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Business magazine

Job interviews

Preparation is the key to a successful job interview. Here's how to be ready for some common question types.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary	Definition
1. ..... to deal with something	a. causing worry because something is difficult to do
2. ..... nerve-racking	b. not related to what is being discussed or what is important
3. ..... hypothetical	c. an important skill that is needed to do a job
4. ..... irrelevant	d. to handle something; to take action in response to something
5. ..... to be the perfect fit for something	e. to remember a past event
6. ..... competency	f. imagined and not necessarily real or true
7. ..... to recall	g. to not be working that day
8. ..... to be off work	h. to be exactly what is needed

Job interviews

Job interviews can be a nerve-racking experience, especially when you don't feel prepared for them. And with the variety of interview questions that can be asked these days, it's hard to know what type of questions you should prepare for.

Here are three types of interview questions that you should practise answering before that important job interview.

1. Common interview questions

Tell us about yourself.

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Why do you want to leave your current job?

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These questions are for the interviewer to get to know you and to see if you're the best person for the job. Don't simply list things like your hobbies, your strengths or your work experience. Instead, give examples and use them to show your personality and the characteristics you have that make you perfect for the job. Your interviewer may want to ask questions about certain areas of your CV, so use this opportunity to link your experience to the job you're applying for.

Avoid: Giving a detailed life history or telling long stories that are irrelevant to the job or to the company.

2. Competency questions

Tell me about a time you had to work as a team.

Tell me about a time you had to use your creativity to solve a problem.

Tell me about a time when you experienced conflict with a colleague and how you handled that situation.

Here, the candidate is asked questions about situations they have faced in the past that can demonstrate a particular skill they have. These could include skills like critical thinking, influencing, problem solving or flexibility. Interviewers often want to hear about challenges you've had, not just about times when everything went smoothly, so be ready with examples such as how you resolved conflict in your team or dealt with someone who was not working well. This will demonstrate that you can handle difficult situations.

When preparing for the job interview, read the job description carefully for the required skills and abilities and try to recall situations where you had to use these skills. Then use the STAR technique when talking about these examples:

- **S**ituation – Give details about the context of your example and what you were trying to do.
- **T**ask – Describe your responsibilities and the challenges you faced.
- **A**ction – Describe what steps you took to deal with the situation.
- **R**esult – Talk about the end result and how you contributed to this outcome.

Avoid: Going in unprepared and having to think up examples, or saying you've never faced any challenges at work.

3. Hypothetical questions

What would you do if you had a different opinion from your boss about how to do something?

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How would you deal with a large volume of work with several staff members off work?

What would you do if you had to introduce a new policy that you knew was going to be unpopular in your team?

Hypothetical interview questions are similar to competency questions except that instead of asking you to talk about an experience you've had in the past, they present you with an imaginary situation that you might face in your new job.

This might seem difficult to prepare for, but remember that your answers are meant to demonstrate the skills needed for the job. When preparing for the interview, consider the qualities that the interviewer might be looking for, qualities like conflict management, time management or people skills. Then think about how you can demonstrate those qualities in a range of situations. Start with situations that you've experienced and move on to other possible situations that you might encounter in the role you're applying for.

Avoid: Going off-topic, changing the subject and not answering the original question.

Whatever type of questions they ask, interviewers want to find the right person and are keen to give you the opportunity to demonstrate what you can do. With some preparation, you can show them that you're the perfect fit for the job.

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The main message in this article is that you should spend time preparing for a job interview if you have one coming up.	True	False
2. If the interviewer asks you about yourself, you should make sure all the information you give is relevant to the job.	True	False
3. You should avoid talking about personal things like your hobbies.	True	False
4. If the interviewer asks you about an item on your CV, you can give more detail and say how it is connected to the job you're applying for.	True	False
5. The STAR technique can be used to organise your story when answering competency questions.	True	False
6. You should never talk about difficulties you've experienced at work.	True	False
7. You can't prepare for hypothetical interview questions.	True	False
8. It helps to think about the skills and qualities that the interviewer is looking for when answering interview questions.	True	False

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Task 2

Put the questions in the correct groups.

Describe a difficult decision you've made.	Why do you want this job?	What would you do if a team member was performing badly?
Tell us about a time when you led a team to achieve an objective.	What would you do if your project goals suddenly changed?	Do you consider yourself successful? Why?
What would you do if you became dissatisfied with your job?	What motivates you?	Tell us about a new skill that you've learned for work.

Common interview questions	Competency questions	Hypothetical questions

Discussion

Do you have any tips for successful job interviews?

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