Guide: Interviews

Months of preparation, self-evaluation, and looking for suitable firms culminate in a series of 30-minute interviews. Only the candidate who, thanks to a prior examination of his or her professional objectives, comes to the interview confident and professionally prepared will give a good impression and interest the interviewer. The candidate whose preparation begins a few minutes before the interview generally finds him or herself in an uncomfortable position, manifested by a lack of interest on the part of the interviewer and embarrassing gaps in the conversation.

All preparation must lead to the ability to answer with certainty the key question (which may not be explicitly stated): 'Why should I hire you?' All of the interviewer's questions refer back to this: 'Why are you interested in marketing?' 'Why are you interested in this company?' 'Why do you want to work in this industry?' You must answer these questions in a manner that leads the interviewer to consider you as a possible member of the company.

It is very important to prepare for each interview individually, even if common guidelines are used for all.

- Be honest. Lack of honesty only leads to mistakes of little benefit to the company or candidate and harms the candidate and IESE's image.
- Be calm and self-assured.
- Comply with what is agreed on and arrive at the appointment punctually.
- Adapt to the style of the interviewer.
- Be positive throughout the interview, even if negative conclusions are reached.
- Attend all the interviews arranged for you. If you do not wish to proceed with one, apologize to the company and inform the Career Management Centre.

Go into the interview with a positive attitude that you feel comfortable with. Avoid trying to project a personality or to give answers that you think the interviewer wants to hear. Be yourself; relaxed and enthusiastic.

Interview Types

- **Standard Interview** - This is a straightforward information exchange interview. You are asked questions about your education, prior work experience, career interests, etc. The ideal interview flows like a conversation, with a dynamic exchange of experiences and ideas so that the two parties get to know one another.

- **Stress Interview** - While most people find interviews to be stressful by their nature, with a certain amount of doubt, uncertainty and pressure, the 'stress interview' is different. The aim of the stress interview is to create intense pressure in order for the interviewer to observe your reactions and performance under stressful conditions. Stress interviews are most often used by client-centred businesses, like consulting or investment banking firms...
"Assessment Center". Se Assessment centers may seem a foreign concept, but the process is really not all that unusual. We observe and evaluate others all the time. We formulate opinions of others at least partly from our observations of them in a variety of situations. We compare their behavior to a set of standards that we feel are correct. This evaluation of people is similar to what happens in an assessment center. The difference with an assessment center, however, is that participants are assessed using measures designed to be accurate and objective. Often when forming opinions, it is hard to be objective and therefore decisions can become distorted. In selecting personnel for key positions, distorted opinions greatly decrease our chances of selecting the best candidate for the job. An assessment center process attempts to increase the accuracy of our observations. It relies on a clearly defined set of standards which highly trained observers use to compare with the participant's behavior.

The actual design of the assessment center varies from organization to organization. No two assessment centres are identical as they are designed around the organization's needs and objectives. All of them do and must, however, contain certain key components. These include:

- **Multiple raters** - Raters are trained or certified and may be managers (at least two levels above the target job), outside consultants, or industrial/organizational psychologists.
- **Multiple techniques** - Multiple techniques allow several dimensions to be observed in a number of exercises, thereby reducing the potential for bias.
- **Consensus among the raters** - Consensus means that information is combined to give an overall rating.

### The First Interview

The first interview with a company usually lasts 30 minutes, during which the interviewer tries to impress the candidate with the opportunities available in the organization, while at the same time evaluating how the candidate's qualifications match what the firm is looking for. This two-track approach requires thought and preparation on your part before the interview.

A successful interview follows a series of steps. At the beginning, each party tries to find out a little about the other, starting with an exchange of names and a handshake. Next is usually a short conversation about some insignificant topic. Wait for the interviewer to ask the first question and, in general, to direct the interview. Some typical 'opening questions' might be:

- I've read your résumé, but tell me something about yourself.
- Why are you interested in our company?
- Why do you think your work experience would be interesting to us?

Your initial comments about your abilities, strong points, successes, etc., provide the focus for the rest of the interview.

The middle of the interview, which is the longest part, deals with questions and replies, the résumé and the skills and abilities of the candidate. All questions are aimed at evaluating candidates, one question usually leads to another and the interview jumps from one subject to another. At first this may seem disorganized, but the interviewer will be taking notes and at the end can give an opinion on the candidate. Interviewers have different
styles: some are more direct, others more oblique, but the important thing is to handle each question with consistency and confidence.

The end of the interview is the time for the candidate to pose more general questions, even if he or she has asked questions previously in the interview. This is when to ask about the position, the company's culture and all issues on which the candidate has doubts. It is the time to express interest in the position and to show your knowledge of the company, if the interviewer has not raised the subject previously.

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**Interview Recommendations**

Arrive prepared to explain and elaborate on any point in your resume. If you consistently have problems with a phrase or paragraph that is interpreted incorrectly, make the necessary adjustments to your interview method or résumé.

Give concise answers with examples that illustrate your comments. The interviewer is interested in knowing why you feel a certain way or what motives underlie your professional objectives.

In open interviews (those in which the interviewer does not ask many questions) you should give a brief, articulate presentation which explains how your experience meets the needs of the position, how you will enhance the business, why you are interested in the position, and what abilities you will use in fulfilling it.

It's not enough to show interest, knowledge and preparation. Show enthusiasm for the work and for the company. Enthusiasm is expressed by your intensity - body language, tone of voice, gestures, eye contact, and the rhythm of your answers. Interviewers are looking for the best candidates who, at the same time, appear to be interested in their company.

Take control of the interview if you would like to direct it toward an area that you think it is important to mention. The majority of interviewers are looking for self-confidence and vitality. The final part of the interview is the best time to highlight an important point or ask a pertinent question. If the interviewer doesn't seem to be interested or isn't prepared to answer, re-focus the interview by returning to your qualifications for the position.

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**Sample Interview Questions**

- How do you think a colleague or friend who knows you well would describe you?
- Tell me about a difficult problem you have encountered and how you dealt with it.
- How would you describe yourself? Tell me about yourself. (Be well prepared for this question. For example, you should be able to say where you were born, grew up, and went to school; what university you attended; why you chose IESE; and why you have come to this interview. Be imaginative - don't follow the same pattern as everyone else.)
- How do you keep abreast of current events?
- What do you do to relieve tension?
• Describe your weak points. Which is the weakest and how do you compensate for it?
• Describe your strong points. What is your strongest asset? Your best ability? (Try to demonstrate points that present an advantage to the company or the industry for which you are interviewing.)
• Have you had a major failure? What did you learn from it? In general, what have you learned from your errors?
• What do you do if you are weak in a quantitative area (statistics, accounting, etc.); how do you compensate?
• What do think have been your greatest successes or achievements? Your failures? Your biggest disappointments? How did they come about?
• What have been the three (five) most important accomplishments (decisions) in your life? What decisions have you regretted most? Why?
• Do you consider yourself a leader, an entrepreneur, creative? Why do you feel you are? (Be prepared to give examples.)
• Are you more of a team player, or more of an entrepreneur?
• Why do you feel that you are suitable for this position? Why should we hire you?
• What makes you think that you will be successful in business management? In your professional life?
• How do you feel working independently? With others?
• How is your job search currently going? What other firms have you contacted? (It's not necessary to give specific information.)
• What do you like to read? What are you currently reading?
• Define cooperation, leadership, etc.
• Who have you talked to today?
• You have five minutes to describe the most relevant reasons, based on your experience and personality that demonstrate why you are the most qualified applicant for this position. (Prepare several important points or aspects that you would like the interviewer to remember after you have gone. Describe them with short, concise phrases.)
• Are you resilient? Aggressive? (Be prepared to back-up your answers.)
• Up to what point are you competitive? Will you fight to get ahead?
• What type of work do you enjoy: difficult, routine, challenging? Why?
• What qualities does a director need to be successful?
• Have you ever spoken in public to a large audience? Why?
• Have you written a lot? About what?
• What type of situations easily frustrate you?

During the interview you may also be asked about your motivations (the why's) for doing one thing or another. The interviewer wants to know your motivations, but also your character, personality, and leadership ability.

Questions to Ask

Candidates are always invited to put questions to their interviewers, usually at the end of the interview, and failure to take up the offer will probably mean that you are branded as lacking imagination or initiative. If the interviewer has answered all the questions you wanted to ask, say so, but be sure to mention what they were. Try to think of another one or two but don’t ask anything you have already been told or should already know.

Good questions do not arise out of thin air and you should prepare at least three or four questions to ask. It is a good idea to write them down – you won’t worry about forgetting them and the interviewer can see that you have done your homework. People often worry about what to ask, but it should be one of the easiest stages of all, especially if you have researched the company beforehand. You can ask about the job itself, the company and its
aims or more "social" questions about the culture of the company – never ask just this last type however or you could come across as frivolous! Some ideas are listed below:

**Career Path**

- What are the career possibilities within the company?
- Is any training offered with this post?
- What is the company's policy regarding training and development of personnel?

**Job Description**

- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- What objectives need to be met in this role?
- Who will review my performance? How often?

**Company**

- Could you explain the organizational structure of the company?
- What significant changes do you foresee for the company in the near future?
- What are your strategies for growth?

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### Reasons for Failing an Interview

1) **Lacks sufficient industry/company knowledge**

**Action:**

- Read trade journals on the industry (the Financial Times for financial information).
- Talk to alumni or someone in the industry about what they think are the key issues in the industry and company.
- Search database for journal and newspaper articles on company and industry.
- Read company’s Annual Report and corporate literature available in the library, visit their web site.
- Attend corporate presentations.

You need to be careful not to 'show off' how much you have prepared by just rattling off data non-stop. Your preparation will show in the way you answer questions. If you try to flaunt your preparation, it will come across as insincere.

2) **Lacks related work experience**

Some candidates are career changers, so of course they don’t have related work experience. Therefore what they need to do is demonstrate transferability of skills. If the recruiter comments that a candidate doesn't have related work experience, then he or she candidate is NOT demonstrating this transferability of skills.
Action:

Identify the skills that the job you are interviewing for requires, by:

- Reading up on the industry, thinking about what is happening, and making educated guesses about required skills.
- Talking to people who have interned in this type of position and ask them what it takes to be successful.
- Calling alumni or people you know who have the same type of position and asking them what skills they think are most important in that job. Get a couple of opinions and look for commonalities.

3) Needs to sell self better

The candidate isn’t emphasizing his/her strengths and skills and is not effectively persuading the interviewer that he/she would fit and be an asset to the company. Also, they may be using negative language to describe situations (or even themselves). Any use of negative language will cause interviewers to store negative impressions about the student in their memory.

Action:

- Use positive language, even if the interviewer asks about weaknesses. Focus on how you turned them into strengths. If they ask a negative question, try not to answer it if possible, or focus on the positive.
- In an interview, candidates can be their own worst enemy. If they don’t believe in themselves or their ability to do the job, no one else will! So candidates need to know their abilities and skills, and sell them.
- The candidate must decide in advance why he/she would be a good fit for a particular company, and be able to articulate this effectively.
- The candidate must sell his/her relevant skills and competencies by giving examples and illustrations that connect with the prospective employer’s needs.

After the Interview

- Send a thank you letter after the interview.
- If you have not heard from the company in three or four weeks, you can contact the recruiter.