

Job interviews

An interview is a conversation with a purpose, for both the employer and the applicant. The employer can learn about the applicant as a person – their personality, social skills, general abilities and potential. The applicant can learn more about the organisation, the position, career prospects, work environment and the people within the organisation.

Typical interview structure

Most interviews follow a similar structure, but differences can exist. Make sure you research the format, content and process of the interview you have been invited to. Find out about the type of interview, the timing and location. Ask if there is any particular preparation you can do. Find out if there is a panel interviewing you and what their names and position titles are. In a panel interview there may be three or more interviewers. Usually one takes the chair and introduces the others, each of whom takes turns at asking questions. One member may simply act as an observer. In answering questions, look firstly at the person who is asking the question, make eye contact with other members of the panel and then finish by looking at the person who asked you the question originally.

The typical interview structure shown here is a guideline only:

- Introductions, handshakes and invitation to take a seat.
- Opening small talk.
- You are encouraged to talk about yourself – for example, ‘Tell me about yourself’.
- Questions are asked to build links between the organisation and you. Some examples include, ‘Why do you want to work for us?’ ‘What do you have to offer us?’ ‘What are your career goals?’
- Behavioural interview questions are asked. (See explanation below).
- The interviewer describes conditions of work, such as hours of work, leave, and training.
- You are asked if you have any questions. Prepare between 3–5 questions.
- Interviewer closes, thank you and goodbyes.



Types of interviews

Behavioural interviews

This style of interview is used by most medium and large businesses today. The interviewer is looking for previous behavioural events that illustrate a particular competency or skill set. This is based on the premise that past behaviour predicts future performance. Questions will typically be prefaced by ‘give me an example of’ or ‘tell me about a time’ These events will then be probed further by: How? Why? What?

Behavioural interview preparation

- Analyse the position description and brainstorm behaviours associated with each skill or competency.
- Identify examples (situations and experiences) that best demonstrate these skills and traits. Examples can come from your academic study, interests, work and life experience.
- Apply the STAR model to help structure your answers:
 - S/T: Situation or Task: describe the situation or the task you were set
 - A: Action or Activities: describe the actions you took or the activities you performed.
 - R: Results: describe the result of your actions – What happened? What was the outcome?
- Rehearse examples of these previous situations and events to show **how** you approached these situations, **why** you used that particular method or action, and **what** the outcome or achievement was.

Case interviews

Case interviews are frequently used by consultancy firms and focus on understanding and exploring one or more situation(s) that may be typical in a consulting environment. You may be on your own or in a group case interview. The case interview is a test to evaluate your analytical ability, problem solving skills, team skills, creativity, curiosity, common sense and ability to articulate your ideas and solutions in a constructive way. Therefore the interviewer will be assessing the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes you have used to arrive at a solution, rather than looking for the ‘correct’ answer.

Case interview preparation

- Think about the business problems or situations you might encounter if working for the company. Refer to the position description, company website and literature – What will they be expecting you to do when working there?
- Develop a framework in which to evaluate problems, for example, review the situation, research and discuss options if part of a group case interview, consider alternative possibilities, eliminate unworkable solutions and prioritise outcomes.
- Read business journals and focus on articles discussing current issues facing companies in that industry/sector.
- Practice working through cases. Examples can be found on consulting companies websites, such as The Boston Consulting Group website http://www.bcg.com/join_bcg/interview_prep/process/default.aspx
- Refer to the ‘Case Interviewing’ handout available at Careers, Internships and Employment for further information.

Telephone interviews

The telephone interview is as important as a face-to-face interview, as it is your first formal interview contact with the organisation. A telephone interview can be used to 'screen' a candidate for a face-to-face interview or can replace a face-to-face interview if the organisation is located outside New Zealand. You may have one or more interviewers on the telephone.

Telephone interview preparation

- Prepare the same as you would for a face-to-face interview.
- Ensure the telephone number you give is correct and that it is a landline telephone i.e. not a mobile phone.
- If the telephone connection is a bad one, ask the interviewer to call you back in an attempt to secure a better quality line.
- Make sure that on the scheduled day and time of your interview you are in a private room i.e. one that is free from noise, distractions and interruptions.
- If you use a cordless telephone ensure that the battery is fully charged.
- If you want to have notes in front of you during the interview, make sure they're easily visible. Rustling through papers while the employer is listening does not give a good impression.
- Visualise the interviewer asking the questions and respond as if they were in front of you i.e. smile and make gestures. Finding an object to focus on, such as a picture on the wall, may assist you in this.
- Vary the tone of your voice and ensure you have clear pronunciation and are matching the voice pace of the interviewer.
- Dress for the telephone interview as you would for the face-to-face interview to help you get into an appropriate frame of mind for the interview.
- Consider standing up. This helps you stay alert and can impact the energy you project to the employer.
- Do not feel obliged to speak if there is a silent patch during the telephone interview as the interviewer is likely to be processing your answer and taking notes.
- Finally... take a deep breath and relax... let yourself be the best you can be on the day.

Video / teleconference interviews

A teleconference interview involves you and the interviewer being in different places each with a video camera and a microphone connected via a network. You will sit facing a camera and a television or computer screen on which you

Practice! Practice! Practice!

Like any other skill, the more you practice, the better you get. A mock interview can be useful, particularly with someone experienced in the interview process. Ask a friend, relative or Careers, Internships & Employment to help you.

will be able to see the interviewer(s). They will be similarly facing a camera and a television/ computer screen on which they can see you.

Video / teleconference interview preparation

- The structure and questions will be the same as a standard face-to-face interview.
- It is possible that there may be a slight delay on the video conference, which may be unsettling at first but usually is un-noticeable after a few minutes.
- If you are having trouble hearing or seeing the interviewer clearly, tell them immediately.

General interview tips

Before the interview

- Re-read the job description. Identify what you think are the key skills, experience and personal attributes they will be looking for. Prepare examples that showcase how you have demonstrated these.
- Re-read your application – interviewers often use information from CVs as a starting point for interview questions.
- Research the organisation (see page 14).
- Read the list of common questions in this guide, other books and websites. Think about possible answers. Don't memorise an answer verbatim – think about the main points you want to get across.
- Reflect upon your strong points and the particular messages you want to get across in the interview.
- Consider and prepare what questions you have about the job and the organisation. What do you want to know that you haven't been able to find out in your research?
- If you have any special requirements, ring and speak to the person organising the interview. State your requirement and why you need it, for example, if you have a mobility-related impairment, ask for a car park near to the entrance.

At the interview

- Be punctual.
- Be well groomed and neatly dressed in appropriate attire for the profession you have chosen. Don't worry if the interviewer is dressed more casually than you are.
- Nerves are natural! Just try to relax and answer as confidently as possible.
- Smile.
- Speak clearly and look directly at the interviewer while speaking.
- Ask to have a question repeated if you did not hear or understand it. It is better to do this than attempt to answer the wrong question.
- Emphasise your strengths.
- Before the interview ends, make sure you know how the selection will proceed. That is, when is the next step or when can you expect to know whether you've got the job.
- Thank the interviewer for his/her time.

After the interview

- Think back over the questions that were asked and your answers. Were there any questions that you found difficult or wish you had answered differently? Were there any unexpected questions? What would you do differently next time to improve?
- You may be asked to return for a second interview, so make notes which might be useful. For example, note questions you did not answer well – they may be asked again – and note questions you expected to be asked but weren't.
- Consider: Was your introduction professional? Was your body language positive? Did you make eye contact, smile and present well? Were your answers comprehensive? Were your questions relevant and concise? Did you do enough research and preparation?
- After the selection decision has been made, ring or email the employer/interviewer for feedback.

Common questions

No two people will interview in the same way. However, the following may be of some help to you regarding questions and answers.

- Questions asked at the beginning of an interview are usually intended to encourage you to talk and to help you relax.
- Questions asked by skilled and well-prepared interviewers will always have a purpose regardless of how irrelevant to the position they may seem.



AQUALINC

AQUALINC RESEARCH LIMITED

Our rivers, streams, aquifers and lakes are a national treasure.

At Aqualinc we are passionate about equipping New Zealand for world-class water management that retains their treasured qualities and sustainably provides socio-economic benefits through their use.

This is the purpose that motivates and guides Aqualinc's research and consulting.

If you share this passion, and have an honours degree or higher in engineering, resource economics, environmental science or agricultural science, we look forward to discussing opportunities for employment or post-graduate research at Aqualinc.

CONTACT Fiona Gannaway EMAIL f.gannaway@aqualinc.co.nz PHONE 03 964 6513

Water Allocation | Integrated Catchment Management | Groundwater Management | Irrigation

Experience – Expertise – Excellence

www.aqualinc.com

- Think about relevant examples to show you have the specific qualities and skills required for the position. Interviewers are seeking evidence of such qualities as your motivation, attitudes, initiative and self-insight.
- Answers you give must be your own, and in your own language and style. Don't memorise answers from books or the internet – think up your own, or at least put them in your own words.
- Employers may ask topical questions – read/watch the news and think about what might be of interest to the employer.

There are no model answers and it would be a mistake to try to formulate answers ahead of time. It is okay to ask for a moment or two to think before answering a question.

Here are some guidelines on answers to certain questions. Look at them critically and decide which would be the right way for **you** to answer them.

1 'Tell us about yourself!'

You could touch on your schooling, university study, work experience, interests, any special experiences (e.g. American Field Scholarship) or achievements.

2 'Why did you choose to major in ___?'

Avoid the impression of aimlessness or uncertainty. Remember: choosing a major out of interest and being willing to talk about this is a valid response. Show evidence of interest, logical thought, planning, research and a positive attitude to study.

3 'What do you do in your spare time?'

This is generally asked in an attempt to round out a picture of you as a person. Emphasise how actively you pursue spare time interests.

4 'Describe a situation where you have worked in a team?'

Quote examples of past participation and contribution in teams from work, sports, choirs, committees etc. Concentrate on your contribution in relation to what the team did, and use the STAR principle (see page 31).

5 'What appeals to you about this job?'

Think carefully before answering this question. Typically your answer may include how the position is relevant to your interests, previous studies and skills. Discuss how the position will enable you to further develop your skills.

6 'How do you handle pressure?'

Give examples of pressure situations you have been in and ways in which you have positively handled them. The employer is seeking to ascertain whether you have developed strategies for coping under pressure.

7 'What are your major strengths and weaknesses?'

Listing too many weaknesses will type you as very negative; however, denying any weaknesses will make you appear naive, arrogant or dishonest! The employer is seeking to ascertain your maturity and awareness of yourself. Remember weaknesses can be turned into strengths. For example, your need to understand the 'big picture' before making a decision shows that you don't rush into things.

8 'What are your long term plans, say in the next 5 years?'

Outline the goals you wish to achieve to give evidence that you are the sort of person who plans ahead.

9 'Why should we appoint you?'

Answer in terms of qualifications, skills and interests that you possess which are relevant to the position.

10 'How much do you know about the organisation?'

Your answer will reveal how much homework you have done before the interview. Read any

recruitment material, brochures or annual reports. Use your initiative to find out as much as you can about the organisation and cite ways in which you have gone about finding this information. Check their website and for press articles from the recent past.

11 'What about your disability?'

Job seekers with a disability, which is evident or has been disclosed, may be asked questions similar to these. Practice answering these so you will be ready to discuss them with confidence and to your advantage.

- How do you think your impairment / medical condition will impact on your work? In what ways did your impairment / medical condition cause you problems during your university study?
- How have you managed to overcome the barriers and difficulties you face?
- How will you be able to do the job if you have _____?

See page 38 of this booklet, our website or view resources in the Careers, Internships & Employment Reference Area for more information.

12 'Have you any questions?'

At some point in the interview you may be given the opportunity to ask questions. You should use this opportunity to clarify any points that you are unclear about in relation to the position you are applying for. In the following list you will find some examples of types of questions often asked by interviewees. Be careful to choose questions relevant for you.

- What on-going training could I expect?
- What is the organisation's attitude to further study?
- Where would a new graduate expect to be in five years?
- What performance appraisal system do you have?
- Is it possible to transfer (either within divisions, to other cities or to other countries)?
- What would a typical day be like for a new staff member?

Further reading

Careers, Internships & Employment have a wide range of books and DVDs on interviewing available for loan. Check out the list on www.canterbury.ac.nz/careers under Career Resources.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATE CIVIL ENGINEERS: THINKING ABOUT TAKING THE NEXT STEP?

MacDow

We're a leading engineering and construction company operating across New Zealand and the Pacific Islands; our expertise includes the construction of bridges, roads, tunnels, mining infrastructure and ocean outfalls.

We have a number of exciting opportunities available for engineers who are looking to start out their careers.

To find out about more and to register your interest in graduate or holiday work opportunities go to www.macdowcareers.com

**McCONNELL
DOWELL**
CREATIVE CONSTRUCTION™