

Interview Preparation



A Tipsheet on Preparing for Interviews @ VICSES

The purpose of an interview

The purpose of a job interview is to create a conversation between you and the person hiring. Each party wants to gain certain information to help them make the best choice possible.

Your objectives are:

- To understand the practical, day-to-day elements of the role you are applying for
- To understand what will be expected of you in the role
- And, ideally, to get an offer.

The employer's objectives are:

- To understand what you have to offer (your skills, abilities, and knowledge)
- To understand who you are (your personality, character, and interests)
- And, to see if you are the right fit for the role.



Don't forget, this means you are also 'interviewing' the employer to see that this is the right role, team, and fit for you and your career goals. You want to get a clear picture of what it will be like operating in this role, so that if you receive an offer, you are fully informed.

General Interview Format

While interviews can vary in terms of the questions asked and the number of people present, most interviews will follow a similar core format. When preparing for your interview consider how you might respond at each stage of the interview.

1. Interview Introduction

You will be introduced to the interviewers and discuss how the interview will progress. Aim to build rapport and connect with each of the interviewers.

2. Information About the Role

The interviewer will provide an overview of the role. You may have accessed much of this before the interview but updates may be provided.

3. Questions to the Candidate

The interviewers will ask the candidate questions that range from general to questions about specific behaviours.

4. Questions to the Interviewer

The candidate can ask any questions that they have of the interviewers

5. Conclusion

Discuss next steps and provide any final information or thoughts



Pre-Interview Preparation

This is arguably the most important stage in the interview process. It is worth investing time in the preparation to make sure you feel confident and calm in the interview. The key aim at this point, is understanding your goals, knowing what skills are relevant, and practising your story telling.



Know the Role

Analyse the job description and do your research! The key point is to think about the role from the perspective of the employer. They will have identified key skills that they believe the successful candidate will need; you want to identify what those skills are.

The following questions can help you understand what an employer is looking for:

- What are the key responsibilities in this role?
- What are the core skills needed to be successful in the role?
- What values are most important to the organisation, and to the role?
- What might be the biggest challenges for the role?

Not sure what these might be? Talk to someone who may know! Consider if the role requires problem solving, communication, or risk management.

Know Yourself

The interviewer is going to want to know about your skills, experiences, qualifications, and achievements; so it is important to have examples and stories that describe you.

For more tips on identifying your core skills and achievements, check out the Resume Writing Tipsheet!

The following questions can help you create a clearer picture of your skills and value:

- What are you currently responsible for?
- What skills do you have?
- How do you influence people? or manage conflict?
- What are the learnings you've had that you can bring into the new role?

Link the Two Together!

This is the most important piece; you want to demonstrate how you can bring your skills and experiences into the new role to meet the needs and challenges of that role.

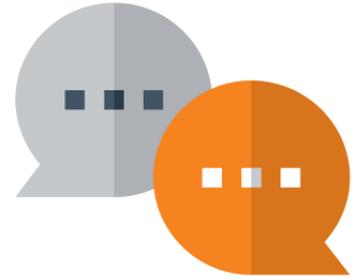
What does this mean?

- Do you have skills that will be needed in the new role? These are the skills you want to be able to describe and provide examples of.
- Have you successfully dealt with challenges that might exist in the new role? Knowing what your process was for dealing with the challenge previously will help you think about how you might approach a challenge in the new role.



Preparing for Behavioural Questions

Most interviews will spend a good portion of time on Behavioural Questions. These are questions that focus on what you did, or how you behaved, in different situations. This is because how you behaved in the past, gives a good indication of how you will behave in the future.



Important to remember with Behavioural Questions:

- Answering these questions is like telling a story, they are a chance for you to provide more information than you can in your resume
- These questions are more interested in the PROCESS, and less interested in the OUTCOME! How did you act? What did you do? the result is less important

Using the CAR Model to respond to Behavioural Questions



The CAR Model is a simple and straight forward way of responding to behavioural questions. The trick is to ensure that you tell the interviewer a 'story' about how you used or demonstrated a skill, which includes a start (the 'C'), a middle (the 'A') and an ending (the 'R').



CONTEXT: Start by describing a situation and setting the scene for a relevant example from your past experiences. The key here is to choose your example well; one that clearly demonstrates the quality or skill the employer is looking for.

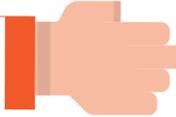


ACTION: the middle of the story is about explaining what action or actions your took. The focus is on the PROCESS, so be specific rather than making vague statements and outline your steps and rationale. This is the longest section.



RESULTS: to end the story detail the outcome of your action. This may be the shortest section, but you want to offer specific facts relating to the result, such as statistics or feedback you received from a manager.





Examples & Practice

Below are some common behavioural questions that you might want to consider, prepare for, and practice.

- Can you describe a major problem you have faced, and how you dealt with it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deliver results in the face of major challenges.
- Give an example of how you are able to adapt your communication style to different audiences.
- Can you describe a time when you've had to manage a conflict between team members?
- Tell me about a time when you had to demonstrate adaptability.



Identify the skill the interviewer is wanting information on

A good strategy as you listen to questions is to identify what skill the interviewer wants you to talk about.

1. Can you describe a major problem you have faced, and how you dealt with it?
2. Tell me about a time when you had to deliver results in the face of major challenges.
3. Give an example of how you are able to adapt your communication style to different audiences.
4. Can you describe a time when you've had to manage a conflict between team members?
5. Tell me about a time when you had to demonstrate adaptability.

Problem Solving Skills

Prioritisation; Negotiation; Initiative; and possibly others

Communication Skills

Conflict Management Skills

Adaptability and Flexibility



Select an appropriate example from your past experiences

Using the CAR Model, describe a story that provides evidence of how you have used the skill in question in the past. You don't have to use an example that perfectly matches the role you're going into, instead pick an experience that best shows off the underlying skill. The reasoning for this is: if you can use the skill well in one context, you can use it well in another context.

Top Tip: have 2 or 3 example stories that show off 1 or 2 key skills that you think are relevant to the role. Practice these before so that you can use them easily and confidently!



3

Share your answer

Once you have an idea of the skill being asked about, and a relevant example, share your answer using the CAR Model. An example question and answer have been provided below.

Question:

Can you tell me about a time when you've had to manage conflict within your team?



This question is wanting to understand your communication and conflict management skills

C



Context:

I was working on a project with tight deadlines, but the person who I relied on for information kept sending it through late. This was holding me, and those after me up.

A

Action:

My process for resolving challenges like this is to not make assumptions. Instead I phoned the person when they were free and shared how their late responses were slowing me and others down. I asked them if they realised this, and asked if there was anything I could do to help them get the information to me quicker.

R

Result:

Through this conversation I found that deadlines hadn't been properly communicated and the other person didn't realise the impact they were having. I was able to work with this person to create a better work request process and I was clearer with my needs when emailed them. From that point on we worked well and had no more delays.

Remember to focus on the PROCESS. What steps did you take? How did you demonstrate your skill?



Now answer the same question, using an example from your own work experience:

C

Context:

A

Action:

R

Result:



Other Questions to Consider

While it is useful to think of some possible Behavioural Questions and practice answering using the CAR Model, it is also helpful to prepare for some other questions that might come your way. Some common additional questions have been detailed below:



Other Questions	Question Purpose
1. Tell me about yourself	1. To get you to feel more comfortable. Talk to your recent career history and focus on relevant experiences.
2. What are some of your achievements?	2. To understand some recent and relevant achievements. Identify the skill you used to achieve the outcome.
3. What are your strengths?	3. To understand what you see as your strengths. Focus on a main strength or skill and how it could benefit the role.
4. What are your weaknesses?	4. To understand your self awareness and self development actions. Select an area not vital to the role, and share how you are working to overcome or strengthen the area.
5. What development or support are you looking for?	5. To understand how you are wanting to partner with the organisation. Describe how you like to be supported and any development goals you might have.

Being Prepared with Your Own Questions

At the end of the interview, you will likely be given the opportunity to ask a few questions of your own. This is a great chance to show your interest in the role and to further check that the role is right for you.

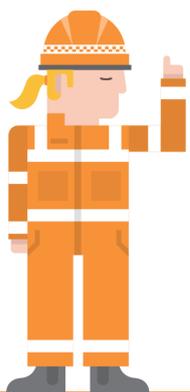
These questions generally serve one of 2 purposes:

1. To provide further opportunities for you to answer questions and share your value
2. To give you a better understanding of the role and what would be expected of you.



Some example questions you might ask at the end are:

- Are there any hesitations or concerns you have about my application?
- Are there any qualifications or experiences you think my application is missing?
- Have I answered all your questions?
- What does your ideal candidate look like?
- What does success look like in this role?
- What do you expect to see from me at the 1 month, 3 month and 6 month mark?
- What are the goals for the role over the next 12 months?
- How will you assess my performance in this role?
- When are you looking to make a decision by?





During the Interview

If you have done your preparation, then there is a good chance you are entering the interview feeling confident and calm. However, last minute nerves can still hit, so the following tips are useful to keep in mind to help keep you head switched on!

First Impressions Count

Research has shown that humans can make accurate assessments of someone's suitability for a role within 30 seconds. This means the first moments of an interview can play a big role. The following are all important factors to consider:

- Presentation: are you well dressed?
- Body Language: are you holding yourself confidently? Is your body relaxed but engaged?
- Communication: do you know the names of the people interviewing you?
- Eye Contact: are you looking at the person asking you a question?
- Not Interrupting: allow people to ask questions fully before jumping in.
- Positive Affirmations: where appropriate respond to questions positively before responding.

Do not underestimate the power of a strong handshake when introducing yourself and appropriate eye contact throughout the interview.

Manage Stress During the Interview

When we are stressed our brains can shut down, making it harder to formulate helpful answers and present our strengths articulately. Several tips can help us manage stress:



Steady breathing



Acknowledge any anxiety



Sip some water

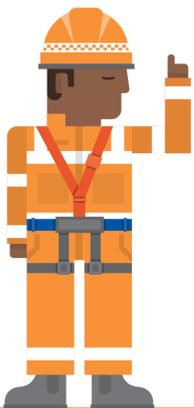


Muscle relaxation



Connect back in with the world around you

What if Your Mind Goes Blank?



It's common during interviews for your mind to go blank for a few moments. In these situations the key is to stay calm, and give yourself a moment to catch up.

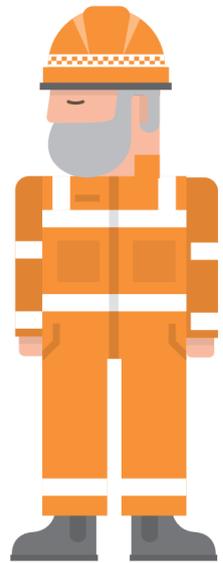
- Stay calm
- Breathe
- Sip some water
- Be honest that you've gone blank and ask for a moment
- Repeat the question back out loud, this can help kick start your brain



After the Interview

Wrapping up an interview on a positive note helps create a lasting impression that the interviewers will take away from the interview. Much like first impressions, last impressions also count.

- Thank the interviewers for their time
- Express gratitude for the opportunity
- Check that the interviewers have your contact information



Immediately afterwards

After the stress and pressure of an interview, take some time out to relax and celebrate having completed the interview process. Taking some time to switch off and focus back on your current role and routine. Ruminating on every moment of the interview usually won't help you feel better or change how the interview went.

After a day or two find a quiet moment to reflect on the interview. The following questions can help you review how you went objectively and help you consider how you might approach your next interview:



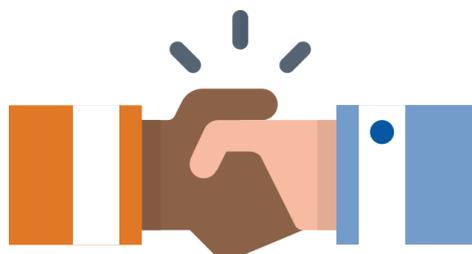
- What did I do well during the interview?
- What didn't work the way I planned? Why?
- What would I do differently in my next interview?

Follow up actions

As a follow up to the interview, it can be helpful to reach out to the interviewers after a short period of time to check in and ensure that they have all the information they need to make their decision.

- Give your references a heads-up
- Follow up with a thank you email
- Check in after 1-2 weeks
- Ask for feedback

Goodluck!



SUPPORT SERVICES

24/7 Support Options



Lifeline

Anyone having a personal crisis
lifeline.org.au
13 11 14



Open Arms

Veterans and families counselling
openarms.gov.au
1800 011 046



Beyond Blue

Anyone feeling anxious or depressed
beyondblue.org.au
1300 224 636



1800 Respect

Sexual assault and domestic violence
1800respect.org.au
1800 737 732



Mensline Australia

Men with emotional or relationship concerns
mensline.org.au
1300 78 99 78



Directline

Alcohol and drug counselling and referral
directline.org.au
1800 888 236



Kids Helpline

Counselling for young people aged 5 - 25
kidshelpline.com.au
1800 55 1800



Suicide call back service

Anyone thinking about suicide
suicidecallbackservice.org.au
1300 659 467