

Maximise Your Potential

Essential Skills for Online Interviews and Meetings

BEFORE YOUR INTERVIEW

RESEARCH and PREPARE! Do your research and be ready with all of the relevant information you require for your interview.

- ◆ Check your application. What skills and qualifications do you have which match up with the job description? The interviewer will have your application in front of them during the interview so make sure it is as impressive as can be in both content and presentation. There are many tools online to help you create a CV/ application you can be proud of.
- ◆ Think about why you want this job? This is really important. If you know *why* you want the job you can imagine what you will do in the role, who will benefit and what it is about you that makes you the one they want. Make a note of the reasons why you really want this job.
- ◆ Why you? How can you help the interviewer to imagine you in the role? Imagination is very powerful, it connects with emotions, engages and helps to inspire others. You want your interviewer to be inspired by your potential and the skills, strengths, personality and energy you can offer. Make a note of what excites you about the role and who will benefit from you being in the role, what are the benefits and what will you do?
- ◆ What personal strengths do you have which will make you successful in this role? This can be hard for some of us to think about, we worry people might think we have a large ego but knowing your own strengths is essential to you when applying for a job and setting yourself apart from others. Write a list, then when you think you have enough, ask yourself what other strengths you have as well as asking colleagues, friends and family. The list should be long! It will help you to appreciate all your positive attributes and give you confidence.
- ◆ Carefully read the job description before the interview and pick out key words and relevant phrases which you can incorporate into your conversation and answers to reinforce your suitability for the role. Practice the sentences you will use and the answers you might want to give so that you remain clear and effective in your responses.

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- ◆ What do you know about the organisation? Do you know their ethos, ethics, purpose, mission and values and are they aligned with yours? Think about how you can identify this in the interview and help the interviewer to believe you are the right fit. Think about the values of the trust and how you can talk about the way you demonstrate those in your work.
 - ◆ What can you learn about the interviewer prior to the interview? This can be very useful to you in terms of understanding their responsibility within the company as well as their personality, achievements and expectations.
 - ◆ Knowledge is power! Have all the information you require ready and at your fingertips on the day.
 - ◆ Prepare your presentation! If the interviewer has asked you to prepare a presentation such as PowerPoint make sure you prepare this in good time and practice the online presentation with someone prior to the interview to iron out any potential technical problems.
 - ◆ The rules do not change because the presentation is online. You and the PowerPoint need to be engaging and impactful. Master how you share the screen so that you can be seen during the presentation; you are being interviewed, not your PowerPoint. Use engaging images, data and wording in your presentation but be careful not to include too much information which may be hard to digest during the interview and draw focus away from you.
 - ◆ Email detailed documents you wish to share prior to the interview, ensure the interviewer has received them and have a copy with you so that you can talk through them if they have any questions.
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- ◆ Here are links to useful YouTube tutorials on preparing and presenting your presentation online.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zpn_lyCKsv4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RagDree80-Y>

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PERSONAL PREPARATION

- ◆ Try to get plenty of sleep and wake up with plenty of time to get yourself ready before the interview. You must not look like you have just rolled out of bed and dashed out of the shower.
- ◆ Eat well. Make sure you eat before your interview. Don't eat anything unusual or out of the ordinary and definitely not too spicy, you do not want to have indigestion or an upset stomach in your interview. You may not feel hungry due to nerves so try to eat a banana which has useful nutrients including potassium and tryptophan. Tryptophan is known to help boost your memory, learning and regulate mood.
- ◆ Ensure you are calm and centred. Exercise is a great way to combat nerves, feel good and boost energy. If you feel you need to calm down and control your anxiety yoga, meditation and breathing can really help. There are many accessible apps and online resources to help and here is a quick, breathing exercise you can try.
 - * Find a quiet room or space and have your phone or timing device with you.
 - * Make yourself comfortable with your back supported. You can sit on a chair or lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the ground.
 - * Without judgement or force work through your body and check for tension. Try to release any tension, wriggle your fingers and toes and give your arms and legs a gentle shake. Check your neck and shoulders are soft and your jaw, tongue and eyelids are feeling relaxed.
 - * Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Rather than a quick, shallow breath in your chest you are seeking to find a slow, deep breath.
 - * Have a quick practice breathing and counting in your mind. You are going to breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts and breathe out for 4 counts.
 - * Set a timer for one minute, this can be on your phone or similar device. When you are ready start the timer and breath and count as you have practised, repeating until the time is up.
 - * After one minute open your eyes and notice how you are feeling and what has changed. Get up slowly and when you are ready
 - * You can repeat this as often as you like or set the timer for longer, such as 5 minutes for example.

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- ◆ Plan what you will wear. You must look smart and professional even if you are at home! Make sure your hair is smart and your clothes are ironed and even wear the shoes you would wear if you were to go to an interview in person.
- ◆ It is not recommended that you wear stripy or patterned clothing as this can be distracting. Wear block colours and avoid white if you can as it may wash you out and will not look good against a pale background.
- ◆ If you wear glasses be aware that you may get some glare and it will be difficult to see your eyes unless you have anti-glare glasses. If you can manage without them or have contact lenses it might be worth trying those instead.
- ◆ Stay hydrated and have a glass of water near you to keep you alert and refreshed.

PREPARE YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ You may have to move things around a bit but the right technology, backdrop and lighting are key to making your interview a success!
- ◆ Eye contact is so crucial and effects your hiring potential. Make sure the device is at eye level because you do not want to be looking down or up at the interviewer as it is not flattering or good for building rapport. Position your device so that you can sit with good posture, in the centre of the screen and look directly at the interviewer. You can use books on your desk to achieve the right height of your laptop or a stand for your mobile device.
- ◆ The right location is crucial. Find a quiet, private place for your interview. This could be at home or in a private office. Make sure you warn everyone that you will be having an interview and that they will not be able to enter the room or make any noise.
- ◆ If you are at home make sure you find a comfy place for your pets as far away from the room as possible, distractions such as the cat wondering along the table or the dog barking are not conducive to a successful interview.
- ◆ Create a neutral and professional look and atmosphere around you. Check what is behind you. Try to find a blank wall in a well lit room. If this is not possible try to find a position with a few distractions behind you as possible. There could be

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very personal photographs or distracting ornaments and furniture in view, as well as looking unprofessional it may draw the attention of the interviewer away from you.

- ◆ If it is a sunny day the light from a nearby window can be very effective and for extra light, you can position table lamps around your screen so that your face is lit well. Make sure your eyes can be seen clearly and that they are not shaded. The effect you are trying to achieve is as if you are in the same room. This is still a face to face interview, happening in real time and it is down to you to deliver the best version of yourself.
- ◆ By now you will have done your research and thought about the points you want to make and the questions you want to ask during the interview. The benefit of an online interview is that you can have lots of notes to help you. Get some good quality post it notes, make key notes and stick them around your screen out of sight. Have your application next to you, as well as the job description, any information or presentation material you have been asked to prepare and a pen and paper so that you can make notes.
- ◆ Decide upon the technology you will be using. The best device would be your laptop or PC as these are static and have a larger screen.
- ◆ Don't rely on Wi-Fi, it is not reliable enough and there is nothing more annoying or distracting than a bad connection. Plug the Ethernet cable in to your computer or PC as this will give you a much better connection.
- ◆ If you need to use a mobile device try to make sure you have a strong Wi-Fi connection, be as near to the router as possible and secure the device on a stand at eye level. Holding the device is distracting and not stable so not recommended at all.
- ◆ Make sure you know how you will be connecting and on which platform, it could be Skype, Zoom or Google hangout for example. Have a look at the platform at least a few days before your interview so that you are familiar with it, making sure that your camera, mic and speaker are working and compatible. Remember to practice facilitating your online presentation with someone too. It is better to iron out technical difficulties beforehand and it demonstrates that you are keen to make a good impression.

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WHAT TO DO IN THE INTERVIEW

You have prepared, done your research, prepared questions, prepared your space and technical equipment, dressed appropriately and calmed your nerves.

- ◆ First appearances really matter. Even though you are not in the same room as your interviewer it is still possible to create a good impression and build rapport. Sit comfortably with a good posture which demonstrates that you are energised and ready.
- ◆ Smile! Smiling is so important, it helps to break the ice and build rapport. We all like people who are like us and have things in common, it is just human nature. So, use your acuity to gauge their mood, pace of delivery, body language, tone of voice and use of eye contact in order to meet the interviewer at their level and help them to feel more comfortable and relaxed. If this is an initial interview you may never have met this person before so building rapport can help them to imagine what it would be like to work with you or have you as part of their team.
- ◆ Breathe. Maintaining calm steady breathing is good for you and the interviewer and will help to keep you both calm and focused. Effective breathing also, supports the voice and encourages good posture. *refer to the earlier breathing exercise.
- ◆ Eye contact and getting it right is so important. Not everyone likes to have someone stare directly into their eyes all of the time but completely avoiding eye contact will almost definitely destroy your chances of getting the job. Try to match the way the interviewer makes eye contact with you, this is likely to be the most comfortable way forward for both of you. If you want to make an impact regarding certain points slow down your language and look directly in to the camera at the interviewer.
- ◆ Watch out for your diction and tone of voice. You must manage your state even if you are tired, anxious or stressed. Present yourself and your ideas with engaging professionalism and an energised, calm and positive tone of voice. Clarity in both your diction and choice of words will create the impression of a capable candidate who is clear about what they want to say and what is expected of them.
- ◆ In your preparation you will have thought about what you want to say so you can polish your delivery by recording yourself asking relevant questions or statements. When listening to yourself, listen out for um's and er's, they will be there! Listen for words you can delete to make your delivery more concise. Listen to your diction, do

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you sound clear and crisp and are you pronouncing the T's on the ends of your words? Listen for variation in your tone of voice, speaking with the same tone and pace all the way through the interview will become tiresome, practice expressing emotion through the voice and keeping it positive.

- ◆ The key is to make sure you don't sound scripted. Practise will help you feel confident that you know your stuff and will ensure the conversation flows naturally.

PRACTICE!

- ◆ Find willing friends, family or colleagues to practice online interviews with. Check with them that the transmission is good, and ask for feedback on the lighting and backdrop. Finally check with them that you come across as a friendly, knowledgeable, skilled professional and that you communicate naturally and confidently to camera.