

A GUIDE TO BEING INTERVIEWED

(Prepared by the Careers And Employment Office, University of Auckland,

Although the specific questions will vary enormously, almost all interview questions are addressing one of the four basic underlying questions.

THE FOUR UNDERLYING QUESTIONS ARE:

- **WHO ARE YOU?**
- **WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR US?**
- **WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US?**
- **HOW MUCH WILL YOU COST?**

(From: Murray McLachlan & Stewart Forsyth 1992 Job Winning in New Zealand, Penguin, Auckland)

Preparation is the key to a successful interview. If you prepare around these four underlying questions, you can usually handle any specific question with self-confidence and assurance, because you can recognise the underlying question and respond to that.

Here are some ways to prepare for the underlying questions.

WHO ARE YOU?

A typical question the interviewer might ask could be: “**Tell me a bit about yourself.**”

You could refer to:

- Where you were born and grew up
- Your education
- Work experience
- Interests
- Special experiences such as travel
- Achievements you're proud of
- Goals

PREPARATION: Write down a short “story” about yourself and practice saying it out loud. It should not last more than two or three minutes at the most.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR US?

A typical question the interviewer might ask could be: “**What can you offer our company?**”

You could refer to:

- Natural abilities and talents
- Learned skills
- Transferable experience
- Specialised knowledge
- Personal qualities

PREPARATION:

- Build up a vocabulary of words to describe yourself.
- Label your skills and abilities.
- Identify key experience and achievements.
- Write them down and practice saying them out loud.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR US?

A typical question the interviewer might ask could be: “**Why do you want to work for us?**”

This sort of question allows you to demonstrate what you know about the company, for example its –

- range of activities
- organisational structure
- clients or customers
- image and or market niche
- financial situation
- plans for growth
- competitors
- training programmes
- prospects for advancement

PREPARATION: Read company literature (e.g. annual reports), newspapers, business magazines and observe television and radio news and interviews, etc. Talk to people in the company. Find out about other companies in the same industry. Write down what you know and practise talking about it.

HOW MUCH WILL YOU COST?

A typical question the interviewer might ask could be: **“What sort of salary did you have in mind?”**

- This sort of question usually comes up towards the end of the selection process.
- Mention a range rather than a fixed sum, e.g. \$30 000 to \$35 000.
- Do some research to get an idea of the market rate.
- In reality there may be little room for negotiation. Make an effort to read up on the current legislation to find out what options are open to you.

PREPARATION:

- Ask friends with similar jobs.
- Check the Situations Vacant for mentions of wage and salary rates. Although this information is frequently not included in job vacancy advertisements, companies may be willing to give you a general idea of the salary range, especially if you make it clear you are only making a general enquiry.
- Phone employment agencies, who also may be able to quote a salary range for a particular job.
- In some circumstances, the Careers and Employment Service can give general salary guidelines. Look in particular in the annual Graduate Destinations surveys.
- Some employers do not know what the market rate for their job is. This can put you in a strong position to quote your own appraisal of the going rate, based on what you have been able to find out.
- Identify your most valuable skills.
- Practice stating out loud what you think you're worth.

TYPICAL INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Many interviews follow a very similar structure. If you have a general idea of how the interview could proceed, you are more likely to relax and give your best at each stage, rather than feel on edge wondering what's coming next. In addition, if you have a structure in your mind, you can judge

where it is most appropriate to make a point of introducing particular information about yourself. However, the following sequence is only a guideline, some interviewers can take great pride in delivering the unexpected.

- Introductions, handshakes, who sits where.
- Opening small talk.
- You are encouraged to talk about yourself: “Tell me about yourself.”
- You are encouraged to build links between yourself and the company: “Why do you want to work for us?” “What do you have to offer us?” “What are your career goals?”
- The interviewer describes conditions of work, such as hours of work, leave, training.
- You are asked if you have any questions – *prepare at least one or two.*
- Interviewer starts to close.
- Thank-yous, handshakes, goodbyes.

HOW YOUR'RE BEING RATED

The question and answer process of most interviews is just the surface layer of what is going on. Most experienced interviewers will be mentally, or literally, ticking off certain points as you are talking.

The following questions often appear on the rating scales used by interviewers.

- Is this applicant effective in communicating his or her thinking?
- Does this applicant have a friendly, confident manner and a mature personality?
- Does this applicant show good sense of initiative?
- How hard do you believe this applicant will work?
- How enthusiastic is this applicant?
- Does this applicant show evidence of leadership?
- What degree of determination does this applicant seem to possess?
- Would you want his applicant to represent you or your company at a meeting?

(Source: Careers Advisory Service, Victoria University)

A STRATEGY FOR ANSWERING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Even when you have prepared thoroughly for an interview, you still have to present yourself effectively to the interviewer. How you conduct yourself in an interview can be just as important to the interviewer as what you actually say. Often there will be more than one person interviewing, two or three is quite common, an occasionally you can face a panel of several people. Your poise and self assurance under pressure can be critical, and the following points outline a strategy for dealing with any question the interviewer cares to throw at you.

- Give your full attention to the person who is asking the question.
- Listen to the question.
- THINK!
 - Did you hear the question properly?
 - Did you understand the question?
 - What information will you draw on to answer?
 - Would you be better to answer with specific detail or take a more general approach?
 - Is there a deeper question buried inside the obvious one?
- CLARIFY:
 - If necessary, ask for the question to be repeated or rephrased.
 - Take a moment to think about your response.
 - Check with the interviewer as to how they would like you to reply, to tell them how you intend to reply.
- Address your reply mostly to the person who asked the question but glance from time to time at others who are present.
- Avoid “yes” and “no” answers.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Stop when you’ve come to the end of what you have to say.
- If you hear yourself waffling on, getting muddled, or starting to repeat yourself, stop yourself with a statement like “I think that’s all I have to say to that question.” And stop!
- If you make a bad start, say, “I’d like to go back and start this reply again.” Then order your thoughts and begin again.
- If it seems like an involved question, make a few brief points and ask the interviewer whether they would like you to elaborate further and on which points.
- Be honest. Pretence and bluff will do nothing for you.
- A smile from time to time will cheer everybody up!

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

It is highly unlikely you would be asked these specific questions.

Nevertheless, plan out how you would like to answer these sorts of questions. Practise saying out loud the replies you could make. If you can handle these questions with some confidence, you should be well prepared for the real thing.

Writing down an answer in full or jotting down some main points is a good way to start, but knowing it in your head is not enough. You must also be able to say it out loud. The more you practise the more words you say will hang together and make sense, and the less self conscious you will feel. Don’t rely on the right words popping out of your mouth just when you want them to.

Educational Background

- Why did you decide to go to University?
- Why did you choose your major subject?
- If you could do so, would you plan your academic study differently?
- What subjects do you most enjoy, and why?
- What subjects do you least enjoy?
- Do you think your results are a fair indication of your academic potential?
- Do you have plans for further study?
- What have you got out of being at University?
- What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
- What other skills do you have? (e.g. languages, computer skills, research etc.)
- What achievements have given you most satisfaction at University?

Personal Characteristics

- Describe your most rewarding experience.
- Is there anything you dislike very much – what makes you angry?
- How would you sum up your strengths and weaknesses?
- What motivates you to your greatest effort?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How do you think a friend who knows you well would describe you?
- Describe a problem you’ve had in personal relationships and how you’ve resolved it
- What is the most important mistake you’ve made and what have you learnt from it?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?

- What lessons have you learned from holding positions of responsibility?
- What evidence other than academic can you provide regarding your ability to work under pressure?
- Do you prefer working alone or with others?

Interests and Activities

- How did your interest in this area develop?
- What has your membership of this club involved?
- What level of responsibility have you assumed?
- In what ways does this activity benefit you?
- How demanding is this interest on your time?
- What do you enjoy most about it?
- What other interests do you intend to develop when you have more time?

Career Motivation

- How has your time at University prepared you for a (e.g. business) career?
- Why have you applied for this kind of work/career?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- What do you see yourself doing in five/ten years time?
- What short-term career goals have you set and why?
- What long-term goals have you set and why?
- What preparations are you making to achieve these goals?
- What satisfaction are you seeking from employment?

Knowledge of Career Area

- What do you know about a career in...
- What rewards are you seeking from a ... career?
- What qualities do you have that you think would make you successful in...? (e.g. management)
- What pressures do you see arising from the training programme?
- If you were a recruiter for this company what three qualities would you be seeking in candidates for this type of work?

Knowledge of Organisation

- Why are you seeking a position with company?
- What do you know about our business?
- Who do you see as our major competitors?
- What do you consider to be the main difficulty facing our competitors?
- Why should our company/organisation employ you?
- What contribution do you think you can make?

- What do you think it takes to be successful in this industry?
- What evidence do you have that you could handle our various customers/clients?
- What new development has our company been associated in recently?
- How do you see recent government legislation on ... (e.g. the Resource Management Act) affecting our organisation?
- What do you hope to gain from working in an organisation with our size and structure?

These are tough questions. Go back to the four underlying questions mentioned at the beginning of the leaflet and see what the underlying questions seem to be. Use the reference points and suggestions for preparation to work out some possible responses. If you can handle these you should be able to cope with most questions you could be asked.

CUE LIST FOR WORKING OUT WHAT YOUR SKILLS ARE	
<p>THINKING SKILLS</p> <p>Reading Spelling Comprehending Understanding Remembering Memorising Studying Learning Analysing Planning Problem solving</p>	<p>PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS</p> <p>Punctuality Appropriate dress Able to motivate yourself Set and achieve goals Manage your time Cope with pressure Plan for the future Express self-confidence Show a positive attitude</p>
<p>INTERPERSONAL SKILLS</p> <p>Showing warmth and enthusiasm Smiling Working co-operatively with others Being able to compromise Dealing with the public</p>	<p>SPECIALISE SKILLS</p> <p>Typing/keyboard skills Computer software packages Driving/flying skills Playing a musical instrument Operating specialised machinery Medical skills</p>

<p>Being respectful of others Taking responsibility for yourself</p> <p>COMMUNICATION SKILLS Speaking clearly Ability to find the right words Expressing ideas simply and clearly Listening Understanding the other person's point of view Using appropriate body language Understanding cultural differences</p> <p>NUMERICAL SKILLS Basic arithmetic Measuring accurately Calculating percentages Balancing accounts Interpreting statistics and graphs Using complex mathematical formulae</p> <p>INFORMATION SKILLS Identifying what you want to find out Knowing sources of information Knowing how to ask for information Extracting relevant information Using library systems Using computer databases Ordering and classifying Being able to find it again Knowing what to throw out</p>	<p>Building/construction skills Artistic skills Skill with animals Skill with computers Inventive /creative skills Sports skills Public speaking skills Diagnostic skills</p> <p>FUNCTIONAL SKILLS Organising Researching Meeting deadlines Planning objectives Taking Initiatives Motivating others Working within a budget Running meetings Identifying difficulties Solving problems Being a leader Raising money Facilitating groups Making decisions Writing reports Managing projects Working in a team Negotiating</p>
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PERSONAL QUALITIES: WORDS TO STIMULATE YOUR THINKING		
Accomplished	Empathetic	Outgoing
Active	Energetic	Passionate
Adaptable	Enigmatic	Passive
Adventurous	Enthusiastic	Patient
Analytical	Even-tempered	Perceptive
Approachable	Excitable	Persistent
Argumentative	Extravagant	Persuasive
Artistic	Flamboyant	Positive
Astute	Foolhardy	Practical
Attentive	Formal	Proactive
Authoritative	Friendly	Productive
Brave	Generous	Prudent
Broadminded	Good-natured	Questioning
Brilliant	Grave	Quick-witted
Business-like	Gullible	Rational
Casual	Happy	Reasonable
Careful	Hardworking	Relaxed
Cautious	Healthy	Reliable
Charming	Helpful	Responsive
Cheerful	Honest	Sensitive
Cold	Humorous	Serious
Committed	Imaginative	Shrewd
Competent	Impartial	Shy
Concerned	Impatient	Sincere
Confident	Impulsive	Sound
Conscientious	Indecisive	Spontaneous
Conservative	Industrious	Stable
Consistent	Infallible	Superior
Constant	Intelligent	Suspicious
Co-operative	Intellectual	Sympathetic
Creative	Intense	Talented
Credible	Jolly	Thorough
Critical	Judicious	Tolerant
Curious	Knowledgeable	Trustworthy
Demonstrative	Level-headed	Unaffected
Determined	Logical	Unassuming
Decisive	Loyal	Unusual
Defensive	Lucid	Visionary
Diplomatic	Mature	Vital
Discreet	Moody	Volatile
Dogmatic	Motivated	Warm
Dutiful	Non-judgemental	Whimsical
Earnest	Nervous	Wise
Easygoing	Objective	Witty
Efficient	Open	

Elegant	Optimistic	
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A VERY GENERAL GUIDE TO TESTS AND ASSESSMENTS

This is very brief and very general and what you actually encounter could be very different. There are a huge range of tests and assessment procedures, and new ones being made up all the time.

1. Pencil and paper tests

In an employment situation, these can fall into four broad categories

- IQ tests
- Aptitude test
- Personality tests
- Interest inventories

Very often both the IQ and the aptitude tests are compressed into a test of verbal reasoning and a test of numerical reasoning. In fact, it is unlikely that you would be given a formal IQ test for the purpose of ascertaining your IQ score. But you may be given a test, which assesses your competence with words and numbers, since much of what is considered to be intellectual ability can be tapped by these two measures. There are also non-verbal IQ tests made up of sequences of different patterns.

For many jobs, ability with words and numbers are the major aptitudes an applicant must possess. Some specialised jobs demand specialised abilities and for these dimensions as mechanical ability or spatial relations may be tested. Mostly, though, it would be words and/or numbers.

The numerical tests usually involve solving mathematical problems, some are easy and others are much harder. You may be asked to answer a question of the type "If it takes two men, with a combined weight of 185kg, 14 months to cross the Antarctic in summer, how long would it take three men in winter?" (Don't try to work it out, it's completely illogical). You may be asked to work with algebraic formulae, or do some statistical calculations. You may have to find missing numbers in a sequence or continue on with a sequence of numbers using the same logic as demonstrated by the numbers that are given.

The verbal tests are aimed at assessing your ability with, and understanding of language. You may be asked for the meaning of words, or which ones don't belong in a particular grouping (which word doesn't belong: aeroplane, car,

peach, bicycle). You may be given tasks, which ask you to relate or categorise abstract concepts (dog is to kennel as bird is to). Some questions may seem like general knowledge quizzes.

Personality tests are aimed at assessing the sort of personal qualities you possess, the sort of values you hold, how you would respond to certain situations and so on. Sometimes these take the form of presenting you with a statement, which you either agree or disagree with. Usually these take the form of five points along the scale with a neutral or "don't know" response in the middle. Sometimes you are given a multiple-choice format. These tests may seem similar to quizzes that are published in magazines under headings such as "How romantic are you?" However, the more sophisticated versions have a lie scale built into the scoring formula, and if you manipulate your answers to what you think is "best", you might get caught out by the score on the lie scale. Frequently, the people doing the test have an "ideal person" profile, which they match to the results of your test. The amount of your variation from the ideal is what they are looking for.

Interest inventories typically give you statements about a certain type of activity and ask whether you like or dislike it. These responses are then seen to cluster into particular categories of interest such as "social" or "artistic".

2. Experimental assessments

These are situations where you are actually doing something, either individually or with other people. Some examples might be:

- Making a short presentation to a group on a topic. Sometimes you know the topic in advance, sometimes you get to choose it or you might get one tossed at you in the spot.
- Being given a problem to solve as a group. These can be very elaborate, but often take the form of a hypothetical survival situation, such as "Your plane has crashed in the desert. One of your party is injured and cannot walk. All you are able to salvage is two teaspoons, seven copies of that day's Herald, a Bic lighter that doesn't work and a plastic bag full of boiled lollies that may be contaminated with aviation fuel. What do you do? Typically there are observers who take note of the sorts of ideas different people put forward, how clearly these are expressed, creative solutions, leadership, how people work constructively with others and so on. The actual solution is less important than the process involved in getting to it.

- Physical and/or endurance activities, usually in a situation where people are together for a couple of days. This sort of thing also often tests team working and problem solving.
- Social times where you are just holding a drink and standing around chatting. Your social confidence and general personal style is frequently under observation. It will be noted, for example, whether you initiate conversations, speak easily with everybody, dominate conversations and so on.