

BBC Learning English

Ask about English

Job interviews



A question from Mayur in India:

I will have to face interview and group discussions in order to get recruited into a company, can you please tell me how to behave in an interview.

Catherine Chapman answers:

Hi Mayur!

Thanks for your question! Many people feel nervous about interviews, but there are a lot of things you can do to help yourself. Here are some of my favourite tips for successful interviews.

1. Prepare for the interview.

Do some research about the company so that you can talk knowledgeably about it. Try to predict what questions you will be asked, and prepare your answers. To help you do this, look at the job advertisement and job description/person specification if you have them, as well as your CV and covering letter. Some general questions you might be asked are:

- Why do you want to work for this company?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What special skills and talents can you bring to this position?
- How would your manager describe you?
- What did you learn in your last job?
- Give an example of a work problem that you have been able to solve.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What is your long-term career plan?

Make sure you can answer these questions! Practise pronunciation of difficult words and if you know the name(s) of the person/people who will be interviewing you, make sure you can pronounce them properly.

2. Try to make a good first impression.

Wear clean, well-fitting clothes which are appropriate for the job and company you have applied to. Smile, make eye contact and give a firm handshake. Sit fairly upright in your chair and sit still. Speak clearly and confidently. The interviewer will probably start by asking you some general questions to make you feel relaxed. Don't worry about being nervous - it's normal - but don't let your nerves stop you from giving full answers to questions.

3. Give full answers to questions.

The interviewer is asking you questions because s/he wants to know more about you, so don't mumble or give one-word answers. Don't memorise answers and repeat them word for word. This sounds mechanical and boring, and you'll get stuck if you are asked a question which you haven't prepared for. You will give a much better impression if you speak naturally. Make sure you answer the question that was asked, and try to give specific answers with examples. For example, if the interviewer asks you what you learnt in your last job, you could say: *In my role as assistant manager, I improved my organisational skills as I was responsible for organising the work schedules of 10 full-time and 5 part-time staff.* But don't give so much detailed information that you become boring!

4. Tell the truth.

Don't panic if the interviewer asks you to talk about problems you have had. S/he isn't trying to make you look bad. You should briefly describe the problem and then explain how you tried to solve it. You should also say something about how successful the solution was, for example: *'The workload on my degree course was very high in the first term, and I found myself falling behind. I solved the problem by making a study timetable so that I didn't spend too much time working on each essay. I also booked a couple of one-to-one sessions with my sociology teacher, who was able to guide my research, which saved me a lot of time.* Don't lie or exaggerate. You must ALWAYS tell the truth, remembering to try to show yourself in a positive light. A part time job stacking shelves in your local supermarket isn't *'just/only a part-time job'* and it may not be *'a fantastic opportunity'* but it is *'a chance to meet people, experience a retail environment and earn some money to support my studies'*.

5. Prepare your English

Before the interview, you can practise your interview technique by getting a friend to role-play the interview with you. Make a note of any difficulties you have with your English so that you can research and practise them before the interview. During the actual interview, don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat something if you didn't understand it. If you want to check your understanding, repeat the question in your own words: '*So you're asking me....*' '*You mean you want to know...*' This will also give you some time to think of your answer. Don't pretend you understand something if you don't. Speak clearly and confidently, not too quickly and don't worry if you make a few mistakes.

6. Ask questions.

Make a list of things you want to know about the job and take it with you to the interview. When it is your turn to ask questions, have a quick look at it and ask any that haven't been answered already. Some topics you might like to ask about include:

- Promotion prospects
- Opportunities for travel
- Pension or healthcare scheme
- Training opportunities
- Cost and availability of accommodation in the area

Use polite question forms like *I was wondering... Could you tell me a little bit about...? I'd like to know something about...* At the end of the interview, remember to thank the interviewer for seeing you.

Well I do hope these tips are helpful Mayur. Thanks again for your question, and good luck in your job search!

Catherine Chapman has a BA (hons) in Communication Studies, CTEFLA, DELTA and a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and English Language Teaching with Manchester University (UK). She has taught EFL, EAP and IT skills in several countries, worked in ELT management and has developed web-based ELT/EAP materials projects in institutions including Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and Newcastle University (UK). She now works as an ELT Writer for BBC Learning English.