

Job interview

Congratulations, you are invited to a job interview! Based on your CV and application letter, you are invited to a first interview. What comes into play and how do these interviews work? The goal of a job interview is to find out whether there is a match between the applicant and the organisation.

- **Rationally:** the interviewer wants to confirm that you are qualified, so they will gauge your suitability based on your qualities, experience and motivation.
- **Emotionally:** they will check if there is a connection; do you fit in the team?

At the same time, a job interview is meant for you as an applicant to find out whether the job matches your expectations, enthusiasm, and motivation.

Preparing for a job interview

Clothing and appearance

- Always be dressed as yourself, but show the best version of yourself. People automatically associate a neat and tidy appearance with positive qualities. The recruiter or employer will notice that you have paid attention to your preparation. So wear something you feel comfortable in, but which looks decent as well.
- Adjust the clothes you wear to the type of company. Some organisations value a formal outfit (a suit-jacket or -shirt), while other companies prefer a more casual style. To find out the style of the company, you can check the website ('our team' /'our people'-page) or LinkedIn-profiles of people working at the company, because this gives you an idea of the way the employees present themselves. When in doubt, err on the side of formal rather than casual.
- Plan your outfit in advance and make sure it is clean and ironed.
- Short sleeves (men) and tank tops (women), too much cleavage, pants that are too tight, short skirts, sandals or slippers: they are all in no way representative.
- Do you have visible piercings or a lot of earrings? Temporarily remove these for the job interview. Make sure to hide visible tattoos as well.
- As a woman it is okay to wear make-up, but be sure not to use colours that are too dark or too bright. Wearing brightly coloured lip stick or nail polish is also not recommended.
- Wearing a notable accessory (tie, shawl, necklace) could help the recruiter remember you and it shows your personality.
- Make sure to polish your shoes.

Ready knowledge and conversation skills

- Research who you will be talking to. Look them up on the website or via LinkedIn.
- Read up on the organisation. Check out their website, strategy, annual plan, latest communications (social media, the news). Prepare a number of good questions that you can ask (see sample questions below). This way, you can show that you have prepared well (and are thus motivated), and you yourself get more clarity about the position or the organisation.
- Highlight in the vacancy which qualities/knowledge/experience are required and which tasks you will be doing. Matters that recur more than once are probably important to the organisation, so it is good to have at least some examples of these ready.
- Think about which sides of yourself you want to emphasise, make sure they are clearly visible on your CV and in your letter and have examples ready. Discuss this with someone who

knows you well: where do they think your opportunities lie? What should you highlight in the interview?

- Make sure you prepare answers to the most frequently asked questions during a job interview (below).
- A recruiter or employer likes to hear examples, so he/she can imagine what your behaviour is like. Try to explain your qualities and interests using examples.
- If you are very nervous, it could help to practice with someone prior to the interview.
- Have the printed job announcement, your CV, letter, list of questions, pen and paper ready.
- Choose a preparation that allows you to be both mentally and physically 'in shape'.
- Prepare your trip and make sure you can get there in time. Go for a walk in the neighbourhood and report at the front desk 5 to 10 minutes before the interview.

During a job interview

The interview will usually consist of the following parts:

- The application committee introduces itself;
- An introduction is given about the organisation, the team and the position;
- The applicant introduces him- / herself;
- The application committee asks the applicant questions;
- The applicant asks questions to the application committee;
- The application committee tells about the rest of the application procedure;
- The interview comes to an end.

Depending on the organisation, the style of is looser (a conversation where questions are asked back and forth) or more formal (more of an interview).

The start of a job interview

Mindset

Be sure of yourself: you have been invited for an interview, so the company already sees potential in you!

Entering the company premises

As soon as you enter the company premises, act as if you are already a colleague. Greet people nicely, be polite and gallant, e.g. ask if you can hold open a door, help out if possible.

Being picked up

1. Maintain an open posture: shoulders back, straight back, balance on two legs, let your arms hang loosely along your body.
2. Look at your conversation partner, turn your body towards them.
3. Put a smile on your face and a 'twinkle' in your eyes.
4. Give a firm handshake when introducing yourself. Pronounce your name clearly, in a low tone of voice ("Hello, I am Tom").
5. Create a positive atmosphere, e.g. pay a compliment, say something positive about the weather or ask a simple question to start a conversation, e.g. what is someone's job or how long have they worked here? This says a lot about your social/communication skills.

Entering the meeting room

Repeat step 1 to 4 to introduce yourself to any other conversational partners. If you do not know where to sit, do not dawdle but ask clearly, 'where shall I sit?'. Say 'sir/madam' and if that feels

odd, ask if you can say 'you'. When you yourself are approached very informally by the application committee, it is wise to go along with this.

'Something to drink?'

A cup of tea or coffee often stays hot for a long time. Coffee thereby provides extra adrenaline. A glass of water is a safe choice.

The middle of a job interview

The questions

The questions the interviewer will ask are mainly about your CV and letter or questions that are important to them (see appendix for frequently asked questions). First of all, realise that the aim of each question is more or less the same, namely, to gauge your suitability (qualities, motivation, personality).

Your answers

Your answers will be similar as well, i.e. varied between:

- **Examples:** by giving examples of your experiences, you convince the committee of your suitability. So, illustrate your answers by using examples.
- **Short and to the point:** or, for variety's sake, make your answer to the point, leaving room for questions (do not just answer with yes or no, because even if someone asks closed questions, a short explanation will keep the conversation going). Be prepared for the fact that the application committee will probably ask follow-up questions. For example, with the questions: Can you give an example? How did you go about it in a different setting?
- **Show your best side:** when answering the questions, try to keep in mind which qualities you want to highlight. You do not have to wait for someone to ask you about your strong points in order to be able to name them.

Example:

You want to emphasise your independence, but you are asked: 'why did you choose study x?'
Answer: 'I deliberately went looking for a study program with plenty of room for independent work. I also find it interesting to study the following subjects: ...'

Try to get a conversation going instead of an interrogation

People are also looking for a nice colleague. This is a less tangible element, which is about you as a person. You can influence this by:

- Asking questions yourself
- Responding to someone else's answers
- Incorporating something personal into the conversation
- A connection often forms faster if you have something in common, such as having studied at the same university, living in the same neighbourhood, same hobby. Often the beginning and the end of the interviews are good times to look for these kinds of aspects.
- Look the interviewer in the eye, this makes you come across interested and sincere. If there are several people present in the interview, make sure you do not just look at the person asking most of the questions. When answering, alternate your gaze so that everyone feels involved in the conversation.
- Try to come across as positive, energetic and relaxed. Keep your hands above the table, sit and stand straight and use your hands when you speak. Switch positions once in a while. Show that you are listening and nod your head.

- Try not to fuss with your hair, face or pen as this can be distracting or disruptive. Such things can sometimes happen when you are nervous, but if you are aware of these things you can catch it ahead of time.

Dealing with nerves

Know that no one expects you to be able to do everything at once and that everyone understands that a job interview is exciting. Almost everyone gets a little anxious before a job interview. There are ways of suppressing your nerves, but often this is not necessary. Accept that you are nervous. Your interviewer understands that you are tense and may not expect otherwise. Make sure you are well prepared in order to avoid difficult situations as much as possible. If you do not have a good answer to a question, be honest and say that you need to think about it a bit longer. You can also explain that you are willing to learn and give an example of how you have been able to quickly put new information into practice before.

Towards the end of the job interview

- **Follow up on a question from the interviewer and ask questions during the interview yourself as well** about the position and the organisation. You will come across as interested and well prepared, and it is important for you to figure out whether you will feel at home in this position and organisation.
- **Ask the questions that are important to you, but be careful not to get ahead of yourself.** Often the practical matters about terms of employment, such as salary and working hours, will be dealt with in a subsequent interview. It is useful to ask about the team, the style of leadership of the manager, the main challenges the team is facing or major projects.
- **Pay close attention to the interviewer's reaction (non-verbal).** If you notice that they respond enthusiastically to your questions, then you are welcome to ask more. If you notice someone is not keen on this, for example because the interview is running late and they have another appointment, keep it as short as possible.
- **At the end, the recruiter will always ask if you have any questions.** If you cannot think of a question, ask about the further procedure, how many candidates are left, when can you expect a response?

After a job interview

Do not expect a response too soon. The application committee still wants to talk to others about you and there might be other candidates who need to be interviewed. After more than two weeks, you can call to ask politely and curiously if anything is known about the procedure. Do not be pushy, but show that you are still interested in the position.

Rejected?

Usually, you will receive a response to the interview within 2 weeks. And yes, sometimes this comes along with the disappointment of rejection. No need to panic and give up, but evaluate! Call or email the person who interviewed you and tell them that you would like to learn from this experience. Ask about the reasons for rejection. Try to ask more questions and request concrete tips for a future interview.

Online interviews

Until recently, most job interviews were conducted at the employer's location. But if that is not convenient or possible, an online interview via Skype, Zoom or another platform is a good

alternative. Bear in mind that, especially in the preparation, things sometimes go slightly differently. Here are a few useful tips:

1. **Make sure your surroundings are quiet.** Inform your housemates or hang a note on the door so that there is no noise or distraction. Also, just to be sure, keep your pets out of the room.
2. **Provide a calm background.** A white wall is convenient, but not always available. Clear away as much as possible. In some programmes you can also 'blur' the background by checking this option beforehand. If you use a virtual background, make sure that you do not move too quickly through the image, for example with hand gestures. This can make it a bit unclear.
3. **Position your device so that the camera is at eye level.** A camera that is too low will never give a nice picture. If the camera is too high, the other person will be looking down on you. Not very convenient either.
4. **Make sure there is no light source behind you (and certainly not an unshaded window).** A light that is not too strong and that illuminates your face from the front is best. Check beforehand what gives the best effect.
5. **Check the platform.** If the platform is new to you, practise with it first. You can also ask your employer if it is possible to test the technique the day before.
6. **Strong Wi-Fi.** Find out where you have a good signal. If necessary, disconnect other devices from the Wi-Fi so that your signal is optimal. In any case, turn other devices off or silence them (not on vibrate) so you are not disturbed by notifications.
7. **Have a pen and paper within reach.** Nothing is more annoying than someone who is typing while you are in a video call.
8. **Look into the lens while talking, not at your own image on the screen.** If you keep enough distance from the camera, it will seem as if you are really looking at the person you are talking to. But in the meantime, you can also follow his or her facial expression on the screen.
9. **Repeat the question.** Confusion is more likely to arise online. To indicate (or test) that the question has been properly understood, repeat it before answering.

Practising a job interview

Are you struggling with formulating your answers? Or do you want to practice with the questions? Make an appointment with the Career Officer!

Appendix: frequently asked questions

1. What do you like about our organisation? Why do you want to work here?

Choose something that matches one of your positive qualities. This gives you a good opportunity to draw attention to it.

2. What are the current market trends?

Make sure that you have thoroughly researched the organisation and that you are up to date on current projects. Check recent news updates, know the mission/vision of the organisation and focus on matters that highlight your strengths.

3. Why should we choose you?

Answer briefly and to the point. It is better to have one strong argument than a series of lesser ones.

4. Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years? What is your vision for the future?

Do not get carried away; an applicant who expresses too much ambition may come across as someone unlikely to stick around for very long. But answering 'no idea' is certainly not helpful. Indicate a direction. For example: "I would like to develop myself further in the direction of managing and guiding others."

5. Why do you want to leave your current job?

Although this may be tempting, you should refrain from describing your current situation negatively. Put a positive spin on your situation. For example: "I am looking for more responsibility" rather than: "I get absolutely no room for my own initiatives now."

6. Why have you chosen your study programme?

This is a good opportunity to talk about your motivation for important matters how you make decisions.

7. What subject did you like best and why? And what was your least favourite subject?

Emphasise your driving forces, motivation, and ambition.

8. What type of people do you enjoy working with and what type of people do you struggle with?

Your answer says something about the kind of person you are. Being able to indicate what you struggle with is a strength. It shows that you have self-awareness.

9. When quitting your studies: why did you choose not to complete your study programme?

Give an honest response, there is nothing wrong with having made a 'wrong choice' or having chosen a path that was not right for you. Emphasise what made you realise it was not a good fit and what you subsequently did to find a different path. Indicate what you have learned from this.

10. What are your best qualities?

Do not be too modest, but do not exaggerate either. Are you struggling with this? Try the following: people around me say i am

11. What are your weaknesses/ areas that need improvement?

Name things that are easily justifiable, the downsides of your positive qualities or things that are not relevant to the position. But stay honest. A clear answer to this question shows that you have self-awareness.

12. What are you proud of? What is your best achievement?

Name something that demonstrates your strengths. Examples from your internship, student job, study project or something related to a hobby or sport.

Questions about yourself

- What can you tell us about yourself? Or in the form of a statement: 'tell us about yourself'.
- What are your strengths or positive qualities? How would you like to use these in this position?
- What are your weaknesses or negative qualities? How do you deal with those?
- What are you proud of?
- If we would call your best friend, what would he/she tell us about you?
- What hobbies or interests do you have? What do you like to do in your spare time?
- [sketch of a tough situation within the position] – could you give us an example of a similar situation you experienced, and tell us how you handled this?
- How do you handle many different tasks at the same time?
- Can you guide us through your resume/CV?
- What can you offer us that other applicants cannot?
- Why should we choose you?

Questions about your motivation

- Why did you apply for this position?
- Why would you want to work here?
- What is, according to you, the most interesting part of this job?
- What do you like best about this position?
- What would you like to achieve / tackle / change within this position?
- Where do you want to be in a few years?
- Do you still have more job applications going?

Questions about expectations of the position

- What do you think the position will look like? What are your expectations of this job?
- What would you consider to be the most important skills for this function?
- What is most important to you in this job?
- Are you willing to: work overtime, take extra educational courses, etc?
- We think you are overqualified for this job; how will you deal with this?
- What do you already know / expect from our organisation? Our department? Our team?

Questions about your education

- Why did you choose this particular study program?
- What does your study program entail?
- Why did you choose this university?
- What was/is your favourite course?
- Why did you (not) follow extracurricular courses?
- What do you still want to learn? How do you want to develop yourself?
- Why did it take you this long to graduate?
- Why did you not finish your education?

Questions about your work experience

- What did you do in your previous job? What do you mainly do in your current job?
- What is the most difficult part of your current job?
- What is the reason you are looking for another job?
- Why did you make certain choices in your career?
- What is your greatest success?
- How did you deal with resistance / stress / problems? (and give an example)
- What have you learned so far?
- Why did you get fired / why did you quit?
- Why have you had so many different jobs?
- You do not have the required work experience; how will you compensate for this?

Questions about your ambition

- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- What is your goal for the long term?
- What is your vision for the future?
- What is your ambition?
- How successful have you been so far?
- Have you ever failed in your education or employment? What happened then? How did you handle this?
- Are you satisfied with your career so far?

Questions about you as colleague

- What role do you assume in a team?
- Are you more of a generalist or a specialist?
- How do you deal with criticism?
- What kind of colleagues do you enjoy working with?
- What kind of colleagues would you rather not work with?

Questions at the end of the interview

- When can you start?
- What is your period of notice?
- Are you willing to move?
- Do you have a driver's licence?
- Do you have a car?
- What impression did you get from our company / department / team / of the position?
- What did you think of the interview?

Sometimes an interviewer will ask you what you thought of the interview. You are not intended to return at length to matters of the conversation, just reflect in a few words/phrases.

Questions that you do not have to answer

You are not required to answer questions related to your health or medical past. However, you are obligated to indicate matters that could hinder your work (for instance, if you apply for a job as a florist, but you cannot bend down due to a back injury. An employer is then allowed to stop salary payment and can fire you).

- Are you pregnant?
- Do you want to have children?

- Are you religious?
- Are you a member of a political party?
- How is your (mental) health?
- What is your sexual orientation?
- What is your race/ethnicity?

Sometimes the application committee is not aware of the fact that questions like the ones above should not be asked. If such questions are asked anyways, you can (kindly) respond:

- By bouncing the question back: 'this question frankly surprises me a little. Is there a specific reason for you to ask this?' / 'Does the job involve a certain amount of pressure on private life?' / 'How is this relevant for the position?'
- You could also answer the question with a joke, with which you don't give a substantive answer.
- Or you could say: 'I consider this a very personal question which I would rather not go into' / 'I always like to keep work and private life separated' / 'This is private, and I prefer to discuss matter like these at home'
- Sometimes your medical history can actually be an advantage, for instance when sometimes you can understand people better because you are an expert by experience. You should, however, be very certain that your health will not become a problem again. Clearly show how you learned to deal with your health, live with it, how it made you stronger or how it made you more aware of where your boundaries are.

Questions you can ask

- What caused this vacancy?
- What expectations do you have regarding my job / position / performance?
- What is the most important regarding this job / position?
- Suppose that your chosen candidate will soon be working here. How would you notice one day that things are going in the right direction? (ask about behaviour and effect)
- What would a week in this position be like?
- What would my first tasks for this job be?
- What is my position within the organisation?
- What does the department that I would come to work in look like?
- Could you tell me a little bit more about the culture within the company?
- What makes it fun to work here?
- What does the team composition look like?
- What educational possibilities does the organisation offer? What opportunities are there to further develop myself?
- What does the selection procedure look like?

From doubt to advantage

During an interview, you may encounter doubts from the application committee, such as 'you are too young'. You may also have doubts yourself during the interview. Below you will find possible answers with which you can turn such doubts into plusses.

You are too young

- New, fresh ideas
- Quick with new technology
- Motivated and enthusiastic
- Flexible in terms of working hours
- Flexible in content and way of working.

- Knowledge is up-to-date, aware of the newest scientific insights.
- People who have been working for years, have also started off too young and unexperienced.
- Cheaper

You do not have enough experience

- I developed my skills within other situations, such as... (voluntary work, side jobs, sub-positions, internships)
- I am willing to further develop myself (extra education/courses)
- I know I am capable of doing this, because... (example)
- I am a fast learner and I easily adapt
- I am extra motivated
- I am committed / involved in this position / organisation
- I have had good education with grades above average
- I meet the requirements for this position

You are too educated

- I am very motivated for this job

No clear line in career path (varying background)

- I like new challenges
- I am broadly interested
- I am entrepreneurial, curious, and open to new things
- I have carefully thought this job through
- Try to show the similarities between different experiences

Wrong experience/background

- The basic knowledge / educational level is present
- I am broadly interested
- I have developed these skills through different experiences, namely...

You do not understand the question

If you do not know what to say right away, just ask:

- What exactly do you mean (by this question)?
 - I do not quite understand you, can you be more specific?
 - Is it relevant to the job?
 - Or you could say: 'Gee, that is a good question, I will have to think about that...'
- 