

Ultimate Interview Guide

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Welcome to the Ultimate Interview Guide

Welcome!

Job interviews are a big deal. This could be the one meeting that stands between you and your dream job.

That's why our specialist consultants have created this guide to help you put your best foot forward.

In this guide, you'll learn how to prepare, how to respond in the actual interview, and how to follow up after the fact, no matter what stage you are at in your career. Of course, every case is different, so it's important you also trust your instincts.

The Bayside Group's specialist consultants have worked closely with candidates to help fulfil their career ambitions for over 40 years. We hope this guide will give you the confidence to show your strengths and reach the next step in your career.

Best of luck!

Before the
interview

Researching the company

It pays to do your research

Even if the organisation you're interviewing with is one you've been following for a while, it pays to do your research and make sure your information is up to date.

Key resources include:

- *Company website*
- *LinkedIn and other social media offerings*
- *Google*
- *Talk to any contacts you know within the organisation*
- *Key business activities: what do they do? What markets/industries are they in? Who are their clients?*
- *Brand values: these will theoretically make up the foundation for the manner in which the company does business, and can usually be found in a company's About Us section on their website.*
- *Vision and strategic direction: this will give you valuable insight into what the potential work-flow and working environment will be like in the future, and more importantly, how you fit with this direction.*

→ *Senior management and, if possible, managers in your department: many companies have key figures listed on their website. If not, have a look on LinkedIn and see if you can identify the background and career stories of your key contacts. It's always good to find ways to relate to the people you will be meeting, as this can make you feel more comfortable with them. Just be careful about how you approach it and comment only on professional information provided on the website or their LinkedIn profile.*

TIP



As you research a prospective employer, keep in mind they are likely doing similar research on you too. Make sure your social media profiles are private, professional and presented in such a way that you would be comfortable with a prospective employer seeing them. See our Social Media Guide for more information.

Understanding the role

Knowledge is key

This is crucial. While no interviewer will expect you to have a detailed understanding of the role before you meet them, you should have a good knowledge of the job description – and how your experience, skills and talents will make you a great fit.

If there is anything you don't understand about the role based on the ad, try Googling it or asking friends or contacts in the industry. This way, when it's time to ask questions in your interview, you will seem informed and enthusiastic.

Remember, asking questions is great and a critical part of the interview. However, asking unconsidered questions about what the company does, or what the basic functions of the role are, could make you seem unqualified. Always do your research – it calms your nerves and positions you as a strong candidate.

TIP



An eagerness to learn is a strength when it comes to gaining an understanding of your prospective role. Ask around in industry, do your research, and don't be afraid to check with your interviewer on details you were unable to find on your own. It shows an interest in the role – and ensures you don't waste time discussing a role that is not in line with your experience or career goals.

Preparing your questions

Preparing makes all the difference

'Do you have any questions for me?' It's the part of the interview many interviewees dread.

But, with a little preparation, you have no need to fear. The idea here is to show that you are knowledgeable about the industry, could do a great job in the role, and just want a bit more information to help you understand what success looks like to your Hiring Manager.

Here are a few potential questions for your interviewer:

- *What would an average day look like in this role?*
- *How does this department contribute and relate to the wider company?*
- *What would an ideal candidate for this role look like?*
- *Ideally, what would you be looking for me to achieve in the first 3 months/12 months in the role?*
- *How would you describe the culture in this business?*
- *What do you like about working here?*

TIP



Remember to be respectful in your questioning – you are ultimately trying to build rapport. Also, avoid asking a pre-planned question that has already been answered in the interview. This may lead the interviewer to question whether you were listening during the discussion.

Choosing the correct attire

Achieving the right look

Dressing too professionally can be forgivable.
Dressing too casually can cost you the job.

In order to get an idea about what to wear for your interview, take another look at the company's website and social media offerings. Is everyone wearing suits in all the photos? If yes, wear a suit. Are they all wearing dressy casual attire? Take it up a notch to be safe.

While it is great to show your personality, particularly for creative roles, it is always important to show respect for your interviewer's time by appearing clean, tidy and professional.

TIP



Review your interview outfit beforehand to make sure it fits comfortably and doesn't need laundering or mending. If it doesn't look right or makes you uncomfortable, wear something else. It is common to see people squirm throughout an interview due to a poor wardrobe choice.

What to bring along with you

Be ready to succeed

You will often be instructed to bring specific information to an interview, depending on the role, the recruitment process and the type of work you are applying for.

Make sure you take careful note and plan ahead so you have everything you need.

Examples of what you may be asked to bring with you include:

- *Two points of ID*
- *Relevant licenses*
- *Qualification certificates*
- *Examples of work (depending on your profession)*
- *Tax file number (if you're applying for temporary work)*

You should also bring along a copy of your cover letter and resume so you have the same reference point as the interviewer.

TIP



If you're unsure what to bring and forgot to ask, email the interviewer to confirm requirements if they haven't emailed them already. This is particularly relevant if you are applying for temporary work, as often the recruitment timeframes are shorter.

Planning your trip to the interview

Your journey starts now

Lateness to an interview is a total no-no. It implies that you are not serious about the role and puts you on the back foot before you even start.

Always aim to arrive well in advance and, if necessary, take a walk around the block or sit somewhere nearby so your arrival time to reception is around five minutes before your interview is due to start.

To ensure you are on time, plan your journey using Google Maps or the public transport journey planner for your city or town. It is completely appropriate to ask the person booking your interview for their tips on where to park if you are driving but if you don't feel comfortable asking, Google is your friend here as well.

TIP



It might be obvious to say don't be too early or too late, but it is all too common in our experience. If you're late, the interviewer may doubt your commitment. If you're too early, you may in fact be interrupting the interviewer's schedule and/or preparation time.

At the
interview

Staying calm & collected

Keeping nerves at bay

It's normal to feel nervous, but visible nerves can get in the way of giving your best impression.

- Practice your 'elevator pitch' with family and friends – this is your quick explanation of who you are and what you do, rounded off with why you want the role you're interviewing for. Often, an interviewer will start off by asking you to tell them about yourself, so if you have this answer down before you go in, you'll be off to a great start.
- On your way to the interview, breathe slowly in through your nose for three seconds, then out through your mouth for three seconds.
- When your interviewer asks a question you're not sure about, take a moment to take a breath and think about your answer. Remember, this is your interview, so it's okay not to answer every question within a millisecond of it being asked. It is also alright to ask for clarification on a question if you're not sure what is being asked.

- Don't put too much pressure on yourself – if you stumble or say the wrong thing, just take a breath and move on.
- Smile! Smiling is proven to make us feel happier – even if we're feeling nervous.
- Ask for a glass of water at the start of your interview. If you need a moment to think before answering a question, you can take a sip.

TIP



Natural nerves can be okay. Some people think that being nervous is a bad thing and try to compensate by being overly confident and not their true self. If you are showing natural nerves because you care about the job and really want it, this can be a positive quality.

First impressions

Be prepared

First impressions start earlier than you may think:

- *Turn your phone off well before you are near the site, and don't make phone calls immediately after the interview until you are in a private location*
- *Be warm and friendly with everyone you encounter outside or within the building – you never know who you might make an impression on*
- *You may need to make small talk with reception or as you are walking to the interview room, so be prepared and keep it professional*
- *Be enthusiastic*

TIP



Reception will often provide feedback on positive or negative impressions of you, so keep this in mind when you are entering the site.

Appropriate VS inappropriate

What not to do

While the expected level of formality will vary from business to business, there are a few key behaviours that are never appropriate for an interview, including:

- *'Ghosting' or not showing up for the interview without notice*
- *Bringing friends or family to the interview*
- *Taking off your shoes*
- *Making sexually suggestive, politically charged or discriminatory comments*
- *Behaving aggressively or shouting at your interviewer – if the interviewer is offensive or upsets you, take the higher ground and excuse yourself from the interview*
- *Chewing gum or eating*
- *Answering your phone*
- *Swearing – don't use words you would tell a three year old are unacceptable*
- *Bad-mouthing previous employers or managers*

TIP



Sadly, all of these examples are ones our consultants have witnessed. Use your judgement and manners and you are sure to behave appropriately. If you have concerns about what might be appropriate behaviour, feel free to ask your recruitment consultant before a client interview – we are here to help.

Body language

Make a positive impression

What you say verbally in any type of meeting is only half of the message you convey. It's crucial to be aware of the message you send with your movements, body position and eye contact.

- *Use a firm, confident handshake – not too firm though!*
- *Maintain eye contact to a comfortable level. If you feel you are staring, briefly shift your gaze to your interviewer's cheek or chin*
- *Sit up straight with your shoulders back*
- *Take your cues from your interviewer – mirror their pose*
- *Keep arms and legs uncrossed*
- *Rest hands on top of each other in your lap or on the table*
- *Nod and smile often, but not constantly*

TIP

At the end of the day, it is most important that you appear to be engaged. If you appear disinterested or like you'd rather be anywhere else, the interviewer will have concerns.

Responding to questions

TIP

→ If you are unsure, nervous or shy to talk about yourself and your job successes at an interview, there's no need to be. That's what the interviewer wants to hear. Think of yourself as the narrator of a compelling short story, and convey the elements of your story relevant to the key criteria of the role. Avoid making your story into a novel that is too detailed, dramatic or goes off on tangents!

Useful guidelines

Interviews will tend to follow a fairly unsurprising structure, with a chat about your background, motivations, skills and strengths. Each interviewer has their own style and a professional recruiter will have his or her own ways of seeing the real you – not just the version of you on your best behaviour.

When you are asked to outline your experience, keep your response to between 5 – 10 minutes and ensure the most relevant points are highlighted.

The interviewer then has an opportunity to ask follow up questions.

Tips for answering questions:

- *Don't interrupt the interviewer – let them finish before you start speaking*
- *Listen carefully to each question and answer accordingly*
- *When answering competency based questions, be specific and expand on your resume rather than repeating it*
- *In answering behavioural based questions, describe the scenario, your approach and the outcome. These questions provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate a range of capabilities, such as adaptability, resilience, problem solving, creativity and leadership*
- *Don't be overly familiar or make assumptions – instead ask questions if you're unsure*
- *Be enthusiastic and avoid negativity in your responses*
- *If you're interviewing via video, consider connectivity reliability, background, lighting and external sounds – make sure your environment is professional*

Responding to questions (cont.)

If you have prepared properly and brushed up on your own career history (a quick refresh of the duties from your roles more than a couple of years ago is always a good idea) and the position description, you should be able to answer straightforward questions naturally and without too much anxiety. But what about those curveball questions?

To help you prepare, we've put together three of the most common 'difficult to answer' questions, along with how to answer them like a pro.

1. Where do you see yourself in five years?

This is a tough one, as many candidates will trip over their feet trying to give the answer they think their interviewer wants. In this case, it's best to answer with the professional truth. The professional truth is about your career aspirations only, as opposed to the personal truth, which might include things like 'In five years' time, I hope to spend my days relaxing on a yacht in the French Riviera.'

Where you see yourself in your career in five years – will you be a manager? A director? A partner? Running a division or firm? Leading a team of workers or developing

cutting edge solutions for your employer? Working in a complementary area of expertise? Try to keep from promising to still work in your interviewer's business – or worse, talking about going to work somewhere different! Keep things broad so your interviewer gets an idea of whether your goals and intentions align with the trajectory of the role they are hiring for.

The difference is obvious when we frame it like this, but there can be personal truths that seem more like professional ones, such as achieving health or fitness goals, or topping a personal best on the golf course. Be sure to keep your aspirations professional only.

TIP

Keep in mind at least 75% of interviewers would struggle to answer this question. If you're really unsure, it is acceptable to discuss the experience or skills you wish to gain, particularly if you are in the early stages of your career, or relay your two year goals instead.

Responding to questions (cont.)

2. What is your greatest weakness?

This is one of those daunting questions that many professional recruiters still ask. It often looms in the back of the minds of job seekers and preparation is the antidote to anxiety – so here is how to answer it.

Once again, it's a simple case of telling the professional truth. What is your greatest professional weakness? Do you have a bad memory? Do you have to check yourself when working on group projects as you have a tendency to take over? Are you very competitive?

All weaknesses have another side to the coin – strengths. Someone with a bad memory can be well organised and work to lists. An individual who tends to take over could be a natural leader who is developing their listening skills. A competitive person may make a great sales professional.

Consider your weakness and then think about the strength that comes along with it – and be sure to include that in your answer, on the off chance this question does come up.

Also, consider the weakness you highlight in the context of the role. For example, don't use listening as a weakness if you are interviewing for a leadership position, or working in a team if the environment you will be working in is collaborative.

TIP

→ The most common answer to this questions is being a perfectionist. Try not to use this answer as increasingly, workplaces require people to be fast-paced. Perfectionist behaviour may be considered a barrier to a person's ability to get the job done on time or be flexible.

Responding to questions (cont.)

3. Tell us about your greatest professional failure/a conflict you resolved

This is a popular question and, although it sounds like a tough one, it's actually a great opportunity to show off your resilience and agility – two highly sought after attributes.

Discussing your greatest professional failure is a chance to show you have learned from what went wrong. When describing a project that ran over budget or an order that was not delivered on time, try to identify what factors contributed to the failure, and finish by sharing how you do things differently now as a result of your learning.

When describing a conflict, be sure to own your part as well. Rather than talking about how a former colleague was a 'difficult personality', try to focus on the issue rather than the personalities, what went wrong, what you learned and how you'd avoid such a conflict in the future.

Everyone makes mistakes – but a person with potential learns from them.

TIP



The 'conflict' question provides insight into a person's emotional intelligence (EQ) in how they manage relationships with colleagues. So many times we see people get very personal or emotional when answering this question. What we are ideally looking for is a professional and constructive approach that enables people to move past an issue and achieve an effective outcome.

Asking your questions

Question time

Interviewers will typically offer you the opportunity to ask any questions when the interview is drawing to a close. Make the most of this chance and ask the questions you've prepared, along with anything that might have come up during the course of your interview.

Don't be shy – well thought out, relevant questions show you are interested in the role and the company, so take this moment and make it your own.

TIP



Asking one or two questions shows us you're interested and that you have understood the discussions held during the interview, so make them count. It is important for you to ensure that the role is right for you.



Ending the interview

Final impressions

When the interview is complete, it's time for goodbyes. If you are keen on the role, be sure to say so and inform your interviewer that you're looking forward to hearing from them.

At this point, the interviewer mentioning 'next steps', such as contacting you once the shortlist is completed or getting in touch next week to schedule another meeting, tend to be good signs – but this isn't set in stone.

Be sure to offer a firm handshake with eye contact and a smile, and thank your interviewer for their time. Last impressions count too, after all.

TIP



Make sure you are clear on the recruitment process moving forward, so you are aware of timeframes for follow up afterwards.

After the
interview

Should I follow up?

Show interest within reason

Following up is a great sign that you are keen for the role, within reason. Sending a polite email to your interviewer after your meeting can affirm your interest, while calling every day can be a little much.

Use your judgement – if the interviewer was actively contacting you before you met and seemed keen at the interview, a quick call after a week or so is within reason. Some companies move very quickly to shortlist, while others can take some time, so be patient.

TIP



We know this sounds awful but the reality is that consultants are really busy, as are Hiring Managers who are understaffed or taking on extra work during the hiring process. By no means are we saying don't follow up, just keep this in mind when making follow up requests.

How long should I wait to be contacted?

There isn't a set rule

There is no hard and fast rule that applies here unfortunately. If you are dealing with a recruiter, it's reasonable to expect an update within a few days, but if you are dealing directly with a Hiring Manager, they have their daily tasks and responsibilities to take care of first, which can mean you're waiting a little longer to hear back.

As a general rule, if you haven't heard anything for a month, you can assume another candidate was successful in winning the role. However due to internal changes, some roles can take more time.

TIP → There isn't really a straightforward rule – sometimes an organisation is waiting out a change, a Hiring Manager is off sick or on holidays, or they are waiting for final approval on a salary. While it's not ideal, there may be extenuating circumstances that extend a hiring process. We've seen it all!

Should I apply for other roles?

What to do while waiting for a response

If there are other roles you are interested in, by all means apply. It is never a good idea to keep all your eggs in one basket but, by the same token, don't just apply for anything and everything.

It's also fine to let your interviewer know that you are looking elsewhere if they ask – but there's no need to raise this information unprompted.

TIP



Until the deal is done, you are a free agent. Unfortunately we have seen roles withdrawn at the last minute, so we have an ethical obligation to make you aware of this. You have every right to keep your eyes open (and your fingers crossed!).



What if I'm unsuccessful?

Be gracious in defeat

This won't be the last time your interviewer is hiring and you want them to remember you as a great candidate who missed out by a small margin – there could be better luck next time.

TIP



If you don't get the role, thank the organisation for the opportunity to be considered and follow up with an email thank you as well as this can build relationships for future opportunities. This advice also extends to leaving a position.



How many interviews will I have to do?

What is standard?

It will depend on the nature of the role. Many roles will require multiple interviews prior to an offer being made. Usually you will meet with a recruiter or Human Resources representative, then the Hiring Manager, and there could be other people within the organisation who want to meet you, from potential collaborators to senior management.

Anything up to three interviews is fairly standard practice, but the number can be higher than this particularly if a company is using a recruitment firm, the role is senior, or requires a high security clearance.

TIP

Be prepared for one – two interviews which is the most common practice.

The offer

Congratulations!

You've been offered the role. Remember that an offer is just that – an offer, which can still be negotiated and/or withdrawn, so neither you nor your prospective employer is bound by any contract until you have both signed on the dotted line.

Always ensure that you review your employment contract carefully, and make sure that you are comfortable with your salary, the terms and any benefits mentioned (or not mentioned). It is okay to ask questions but if you're not sure, we recommend you seek advice from your network first – i.e. a friend, colleague or family member who works in HR or law, or who works as a Hiring Manager.

TIP



Be clear about what you will and won't accept – changing your mind at the last minute or starting a job and then leaving will impact on your reputation in the marketplace.