

## INTERVIEW

An interview is the next logical step after a GD. Interview means a formal interaction between a candidate for a job and his or her prospective employer to exchange their views, ideas, and opinions and to understand each other better.

The process varies across companies and across roles. For a fresher, there could be a round of written tests, followed by a GD, and then a personal interview. However, for lateral or senior roles, there would only be rounds of personal interviews with different functionaries in the organization. It is only in the early years of your career that you will have to participate in a GD as part of a job selection process. Some companies, especially the larger ones, have standardized procedures for interviewing candidates, whereas the smaller companies restrict their procedures to only one or two rounds of personal interviews. In some companies, the process involves evaluating the candidates through a couple of tests to ascertain whether they match the requirement. The procedures are different for different companies and positions for which the interviews are being held and cannot be generalized.

An interview has *two purposes*:

- To find if the candidate has the right attitude and fits the requirement and company culture
- To find the best candidate to fill a vacancy

### What does an interviewer look for?

- Who you are as a person
- Your knowledge
- Your skills
- Your attitude
- Your ability to interact with people
- Your capacity to take work pressure

From the perspective of the candidate, he or she will try to find whether the role and the salary package offered are suitable to him or her.

One important point that you should be aware of is the fact that the process of applying for a job and getting selected takes time and you should be prepared for it well in advance. The process of planning for a new job should start well before time. If you are planning for a change of job in, say, December, you should start planning sometime in early July; if there is a recession, you should start planning even earlier. Therefore, planning is extremely critical. When you are planning to hit the job market, take some time to prepare yourself. Even if you are seeking placement through college campus interviews, you should start working well in advance (Exhibit 17.2).

The timing of an interview or the start of a selection process may have a big impact on your career. Avoid entering a selection process when there are signs of a recession setting in or when the economy is doing poorly. In such situations, remember that you run the risk of not being offered the right compensation.

## EXHIBIT 17.2

### Situations when you appear for interviews

A job interview is not the only situation in the business world when you would be appearing for an interview. There could be other reasons why you may need to attend an interview. While a job interview is implied when we use the term 'interview', the following are some other types of interviews conducted by organizations:

- *Assessment interview*—An interview that is conducted to assess the potential of a supplier or creditworthiness of a loan applicant is known as an assessment interview. Assessment interviews could be held for internal as well as external customers.
- *Exit interview*—An interview conducted by the HR team or a senior executive with an employee leaving the organization is called an exit interview. The purpose is to understand why the employee has resigned.
- *Selection interview*—An interview conducted to

select a particular candidate from a number of candidates with similar profiles is called a selection interview. It is conducted by companies to select people for various assignments, work responsibilities, etc.

- *Promotion interview*—An interview held to select an employee from a group of employees for promotion is called a promotion interview. Some companies hold an interview to select employees for all promotions, whereas some other companies conduct an interview only for selecting employees for managerial roles or for similar, responsible positions.

Interviews could also be conducted to hear and resolve the grievances of a large group of employees.

Therefore, when we use the word 'interview', we should be aware that it also implies interviews other than those conducted by organizations to select candidates for jobs.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews could be conducted in three stages. The first could be a screening interview, the second a personal interview, and the third an HR interview. All these interviews have one single common purpose: to know more about you as a person and whether you would be suitable for the organization.

The various types of interviews are as follows:

- *Structured interview*—Structured interview is a method of interviewing by which a standard set of questions is posed to each candidate. This method is generally used either for recruitment of freshers or during screening. It is never used to interview lateral candidates.
- *Group interview*—Group interview is a method of interviewing by which a group of candidates are called and interviewed in parallel. The way they interact among themselves is also evaluated. For example, during the recruitment of software engineers, the candidates are asked to write a piece of a software code and simultaneously questions are posed to them.
- *Open-ended interview*—An open-ended interview is an unstructured form of interview in which a candidate is allowed to talk freely. The interviewer tries to judge the personality and skill sets of the candidate. The information obtained in this process is suitable to decide about the candidate. Sometimes, candidates have the habit of going off track, to speak about issues unrelated to their work experience. The interviewer will have a copy of the candidate's résumé and will frame questions based on his or her résumé and the work that he or she has done. Sometimes the interviewer gets very friendly with the candidate to check how he or she behaves or responds to questions. As a candidate, you should think for a moment before you respond to the interviewer.
- *Stress interview*—The objective during a stress interview is to unnerve the candidate by asking questions that will make him or her feel uneasy. The interviewer will put you through much stress, try to disturb you by interrupting you often, or be critical or rough with you.

These are the four most common types of interviews. However, these days, many companies have introduced concepts such as *situational* and *behavioural interviews*. These interviews are not conducted separately, but may be clubbed with any one of the four methods of interviewing.

*Situational interviews* are ones in which candidates are placed in 'real-time' situations at work and their responses are evaluated. For example, you will be given a memo and asked to correct it. Or, if you are being interviewed for the job of a copy writer, you will be given an advertisement copy and asked to correct it. Although this method is time-consuming, it is an effective tool in gauging a candidate's capability. In a new environment, the candidate's ability to perform to the best of his or her capabilities is tested.

*Behavioural interviews* are ones in which the interviewer asks how the candidate behaved in a particular situation in the past. The basic idea behind this type of interview is that past behaviour of the candidate is an indicator for how he or she is likely to respond in similar circumstances in the future. For example, the interviewer may ask you, 'Tell me one situation in office when you had a conflict and how you dealt with it.' Similar questions could be asked about your life, values, beliefs, and attitudes—for example, 'If you are given ₹1,000, how would you spend it?' If you are being interviewed for a sales job, you might be asked to assume that you are a salesperson and try to sell a pen or a tie (to the interviewer).

As a candidate, when you face a question about how you handled a situation at office, you should answer it in the following manner:

- Describe the situation.
- Say what you did.
- Narrate your learning experience from the situation.

Behavioural interviews can consist of questions from various situations in your life. Questions could be asked about your communication ability, customer orientation, technology skills, learning, motivation, ability to work in teams, cross-cultural sensitivity, and so on.

If you are being interviewed for some other types of jobs, such as that of a copy editor, software engineer, or data entry operator, you will be asked to produce a sample piece of work. For example, a software engineer might be given a programme written in JAVA or C++ and would be expected to correct it, and a data entry operator might be asked to enter some data accurately.

## WHAT DO EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR?

In Chapter 1, we looked at the qualities that employers look for in their employees. They are leadership traits, willingness to learn, cross-cultural sensitivity, the right skill sets, etc. Employers consider whether candidates are the right fit for their organization, taking into consideration the company's outlook and corporate vision. Companies could look for intellect, commitment, initiative, and so on. Some companies look at the backgrounds of individuals and may even take into account the school or college you have passed out of.

Therefore try and understand, at the first go, what kind of job you are applying for. You should demonstrate qualities that may be required for the job profile. If you have applied for the post of customer services representative, the chances are high that the company concerned is looking for people who have problem-solving skills, communication skills, and listening skills.

## GETTING READY FOR AN INTERVIEW

As an interviewee, you should be very well prepared to answer questions based on your résumé and be able to justify any loopholes in it.

Before you go for an interview, you should be well-prepared—most importantly, you should have some information about the company you have applied to (see 'Facts you should know about the company before an interview'). You should be able to speak with confidence about the company, its business, and its competitors, and what it expects from its employees and from those working in jobs with similar profiles to the one you have applied for. This will not only make you confident but will also help you to prepare well for the interview.

In Chapter 16, it was suggested that as a candidate you should research how the interview process is carried out. If you have a GD, then be well-prepared for it. If you are a fresher, ask your professor to arrange a few mock sessions. Record them on video and check your performance. Keep your knowledge about the general business and economic environment of the country updated. This will also strengthen your participation in the GD.

The next step for you is to get ready for the interview. In this stage, you need to

- plan your answers and also the questions that you would like to ask about the company and the job
- improve your confidence
- dress well and be ready

### Facts you should know about the company before an interview

- About the company, history, employment, and position in the industry
- Competitors
- Products and services
- Global presence
- Publications, blogs, presence in social media, analysts' review
- Finances of the company
- The position you have applied for
- Requirements of the specific position
- Job profile
- Growth opportunities
- Salary offered for the role
- Requirement of travel
- Working hours to be put in
- Qualifications and any technical skills required

Plan your answers and also the questions that you would like to ask—Prepare your answers to questions that are likely to be asked. If you are a technical person, you will be asked about technology. If you have applied for a sales position, you will be asked about your contribution to sales in your current organization. Companies would be looking to find out whether you would be suitable to their organization. Every employer is concerned about keeping away unsuitable people. Employers will test your attitude, knowledge, skills, and abilities in all the different ways possible to find out all about you. If they select the wrong candidate, it will be a failing on their part as well as a setback for the company and the team the recruiter is working for.

As mentioned earlier, you will face personal interviews and an HR interview, though you may or may not be required to attend one in the screening stage. You should be ready with your answers to the common, general questions. However, your answers should not appear rehearsed.

Similarly, the interviewers may give you a chance to ask questions. Ensure that you do not ask them irrelevant questions such as 'May I know your name, please?' or 'What is the take-home every month?'. A list of questions that you may ask the interviewer, a list of questions that you should prepare to answer, and a list of dos and don'ts for interviews (Table 17.3) have been given for your reference.

**Table 17.3** Dos and don'ts for an interview

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groom yourself well.</li> <li>• Show enthusiasm.</li> <li>• Carry extra copies of your résumé for an interview.</li> <li>• Keep smiling.</li> <li>• Treat an interview like a conversation.</li> <li>• Ask questions to clarify doubts.</li> <li>• Be courteous throughout the interview.</li> <li>• Look into the eyes of the interviewer while talking to him or her.</li> <li>• Carry a pen and a notepad with you.</li> <li>• Be genuine and truthful when you reply.</li> <li>• Display positive body language.</li> <li>• Be polite.</li> <li>• Be assertive and firm.</li> <li>• Show clarity in your thought process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not demonstrate overconfidence.</li> <li>• Do not ask other candidates about what they have been asked.</li> <li>• Do not ask questions just for their own sake.</li> <li>• If the interviewer has not extended his hand to shake hands with you, do not extend your hand first.</li> <li>• Do not demonstrate a lack of interest.</li> <li>• Do not lie.</li> <li>• Do not answer before the question has been completed.</li> <li>• Do not fiddle with your tie or pen.</li> <li>• Do not talk continuously.</li> <li>• Do not go for the interview without preparation.</li> <li>• Do not be unclear about your expectations from the job.</li> <li>• Do not answer a question without thinking for a second.</li> <li>• Do not be rude or get into an argument with the interviewers.</li> </ul>

During an interview, remember that you will have to stand out in a crowd. If you can do that, you are likely to be hired.

- Extend your hand for a handshake only if interviewer has extended his or hers.
- Do not take a seat unless you are asked to.
- Do not start the discussion; let the interviewer do so.

### Questioning and Answering

The questioning and answering phase is the most important phase. The duration of an interview can never be predicted. You should be able to strike a chord in a minute or you may not be able to do so at all. It is important that you allow the interviewer to finish the question before you start answering it. One-word answers are looked down upon. Explain your point in a sentence or two (Table 17.4). Sometimes you may need to elaborate, but keep a check on the time that you take. Give relevant pieces of information only. Try and understand the non-verbal signals given by the interviewer. Is he or she feeling happy with your answers, or does he or she want to get to the next question? It is often quite difficult to interpret the non-verbal signals as experienced interviewers can mask their feelings easily. (See the note on strengths and weaknesses.)

**Table 17.4** Nature of questions at interviews and suggested responses to them

Nature of question	Your response
About the company, the job, and your career objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be specific, to the point, and assertive.</li> <li>• Be clear in mentioning why you want the job and how you would contribute.</li> <li>• Speak specifically about the company, its vision, values, and the work that it does.</li> </ul>
Tell me something about yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not ever get into an autobiographical mode.</li> <li>• Give the interviewer specific strengths about yourself.</li> </ul>
Why do you want this job?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be clear.</li> <li>• Make your strengths known.</li> <li>• Mention the reason why you are looking for a change.</li> </ul>
Your achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be specific.</li> <li>• Do not forget to mention why you consider achievements as achievements.</li> <li>• What are the skills you have demonstrated in what you have termed your achievements.</li> </ul>
Where do you see yourself three years down the line?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not be specific (do not say, for example, 'I want to be the sales manager' but say, for example, 'I want to add value to what I would be doing, to ensure that I add value to the organizational goals and prosper in my career.')</li> </ul>
What are your hobbies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never cook up hobbies. For example, if you say 'photography' despite it not being your hobby, the interviewer will probably ask you a question about photography that you may not be able to answer.</li> <li>• Be genuine.</li> <li>• If you feel that there is a relationship that can be drawn from your hobby to the job you have applied for, do mention that.</li> </ul>
What is the book you have read most recently?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just mention the book title. If you are asked for further details, then mention the details.</li> </ul>

(Contd)

Table 17.4 (Contd)

Nature of question	Your response
What are your weaknesses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Term as your weakness something that is not related to your work.</li> <li>• Mention something that you are working on improving, such as your writing skills, provided your work does not involve too much writing.</li> <li>• Term as your weakness something that does not have any real effect, such as 'procrastination'. You can sound positive even when mentioning your weaknesses by saying 'I am working on it'.</li> </ul>
Why are you looking for a change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can tell the truth. If you have been asked to leave a job, mention why this situation has come about.</li> </ul>

### Strengths and weaknesses

The chances are very high that you will be asked about your strengths and weaknesses. When you speak about your strengths, be natural and original. Do not use words or expressions that make your explanation look rehearsed. Keep the description of your strengths simple. When speaking about your weaknesses, do not be point-blank. Make them appear to have a low negative impact. For example, say 'I am impatient to complete my task, and sit on the head of the person concerned to get work done.' Sometimes the interviewer may ask you to describe yourself in three adjectives. Think before you answer.

Be cautious with your body language. Ensure that you sit erect, with your back to the back of the chair. Keep smiling, and curb excessive movements of your hands. Do not slouch. Avoid shaking your legs or, especially, tapping your feet. Always look into the eyes of the interviewer, and whenever a question is being asked by one person (in case more than one interviewer is present), look towards all the interviewers and answer the question.

### Closing

The closing is the next phase, when the interviewer has no more questions to ask you. He or she will let this know. The interviewer will also tell you about the next step that you have to take. You may be asked to attend another interview or leave. Sometimes the interviewing panel may ask the candidate later, at a separate round of interview with the HR team. At some interviews, a representative of the HR team would be present on the panel and your salary and perks would be discussed at the end of the interview. However, you should let a company representative initiate the issue of salary (Exhibit 17.3).