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PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW

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From the interviewee's perspective

Preparing for the interview

In your preparation for a job interview, contemplate the difference between content and process. There is some overlap between the two.

- content is about what is said and exchanged between yourself and the interviewer or panel
- process is more intangible and is about the interaction between you and the panel.

| Managing content | Managing process |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Anticipate questions | Develop presence – handshake, walk, body language |
| Prepare answers to generic criteria | Put zest into your answers |
| Practise, practise, practise | Make a positive first impression and end confidently |
| Listen to the questions asked | Take notice of subtle hints and incorporate them into your responses |

An interview is a two-way process. There will be some points you will want to make at the interview. If they are not brought out through the questioning process, you may be able to make them at the end of the interview.





Hear the questions - prepare some answers

Hear the questions

Take note of key words in the question - they make a difference to the form of the answer:

- describe
- outline
- tell me about a time when
- give an example of
- explain
- how, what, when, why?

Different types of questions require different types of answers.

1. Facts

Can you give some examples of computer programs you have used, and how effective have you found them?

2. Understanding

Describe an experience of good team work. What made it so good?

3. Self-analysis

Outline your experience in the role of project manager

4. Views and ideas

Tell me about a time when you have had an idea, and how you went about having it heard and then implemented

5. Examples of experience

Give an example of a difficult customer service situation you have handled

Prepare some answers

You do have some control over what happens in an interview. To reduce nerves and present more confidently, spend time beforehand thinking of the questions you might be asked. Prepare and practise your answers. For example, you might be asked:

1. what has attracted you to apply for this position?
2. tell us about three of your most significant accomplishments
3. what are your professional objectives in the next 12 months?
4. describe how you go about building relationships with customers
5. what are the major elements in managing a project?
6. tell me about the most difficult interpersonal situation you've had to deal with and how you dealt with it
7. with the benefit of hindsight, what might you have done differently?



Presenting achievements and strengths

In an interview, it is important that you feel comfortable talking about your strengths and accomplishments. One way of doing this is to make a sound assessment of yourself, and then present that information in a matter-of-fact way, backed up with evidence. Team contributions should be acknowledged whenever appropriate, but highlighting the role that you played.

A model to use as a basis for this approach is:

- identify a number of strengths relevant to the position
- outline their relevance
- show how they were developed.

Describing the relevance of those strengths informs the panel that you understand their needs and how you can add value. The evidence is designed to be reassurance that you can do what you claim. The wording of your answers also implies that you have strengths other than the ones mentioned.

Being able to demonstrate, through examples of your previous experiences, how you can use your skills, knowledge and experience for the benefit of the employer is the most important factor.

Suppose the position involves marketing a service in regional areas. From your research and the selection criteria, you know that the critical elements of this job are project management, liaison and supervisory skills. Your responses to questions about these strengths might be:

My project management experience was established at the Dynamic Realty Company and I had the opportunity to develop it further at the Largo City Council. I was the Project Manager for a team of six staff members, and was responsible for investigating and developing creative marketing approaches for the City of Largo.

You would go on to talk about your key responsibilities, the management of the project budget, how you met deadlines, your ability to both supervise the team and provide motivation, and your liaison skills in regard to the consultation of other people and external organisations where you gained information.

The importance of the interview

If you have been short-listed for interview, you can assume that you have met the main competency factors for the job.

What the interview offers is the opportunity for you to demonstrate:

- your enthusiasm
- the lessons you have learnt from experience
- your insight into and understanding of what is involved in the position and its duties
- the value you can bring to the business or organisation.

The importance of language

Be aware that your body language should display interest and commitment.

- your voice should sound motivated and enthusiastic
- speak clearly and confidently
- try to make the interview as conversational as possible
- maintain eye contact with the interviewer/s
- answer in the first person as much as possible
- use words that demonstrate your confidence and skills.



Sample interview questions

(General staff)

Opening questions

Why are you interested in this position?

What attracts you to this position?

What qualifications, training and experience can you bring to this position?

Describe one of your major job achievements during the last 12 months.

Team

Can you give us an example from your past experience of the benefits you have gained from working in a team?

Setting priorities

Tell me about a time when you've experienced competing priorities and how you managed that situation.

Customer service

Tell me about a customer service experience that you have been most proud of.

Tell me about a time when you have been confronted with an angry customer and how you dealt with that situation.

Problem solving

Can you tell us about a challenging situation you have faced at work, and walk us through the process you used to resolve it?

Innovation

Tell us about one change or innovation that you introduced. How did you go about implementing that change?

Organisational skills

As you know, this position involves a variety of complex procedures that are sometimes carried out concurrently. To arrange your work so that things are done well and efficiently requires good organisational skills. Can you explain how you organise your work in your current job?

Initiative

Can you tell us about a time when you needed motivation to get through a long and difficult day? How did you keep up your motivation? What did you achieve?

Meeting deadlines

Please tell us about how you have handled high pressure work tasks. What strategies did you use to achieve positive outcomes?



Interview tips

Pre-interview

- utilise the contact person for the position if you have any questions or require further information about the role
- explore the CSU website and gain some insight into the area to which the position belongs
- prepare for questions, and prepare some questions that you would like to ask
- try to be as relaxed as possible. Visualise, be positive, relax and take some deep breaths.

In the interview

- prepare two points you want to make in the interview
- it is acceptable to have notes or dot points to refer to during the interview, or make notes yourself
- bring a job portfolio that includes samples of your work
- be conscious of body language
- establish eye contact
- use your insight and enthusiasm
- have questions about what you want to know about the job or organisation.

Expect some generic questions

- what led you to apply for this position?
- can you tell us about two highlights of your career / education?
- what gives you a feeling of satisfaction in your work?
- how do you evaluate whether you are performing well?

Career-related websites

www.positionsvacant.com.au

www.career.com.au

www.seek.com.au

www.mycareer.com.au

www.careerone.com.au

www.hays.com.au

www.interviewcoach.com

www.askoxford.com/betterwriting/successfulcv

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