

Interview Preparation for candidates

The secret of success in interviews lies in preparation so it is well worth spending time preparing to ensure that your interview has a positive outcome.

General Areas

Know as much as possible about the company that you are seeing – research their website. Find out as much as you can about their divisional / structure, key markets, geographical spread, financial results, growth plans etc.

Find out as much as possible about the individual(s) that you are meeting with – name, title, responsibilities, background, and personality.

Know your own CV – if you can, read back through it on your way to the interview.

Know the key achievements that you have mentioned and be prepared to expand on them in the interview. Have some additional achievements ready in case they ask about others

Remind yourself about facts and figures relating to your current employer as the interviewer will expect you to be fully informed on them

The interview

Have at least 4 reasons why you are interested in joining this new employer – Employers like to hear what is attracting you to them rather than *pushing* you from your current role i.e. The PULL factors rather than the PUSH factors.

Reasons could include:

- Size of the company / team
- Quality of the opportunity available
- Opportunity for career and personal development
- Potential employer's reputation in the marketplace
- Promotion opportunity

Think about your ability to do the role that they are interviewing you for

- What are the 4 / 5 key skills that you can bring to the role?
- What previous experience can you use in this role?
- What are the company's needs in recruiting this role and how can you help to fill them?
- How would you go about creating an impact in the role in your first week?
- What would be your first priority in the role on day 1?
- What new skills / new ideas can you bring to the company in this role?
- What past experiences do you have that can really benefit the company if they appoint you to this role?
- What key milestones do you wish to achieve in the first 6 months in this role?

Even if you are not asked all of these questions you can actually use the preparation that you have done by volunteering the information and displaying how much you have thought ahead and how serious you are about the opportunity.

Likely interview questions

Tell me about yourself?

The interviewer is interested to understand how you would fit into the company / role so be honest and be yourself, however do keep in mind the opportunity available and what you know of the company and its culture.

Why should we offer you this job?

Speak about your skill set and what new ideas and experience you can bring to this role. You could also think about the need within the company for this role (both immediate and long term needs) and the benefits that filling it with a candidate with your experience would bring to the company in both the long and short term.

Why are you leaving your current employer?

Again honestly is the best policy though it is generally believed that you should not attempt to discredit your current employer in any way as this is generally seen as bad form. Common reasons for leaving a position include:

- Reaching a ceiling in terms of learning and development
- Promotional opportunity i.e. increased responsibilities / remit
- Ambition – wanting to progress your career faster than your current company can accommodate
- Role change - Taking your career in a direction that is different to the path mapped out at your current company
- A desire for a different company culture
- Internal / operational changes at your current company

What has been your biggest success at work?

It is important here to show how you can use your own initiative. Talk about your own achievements rather than how you helped someone else achieve – that can come later when you speak about your ability to work in teams and guide others. Examples of your own achievements could include a difficult goal that you had to achieve? Think about how you went about meeting that goal. It is always a good idea to have a few different examples prepared so that you can demonstrate how well you handle different situations.

Why did you choose finance?

Again be honest. Think about what attracted you to finance and what your perception of finance was at that time. Also, think about the skills that you were able to bring on your first day and how you responded to the training. Give some consideration to your personality and character and how they help you to perform your duties. Lead the conversation to the present as you are now looking for a step up in your career and highlight for the interviewer what you have learned and how you would like to progress.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

The interviewer is looking to hear that you have a sense of drive and purpose here. They want to know that they can depend on you long term. Give this question some thought and avoid specific job titles but do speak about your ambitions both short and long term, the skills that you wish to acquire and the responsibilities that you see yourself taking on.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Again be honest but always possess more strengths than weaknesses and try to put a positive spin on your weaknesses. Do not go for a set answer here as they are terrible in this situation. Be honest and display your own self awareness and also show that your weakness is but one small facet of your overall make-up. Use an example that is practical, meaningful and that highlights your awareness of, and your efforts to overcome, this weakness.

On your strengths do choose something that you can describe with conviction and that is hopefully relevant to the role.

How do you motivate yourself / what motivates you?

Be honest and remember that people rarely have only one motivator. Aiming to grow your skill set and build a long term career within finance is excellent. If the role on offer is a career step up then show that you are motivated and ready to take that step.

What are your hobbies and interests?

Think about this ahead and have a good mix of hobbies ready that you can chat about with enthusiasm, interest and knowledge. If you say that you go to the theatre or the cinema then do have a relatively recent visit to speak about. Equally if you love reading then have a favourite or last book that you can speak about with enthusiasm!

Competency based interviews

A competency based interview should be an objective discussion of relevant examples and things that you have actually done and achieved in your career to date. One of the most important things to remember is to be comprehensive (though always to the point!) in all of your answers. Don't assume that they will know or realise some of the answer so give the whole story.

Competency based questions tend to work in the following way:

Situation & constraints

- What you did?
- How you did it?
- Why you did it that way?
- Who else was involved?
- What you achieved?

With the detail that you need to get across you should pick fairly large examples so that you can drill down into the detail and really explain your skills. It is a good idea to have thought through your examples before the interview as you do not want to think of the best examples after the interview.

Questions that you can ask

Do prepare some questions and remember that the interview is a two way process so this is your opportunity to find out all you need to know to decide if this opportunity is right for you in terms of growth and development.

If you are being interviewed by the direct line manager for the role then a great question to kick off with is:

What are your priorities in recruiting this role?

Or

If I was appointed to this role how could I help you in the first two weeks?

Use the answer to highlight your skills in this area.

Other questions include:

- Opportunity to meet the team
- Mid and long term growth plans
- What key skills / qualities do they feel are required to be successful in this role
- What advanced training opportunities exist for someone that demonstrates outstanding ability

It is likely that the interviewer will want to challenge you in the interview and see how you think on your feet and cope with stressful situations so be prepared for this. If you are asked a difficult question then do pause and take your time answering – do not feel rushed.

Listen to the question and try not to stray too far from the question in your answer.

Remember that the interview is a 2 way process so ask questions and find out all you can about the role and the company.

Following the interview

Make notes for yourself in case you are asked to attend a 2nd interview – you will not remember everything!

Note down the names, titles and areas of responsibility of the individuals that you met.

Make notes on each conversation – the style of interview, what was discussed, the answers you gave, questions that you could not answer/ had difficulty answering / were dissatisfied with your answer – if you make a note of it then you may be able to improve on it later!

List everything that you learned – this will be valuable later. Note down all questions that come to your mind on the opportunity / company.

Make a note of anything that you did not understand at the first interview.

Write down your own impressions of the company, the opportunity and the people that you met including all the positives and negatives. This is very important as first impressions count!