



**Great people are  
our business**

Interview Guide  
**Get the advice you need**



# All you need to know for a successful interview

**Whether you are looking for your first job or moving on from your current position, making the right impression and selling yourself at an interview is essential to landing that dream role.**

With more than 25 years experience working with finance professionals across the region, our highly trained consultants are perfectly placed to guide you through all aspects of the interview process with top tips and expert advice on everything from confident preparation to smart questions to ask during your interview.

With our help, you will have the skills and knowledge to deliver an outstanding interview and be well on the way to securing the job that you have always wanted.

# Do...

- ✓ Find out as much as you can about your potential employer; read their annual report, check out their website and follow them on social media.
- ✓ Make sure you understand the type of business that they are involved with and brush up on your knowledge of the key issues and market trends.
- ✓ Understand what will happen on the day - how long will you need to be there for, will there be a written assessment or psychometric test involved?
- ✓ Read your CV and the job description and ensure you are confident on all the key points.
- ✓ Create the right impression from the outset by dressing in a professional and presentable manner. Make sure whatever you wear is comfortable and well fitting and clean!
- ✓ Make eye contact and keep it natural and friendly – smile at the appropriate moments and appear warm and open to any questions and comments.





- ✓ Be aware of your body language and make sure that you are sitting comfortably and not shuffling nervously in your seat.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic – employers are looking for people that can carry out the work efficiently but they also look for candidates that will add something to the company.
- ✓ Be positive about your own skills and attributes and try to link these back to the potential job role to show your suitability for the position.
- ✓ Keep the conversation flowing and give full and detailed answers. Stick to the point you want to make and give careful and concise responses to the questions.
- ✓ Take time to think about your answer to each question; if you are unsure ask for clarification and avoid long and convoluted answers.



# Don't...

- ✗ Be negative about your current or past employers; give positive reasons for why you are looking for a new role.
- ✗ Nothing creates a bad impression like somebody arriving late for an interview; get the exact address and do a trial run if possible. Aim to arrive 10 minutes early so you can relax and gather your thoughts beforehand.
- ✗ Ask about salary and benefits until it is raised by the interviewer; many would-be employers can be put off a candidate if they feel they are too interested in the potential salary and rewards rather than the position itself.
- ✗ Lie about your current salary to try and secure a better package. Most employers are very much aware of salary levels within their industries and will not look favourably upon someone that they feel is not being honest about their expectations.
- ✗ Cover up areas of your CV – you will get caught out! Be clear in your responses and explain how you have taken steps to improve or the circumstances behind any career gaps such as travelling, maternity leave or redundancy.
- ✗ Come across as being cocky or arrogant – you should be confident in your ability but make sure you are likeable with it.



*Don't create  
a bad  
impression!*

# Make a difference

How are you going to make a difference to your new employer's business?

By taking time beforehand to think about your strengths, achievements and areas that you are proud of, you will be able to sell yourself to the best of your ability and make you someone that they are keen to employ. Interviewers will not be expecting you to be perfect in every way so give thought to your weaknesses and be positive about how you are looking at areas for improvement.

**What will you do for me?**

**How will you reduce costs?**

**How will you improve profits?**

**How will you improve morale?**

**How will you improve systems?**



# Prepare key points

**Whilst it is impossible to predict what questions you will be asked, there are some common themes which are likely to come up during an interview.**

Take time to prepare some key points – but don't over-rehearse your answers; you want to come across as confident and natural in your responses.

- Why did you choose a career in your particular field or specialisation?
- What have you gained from each position that you have held so far?
- What interests you about the position and company you are applying for?
- What do you see as your key strengths?
- What areas would you like to improve upon?
- What are your ambitions for the future?







# How to avoid common job interview mistakes

**More often than not people come unstuck in job interviews by making some very common mistakes - make sure you know how to avoid these and you are bound to impress!**

## **Mistake Number 1 - Not doing your research about your potential new employer**

With so many sources of information – company website, annual reports, news articles and social media feeds – there's really no excuse for not being able to talk confidently and knowledgeably about the company you are hoping to join.

## **Mistake Number 2 - Not understanding the role**

Check the job description and link your skills and experience to what your interviewer is looking for. If you are unclear about anything then be sure to ask questions beforehand.

## **Mistake Number 3 - Focusing on your weak points**

Don't talk yourself down – turn the question around so you can highlight the skills that you do have and will be of benefit. Be positive and demonstrate a willingness to learn and gain more experience.

## **Mistake Number 4 - Not being in the right frame of mind**

Look upon your interview as a positive experience and keep reminding yourself of all the valuable skills and experience that you can bring to the company.

## **Mistake Number 5 - Not thinking before you speak**

Listen carefully to what the interviewer is asking and take a few deep breaths before answering. If you are not sure what the question means ask for clarification – it's much better than answering incorrectly.

# Second interview success

## how to clinch the job

**Never assume a second interview is a formality – even if you are the only candidate that has been asked back, make a poor impression and all your hard work could be undone as your dream role slips through your fingers.**



### **Do your research**

Ask for feedback from the interviewer and use this information to prepare your groundwork for the next stage. Recall any useful points that you gathered during the interview and demonstrate that you are serious about the opportunity and have enthusiasm for the challenge on offer.

### **Be positive**

You have been invited back so they clearly think that you could be a suitable fit – the interview is your opportunity to put that beyond any doubt.

### **Make the right connection**

A second interview is often an opportunity to determine which candidate will slot into the team the best and your interviewer will be looking to see how you would be able to gel with your potential work colleagues.

### **Address any concerns**

If there was a question that you don't feel you fully answered first time around expect to be asked it again – show your interviewer that you have given the matter further consideration.

### **Demonstrate your worth**

Identify areas where you can add more to what has been asked for in the job description to really set you apart from any other candidate.



## Facing a panel interview

**Going for a new role which involves being interviewed by a panel can seem a huge challenge - with an increased number of people to impress you may be more worried about making a mistake. With some thorough preparation you can be confident of delivering the best interview that you can.**

Find out who you will be interviewing with and their particular roles within the organisation. Consider the type of questions that they may ask and the areas of your CV that will be of most interest and relevance to them.

Be prepared by having some well-thought through answers to likely questions but don't over-rehearse your responses as they could sound forced and unnatural.

Build a rapport with each person and don't just focus upon those that are making you feel most comfortable. Try to draw others in when giving your responses through eye contact, body language or referring back to a previous point or question raised by another member of the panel.

Appear natural and confident as your body language is just as important as what you are saying during the interview. And don't forget to smile!

# What to expect at a competency based interview

**Competency based interviews go beyond assessing tasks and the technical attributes that you will need to undertake the job role but look more at personal characteristics to determine whether you can perform at the highest level.**

Your potential employer will ask about a situation in which you have clearly exhibited a particular competency – e.g. “I would like you to give me an overview of a recent situation in which you had to take a particularly disciplined approach to your work” – and then continue with some probing questions to establish more detail.

“Tell me about the situation.”  
“What was your role?”  
“Who else was involved?”  
“How did you feel when that happened?”  
“What exactly were you thinking then?”  
“What exactly did you do next?”  
“What exactly did you say then?”  
“What was the outcome?”

Your interviewer will be looking for clear and detailed responses. Make sure:

- ✓ to describe a situation with “I did” rather than “we did”.
- ✓ you don’t wait to be led by the interviewer - volunteer your thoughts on the matter.
- ✓ you think about what your thoughts and feelings were at the time as opposed to how you feel now.
- ✓ you are not vague in your responses - be specific and avoid answers such as “I usually do...”

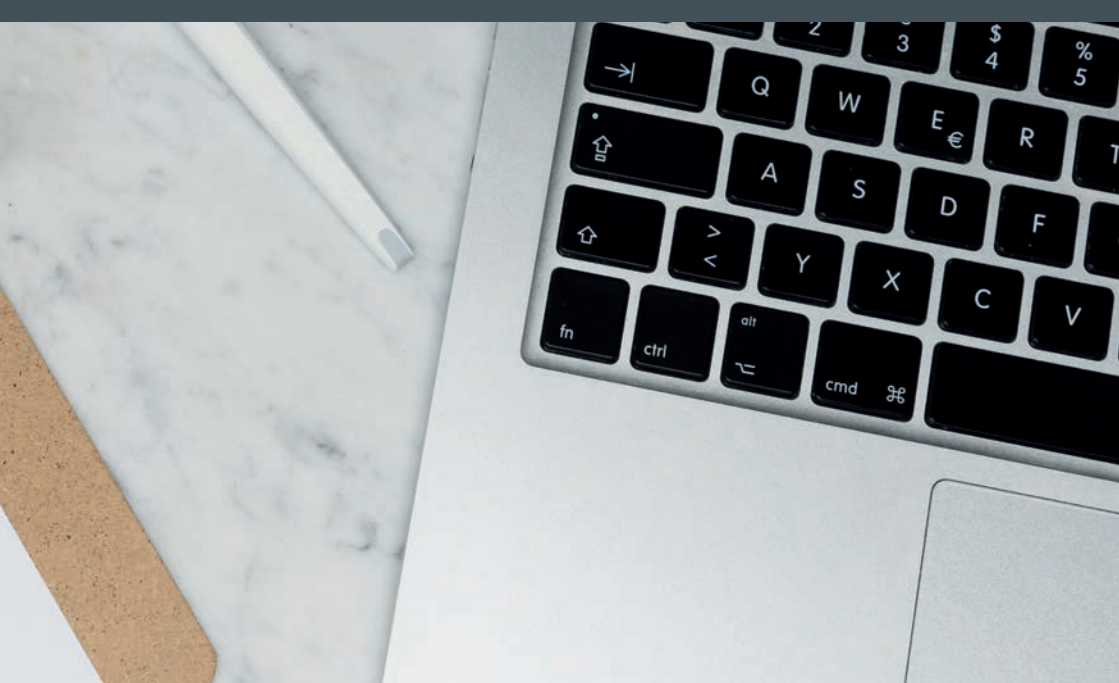


## Tips for your next Video Conference

- Be on time
- Check technology in advance
- Wear appropriate clothing
- Have good light in the camera place

**With more people working from home, an increasing number of interviews are being conducted remotely. If you are invited to an interview that is taking place over a platform such as Zoom or Teams, make sure you prepare in advance to ensure that everything runs smoothly.**

- ✓ Approach it with the same level of preparation and professionalism as a face-to-face interview
- ✓ Make sure you have all the relevant login details and passwords to join the meeting. Also ensure that you have contact details for the person leading the meeting – or an associate – who you can get in touch with if you have any problems on the day
- ✓ Be organised and do everything possible to avoid interruptions or having to step away to gather additional materials
- ✓ Check your device settings beforehand to make sure you can hear and be heard clearly be specific and avoid answers such as “I usually do...”



- ✓ Choose a location where you won't be disturbed and check your surroundings to ensure that anything that can be seen on screen gives the right impression
- ✓ Look into the camera and not at the image of yourself when speaking. If there are a number of people participating, be clear on who you are addressing by including their name in your response
- ✓ Prepare and circulate any useful materials, presentations or assignments completed as part of the interview process in advance just in case of any technical hitches on the day
- ✓ Adopt the same dress code for a virtual interview as if you were meeting in person
- ✓ It can be difficult to read body language remotely so make sure you are clear in your responses and don't forget to smile!
- ✓ At the end of the interview, clarify the expected timeframe for the next steps and remain professional until you are confident that the meeting has been ended by the host.

# 5 questions

that potential employers will want to be asked at the end of your interview

1. What do you enjoy about working here?
2. What is the company looking to achieve over the coming year / in the next five years?
3. What would a typical day be like for the person you appoint to the role?
4. What is the biggest challenge currently facing the company?
5. What can you tell me about the team / department that I would be joining?





# It's not over till it's over...

## **It is important to take time to reflect on your performance and make the right moves during the follow up stage.**

- Assess whether you genuinely think the role would be one that interests you. If so, make sure that this is communicated as part of your feedback, highlighting specific areas that appeal - employers are keen to recruit people who demonstrate they want to be part of the team.
- If there are areas where you don't think you answered the question as well as you could have done try to readdress these concisely in a follow up.
- Provide any supporting material as soon as you can after the interview; make sure you are clear on any deadlines and take care to cover all the points required.
- If you are invited for a second interview, ask if there are any areas from the first interview that they would like you to explain or expand upon in more detail.
- Prepare for a second interview as if it was your first meeting; don't assume it will be a friendly chat to simply seal the deal. Many second interviews involve somebody who didn't participate at your first meeting.
- Ask the interviewer for feedback post the interview. Even if you are not successful, this will provide useful points for you to work on for next time.

- **Is the role one that you would be interested in pursuing?**
- **Is there any more information you need to know about the company or the position?**
- **Is the location an acceptable commuting distance to undertake on a daily basis?**
- **What salary level would be acceptable to you for the position?**
- **Did the interviewer offer any clues as to their potential interest in you?**



Leeds: 0113 236 6300

Sheffield: 0114 261 1700

E: [contact@sharpconsultancy.com](mailto:contact@sharpconsultancy.com)

[www.sharpconsultancy.com](http://www.sharpconsultancy.com)



Follow us on twitter: [@sharp\\_consult](https://twitter.com/sharp_consult)

