Checklist Job interview

Congratulations, you have an interview! Based on your CV and motivation letter you have been invited for a first job interview. What comes into play here is listed in this checklist.

Goal of a job interview

An interview is a good way to find out whether you and the organisation are a match. The interviewer wants to know whether you are suitable for the job - rational deliberation - and wants to know if there is a ‘click’; if you fit into the team/organization - emotional deliberation-. Additionally, you want to know whether the job/organization matches your expectations. Is the job what you expect? And what about the organizational culture?

Different kinds of interviews

Every company has their own style of interviewing. It depends on the procedures, location and/or recruitment phase what an interview looks like. It might happen that there is one interviewer, a committee, an interview of only ten minutes or the whole day. Prepare yourself in any way that is possible.

Different ways

- Personal interview – most common;
- Case interview – this type of interview is about solving a case;
- Phone interview – it is the challenge to leave a good impression only with your voice;
- Interview via Skype or another video platform – make sure your background is quiet;
- Conversation during a career fair or event – even an informal conversation can give you and the organisation a first impression if there is a match;
- And be aware: there might be more than one interview round; first, second or third round.

The interviewer

In general, you will be told who will conduct the interview. If you are not told beforehand, make sure to ask. Also, ask whether there is more than one interviewer and what their role is. A recruiter has a different approach than a line manager. Keep in mind what interests someone might have.

Possible interviewer

- Recruiter / HR employee or manager
- (line)manager
- Director or CEO
- Future colleague
- External recruiter / headhunter
- Lecturer or someone of the faculty, if it concerns an academic position
- Researcher or someone in your field of expertise
Preparation

Look at applying for jobs as sport. What do sportsmen do before a match to be in shape? They have a ritual. Use these kinds of rituals to prepare yourself for the match: the job interview. Such a ritual will put you in the right mindset to 'score'. Think of the right preparation for you to perform the best you can and be in good condition, mentally and physically.

- Read the vacancy and the company website – learn what the company’s core business is;
- Google the company, the interviewer and yourself – be aware of what people can find out about you;
- Use LinkedIn to find out who work at the company – if you know someone, ask what an interview looks like and to what you have to pay attention to;
- Search for news about the organisation, the industry and your field of expertise – what is going on? Who are the competitors?
- What questions can you expect? – check the ‘tricky questions’ document;
- Think of good examples you want to use;
- Prepare an ‘elevator pitch’ – practice, so your story becomes natural;
- Come up with questions you want to ask – what is not clear? Write your questions down and bring them to the interview;
- Do you have the opportunity to pass by the office, use it. What is the best way to get there? What is the dress code? This will help with your choice of outfit;
- Make sure you look well groomed – avoid having bad breath;
- Plan your journey and leave on time – make sure you have a ‘plan B’;
- Bring the contact details of the interviewer and/or company;
- Make sure you have a good night’s rest before the interview.

Dress code

- Wear clean clothes that are ironed and polish your shoes;
- Match your outfit to the company / position, but don’t exaggerate; it should represent you;
- If you have doubts: better overdressed than underdressed;
- Invest in a new suit or accessories – it doesn’t have to be expensive;
- Make sure you have an eye catcher -necklace or tie-, so that the interviewer looks at you and will remember you. Be aware of exaggeration.

Avoid

- A lot of red – this gives a dominant impression;
- Jeans, bare toes or shoulders;
- Clothes that are too big or too small;
- Keep your chest hair and cleavage out of sight;
- Be aware that a design with prints or stripes starts to ‘dance’ before the eyes of the interviewer;
- Too much perfume, make up or accessories will distract
- Stains, a bad breath or greasy hair are not recommendable.
General tips

- An interview is a two-way conversation: be curious and ask questions
- Speak slowly
- Speak the language of the company
- Keep it short
- Keep it simple—don’t make a wrong impression by using complex language;
- Show that you listen, by nodding your head;
- Make sure you don’t forget to research if there is a ‘click’;
- Stay positive and friendly;
- Use the open questions of the interviewer to pitch yourself (what, how, where, who, when);
- Be honest about (gaps in) your CV;
- If you don’t understand a question: let the interviewer know;
- Think a few seconds about your answer if it is a difficult question;
- Take notes for a next interview;
- Don’t forget to switch your phone off!

Not recommended during an interview

- Interrupting the interviewer won’t be appreciated (even if the interviewer is boring);
- Try to avoid discussions – ask yourself ‘what will I gain with this?’;
- Don’t mention salary by yourself during a first interview round – this will be discussed later in the procedure. However, do find out what a common salary is. If the interviewer mentions it, you know what to answer;
- Try to avoid socially desirable answers – nobody is perfect;
- Don’t talk negatively about a former employer;
- Often people start talking too much when they are nervous. Try to avoid this;
- Don’t talk about ‘we’ if you are asked about your responsibilities in a team or project.

Example of the structure of an interview

Entry / introduction

- Make sure you’re there on time (5-10 minutes before the interview);
- Pay attention to or greet other employees you meet;
- Check yourself in the mirror before the interview;
- BE YOURSELF;
- Introduce yourself properly and make eye contact – be aware of a ‘weak hand shake’ or a hand shake that is too firm;
- SMILE;
- Be enthusiastic – you’re looking forward to it!
- Show the interviewer you’re prepared (pen, paper, notes);
- If you’re too nervous, mention this – everybody will understand that you’re tense;
- Adopt a relaxed attitude during the interview – not ‘closed’ with your arms folded.
Ice-breaker

The time before the interview actually starts, allows the interviewer (or you) a light-hearted question or comment. This is not substantively valuable, but is about a first impression. It shows your social and communicative skills.

Questions by the interviewer

The interviewer will ask you questions concerning your CV or motivation letter or about topics which are important to him/her. Answer a question concise, complete, without expanding too much on the subject. Make sure your answer provides room for a follow-up. Try to answer the questions correctly in order to keep your mind on what qualities you want to highlight. You do not have to wait until someone asks you about your strengths to draw attention to them.

Example:
You want to emphasize that you are independent, but you get the question: ‘why did you choose for study X? Answer: “I deliberately started looking for a study that offers a lot of space to work independently. In addition, I find it very interesting to delve into the following topics ... ”

STAR(R) or STAR(E) methodology

Often used by interviewers during a job interview is the STAR(R) or STAR(E) methodology. The core of this methodology is: ‘behavior from the past is the best predictor for the future’. While using the STAR(R) or STAR(E) methodology the interviewer doesn’t only ask about abstract competencies, but also about argumentation and ‘proof’ of this competency.

Example:
Are you capable of taking initiative?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>In my spare time I assist the forester with a wild boar project in the Veluwe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>I follow tracks, count the wild boars and process the information in a computer programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Based on this data, I signal trends directly and actively carry ideas for actions to keep the wild boar population at the right level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Result</td>
<td>The forester can act, even before the official reports were made. The wild boar population has therefore remained unchanged over the last four years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R or E</td>
<td>Reflection or Evaluation</td>
<td>My work is relevant, but the only one who sees it is the forester. He benefits from it and takes credit for my work. Next time I would pay more attention to make sure I receive credit for my work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remember that it is about what you have learned. This way you are able to give a positive twist to a ‘failure’ or weakness.
Questions of you as an applicant

During the interview, the interviewer decides whether you are suitable for the job. Don’t forget to figure out if you like the job as well. Most of the times it is common to ask questions during the interview. Use the question of the interviewer to ask a follow up question. If this is not the case or if you have more questions, there will be an opportunity at the end of the interview to ask your remaining questions. By asking the right questions, you show the interviewer that you are aware of what the job contains, but also that you are a critical person.

Ask whatever is important to you, but watch out that you are not too forward. It is common to discuss topics such as salary and working hours during a next interview. However, it is useful to inquire about the composition of the team or leadership style of your manager. Examples of questions can be found in the document named ‘tricky questions’.

Keep an eye on the interviewer. If you notice that they respond enthusiastically to your questions, you can continue. If you notice that he or she does not appreciate your questions, because there is someone else waiting, keep it short.

Closure

It is good to know what the next step will be in the application procedure. What does the rest of the procedure looks like and when can you expect a response? Sometimes the interviewer will ask what you thought of the interview. Please reflect in a few sentences or words.

After the interview

If you have to wait for a long time or a response, you can kindly inquire by yourself. Don’t sound desperate, but ask about the situation.

Hired or rejected

You’ve got the job: congratulations! Ask about the upcoming procedure and what is expected from you in this stage. Wait with your announcement towards your friends and family and on social media. This also applies if you have to hand in your resignation for you current job, if you have one. The advice is, to share the good news after you’ve signed the contract.

What if you are rejected?
• self-reflection won’t hurt you – why do you think it went wrong?
• Ask the company, if possible
  • What did they think of your CV and letter? And of the interview?
  • Do they have tips for improvement?
  • What are the strengths of the applicant who is hired?
  • Will they keep your CV for the future?
  • Is it allowed to contact them again?