

The text 'Permanent Interview preparation advice' is displayed in a white, sans-serif font. To the left of the text is a vertical orange line. The background of the entire page is a dark, blue-toned photograph of a modern, curved tunnel or walkway. The walls and ceiling are highly reflective, showing distorted reflections of the sky and palm trees. In the distance, three people are walking away from the viewer towards a brightly lit area with glass display cases. The overall mood is professional and forward-looking.

Permanent
Interview
preparation
advice

Whether you're going for a formal competency-based interview, or an informal conversation style coffee meeting, it is just as important to make a good impression and to perform well. For formal interviews, naturally you'll want to ensure you do well. For informal sessions, should you decide at the end you'd be interested, you'll need to have done enough to have the interviewer interested in you as well. Good preparation in all interview scenarios is the key to success.

By following this guide, candidates at all levels will give themselves the best possible chance of interview success and achieving their career aspirations.

THE WEEK/DAYS BEFORE

In the time leading up to the meeting/interview, we advise you:

- Prepare a fluent overview of your career to date in preparation for the “Tell me about yourself” question. This should be clear, concise and draw out your relevant experience to the role. Don't be afraid to subtly drop in some of your key achievements along the way.
- Be ready to explain what attracted you to firm and why you wanted to have the meeting. Is it their size, reputation, the team, the role, the opportunity for growth, the culture, their client base, the work they do? **Pro tip:** weave in why you feel you'd be well suited to the role & firm, based on your career history to date and your personal attributed
- Put the role profile side by side with your CV and prepare examples from your own experience that evidence your ability to perform the role to a high standard. If there are gaps, think of relevant experience you have that will allow you to learn these new areas quickly.
- Anticipate some of the behavioural questions you may be asked, if the interview format is more formal. Some common ones can be found here: <https://www.how2become.com/blog/25-competency-based-interview-questions-and-answers>. Do bear in mind that we can never predict what may happen on the day, so have a good think about your achievements, successes and failings over the years. Often times when you're shown leadership are also times when you've been a team player, solved difficult problems, learned from mistakes and so forth.
- Research the company using more than just the website. It's a good starting point but there is so much more out there these days. What social media channels does the company use and what content do they post, research your interviewers on LinkedIn, look on Google News for recent developments at the company, search relevant trade press, FT, look on YouTube for videos (there may even be one of the interviewer). Cover the basics – when was the company founded, who by, what do they do, how many people work there and what sets them apart from their competitors, where might your skills fit with their business, what interests you about their business?
- Think commercially about the opportunity. Companies want to hire people who are additive to their business. How would hiring you benefit the company? Would you help improve their culture, develop their team, could you save them money by increasing efficiency, would you make them revenue by winning new clients or improving relationships. In short, what do they get by hiring you?
- Think commercially about the business. What opportunities and threats does it face and how can you help maximize/minimize these?

- Try to anticipate any concerns the firm may have with your CV. Have you moved in the last 12 months, are there any gaps that need explaining, is your experience 100% relevant for the role, what experience/knowledge gaps do you have, are there any academic results that could have been better? Nothing necessarily needs to be a deal breaker, as long as it is explained in a way the interviewer will understand. Your recruiter can provide more guidance here on handling specific areas. The key is to never appear defensive. Always be open, appreciative of their concern and understanding.

THE DAY BEFORE

- Go back over your notes from the above and ensure you have all relevant points in your head. If you've made notes you can always take these with you. Interviews aren't necessarily a memory test and coming prepared is seldom a bad thing!
- Get a good night's rest – you want to be on your best form for the meeting
- Ensure you know where you need to be, when and what you should be wearing. The safest best is to dress business formal; however, some companies may be business casual, smart casual or just casual. Check with your recruiter if you aren't sure of what would be the most appropriate.
- Small touches matter. Freshly cut/done hair, clean neat nails, polished shoes, a good pen and pad all help make the best possible first impression.
- Check and double check if your interview is in person or virtual, and that you have the correct information on the meeting invite. If in doubt, ask your recruiter.
- Visualize the meeting and play it out in your head. This technique is well known in the sports world, racing drivers visualizing the turns of a track for example, but it is less well known in the professional world. Imagine entering the room, shaking the hand of the interviewer, sitting down and building rapport. Think through your answers to questions (simple and difficult), points you want to land and how you'll end things. There's a good article on this technique here: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carminegallo/2016/05/24/3-daily-habits-of-peak-performers-according-to-michael-phelps-coach/?sh=3a5e10f8102c>

THE MORNING BEFORE

- Eat well and ensure you've got enough energy for a good performance in the meeting. Be careful of interviews as times when people typically have lower energy levels, i.e. just before lunch, just after lunch or just before home time. You'll need to work extra hard to engage people here and make sure you've had a snack. If you're wondering why this is important, have a look at this link: <https://www.nature.com/news/2011/110411/full/news.2011.227.html>
- Double check location, your route for any delays (traffic, tube strikes etc.) and interview time.
- Arrive 10 – 15 minutes before the interview max. You don't want to be too early and you don't want to be late! If you are going to be late for whatever reason, call your recruiter ASAP so they can let the client know.
- If your interview is virtual, check your camera and audio is working before the meeting starts, and that you can connect with no problems. It's always handy to have your phone hotspot ready to connect in case of any home Wi-Fi issues. Make sure your surroundings are well lit, tidy and they're appropriate for an interview. Do your best to make arrangements for any friends, family members, pets or Amazon deliveries that may choose to join the meeting unexpectedly.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Generally, the interviewer will dictate the flow of the interview. A few things to keep in mind:

- You are being assessed, even in relaxed informal settings. Don't get lulled into a false sense of security and relax too much.
- People generally react negatively to negative people. Be diplomatic and positive in your outlook, even when the questions are soliciting negative information. E.g. Why are you looking to leave your current firm?
- Ask questions. There are a few things interviewers like less than an interview that ends with no questions from the candidate. Typically, it makes people think you've not done your homework. Make sure you have some questions to ask. Good ones include:
 - Why did you join the firm?
 - What has kept you here for X years?
 - How do you see this role evolving over time?
 - How would you describe the culture?
 - What opportunities do you see for growth in 2019?
 - What are the biggest challenges the business is facing right now?
 - What is your background, out of interest?
- Be enthusiastic and show interest
- Be confident, but not arrogant. Don't try and take credit for things you didn't do or that were a team effort. Take credit for your individual achievements and give credit to those of the team.
- Concentrate on building rapport with your interviewer. People like to work with people they like. Whilst most firms are learning how to avoid unconscious bias, team fit (or affinity bias) is still an important consideration for many firms
- Keep an open mind. Every firm has people who have left, for a variety of reasons. Interviews and meetings allow you to learn about the firm directly. If you have concerns, don't be afraid to raise these in a polite way and let the firm answer your questions.
- End well. Thank your interviewers for their time and if appropriate, express your interest in the role. "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today X, I've really enjoyed our conversation and would be interested in talking more." for example.
- Follow up with your recruiter. This is a vital part of the interview, especially if something has gone wrong. We all make mistakes and have mind blank moments from time to time. Your recruiter can deal with this for you when they follow up.
- Send a follow up email. A simple but often overlooked part of the process. Send an email to the recruiter to forward on thanking the interviewer, expressing interest and re-emphasizing why you feel you'd be a great fit for the role.

TRICKY QUESTIONS

Questions you don't know the answer to

If you don't know the answer, don't try and guess the answer. They will know you're making it up and it won't reflect as well as saying "I'm not actually sure of that as it's not something I've had exposure to so far in my career, it's actually one of the things I like about this role. My previous experience tells me the answer could be XYZ and I've arrived there by thinking 123" for example. Showing your working here is important if you don't know the right answer.

Salary & Package

Whilst this is unlikely to be raised in an interview it does occasionally happen. Often, it's best not to get drawn into this discussion and let your recruiter handle these negotiations. We advise saying something along the lines of "Money is obviously important; however the right role and right firm are more important for me at this stage, hence I've not put much thought to what I'd be looking for. I'll have a think after this interview and let you know through my recruiter if that's okay?"

If you do want to give an answer, you can say something along the lines of. I understand the role is paying up to X. Based on my experience so far, I'd be looking for a salary in the region of X – X. The trick here is to make the lower number slightly higher than you'd be happy with and have the top number be slightly ambitious. This way you don't price yourself out or leave money on the table.

Other opportunities

Often clients will ask if you're looking at other things. If you are, be honest but don't give too much away. If you aren't, again be honest and let them know you're being selective and only talking to people if it seems right. In both cases re-emphasize your interest in their company and let them know you'd rather wait and make the right decision.

We hope this guide serves as a helpful starting point. There is plenty of information available of the internet, from friends and in videos to help you.

Good luck and please let us know if you have any questions.