

8. Interview Skills

Learning objectives

- Interview is a Face to Face Oral Communication.
- Each one of us have to face Interviews at some point in our life.
- Interviews are planned and have a purpose.
- Interviews are mutually beneficial, both for the organization and as well as the candidate.
- There are different styles of Interview.
- Learn about the Pre-Interview Preparation.
- Tips on how to conduct oneself during the interview.
- The importance of personal grooming while facing an Interview.
- Social Etiquette that needs to be observed.
- Non-Verbal cues that one should understand and its usage.

During many phases of our lives we face interview

Interview Skills is definitely a very important skill which needs a lot of attention, for, in many phases of our lives we face interviews, for various reasons, may be for the selection to an institution or for a job or for promotion and in either of the cases faring well in them is mandatory if we need to progress in our chosen path.

A Selection Interview is a Face to Face Oral Communication, between two individuals, who are practically strangers, wherein, one of them (The interviewer) has a upper hand.

- ☞ *It is a planned activity:* That takes place in a planned manner at a given time and at a given place.
- ☞ *It is a need based activity:* Need of the company, for they require qualified personnel to fill a vacancy/vacancies. Need of the individual, for he/she requires a job.
- ☞ *It is structured:* The company periodically assesses the man power requirement; if the requirement arises, it is officially discussed and a decision is taken. Everything is done in a structured way.

It has a purpose: The company needs to recruit a suitable candidate for the post, which they hope to find from among the many applicants. The interviewee, since he/she is qualified for the post, hopes to be selected.

It is a process: Just as in the communication process, where both the sender and the receiver has to play a responsible role if the final outcome of the communication process is to be positive, similarly, in the interview process too, both the interviewer and the interviewee have to play a responsible role if the outcome of the interview is to be successful, i.e. the company finds a suitable candidate to fill the vacant post and the said individual finds himself selected.) 2

An Interview presents a mutually beneficial solution

From the organization's perspective, the Interview gives them an opportunity to evaluate and compare each applicant's skills, personality, experience and suitability for the vacant post, and also their performance during the interview, based on which they would be able to short list the candidates, which would ultimately lead to the selection for the said post.

From the applicant's perspective an interview gives him/her an opportunity to showcase his/her talent, skills, aptitude, indirectly letting the interviewer know why he/she is the right person for the job, by performing well in the interview.

The interview also gives the candidate an opportunity to get a 'feel' of the organization culture (more so, if the interview is held in the organization's premises) and also gain more information about the job profile as the interview moves ahead.

Styles of Interview

1. Initial Interview

When there is a situation, where the vacancy for a post is limited but the number of applicants are numerous; at the preliminary level, a kind of Informal Interview is conducted, for a duration of 15-20 minutes; it is like a quick screening of the suitability of

the candidates. Based on the performance of the candidates, a short list is drawn and at the secondary level, an in-depth meeting is held later.

2. Telephonic Interviews

Nowadays, many companies prefer this style of interview, as it helps them to process the entire selection procedure quickly without any wastage on time and resources (both human as well as financial). This interview usually involves answering pre-set questions and the candidate's Soft Skills are assessed.

Once the preliminary scrutiny is done, the applicants are then short listed and called for a Formal Interview.

3. Panel or Board Interviews

As suggested by the title, in this interview, the panel or board members are present. Each one of them ask questions to the candidate; based on his performance, each one of them individually assess the candidate and later take a joint decision as to who should be short listed or selected.

4. Formal Interviews

This is the final round of the various stages of the selection procedure. This is the stage where the dye is cast!

This Interview is so structured, that all the short listed candidates are evaluated along the same parameters; based on the individual performance, the final selection is made.

Pre-interview Preparation

"Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day after day."

—Robert Ollier

We all attend an interview, hoping for the best and with the optimism that the interview will go off well and that the success will be ours!

We are also aware of the fact that, success is not something that can be had by simply waving a magic wand! Success is attained by those, who work towards achieving it; for that, we need to put in efforts sincerely, with a single minded purpose.

To achieve our goal, we need to prepare for it.

Any event, for it to be a success, needs good meticulous preparation. Be it a birthday party or a college annual day function or the annual board meeting.

The success of the event is directly proportional to the preparation that has been done prior to the event.

Recollect your college annual day function, where you had a very important role to play as the function coordinator—How did you go about it? Yes, you started off with planning, finding solutions by asking the “5 Ws and 1H” (Why?, Who?, What?, When? Where? and How?) as you went along with the preparation, for, these questions, answered your objectives/goals and how to achieve them; the steps to follow, the path to be taken, the assistance that needs to be sought etc. It is something like a Mental Mapping that you do, and implement these thoughts into actions...for the D-Day!

Facing an interview is indeed nothing short of an event, for, your career graph will rise depending upon how successful you are at the Interview.

“Learn to walk on the firm ground before You want to fly!”

Before you have stars in your eyes about that great job and the great salary...just because you are academically qualified does not automatically mean that you deserve it! To be a deserving candidate...Plan, Prepare and Perform!!!

Know Thyself

Now, what is the planning and preparation prior to the interview that we are talking about? It is at all levels, mental, physical, psychological, social and communicative levels.

How does one prepare for all these levels? You will find the answer if you were to follow the age old philosophy of ‘Know Thyself’, for, no one can know you better than you, yourself. You alone will know your Strengths, your Weaknesses your Opportunities, your Threats. Do a SWOT Analysis; do an honest

appraisal of yourself; you will automatically realize the areas which are your strongholds, areas where you are weak and need to work upon, areas where you need to ask for assistance etc.

Preparation At The Basic Level

(which should be a continuous process and not restricted just to the Pre-interview Preparation)

- Mental Level - Strengthen your mind with positive energies; toughen your mind to face any challenges; possess an alert mind.
- Physical Level - Physical well being is as important as the mental well being. Follow a regular exercise regime. A healthy mind can exist only in a healthy body.
- Psychological Level - Rid yourself off all the negative emotions, like fear, nervousness, self-doubt. Develop the 'I can do it' attitude.
- Social Level - As we are responsible members of the society we live in, we have to follow certain social norms; practice social etiquette.
- Communication- Develop your Communication Skills; work on your soft skills. Remember, your personality is reflected through how well you communicate, both verbally as well as non-verbally.

Preparation Pertaining To The Interview

Bear in mind that, your potential employer is looking for an employee who is not just technically sound, but also a well developed personality, who is good at multi-tasking and who would prove to be an asset to the organization, in the longer run.

Be a well informed person

During the interview, apart from your technical knowledge, you are going to be assessed on other aspects as well, such as, your Global awareness and at the National and State level too. So, make it a point to be aware of current affairs and issues that is happening all around us; No Man is an Island; anything that takes place around us, is bound to affect us too, directly or indirectly, so, you should be in a position to air your personal views, if asked for reasons, you should be able to substantiate it in a logical and objective manner.

Make it a habit to read at least one national newspaper, daily, so that you have the update on all the happenings that is taking place across the globe. Apart from this, also try and read informative magazines like *India Today*, *Business India*, *Outlook* and the like.

Study your CV thoroughly

Your Curriculum Vitae is their (employers') information centre! It is going to reflect your personality; your CV should mirror you, your abilities, your interests etc. truthfully. Most of us would like to spice up our CV, in order to do that, we inadvertently end up writing things, which, in reality, is not our true self.

This is a danger zone, for, you are going to be questioned, mostly on the basis of information you have provided in your CV.

So, go through your CV thoroughly and frame questions on the basis of it and try to answer them; these may be the likely questions the interviewer too might ask!

Have adequate information about your hobby

In your enthusiasm to project a perfect image of yourself, you may mention a hobby which you may not actually be pursuing! So if questions are asked around it, and if you are unable to answer them, you will end up cutting a sorry figure. It is not just that, your credibility is at stake.

E.g. The most common hobby one ends up mentioning is Reading. A candidate, sometimes commits a 'faux pas'! He makes a note of some of the best sellers and tries to create an impression as if he has actually read them! So far so good! Trouble will arise when you will be asked to give your opinion about the said book, and that is asking for trouble.

Do actually read a couple of much acclaimed books on management, self-help etc. Formulate your own questions based on the book, try answering them; this will help, as then, you can project that aspect of your personality in a positive light by answering any relevant questions with apparent ease. Generally, if the interviewer is convinced with your first answer, he is not going to make you into a book critic! He will move on to the other aspects of interviewing. He was just testing your honesty!

Brush up the technical knowledge pertaining to the post applied

Needless to say, you will be asked questions relevant to the post you have applied for, may be in the form of a problem or a quick analysis of a short case study; whatever may be the case, if you are technically sound, you should clear this round with ease.

Gather maximum information about the Organization, where you have applied

This is one aspect which many of the candidates overlook. This should be on your 'must do' list.

- a. It is always good to know about the organization, its positioning in the competitive market etc. So that will give you an idea if that is the kind of organization you would like to work for.
- b. If the interviewer were to ask you this question as to why you have chosen their company? What were your reasons for applying here? etc., you will be in a very comfortable position to answer them by projecting their company in a positive light

and how you will be an asset to their company with your knowledge, enthusiasm, and the urge to meet new challenges that the company promises to offer, etc.

- c. All this, you will be able to answer convincingly, only if, you have good information about the company and YOU are convinced that this is the right place for you!

Keep all the testimonials readily available.

Your Degree/s, Marksheets, Certificates, be it in Sports, Cultural activities, NGO activities etc., reflects your achievements, in short, it is a sum total of your personality; it should be your pride (minus the ego!). It is not mere documents, on the contrary, it is your passport to your professional world.

- Make an index.
- Serially arrange all your documents accordingly.
- Place all of them in a good quality transparent folder.
- Ensure that you file at least two copies of your CV.
- Also carry at least two recent passport sized photos of yours.

So, if you are asked to produce a particular document, all you have to do is, check the index, flip over to the serial no. of the document and present it. The advantages are:

- a. We all know that an interview situation is stressful, so why add to it? When you have all the documents readily available, you are mentally comforted.
- b. There are a lot of non-verbal cues you are expressing, of being:
- Organized
 - Meticulous
 - Confident
 - Good manager material

I don't think, one should let go such a golden opportunity of projecting oneself in a positive light!

Be well groomed! it reflects your poise and professionalism. Remember, an interview is a place where you are going to showcase yourself in the best possible way; it is the time to market your Academic Skills and Soft Skills, you need to gift wrap yourself 'elegantly'...Do not end up looking like a decorated Christmas tree!

An Interview is a formal event, hence, it goes without saying, that your attire should be formal as well.

Male Dress Code : • Formal attire i.e. Formal suit, formal full sleeved shirt, matching tie, formal shoes with socks matching the colour of the suit. (Ensure that the elastic of the socks is intact; do not use a rubber band to hold your socks up !)

• If you are using a combination suit, ensure that the jacket and trouser go well together; full sleeved shirt and a matching tie; shoes and socks that go well with the attire.

• Hair should be well groomed.

• Do not forget to wear your wristwatch.

• Carry your mobile phone, a small note pad and a pen.

Female Dress Code : • You can either choose the traditional Indian attire, the Sari or the Western Formal Attire, but whatever you choose, ensure that you are comfortable in it; this is very important, because your discomfort will be reflected in your demeanor, which will not be very flattering!

- Sari* : ● It should be a pastel coloured, light silk sari, or a crisp cotton sari with a matching blouse.
- Western Formals* : ● A jacket with matching/~~combination~~ trouser or a knee level skirt. ~~Full sleeved~~ matching shirt. A light silk scarf (optional).
- Footwear* : ● A comfortable pair of working shoes, with low heels. (Ensure that the heels have a rubber sole, otherwise, your heels announce your arrival, which can be embarrassing!)
- Accessory* : ● Should consist of
- * a small pair of earrings. (no long earrings)
 - * a single delicate bangle or bracelet.
 - * a wristwatch.
 - * if required, a thin chain.
 - * a ring—restrict it to one (even, if you are fond of wearing eight of them!)
 - * a small handbag to carry your compact, lipstick, hair brush, mobile phone, a small note pad, a pen and some facial tissues.
- Make up* : ● Minimal. Wear light make up; both, the lipstick and the nail polish should be light coloured.
- Hair* : ● Should be well groomed.
- * Short hair should be well brushed.
 - * Shoulder level hair should be held back with a clip.
 - * Long hair should be tied into a neat bun.

* Both the male and female candidates should use mild deodorant. Suggestion: Male—Musk or Green Tea; Female—Lavender.

* Keep your testimonials and your complete dress ready at least two days prior to the interview day.

Now, you are, all set for the Interview ! Give it your Best Shot!!

Facing The Interview

The D-Day has arrived, you are ready to face the Interview with all confidence.

There are new peaks to climb

It is your turn. You are asked to go to the room, where the interview is being conducted. As you get up from your seat, straighten your attire, take a deep breath, put a smile on your face, ensure that you have your folder with you and proceed with a positive feeling.

The Commencement of the Interview

- * Before entering the room—Always knock at the door.
- * Seek permission to enter, “May I come in Madam/Sir?”
- * After entering, thank the interviewing panel.
- * Once inside the room—stand smartly (without slouching).
- * Greet the panel with a good morning (according to the time) Madam/Sir.
- * Do not sit down, even if there is an empty chair, unless and until you are asked to be seated.
- * You may shake hands with the panel members—it should be a firm, brief handshake; however, a lady candidate should never offer to shake hands first, but, if the panel members make the first move, then reciprocate with a firm handshake.

- * Once you are asked to take a seat, express your thanks and then sit down gently; sit in an upright manner, hands on your lap, palms facing downwards.
- * Maintain a pleasant, confident countenance.
- * Maintain eye contact with all members of the panel, throughout the interview.
- * Be alert to recognize the flow of the interview.
- * Wait for panel members to make the first move.

During the Interview Session

- Answer to the point.
- You may elaborate, if it is required, citing some examples.
- Ensure that you express yourself with clarity.
- Pay attention to your voice—intonation, modulation, tone and speed.
- Pay attention to the choice of words. No slang to be used, ever!
- Be alert to your non-verbal cues, especially your facial expressions and gestures.
- Show interest and enthusiasm in your responses.
- Be a good listener.
- Understand the question and then respond, if you are unclear, request him to repeat it.

Display honesty and sincerity in your interaction

Any organization would definitely expect high level of professionalism from their employees, but the two qualities they would definitely want is honesty and sincerity towards the work and the organization.

An interview is a testing ground. Your integrity and credibility is tested in such a subtle way, you may not even realize it. So, if you are not sure of an answer say so, do not try to fake, for, those people who are seated in front of you as interview panelists are experts in their respective fields and can see through any deceit.

It is all right if you cannot answer certain questions, the interview panelists are also human, they do not expect perfection from the candidates but openness and the courage to say, 'I do not know'.

Do not argue

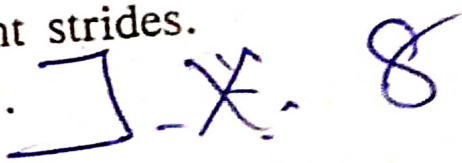
It may happen that you may not agree with some views expressed by an interviewer, just let it pass; do not initiate to express your opinion; if at all it is asked, convey your views in a very diplomatic manner without sounding offensive or aggressive. This gives you a chance to put your oral skills to use!

Use humour, where appropriate

At an opportune moment, exhibit the lighter side of you, may be, through a humorous quote. If you appreciate some humorous remark made by a panelist, give a gentle laugh, and not a guffaw! Remember you are in a formal environment.

When The Interview Comes To an End

- End it gracefully. Stand up and thank each one of the panelists, with a sincere smile and a warm handshake.
- Remember to take your testimonials (and handbag/folder).
- Gently push back the chair.
- Walk towards the door in confident strides.
- Close the door behind you, gently.



Observe the Social Graces

In this formal stage play called 'The Interview' you are in the centre-stage, may be for 15-30 minutes. Whether you will be appreciated in your 'role' or you will be successful, depends on your 'performance'; depends upon the footprints that you have left behind by the first impression and the lasting impression that you have made on the team of interview panelist.

Apart from your technical knowledge, what is going to impress them is your Communication Skill—you are being observed for your Interpersonal Skills as well. How courteous, polite, firm you are in your behaviour; these are the qualities they would look for in their future manager.

Don the mantle and forge ahead!!

Some standard questions that are often asked |

Be prepared for some of these standard questions that are often asked. Frame your answers in such a way, it is interesting, informative, engaging and convincing.

Pertaining to yourself

- *Tell us about yourself.*

(The panel would like to know something more about you apart from what is mentioned in your CV. So, make it as interesting as possible, in all honesty.)

- *What are your strengths and weaknesses?*

(Be objective in your answers.)

- *What is your contribution to our society?*

(If you are attached to any NGO you can mention that or your contribution to any socially relevant cause.)

- *Name a personality who has strongly influenced you and whose ideals you would like to follow.*

(Understand the question, they did not say 'famous' personality! The person who has influenced you greatly can even be your parent or grandfather. The answer should reflect your values, your conviction, your sincerity, your views towards life, how you would like to make a difference to the society etc. What and how you express will reveal a lot about you as a person; in short are you a peoples' person?)

pertaining to your career

- *Why would you like to join our organization?*
(This is one way for them to know how much knowledge you have about their company, for, your answers pertaining to the company will indirectly show your interest level in their organization.)
- *What are your short-term goals/long-term goals/career objectives?*
(The question may be in any of these forms, but the answer that is expected of you is one, which is something that reflects clarity of thought, self-awareness, i.e. you know your capabilities, strengths and the determination to achieve your goals.)
- *Where do you see yourself 5 years/10 years from now?*
(This should reflect your 'realistic' ambitions and your confidence in realizing your dreams.)
- *Why do you think we should select you?*
(You should think from the organization's point of view and see how you will be an asset to them; that way your answer will be objective and effective.)
- *What is your salary expectation?*
(As a part of your pre-interview preparation, make a survey of the salary offered for the said post not only in the company you have applied for but also by other well known companies of equal standing; this will give you a yardstick regarding the salary you can expect. This way you can avoid the risk of over selling or under selling your skills!)

General Questions

- ▶ What are your hobbies?
- ▶ What kind of sports are you interested in?
- ▶ What is your opinion about our present position of our cricket team? Are they fit to play the World Cup?
- ▶ How do you see the future of tennis in India?
- ▶ What kind of books do you enjoy reading and why?

- Name some authors whose writing impress you and why?
- What is your ideal way of spending a weekend?
- What kind of movies do you enjoy watching and why?
- Who is your favourite actor/s, why?
- What do you think of our Prime Minister?/Chief Minister? Is he doing a good job?
- Do you think Madam Sonia Gandhi will make a good Prime Minister?
(For answering these questions you should be well versed with the current affairs.)
- What suggestions would you give to improve the infrastructure in some of our cities? You may choose your city.
- What would you do to improve the state of girl child in India?
- What are your views on adoption of a child?
- What are your views on religion?
- What are your views on AIDS awareness in our country?

Some important tips

- At least a couple of days prior to the interview date, plan how you are going to the venue of the interview. Seek directions; decide on the mode of transport. Ideally, you should make a physical trip to the venue as this will give you the correct picture about:
 - i. the actual distance to be covered.
 - ii. the best mode of transportation to be taken, depending upon the interview time, (peak time traffic etc.).
 - iii. actual time taken to commute to the place.

This way, you will avoid any unnecessary anxieties. It will give an idea of the right time you have to set course giving at least 30-40 minutes lead time to overcome any unforeseen delays.

- Be punctual. It is better to arrive 10-15 minutes early than to be late.

- Remember to carry all the relevant documents; a copy of your CV, interview call letter, all the certificates in a good folder, a pen, a small note pad and a packet of facial tissues.
- Manage your nerves, during the entire period of the interview.
- Be positive and confident.
- Be articulate and mildly assertive.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Shake hands firmly.
- Pay attention to your non-verbal Language.

Now, wear that smart formal outfit and a smile and get going.
Good Luck for your job search...!

Exercise

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the importance of Interview Skills? ✓
2. Describe the characteristics of the Interview. ✓
3. What are the various types of Interviews? ✓
4. What preparation has to be made before the Interview? ✓
5. What is a SWOT analysis?
6. What are the levels at which preparation has to be done?
7. State the importance of the CV. ✓
8. What are the factors that need to be kept in mind before, during and after the Interview? ✓