

How do I prepare for a job interview?

Fail to plan, plan to fail. You are certain to be asked specific questions about your potential employer, so make sure you've done your homework on things like their last year's profits and latest product launches. Nothing is as disappointing as when a candidate oozes enthusiasm and then doesn't even know the most basic facts and figures about a company. Here are a few places you can find some useful information:

An online search

The company's website is the best place to start. It shows the company as it would like to be seen and the products and services they offer. You'll get a feel for the corporate style, culture and tone of voice. Check out the annual report and look for a press or company news page.

As you filter all this information, consider how the role you're applying for relates to the company's mission. You may also be able to use the site's search facility to discover more about the person or people who will be interviewing you.

You should spend some time looking online for any other information you can find about the company. Put their name into Google News to see if they've had any recent interesting stories written about them. You could also discover some information written by their current employees on what it's like to work there.

It's also worth searching for your own name to see what crops up – your potential employer may be doing the same thing.

Industry sources

It's not just information about the company you need – you should also have a good background knowledge of the industry so you can impress at the interview. Browse through business publications and websites to see what they are writing about your potential employer and their industry. Have a look on the newsstands at the big magazine retailers - there's an amazing list of publications out there.

You may find back issues of trade publications at university or public libraries, or you might be able to access them online. Some journals are even available for free or by subscription through their own websites.

If you're already in the same industry as your potential employer, it may be possible to discreetly ask colleagues or your suppliers if they know anything about the company you're interested in.

Preparing yourself

This is the bit most people forget to give enough time to, so don't get caught out. Just like when you're going into an exam, feel confident that you can field any question they throw at you, and try to feel as good about yourself as you can. It shines through.

Here are a few top tips:

- Have a mock interview with a friend based on the common interview questions you're likely to face.
- Be sure you know the time, date and location of the interview and the name of interviewers.
- Decide how you will get there and when you need to set off to arrive in good time, anticipating any delays. Do a dummy run if necessary.
- If you look good, you tend to feel good too. Avoid any last minute panic by preparing what you're going to wear the night before.

- Don't go into the interview with lots of baggage - psychological or physical. Take the bare minimum with you so you can concentrate on the interview, and nothing else.
- If you are asked to bring certificates, references, etc, get them ready well in advance to avoid having to chase around on the morning of the big day.
- It may sound patronising, but make sure you use the toilet before you go in – you don't want to be bursting to go when you're mid-interview.

Be methodical

Sit down with your CV and make notes, just as if you were preparing for an exam. Study your work record and what you have achieved. How do you see yourself? What have you done? What ambitions do you have? Make notes and prepare and rehearse sound bites about yourself. Do this out loud, even if it makes you feel weird.

Try to relate specific areas of your CV back to the job description. It will make it clear to the interviewer why they should hire you.

Remember, one of the most common interview questions is "Tell me about yourself." Prepare a balanced and succinct answer to this question, not a life history. Keep it businesslike and don't stray into personal feelings or family relationships. Avoid anything to do with politics or religion like the plague. Interviewers use this question to learn about your personal qualities, not your achievements - they should already have those from your CV.

