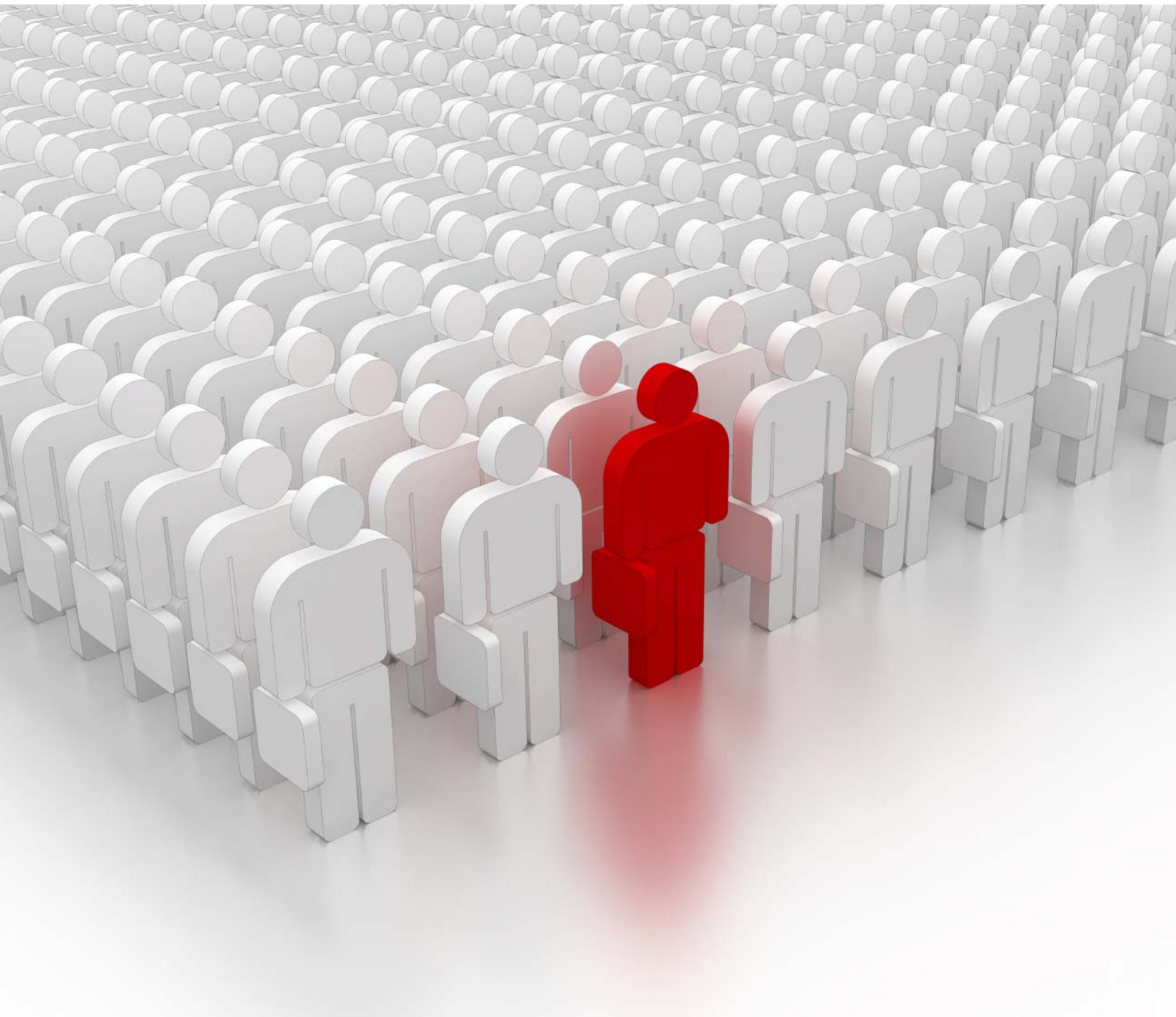


# Top Tips For Interview Success

Impress a potential employer from minute one



## Introduction

The interview is usually the first contact you will have with a potential employer. It is absolutely crucial that you make the right impression and leave your interviewer feeling you're a top class candidate. Yet so many people fall at this common hurdle. Interviews at first glance are a daunting combination of nerves, pressure and handshakes. Yet with these simple Top Tips for success you can make interviews a far less fearsome proposition.

## What To Do

- Arrive early. Make sure you know the route, plan your journey to avoid transport black spots and leave plenty of time for the inevitable traffic jam, train cancellation or tube strike. In case of a major hold-up do ensure you have contact details with you so you can call Omni to let them know you are potentially going to be late.
- If you are late for any reason, or merely rushing to be on time then try as best as you can to compose yourself before entering the building. A calm exterior will mean you seem more confident than you might actually be!
- Make sure to be polite and friendly. Smile, nod and generally give the best possible impression. This simple courtesy should extend to everyone that you encounter in the company, from the receptionist to the MD, not just the one or two people interviewing you.
- Practice a strong positive handshake. Limp, wet handshakes send out all the wrong signals as would be expected. However people are just as turned off by aggressive handshakes that threaten to remove their hand from their wrist!
- Maintain a good level of eye contact (don't stare at your shoes but don't stare the interviewer out!), smile and nod and listen politely. Remember to bear in mind your body language and other non-verbal communication and avoid crossing your arms, slouching or fidgeting.

## What Not To Do

- Don't enter the building wearing your coat, talking or texting on a mobile, with headphones on or generally looking unprepared. You should expect to meet someone who will have an impact on the outcome of the interview from the first minute.
- Avoid any possible distractions by turning your phone off before you go into the building.
- As tempting (and natural) as it may be, don't be rude or personal about current or previous employers to potential employers.
- Don't panic if you encounter difficult questions. Although there are seemingly 'trick' questions that sometimes come up it is often more important to react well to them rather than come up with the 'right' answer.
- Don't switch out of interview mode until you have at least left the building and preferably until you have got most of the way home. A candidate who has breezed through the interview itself can blow it all with a throwaway comment when being shown out of the building.

## Dress For Success

Dressing appropriately for an interview is vital. The first impression you make with an employer will last in the memory and studies suggest that a large number of interviewers make a decision on an interviewee within the first five minutes of meeting. Therefore the right look can make the difference between landing that dream job and missing out.

### What To Wear ... Men

- Do wear a suit. Black, dark grey or navy blue are most acceptable. Suits don't have to be 3-piece but should be in good condition and clean.
- Do wear a shirt and tie. Although ties are sometimes less prevalent in offices these days it is vital to be as smart as possible for an interview. A tie is therefore a must.
- Do wear a smart pair of shoes. Black shoes should go with your suit. Shoes should be polished and in good condition. Avoid trainers no matter what the circumstances.
- Do present as smart an image as possible. Hair (facial and head hair) needn't be military style but should be neat and tidy. Nails should be clipped, hands cleaned (for that all important handshake) and as an added extra check your fly before you even enter the building!
- Don't wear novelty ties, or anything that could be misconstrued as casual.
- Don't wear white socks. Ever. Unless you're playing tennis or going to the gym.
- Don't wear a short-sleeved shirt. They are regarded as casual and particularly don't look right when worn with a tie. Stick to long sleeves and avoid the desire to roll them up, even when it's hot.
- Do take something to carry any relevant documents in (job spec, your A4 pad, handy hints from Omni etc). Ideally make it a smart black shoulder bag, briefcase or document wallet.
- Do take your coat off before you enter the building. Under no circumstances go into the interview with a coat on and if for any reason you do by mistake don't sit there with it on.

- Do check the situation with jewellery (particularly facial jewellery) before you attend. Chances are even in the most forward-thinking organisation a man in earrings, with a nose stud or with an eyebrow piercing will not be regarded as 'smart' in the same way that someone without any body ornamentation will be. So to be on the safe side take jewellery off before you attend. Similarly large chains, rings or anything else noticeable should be removed beforehand.

### What To Wear ... Women

- Do dress as smartly as possible. A trouser suit or skirt and jacket is ideal.
- Do wear a smart pair of shoes but don't wear the most impractical pair you have. Chances are the one time you can't walk in your 4 inch stiletto heels will be when you are walking towards a potential employer!
- Don't overdo the make-up. Avoid large amounts of blusher, foundation or eye make-up as many interviewers would regard this as inappropriate for work (and therefore doubly inappropriate for an interview).
- Don't show too much flesh. The following should not be bared in an interview: cleavage, midriff, thighs, back. Restraint is the most important thing; if an outfit could possibly be misinterpreted, rethink it.
- Do keep jewellery to a minimum. A pair of stud earrings, an unobtrusive necklace and a ring is more than enough. Large earrings, a variety of chains, bangles, rings and other items are unnecessary and can seem unprofessional. Tongue studs or any other noticeable piercings should also be removed for the interview.
- Don't try to be the most fashionable person in the room but also don't worry about being the smartest. You can never overdress for an interview.
- Avoid excessive amounts of perfume, nail polish, lipstick or anything that could distract the interviewer and detract from an otherwise professional appearance.
- Wear something that you feel comfortable in; it will give you an extra confidence boost and reduce the chance of nervous fidgeting.

## How To Tackle A Competency Based Interview

Also known as skills-based, behavioural or structured interviews, competency-based interviews work on the principle that past performance is the best predictor of future performance. The interviewer will therefore be seeking examples of past behaviour that provide him/her with concrete evidence that you have the necessary competencies to succeed in the job.

## What Happens In A Competency Based Interview?

The interviewer will ask you a series of questions along the lines of:

- Describe a situation when you...
- Give an example of a time when you...

When you have answered these, the interviewer may prompt you for further information. When you have exhausted one topic, the interviewer will move on to the next, leaving only a little opportunity for discussion. At the end of the interview, there may be an opportunity for you to ask your own questions. This format may seem rigid, unnatural and unfriendly to many interviewees but as well as providing evidence of competencies relevant to the job, it is also seen as a fair and equitable method of selection since all candidates are asked the same questions.

## What Is The Best Way To Prepare For A Competency Based Interview?

The first and most important tool is a good A4 pad. Along with a reliable pen this will form the basis of your preparation for the competency-based interview. You will make any notes before the interview in this pad. You will also take the pad along to the interview and use it to increase your chances of getting an offer by up to 40%! With your pad and pen to hand you should then:

- Read the employer's brochure and/or job description, and note the skills and competencies they require.
- Note down any examples you can think of when you have put these competencies into practice. These examples could come from current or previous employment; voluntary work; holidays and travel or personal and family experiences.

Compose a paragraph or so for each situation, outlining what happened, how you approached it and what the outcome was. The "STAR" format should help you to structure these outlines:

<b>Situation:</b>	What was the situation in which you found yourself?
<b>Task:</b>	What was the specific task you had to achieve?
<b>Action:</b>	What was the specific task you had to achieve?
<b>Result:</b>	What was the outcome of your action?

The focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group; interviewers will want to know what was your specific role in achieving the desired result.

It is important that you also speak to your contact to establish if there is any other information you can utilise to prepare. Once you have all the relevant information you can create a list of the examples you feel are the best illustrations of the required competence. These may be the first examples you give in answer to the interview questions. Don't forget the other examples; interviewers may sometimes probe for as many examples as possible.

## What If I Can't Think Of Any Suitable Examples?

Try and be as open as possible and remember that the examples you give don't have to be high-level, just relevant.

If you really can't think of anything, consider how vital that competence is to the employer. If, for example, leadership is a key factor and you have really never taken the lead in anything, are you applying for the right job? Would you be happy in it?

If there is only one area that is giving you problems of this type all may not be lost, providing that you are strong in other areas.

## Good Interview Questions

You will need to ask at least two questions during the interview, ideally at the end when prompted to by the interviewer. Using the list of suggestions provided by Omni ('How to...Ask all the right questions') you need to prepare six possible questions and write them in your pad. Six questions are vital because there are three possible scenarios to consider:

- The interviewer asks "Any questions?" where there are at least two of the six left unanswered.
- The interviewer asks "Any questions?" where there are none of the six left unanswered. In this situation the standard response is "No, I think you've covered it all". This is the wrong answer! Here you should recall previous questions and as best as you can ask them.
- The interviewer doesn't invite you to ask any questions. It is vital that you get these two questions in so think beforehand about how you would ask them without being prompted.

## Sample Questions.

### Questions about the company

- What is it about the Company that makes people want to stay? / made you join & stay?
- How does the company encourage a coming together of staff through activities?
- What position does the company hold in the market place?
- What are the company's plans for the future?
- What is the company's current annual growth rate?
- How many offices are there?

### Questions about the department

- What exactly does the department do in terms of the overall company?
- What are the departments plans for expansion?
- What are the ages of the people in the department? / What age group are the other members of the department?
- What is/are the personality/ies of the people I would be working for/with?
- How closely does this department work with other areas of the company?
- How does this department compare in size to others within the organisation?
- To what extent do you encourage staff to interact between departments?

### Questions about the job

- How would you describe a typical day for the person doing this job?
- What would I have to do for you to feel I had done a really good job?
- Who is doing the job at the moment?
- What sort of handover will there be with the person who is currently doing this job?
- Why did the last person leave? Were they with you for a long time?
- What percentage of my job would be typing and what percentage would be administration?
- What type of person are you looking for to fill this role?
- What competencies are you looking for the new person to have?
- Who would I be reporting to?
- How long has the person I will be working for been here?
- How long have you been here?
- How long would you expect a person to stay in this role?
- Will there be the opportunity to become involved and work on my own initiative?
- If I am keen to develop the role what would you like done?
- On average, how often would I expect to come in early or stay later?

### Questions about training and appraisals

- What sort of training is offered to staff within the department?
- Is training provided in-house or are courses held externally?
- What training facilities are available within the department / company?

- What encouragement is given to further study?
- What are the details of study leave that is offered?
- How often do you hold meetings to assess the skills/abilities/progress of staff?
- Who will I talk to about my progress and how often will this take place?

### Questions about your prospects in the company

- What structures are in place for career development?
- What are the promotional prospects? / What prospects are there for career progression?
- If I begin as a junior now, where could I hope to be within the company in 5/10 years' time?
- How do you encourage staff to progress within the company?
- How do you see this role developing?

These questions form the foundations of your thinking about what you will ask in the interview. Amend questions as appropriate and make sure what you ask is relevant to the company and role. Take into account the information you have been given by your contact when deciding on your questions. If you know the role is only a fixed term contract for example then it is not appropriate to ask about career prospects. You could however alter a question about prospects to discuss the possibility of whether good performance in a fixed term contract could lead to something more permanent.

Be careful when asking questions about the company to ensure that you should not already have this information from your preparatory work. Make sure that you want to know the answers to the questions you ask. Although it is important to ask questions you should never be stuck asking a question for the sake of it; proper preparation will ensure this doesn't happen.

## In The Interview

Once you have all your preparatory work in your pad it's time for the interview itself. Take the pad along with you and during the interview place it on the table in front of you or on your lap. The pad will prove invaluable in helping you to get the job so don't feel uncomfortable about it being there. If you feel it necessary then ask the interviewer if it is okay to take notes; the answer will always be yes. Using the pad is easy but will make a big difference to your interview chances. You need to use your pad to take a very obvious note, on at least two separate occasions, of something the interviewer says. You should also use your pad to ask your two questions, as well as to note the answers to at least two of the following four questions:

- When do they expect to know who will go forward to the next step?
- How many do they expect to see at the next step?
- Will the interviewer be involved in the next step?
- When do they hope to have made a final decision?

When the interview is coming to an end, but before you have asked the above questions, if you are interested in the role then you need to say so. Now is not the time to be meek, let the interviewer know that this job seems of real interest and that you're very keen to progress.

## Why Prepare In The Way For An Interview?

One reason stands out above the rest: preparing like this has been shown to improve your chances of an offer by up to 40%! All of the preparatory work outlined above will make you a more marketable proposition and increase your appeal to the employer.

If you need some more convincing though, also consider the following:

- Proper preparation will give you more confidence. Studies show that confidence is a major factor in impressing people that you are meeting for the first time.
- By being prepared and well informed you will reduce the amount of time the employer has to spend going through the basics with you. This both allows more time for you to impress them and leaves the employer with positive feelings about you (imagine being an employer having to run through the same basic information that is readily available on the website with ten different candidates and you'll begin to appreciate why interviewers love candidates who come prepared!)
- Preparation, particularly researching the role and the company, will give you a good idea of whether this is the right job for you. Remember interviews are a good time to see if you are right for them but are also a good time to see if they are right for you.
- Increasingly the majority of interviews you attend will be competency-based. There is a far greater onus on employers to use this interview style as it is perceived to be more 'fair'. Therefore being good at competency-based interviews will be of increasing benefit to you.

## In Conclusion

Following the process outlined above and working with your Omni contact you will dramatically increase your chances of having the success you desire in interviews. You should read this document fully and if you have any questions, Omni are here to help.

In conjunction with the above you should consult Omni's "Top Tips for interview success" document. Additionally the 6 questions you will prepare for the interview can also be agreed after discussion with your Omni contact.

The secrets of success in competency-based interviews are a lot simpler than you might think. With help from Omni and a little elbow grease, in future you will be in a far stronger position than ever before when you shake hands with your interviewer for the first time.

## About Omni

Omni provides small and medium sized organisations with their own robust and expert recruitment function. With a world-class recruitment system, best practice recruitment processes, innovative sourcing approaches and an expert and scalable team of resources, Omni becomes an essential part of our clients' strategic capability and an extension of the existing HR function.

Omni is the winner of the 2008 Recruiting Awards For Excellence in the "Best Managed Service Provider" class.

## About the Author

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