hours and place of work
- Why vacancy has arisen

2. Take time to know all you can about psychometric and ability tests. Do your homework.

These include any of the following:

- Ability tests e.g. verbal or numerical (also diagrammatic, mechanical, spatial, clerical, dexterity, sensory)
- Practical tests e.g. keyboard, IT skills, or demonstrating a relevant skill for the job
- Personality
- Group discussion
- Role plays e.g. telephone call with a customer

You can find several web sites which give you examples of tests so that you can get a feel for what to expect and to practice completing them online. Do your research.

3. Recognise what type and style of interview and know what signal that sends

Types

- Telephone
- 1:1
- Panel
- Other exercises

Styles

- Informal/Formal
- Questions around your CV
- Competency based questions
- Quality of interviewers

Think about what this means in terms of your preparation, strategy and tactics.

4. You must be able to manage your own Body Language to build rapport with your interviewer.

First and last impressions are vital. Have you thought about how you come across? Have you had feedback from friends and peers?

Take a look at and consider each of the following;

- Your Smile
- You Eye Contact
- You Posture
- Your Gestures
- Your Hands
- Your Shoes

Also remember to:

- *look directly at your interviewer when answering questions and remember to put a smile in your eyes.*

- *ensure that your chair is in a comfortable position.*
- *turn to the questioner when answering if more than one person is present.*
- *be enthusiastic, but try to remain relaxed.*

and

- *NOT to fidget or slouch.*
- *NOT to laugh too much or smile too little.*
- *NOT to interrupt.*
- *NOT to be over familiar.*

5. The way you answer questions will have a big influence on whether you are hired.

In general listen carefully to the questions. Give clear, full answers without going off at a tangent. Questions may come under various different groups. The key is to know which ones they are and see them coming.

Here are some examples:

Challenging questions

Consider how you react and think carefully before replying. These are fact finding questions. Use your own words if possible. Avoid stereotyped answers.

Q Tell me about yourself.

*A Depending on how the question is asked:
a) answer briefly with a statement of your career history and then ask which stage of your career he/she is most interested in or
b) go into your prepared "5 minutes on me" compelling presentation.*

Q. Why are you applying for this job?

A. "My qualifications and experience are compatible with the job description as I understand it and I believe I can make a significant contribution to your company".

Q. What could you bring to the company?

A. Concentrate on why you are suitable. Stress your positive points and achievements.

Probing questions

Here are some questions, which probe deeply;

Q How would you handle a situation in which you disagreed with one of your immediate superiors.

A "This would depend on the circumstances, but generally disagreements should be expressed and discussed. However, remember that in the final analysis the employer's interest is paramount.

Q Describe your ideal boss.

A Relate to what you know about your proposed boss, or tell him your ideal is someone you respect and learn from, both within their trade and the company.

Q What sort of person could you NOT work for?

A Hopefully you have not encountered anyone you couldn't work with, but if you have already committed yourself, resist the temptation to describe someone different in age, temperament, attitudes, etc. from what you believe your new employer will be. Describe someone from your past lacking drive or initiative.

Personal questions

Personal questions come up when you least expect them. You must be well prepared. They often occur at 'first' interviews and are generally designed to sort people out.

Q Looking at your career, you do not appear to be a very stable person.

A Because of the nature of the industry you have been in, you have had to make changes to improve yourself.

Q What do you feel about interviews?

A Clarify this, you are as used to interviewing as you are to being interviewed. However, it is not easy to put across one's ability in one short meeting.

Q Enlarge on your strongest and weakest points.

*A Don't forget that weaknesses have complementary strengths. You should be fully aware of any weaknesses you **had** in the past and will have rehearsed these point.*

Q What did you gain from your last job?

A "Useful experience and knowledge to develop and equip me for the sort of job I want now".

Q. Did you have specific objectives in your last job?

A *Make sure your answers reflect the qualities your interviewer needs. Use a relevant achievement as an example.*

Questions to get you talking

These are questions which can occur at first or second interviews and are intended to get you talking:

Q Would you consider yourself more suitable than our other candidates?

A *Not having had the benefit of meeting the other candidates, you cannot answer the question. Point this out, adding that your experience and qualifications appear to be entirely apposite. This is another opportunity to mention relevant achievements.*

Q What do you look for when interviewing staff?

A *"I look for the necessary qualifications and experience, together with a successful record. Generally I look for people who have something to contribute to the existing organisation - and with whom I can work".*

Q You said when you would be available, but we need you to start earlier.

A *It is unwise to commit yourself to a specific time when you could be available - should you find yourself in this corner, "Doubtless if I were offered the job I could make some amicable arrangement to be available earlier" is the answer. Don't worry about working out your notice with your current employer, he isn't the man promoting your future.*

Q What salary are you looking for?

A *Answers to salary questions generally should be evasive, especially early on and should only begin to firm up in subsequent meetings as you become convinced that you will be offered the job. You will have to negotiate your salary in the long run, but that should be at the very end.*

6. You must be smart in the way you answer Competency Based interview questions.

These are increasingly common now. Many HR people like to ask these questions. You must recognise when these questions are asked and know quickly how to answer them. You must also give concrete work based examples to support your answer.

Here are four examples:

“Describe a time when you have worked as part of a team? What was your role? What difficulties did the team encounter? How were they overcome?”

“When was the last time you had to meet a tight deadline? What steps did you take to ensure the deadline was met?”

“Give me an example when you had to explain something to someone? How did you go about it? How did you know they understood?”

“Have you an example when you had to juggle lots of tasks at once? How did you plan your time?”

7. If you don't put across your achievements relevant to the job then someone else will and they will get hired instead of you.

This is a critical area of the interview. Interviewers like to know two things:

*Have you done what we want?
Could you do it for us?*

You must have a list of your key achievements prepared for each of the areas covered in the job specification. Failure to do this may well mean that do not make the short list!

8. Asking the right questions in the right order is integral to your success at interview.

You must ask the right questions therefore direct the interviewer in the way that is of most benefit to you. You must pre-plan your questions. Here are some examples of questions to ask:

- *How is the company dealing with the issue of?*
- *I've read you have a new product.....can you tell me more?*
- *Can you tell me more about the company?*
- *What are the company's plans for the future?*
- *What is your share of the market?*
- *How is the company dealing with the problem of ?*
- *What approximate rate of growth has the company been achieving?*
- *Are you proposing to launch any new projects or enter into new avenues of business?*
- *How do you see the market in the long run?*
- *Are you involved overseas?*

- *Are there bottlenecks or any major problems within the company?*
- *Why has the vacancy arisen?*
- *How do you manage performance in the company?*
- *And.....any questions about the job or company which you need to know to make your decision about the offer*

End up with a good question to end on which shows that you have investigated the company.

9. Don't ever leave an interview thinking that the interviewer controlled the discussion

A good way to avoid this is to think about whether you have delivered examples of your achievements for each part of the role. Where you have not done so ask a relevant question which will allow you to bring out that last achievement that the interviewer hasn't heard yet. You must have a pre-rehearsed relevant question for each of your achievements.

10. Being honest about where you have come up short will allow you to improve your performance next time.

Ask yourself:

- Did I do sufficient homework before the interview?*
- Was my physical presentation OK?*
- Was I in the right frame of mind?*
- Did I display initiative?*
- Was my eye contact OK and did I smile?*
- How did I handle awkward questions?*
- Did I manage to put my achievements across?*
- How well did I ensure that they did not control the interview?*
- What were my questions like?*
- Did I come across as myself?*

Send a follow-up letter addressed to the main person who interviewed to reinforce the interview and reiterate your selling points.

Use this as an opportunity to correct any false impressions you may feel you have left with the interviewer, and/or to emphasise areas of experience you may not have stressed sufficiently. Use your debrief to help you highlight the additional points that may need to be mentioned in your follow-up letter.