

How to Interpret Interview Styles

Employers use a variety of interview methods in the course of a recruitment process. Understanding how each interview type differs and knowing how to adapt your style accordingly, can improve your performance and give you that critical edge over other applicants.

Interviews fall into five main categories:

Telephone Interview

This is a commonly used interview style for screening candidates based overseas and may also be used as a pre-screening tool in drawing up a shortlist for first round interviews. In this interview your only expressive medium is your voice. Gestures, facial expressions and body language all become redundant. Preparation is crucial to ensure you articulate yourself clearly and concisely. Tone of voice takes on a special significance and will help you develop a rapport with the interviewer.

Unstructured Interview

This is still a very common form of interview, and is often the style adopted by less experienced interviewers. These interviews tend to be more informal in manner and often start with the question "Tell me about yourself". Unstructured interviews are more difficult to predict but can allow you to tactfully guide the discussion in a particular direction.

As with all interviews, come prepared with examples of your skills, qualities and experiences. Whilst you may be able to steer the interview in your favour, remain respectful of the interviewer's role and if they become more directive during the interview, adjust.

Panel Interview

In a panel interview, you will meet several interviewers at the same time. It is a very popular interviewing method in the public sector and is becoming increasingly common in the corporate world. These interviews tend to be quite formal in style; candidates often being asked an identical set of questions. The interview questions may be more rapidly paced as several interviewers are involved; so be prepared to expend more energy and be more alert than in a one-on-one interview. Remember to stay focused and adjustable.

Behavioural Interview

This is becoming a more popular form of interview as it predicts future performance based on your previous behaviour. Most Multinational companies would incorporate behavioural questions into their interview process. The good news is that these interviews can be effectively prepared for by anticipating the transferable skills and personal qualities that are required for the job. Have a number of examples to illustrate your skills and use the SAR (Situation/Action/Result) method to structure your answers. (We will focus specifically on behavioural questions in November's article.)

Group Interview

Interviewing simultaneously with other candidates can be disconcerting, but it can give the company an indication of how you interact in a group dynamic. Often the employer will invite the group of candidates to discuss a topic or solve a problem collectively. By observing the group interaction, they can evaluate listening/influencing/leadership skills, ability to work as part of a team etc.

In these exercises, it is important to bear in mind that the end result is not the most important outcome; instead emphasis is placed on how you interact with your colleagues. Avoid overt power conflicts which may make you look uncooperative. If you are a naturally shy person, you will need to ensure that you participate, staying silent for the whole process will back fire – remember calm, reflective people are a vital part of any team.

Conclusion:

Understanding the rules of the game is essential for success in any path of life. Know what to expect in each interview setting, learn to adapt your style accordingly and success will follow.

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