

# Job interview checklist

Congratulations, you got the job interview! Based on your CV and motivation letter you have been invited for an initial job interview. This checklist specifies the aspects that will be covered in this interview.

## Purpose of a job interview

A job interview is a great way to discover if you and an organisation are a good match. The interviewer wants to know if you meet the requirements (rational substantiation) and also if there is a “connection”; if you fit within the department and/or organisation (emotional substantiation). Of course, you also want to know if the job/internship and the organisation suit you as well. Is the work that you will be doing what you expected it to be? And what do you think of the company culture, for example?

## Different types of job interviews

Each company has its own style of conducting job interviews. How an interview will be conducted can depend on procedures, location and/or stage of the selection procedure. You can be confronted by a single interviewer or a committee, a 10-minute interview or one that lasts a full day. Prepare yourself for this, if possible.

### Types

- ☐ Personal interview – the most common;
- ☐ Case interview – this type of interview involves solving a case or problem.
- ☐ Telephone interview – the challenge here is to make a good impression with just your voice.
- ☐ Interview via Skype or another video platform – make sure you have a quiet background.
- ☐ Interview during a career fair or event – even an informal, 5-minute talk can already give you and the organisation an indication of whether you suit each other.
- ☐ Please note! There might be several interview rounds: one, two or three.

### The interviewer

You will always be informed of who will conduct the interview. If not, please ask about this. Ask if more people will be present and what their roles are. For example, a recruiter will take a different approach than a department manager. Keep in mind the agenda which the interview may have.

#### Possible interviewer

- ☐ Recruiter / HR employee or manager
- ☐ Manager or line manager
- ☐ Director or CEO
- ☐ Future colleague
- ☐ External recruiter / head-hunter
- ☐ Lecturer or someone from the faculty if this concerns an academic position
- ☐ Researcher or someone else within your field of expertise

## Preparation

Imagine the application as a professional sport. What do athletes do before a game, how do they ensure that they are in top condition? Top athletes have a ritual. Use these types of rituals to prepare yourself for your game: the job interview. Such a ritual will ensure that you are in the right shape to “score”. Think of the type of preparation that enables you to perform to the best of your ability and to be in top condition, both mentally and physically.

- ❑ Delve into the vacancy and organisation via the company’s website – know what the company does;
- ❑ Google the company, the interviewer, and also yourself – to know what someone else can find out about you;
- ❑ Use LinkedIn to ascertain who works there – if you know someone there, ask how an interview is conducted and what you should be aware of;
- ❑ Also, review news about the organisation, the sector and your field of expertise – what is going on at the moment? Who are the competitors?
- ❑ Think of the type of questions you can expect – prepare for the “tricky questions”;
- ❑ Beforehand, think of some good examples that you want to use;
- ❑ Prepare an “elevator pitch” – practice it so it becomes a natural story;
- ❑ Bring the vacancy and your CV along – also be prepared to answer why you match the vacancy;
- ❑ Think of which questions you want to ask – for example, what is not clear? Write your questions down and take these with you;
- ❑ Are you able to visit the company? If so, please do so. What is the best way to get there? What type of clothes do the staff members wear? This will help with your choice of clothing;
- ❑ Make sure you look neat and tidy – also make sure you have fresh breath;
- ❑ Plan your journey and leave on time – also arrange a “plan B” if things don’t go to plan;
- ❑ Make sure you have the contact details of the interviewer and/or company at hand;
- ❑ Make sure you go to the job interview well rested.

## Clothing

- ❑ Make sure your clothes are washed and ironed and that your shoes are polished.
- ❑ Align your clothes with the organisation/position, but do not exaggerate. It should also suit YOU, you should feel comfortable wearing them;
- ❑ In doubt: err on the side of formal rather than too casual;
- ❑ Invest in a nice suit or accessories – this does not have to be expensive;
- ❑ Ensure you wear something eye-catching, such as a necklace or tie, so the interviewer will take more notice of you and you will be remembered. However, make sure you do not exaggerate.

## Avoid

- ❑ Too much red – this looks dominant;
- ❑ Jeans, bare toes and bare shoulders;
- ❑ Clothes that are too big or too small;
- ❑ Also keep your chest hair or décolleté out of sight;
- ❑ Please note that with busy prints and stripes, the design might start to “dance” before the eyes of the interviewer;
- ❑ Too much perfume, makeup or accessories will distract.
- ❑ Stains in your clothes, bad breath or greasy hair is strongly discouraged.

## General tips

- ❑ An interview is a two-way street – so please be curious and ask questions;
- ❑ Speak calmly;
- ❑ Speak the company's language – you know this as you have prepared yourself;
- ❑ Keep your answers brief;
- ❑ Also keep your story "simple" - do not give the wrong impression with complicated speech;
- ❑ Also show that you are listening, for example by nodding your head;
- ❑ Remember to find out if there is a "connection" between you and the organisation;
- ❑ Have a positive and friendly attitude;
- ❑ Use the open questions to pitch yourself (what, how, where, who, when);
- ❑ Be honest about your CV and any gaps in it;
- ❑ If you don't understand a question, please inform the interviewer;
- ❑ Take a few seconds to think about your answer if it is a difficult question;
- ❑ Make notes for a possible next interview;
- ❑ Don't forget to switch off your phone!

## Not recommended during the interview

- ❑ Interrupting the interviewer will not be appreciated, let him/her finish (even if the interviewer is very boring);
- ❑ Also try to avoid a discussion with the interviewer – ask yourself "What will I gain from this?";
- ❑ Do not mention the salary yourself during the first interview round – this is normally discussed during the next round. Do find out what is the standard salary. If the interviewer does mention it, you will then at least know how to reply;
- ❑ Try to avoid socially desirable answers as much as possible – nobody is perfect;
- ❑ Talking negatively about your former employer is *not done*;
- ❑ Often people talk too much when they are nervous, try to avoid this;
- ❑ Avoid using "we" when asked about your role in a project.

## Example of the build-up of an interview

### Entrance/introduction

- ❑ Make sure you are on time (5-10 minutes before the interview);
- ❑ Also, greet the other employees you meet in the building;
- ❑ Check yourself briefly in a mirror before the interview;
- ❑ BE YOURSELF
- ❑ Introduce yourself politely and make eye contact – make sure you give a firm handshake, but don't go overboard;
- ❑ SMILE;
- ❑ Make sure you look enthusiastic – after all you are looking forward to it!
- ❑ Show that you are prepared (pen, paper, notes);
- ❑ If you are very nervous, address this – everyone will understand that you are nervous;
- ❑ Adopt a relaxed posture doing the interview – not closed body language with your arms folded.

## Ice breaker

Before the interview actually starts, the interviewer (or you) will ask a light question or remark. Although it has no substantive value it is decisive for “the first impression”. It says something about your social and communicative skills.

## Interviewer questions

The interviewer will ask questions regarding your CV and motivation letter or just about matters that are important to him/her. Answer questions concisely, completely and without too much elaboration. Make sure your answers provide the opportunity for follow up questions. When answering the questions try to keep in mind which qualities you want to emphasise. You don't have to wait till someone asks about your strong characteristics before you name these.

*For example:*

You want to emphasise that you are very independent but you are asked: “Why did you select study x?” Answer: “I was consciously looking for a study that would allow me to work independently. Besides, I was greatly interested in delving into the following subjects...”

## STAR(R) or STAR(E) METHOD

Interviewers often use the STAR(R) or STAR(E) method during a job interview. The core of this method is in the statement: “previous behaviour is the best predictor for future behaviour”. With the STAR(R) or STAR(E) method, the interviewer does not just ask for an abstract characteristic or quality, but he/she also wants you to substantiate this and wants to know what behaviour or action is proof of this.

*For example:*

Are you capable of taking the initiative without being asked?

S	Situation	During my spare time I help work on the websites for various festivals in Nijmegen.
T	Task	I maintain the websites, collect new items and am responsible for Google Analytics.
A	Action	I write content, look for news and post this on the websites. I check if all the information is up to date and I analyse which pages are visited. I indicate if possible action should be taken to increase the number of visitors, for example.
R	Result	The organiser of the festivals knows that all the information about the festivals is up to date and is able to be found by interested people. She can also see for example which parts of the programme appeal to people and which don't.
R Or E	Reflection Or Evaluation	My work is relevant but the only person that sees this is the organiser. She benefits from it and “takes all credit”. Next time, I will also pay more attention to better propagate my input and communicate it more widely.

*Remember that the interviewer is also interested in what you have learned. Therefore, you can also give a “failure” or negative characteristic a positive twist.*

## Questions from you as the applicant

During the interview the interviewer will determine if you are suitable. Please do not forget that you also have to find out if the job suits you. Usually you can ask questions during the interview. Just link it to one of the interviewer's questions. If this is not possible or if you have more questions, you usually get the opportunity to ask these questions at the end of the interview. With the correct questions, you can show that you are aware of the content of the position, but that you are also critical.

Ask questions that are important to you but make sure you don't get ahead of things. Often the practical matters regarding terms of employment such as salary and working hours are discussed in a later interview. However, it is useful to inquire about the team composition or the style of management of your intended manager, among others. You can find examples of "tricky questions" in the document.

Pay close attention to the interviewer. When you notice that he reacts enthusiastically to your questions, feel free to keep asking them for a bit longer. When you notice the interviewer does not appreciate this, for example when an interview is running late and he has another appointment, keep it as brief as possible.

### In closing

It is nice to find out during this stage what the next steps will be. How will the procedure go forward and when can you expect a response? Sometimes the interviewer might ask what you thought of the interview. The intention is not for you to provide extensive feedback on aspects of the interview, but rather for you to provide a short reflection in a few words or sentences.

### After the interview

If a response is taking a long time, please make contact yourself after a certain time. Make sure you don't sound desperate or impatient, but just ask what the situation is.

### Job offer or rejection

You have got the job: congratulations! Ask what the next step in the procedure is and what is expected of you. Wait a bit before reporting this joyful occasion on social media and be careful who you tell within your circle of family and friends. This also applies to terminating your current job if you are already working somewhere. We recommend that you do not share this news till you have actually signed your contract.

What if you are rejected?

- ☒ Self-reflection will not harm you – why do you think it went wrong?
- ☒ If possible, ask the company:
  - What they thought of your CV and motivation letter? What they thought of the job interview?
  - If they any tips for improvement?
  - What are the strengths of the candidate that got the job?
  - Whether your CV will be kept for future reference?
  - If you can get in touch again in the near future?