

Job interviews: skills based tests advice

You will usually be asked to complete skills based tests online, as an early stage of the selection process for a job. These are generally designed to assess your competency in widely-used office software packages such as MS Word and Excel.

During the test you will be required to perform tasks in these programs using whichever methods you usually would, including keyboard shortcuts. Excel tests are likely to include questions on functions, charts & graphs. Word tests are designed to assess your ability to format documents using the program's functions.

Once you've completed these tests, the employer or recruiter will have an understanding of your skill level for each of the programs, which is usually classed as either Basic, Intermediate or Advanced.

Psychometric test advice & personality test advice

Psychometric tests, sometimes also referred to as personality tests, are designed to assess your fit for the role and company on a deeper level. Many employers like these tests as the results give them an insight into your way of thinking and working. It can be difficult for them to gain this information from reading your CV or interviewing you in a structured environment.

Psychometric tests offer a potential employer an insight into several areas, such as how you interact with others in a work environment, how you cope with stressful or volatile situations and whether your personality and working style fits with the company's culture.

These tests consist of a number of statements which you are asked to agree/disagree with. Answers are usually multiple choice and are on a spectrum e.g. 'Strongly Agree' down to 'Strongly Disagree'. When reading the questions, keep in mind that your answers should be based on that situation in a work environment rather than a social or personal setting. Bear in mind that there's no such thing as a right or wrong answer to these questions. You should try to answer honestly as it will be obvious to the assessor if you have tried to 'cheat the system'!

Job interview: aptitude tests advice

Aptitude tests are timed tests which are designed to assess either your verbal reasoning ability, numerical reasoning ability or abstract reasoning. In some cases a single test may be used to assess all three areas.

If you're unsure what the test will involve, it's best to ask so that you can practice in advance and ensure you're prepared.

Verbal reasoning tests are designed to assess your spelling, grammar and ability to understand and act on written instructions.

Numerical reasoning tests usually require you to use arithmetic and maths as well as interpreting data from charts or diagrams.

Abstract reasoning tests are designed to gauge your ability to solve problems logically. You will often need to identify and explain patterns in data then find a solution to a problem based on this knowledge. Questions in these tests are nearly always multiple choice and unlike psychometric tests there are right and wrong answers.

Types of interview

While some companies will only call you for one interview, we find that the majority of our clients will have an interview process involving several stages, each of which is designed to assess your suitability for the job in different ways. You will usually be interviewed by a different person or group of people at each stage, increasing in seniority each time. Below are some of the types of interview you may encounter.

Telephone interviews

Some companies use these as the first stage of the interview process. You are likely to be asked to have a telephone interview if the job or company you've applied to is based internationally. It's important to prepare for a telephone interview in the same way you would for a face-to-face interview and maintain a professional manner throughout the call.

Skype interviews

These are increasingly common and are usually introduced to the process if the job or company you've applied to is based overseas. Again, preparation for a Skype or video-conferencing interview is just as important as for an interview in person. Ensure you look smart and position the webcam so you have a neutral space or blank wall behind you.

Competency based interviews

This type of interview is designed to assess your skills and qualities against those required for the job. At this stage, the recruiter is likely to want to hear detailed examples from your previous experience which demonstrate the skills outlined in the job specification.

Portfolio based interviews

If you are applying for a creative role, you might be asked to attend an interview and bring your portfolio of work. The interviewer will then look through your work and ask questions based on particular pieces.

Technical interviews

You will be asked to demonstrate specific technical skills and abilities in this kind of interview. The interviewer may ask you theoretical questions based on scenarios which might arise while you are in the role.

Panel interviews

You will be interviewed by more than one person during a panel interview. Usually one person from the panel will lead the interview but expect questions from all members of the group and treat them all with equal respect, maintaining eye contact as you address their individual questions.

Interview advice

Interviews can be nerve-wracking but the key to doing well is to be prepared and appear knowledgeable about the company and the role. Follow our step-by-step guide to a successful interview and you will have the confidence you need to impress your next interviewer.

Before your interview

Find out all you can about the company, its products or services and the role you've applied for. Research the industry in which the company operates, familiarise yourself with any challenges facing the industry and find out who the company's competitors are.

Based on the job specification, pre-empt questions the interviewer may ask you and prepare answers.

Prepare some questions for the interviewer – this is important as it shows you're genuinely interested in the role.

If you're unsure, check what kind of interview it will be.

Check if you need to bring anything to the interview e.g. samples of previous work or identification.

On the day of your interview

Ensure you're dressed appropriately – it's always better to look over-dressed than under-dressed so wear smart business attire.

Make sure you've planned your route, double-checked the address and leave home in plenty of time.

Try to arrive around ten minutes before the start time of your interview.

If you're likely to be later for any reason, make sure you phone ahead in plenty of time and let the company know.

During your interview

Maintain eye contact with your interviewer(s).

Maintain positive body language: avoid crossing your arms or having your hands under the desk.

Be sincere and enthusiastic in your answers.

Listen carefully to questions and don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you need to.

With negative questions (such as "What are your weaknesses?") try to turn this around so it becomes a positive – don't dwell on negatives.

Make sure you have a copy of your CV in front of you so you are able to answer questions based on it without getting stuck.

Avoid being negative about your current or previous employers or role.

Think about your answers rather than saying the first thing that comes into your mind. It's OK to pause before answering as this shows you are thinking seriously about the question.

After your interview

Make sure you clearly understand the next stage of the process if there is another interview or exercise for you to complete.

If this interview is the final or only stage of the process, ask when and how you will know whether or not you've been successful

Ensure you thank the interviewer for their time and the opportunity to meet with them.

Top 10 questions to expect in an interview

Using our extensive experience of job interviews, we have put together what we think are the 10 interview questions you are most likely to be asked. It's worth preparing answers to all of these before your interview.

1. Tell me a bit about yourself?

Tell the interviewer about your educational background, previous & current jobs and family situation if you feel this is appropriate.

2. What would you say are your greatest achievements so far?

Discuss achievements in your career to date and try to relate them as much as possible to the job specification.

3. What do you like / dislike about your present / previous jobs?

Ensure that the aspects of the job that you liked correspond to aspects of the job you're interviewing for. Try not to be too specific with your dislike and keep them as general as possible.

4. What would you say are your greatest strengths?

List about 3 attributes which correspond well to the role you're applying for. Back these up with examples of how these helped you in your previous role and how you feel they would be beneficial in this new role.

5. What would you say are your greatest weaknesses?

Try to turn this question round so the focus is on the positive and make sure you state how you manage your weaknesses.

6. Why are you looking to leave your current position?

Avoid picking out negative things about your previous role or employer. Keep your answer quite general - maybe say that you're looking for a new challenge and a change of environment or pace.

7. Why have you applied for this job / to this company?

Use your knowledge of the company & role to explain how you would integrate into their team and what benefits you would bring. Make sure your enthusiasm for the business and the job comes across in your answers.

8. What do you know about the company?

Rather than reeling off a list of facts, choose 3 or 4 and state why you find them interesting. Relate these to your market/industry knowledge, their competitors and your own experience.

9. Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

Use your knowledge of the company's structure to explain how you would hope to progress during this time. Demonstrate your willingness to develop professionally, learn new skills and take on responsibility.

10. What are your salary expectations?

Research the salary & benefits of similar jobs and be prepared for this question. Answer confidently and explain why you feel your projected salary is justified.