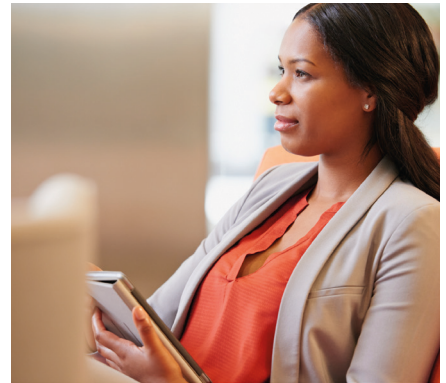
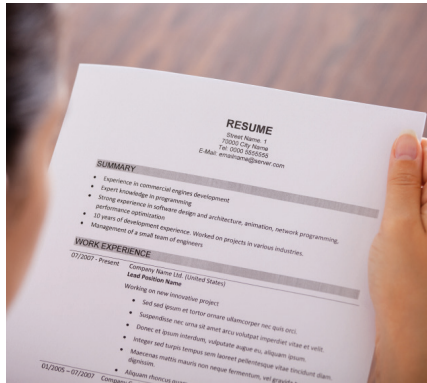


every
woman

WORKBOOK

Approaching job interviews with confidence

For candidates and hiring managers



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ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

Established in 1999, everywoman advances women in business. Our aim is to ensure women from all over the world fulfil their potential. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members, and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to kick-start your career, at a time and place that suits you.

Interviewing is a two-way process - so we've created this workbook with that in mind. If you're a candidate, looking to embark on your next challenge, the first half of the workbook is for you. And if you're a hiring manager, you'll find all the information you need in the second section. You may want to start this workbook at Section 2 if you're about to recruit someone into your team, and embark on the first section when you're looking to take your next step up, or dip into each half when it suits you, gaining insight by putting yourself in the shoes of the person sitting opposite you in the interview.

“Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.”

Alexander Graham Bell,
Inventor of the telephone

We've created this resource because we know that 92% of you fear something about the job interview experience, whether it's your nerves getting the better of you, not being able to answer a specific question, or even showing up late.¹

We also know from our interactions with everywomanNetwork members that internal promotions are no less of a challenge. The interviewer may already have a positive impression of you; you may even have been invited to put yourself forward for a career-elevating position; but the interview itself is no less of an unknown quantity for either party.

Whichever side of the table you're sitting, solid preparation is the route to ensuring you present yourself as your most professional and confident self. This workbook has been designed as a practical tool to help you do just that. By working through its exercises, you'll have a readymade crib sheet for mastering your interview - as interviewee, or interviewer.

We'd love to know how you get on.

Share your experience with Karenmax@everywoman.com. Good luck!

Karen, Max and the everywoman team

SECTION 1

For candidates



LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

If you used our 'Writing a CV to get you promoted' workbook (see 'Further reading') you'll already have plenty of background information about the company or department you're interviewing at, the interviewer(s) and the job in question. It's never too early to start gathering this information.



The following is a checklist of knowledge you should seek to arm yourself with well ahead of your interview. Use the space on the right to make any notes about how the information you discover might impact your interview (either positively or negatively), or anything else that occurs to you.

Company background

This applies even if your interview is internal. Consider what factors about the company's history might impact on the department you want to work in or the role you're going for.

Background notes:

e.g. Company has recently merged and acquired a sales team from another organisation

How might this affect me:

e.g. The other organisation used to be a competitor at my old job so I have knowledge of their processes I could bring to the role

Sources: Wikipedia; LinkedIn company page; company social media accounts; general Internet search; official company literature; longstanding employees past or present; the job description; your own network.

Company news

What are the current market forces, industry trends or economic factors influencing the company or department? Who are its main clients and competitors? What headlines has it recently made? How has it responded to publicity good or bad? Who are its key and/or public figures? What can you discern about the organisation or department's strategy?

Sources: Google news search; Google alerts to bring news to your inbox; company website's news and press pages; industry or trade newspapers and magazines; company's social media pages; current employees; intranet; your own network.

Background notes:

e.g. Company has recently started experimenting with using video on Facebook

How might this affect me:

e.g. Look out for other companies who do a similar thing on Facebook; think about the types of content I might share in the role

Understand the interview

A 15-minute chat with someone from HR or a grilling from a five-person panel? If it's not explicit in the invitation, go back and politely find out the format of the interview and the name(s) of the interviewer(s). If this is an internal interview, find out where it will be held, and get a feel for the environment, if possible.

Sources: The recruitment agent, hiring manager or HR person organising the interview.

What I'll do:

e.g. Speak to the person organising the interview - is there a projector in the room? Will I need a computer?

By when:

e.g. One week before the interview

Anything else:

e.g. Adapt the information I'd like to share at the interview accordingly - if it's a large panel, I'll change my notes into a more formal presentation.

Understand the interviewer

Do your background checks on the interviewer(s), discovering all you can about their background and role, paying attention to any common ground, which will help you, build rapport in the interview and beyond.

If you're uncomfortable with this, be assured your interviewer is almost certainly doing their research on you too too!

Sources: Company intranet; LinkedIn profile; social media; your own network; company press releases; search engines.

What I'll do:

e.g. Search for the interviewer(s) on LinkedIn, check their Twitter profile and see who they are following

How might this affect me:

e.g. Noticed one of the interviewers is a keen runner - I did the Paris Marathon last year so I'll drop it into conversation if possible.

The logistics

How will you travel to the interview? What's the route and how long will it take? Reduce travel anxiety by factoring in time for delays and ticket purchase, arriving in time to buy a drink, freshen up, and compose yourself. Have this information printed out along with copies of your CV (ensure it's the same version you applied with) and the job description, stored in a neat folder.

Sources: Google maps; public transport websites; company website.

What I'll do:

e.g. Visit the site ahead of time

By when:

e.g. A week before on a working day if I can

Anything else:

e.g. I need to buy a plastic wallet and print my CV

TIP

"Dressing one level above the job you're applying for shows a desire to succeed."

Monster.co.uk

Your outfit

First impressions count (half of all hiring managers say they know within the first five minutes of an interview if a candidate will be a good fit²). What you wear can also have an impact on how confident you feel. Plan your outfit and ensure it's all ready so there's one thing off your mind.

Sources: Your recruitment agent, hiring manager or HR contact can tell you if there's a specific dress code.

What I'll do:

e.g. Try on clothes ahead of time and head to the dry cleaners

By when:

e.g. Weekend before the interview

Anything else:

e.g. Is there a culture of dressing down? Find out

TIP

“You should do anything you can that's legal to prepare for an interview. That includes looking at [cheat sheet] sites, talking to people you know who work at the company or used to work there and talking to recruiters who help the company find people.”

Jon Holman, Founder of executive recruiting firm The Holman Group

The interview questions

You'll look at how you'll answer some classic interview questions in the next section. Before you do, it's worth finding out if the company you're interviewing at, or one much like it, is featured on an increasing number of websites which provide examples of job interview questions asked of former candidates. Currently these are predominantly in the tech sector, but it's worth checking. They're often called 'cheat sheet websites' but don't let the name put you off. Recruiters see these as a valid part of interview preparation, though obviously you shouldn't assume you definitely will be asked all or only the questions you might uncover.

Sources: search engines. Hint: try searching for 'job interview questions at [name of company]'.³

What I'll do:

e.g. Write a list of five questions I think I might be asked and rehearse them with my partner/colleague/friend

By when:

e.g. A week before so I have time to rehearse and tweak my answers

Anything else:

e.g. Speak to a colleague who has applied for a similar role to find out what they were asked

The self-interview

Before you go any further, it's worth checking in with yourself and asking

- Why do I want this job?
- What excites me about the specific role?
- What, if anything, worries me about the role?
- Why am I a good fit for this position?

Be as honest as possible; this work will guide your thinking in the following section.

What I'll do:

e.g. Arrange a mock interview with a friend so I can answer these questions with them

By when:

e.g. Two days before so it's close enough to prepare but not too stressful the night before

TELLING YOUR STORY

Preparing answers to all the questions you ‘might’ be asked at interview can feel like hunting a needle in a haystack. After all, it’s impossible to predict what classics and curveballs might be on your interviewer’s question sheet.

We advocate for preparing your thoughts and responses to common interview questions and their variations, as well as any designed to challenge your suitability for the role and those that naturally arise from the job description and your CV. But we also suggest you put as much time into reflecting on your story - figuring out what it’s crucial that your interviewer learns about you so that you can get these points across at opportune moments.



Knowing your own script isn’t just helpful for job interviews: it can stand you in good stead at networking events; in informal conversations with senior figures and decision makers; when crafting your LinkedIn profile summary; and any other situations where you need to succinctly share your career story, like meeting a new mentee for the first time.

Work through the exercises below to get in touch with the essence of who you are, and what important information you need to convey at your interview.⁴

1. What are your headlines?

If your career to date is a novel in progress; what’s the headline of each completed chapter?

Divide your career into time chunks - depending on your level of experience this might mean looking at a few months at a time, or even years or decades. If time segments don’t make sense for you, think about themes - the first job, the first promotion, the early management days, the biggest learning curve. There’s space on the next page for four sections; continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

Take each section at a time and jot down some key bullet points that sum up that period in your working life. For each section, think about your sources of inspiration, role models, the specific knowledge you gained, biggest achievements and why you decided to move on.

Finally, sum up that chunk of your career into a punchy, memorable headline.

EXERCISE:

Notes: <i>e.g. First job as an admin assistant at a university</i>	Notes:
Headline: <i>Learnt how to forge relationships with my seniors, something I put into practice daily in my current, more senior role.</i>	Headline:
Notes:	Notes:
Headline:	Headline:

2. Tell a (short) story using past, present and future tenses

Once you know what key messages you want to convey, these points will need to be structured in such a way that engages the listener. One technique recommended by leading recruiters is to deliver a short story with one sentence each from the past, present and future. Let's say for example that you want to convey a long and deeply held passion for your industry (past), a hands-on approach to work (present), and a desire to become a manager having already laid the groundwork (future):

“I knew I wanted to be a computer programmer from the age of five - I was fascinated by machines and wanted to understand them and make them smarter. I was quickly promoted to supervisor level in my current role, though I am still very involved with coding. I really enjoy my role as a mentor so I'm excited about this opportunity because it will mean being hands on while further developing my management credentials.”

Draft your own version below. If you need more space, continue on a separate sheet.



3. Work out what must be conveyed

Drawing on all you've discovered above, make a list of bullet points of things - accomplishments, successes, challenges, decisions, personal traits which are relevant to the job description - which you feel you absolutely must find a way, to weave into the interview conversation. Find a catchy way to remember them and mentally check in throughout the interview to remind yourself how many you've ticked off.



4. Practise telling your story

Some recruitment specialists advocate rehearsing the key bits of information about yourself that you want to get across in interviews, while others suggest you avoid sounding 'rehearsed' by making notes. Judge for yourself what is best for you. Decide whether you want to come up with a list of information you want to impart and practice it out loud - perhaps with the aid of a voice recorder or a friend listening in to give you feedback, or you want to make bulleted notes that you can draw on during the interview to chat about when the opportunity arises.

QUESTIONS

It's impossible to predict exactly what you're going to be asked at interview, but by preparing your responses to some of the most commonly asked questions, you can be confident that you've plenty of material to draw on. Use the spaces below to brainstorm your answers to each question, drawing on our guidance and hints if you get stuck.

"Tell me about yourself" or "Talk me through your CV"

Be prepared for this classic opener. Keep your answer under five minutes, as relevant as possible to the job you're applying for, and focussed on your most recent past rather than your entire working life. Draw on your career journey, but don't give too much detail. Think instead about creating hooks for your interviewer to ask you to expand on anything they're interested in.

"What are your strengths/weaknesses?"⁶

Conduct a full SWOT analysis before the interview so that you can clearly demonstrate a clear grasp of your own talents and limitations. When discussing your strengths, give concrete examples, in line with the job description if possible, of how you've demonstrated these in the workplace. Be honest about your weaknesses, giving examples of how you've already successfully addressed your shortfalls in a work setting.

“Where would you like to be in five years’ time?”

Share one short-term and one long-term goal. Make these as relevant as possible to the job, sector or industry you’re going for. Demonstrate your ambition, but also how you plan to get there.

“Why do you want to work here?”⁷

Your interviewer will want to see you’ve given this some thought. Formulate your answer in such a way that he/she understands that this job in this company is something you aspire to, as opposed to any job.

“What salary are you looking for?”

This can be a tricky one to answer so it's important you do your research. What is the market rate for this type of job? Speak to a recruiter to arrive at a ballpark figure. Avoid entering into a negotiation until you are offered the position, in which case it's a good idea to look at our Negotiate your salary workbook (see 'Further reading').

“What would your current boss say about you?”

This is a great chance to brag about yourself through someone else's words. Recall any great feedback or praise you've had from your line manager, drawing on formal appraisals as well as informal 1-2-1s.

“If you were a pencil what sort of pencil would you be?”

Whatever your opinion on wacky questions like these, they're becoming increasingly common as a way for employers to test how you react on the spot. It's worth browsing the internet for some lists of similar questions and thinking about how you'd respond under pressure.

TIP:

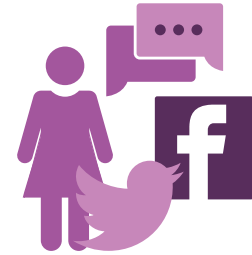
Show your CV and job description to your mentor or a trusted associate. They might be able to shine a light on other questions you might be able to expect or red flags you should prepare to address.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON MISTAKES

Mistake:

Forgetting the interview starts before you reach the room

What you can do: How you treat reception staff, the person who shows you to the room, or anyone else you encounter could be a factor in your interviewers' decision-making. But before you get to that point be mindful that hiring managers will probably have checked your social media accounts to see what conversations you're having online. See 'Further reading' for a guide to cleaning up your digital footprint.



Mistake:

Rambling/trying to squeeze everything you've ever done into your opening statement

What you can do: Remember your bullet point list of what must be conveyed, and keep your answers short and succinct.

“When answering questions it can be good to pick something you are particularly proud of to demonstrate your expertise in the job for which you are interviewing. But just give an overview - they will ask if they want more details.”

Katherine Burik, founder of the Interview Doctor.⁸

Don't be afraid to pause and think. If you need time to consider your response, acknowledge that. Consciously slow down if you notice yourself racing.

Mistake:

Failing to back up your statements with solid examples

What we can do: It's the classic "show don't tell" scenario: telling your employer that you've a great track record in growth isn't going to land with as much impact as telling them a true story which demonstrates that fact. Pay attention to any clues the job description gives about the essential skills required by the chosen candidate, and prepare stories that demonstrate your competence in this area.



Mistake:

Sounding rehearsed

What you can do: There's a fine line between sounding rehearsed and sounding under-prepared. Even if you've learned by heart your answers to certain questions, it's a good idea to draw on bullet points only during the interview, rather than read from a script.

“I once ran a phone interview where the candidate seemed to have scripted answers to every possible question. Each time I asked a question, I heard this intense rustling noise as they searched for their answer. Needless to say, they didn't get the job. Have a few bullet points to hand so you remember the points you want to make, but still sound natural and enthusiastic.”

Lizzie Mortimer, careers consultant for the University of Edinburgh. ⁹

Mistake:
Exhibiting poor body language

What you can do: When asked to identify the biggest body language mistakes job seekers make, hiring managers named the following:¹⁰

- Failing to make eye contact: 67%
- Failing to smile: 39%
- Playing with something on the table: 33%
- Having bad posture: 30%
- Fidgeting too much in their seats: 30%
- Crossing their arms over their chests: 29%
- Playing with their hair or touching their faces: 27%
- Having a weak handshake: 21%
- Using too many hand gestures: 11%
- Having a handshake that was too strong: 7%

Remain mindful, throughout the interview, of what your body language is conveying, correcting your posture accordingly.

Mistake:
An inappropriate question rattles you

What you can do: Research has shown that female candidates are three times more likely to be asked inappropriate or illegal questions (regarding age, health, personal life or family plans) as their male counterparts¹¹. Pamela Skillings, Co-founder of Big Interview has the following advice¹²:

- Gracefully avoid the question and steer the conversation elsewhere
- Keep your answers short, broad and general
- Redirect a question to your interviewer
- Ask the interviewer why the question is relevant to your job.



Mistake:
Not listening

What you can do: When you feel under the spotlight, it's easy to forget the interview is a two-way conversation. Show that you're a good listener. Notice how the interviewer is responding to your answers and pay attention when they're talking, relaying it back to them when it's your turn to speak, e.g. "You mentioned that you're looking for a person with experience of X so I'd like to tell you about the time I _____".



Mistake:
You let nerves overwhelm you

What you can do: Thorough preparation is the best antidote to nerves, but if they do creep in, acknowledge how you're feeling and that it's normal and ok to feel nervous. Then summon up the courage to forge ahead anyway, remembering your strengths and all the hard work you've done to get to this stage. It can also help to see the interview as a performance of sorts, and to channel to image projected by someone who always appears confident. 'Power posing' before an important event has also been shown to increase confidence and calm nerves. To find out more, see the body language hacks listed under 'Further reading'.

Mistake:
Not preparing questions

What you can do: Aim to prepare a minimum of five questions. Show that you're interested in the job, but also the company culture and its goals.

Don't ask anything you could have found out yourself. You can, on the other hand, demonstrate that you've thought carefully about the role, by framing your question around your research: "I read in the media that you are planning to launch X, could you tell me a little more about that?" or "The job description mentions X: can you tell me a bit more about what you're looking for on that front?"

Some great questions to ask include:¹⁴

- What do you enjoy about working here?
- What are some of the challenges you see in this role?
- What does this role mean for the company?
- What is the long-term vision of the company?
- What's the one thing you'd like to improve or change about the company?
- What's the day-to-day of this position?

“When asked if you have any questions, steer clear of anything you should already know the answer to.”

Victoria McLean,
CV writer and interview coach.¹³

If the interview was conversational, you might reach this point and discover your questions have been answered.

“You'd look silly if you ask a redundant question [so] it's better at that point, if you really think you've exhausted the topic, to say, 'You've answered all the questions I've prepared ahead of time.'”

Kim, former executive at IBM¹⁵

Mistake:
Neglecting to clarify next steps

What you can do: Make sure you're clear about the next steps following the interview and when you're likely to hear, so that you can manage your expectations accordingly. If you sense things have gone well and that there'll be a follow up chat, pay attention

to who that's likely to be with and what the format might be, so you can get a head start on preparations.

Mistake:
Dealing with 'no' badly

What you can do: Rejection is never easy to deal with, particularly if you felt the interview went well and this was the right job for you. The following tips will help you overcome disappointment and find positives from the experience:

Learn all that you can from the process. As soon after the interview as you can, write down as much of the questioning as you can remember and score your responses. Is there anything you'd answer differently if you had the chance again?

Ask for feedback and be open to what you hear. It's never easy to hear you lacked experience in a particular area or that you weren't deemed a good cultural fit. Allow yourself to feel disappointment, but as soon as possible afterwards reflect on the feedback, attempt to understand it from the interviewers' standpoint, and question how you'd present yourself differently next time.

Recognise that learning from constructive feedback is the mark of a leader. Some of the most successful business people welcome failure as a means to development. A Forbes study found that leaders in the top 10% in asking for feedback were rated in the top 14% for effectiveness.¹⁶

Use your network: Share your disappointment with a mentor or trusted colleague. Ask for their honest opinion on what you could work on to improve your chances next time, and how they perceive any feedback you've been given or your own recollections of the interview.

YOUR CHECKLIST

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

I have:

- Thoroughly researched the company and my interviewer.
- Decided on my outfit and how I'll get to the interview.
- Checked in with how I feel about the job I'm going for.

TELLING YOUR STORY

I have:

- A solid grasp of the most important points about myself that I wish to convey in the interview.
- Prepared some stories I can share that reflect my qualities in line with the job description.
- Sought feedback from a third party on the kinds of questions I can expect based on my CV and the job description.

ANSWERING COMMON QUESTIONS

I have:

- Prepared answers to each of the common questions I might expect from my interview.
- Worked through the job description and highlighted any additional questions I can expect based on the essential criteria.
- Asked for feedback/fresh insight on the above from a mentor or trusted colleague.

TROUBLESHOOTING

I have:

- Cleaned up my digital footprint.
- Practised being succinct in my responses while also giving enough detail and creating 'hooks' for the interviewer.
- Solid examples of where I can demonstrate competence in specific areas highlighted on the job description.
- Visualised myself walking into the room and conducting the interview with strong, confident body language.
- Confidence-boosting self-talk at my disposal, should nerves strike.
- A set of questions prepared for my interviewer which demonstrate my enthusiasm for and knowledge of the job and organisation.
- Worked on developing a 'growth mindset' so that I can approach this interview from a 'learning' standpoint.

SECTION 2

For hiring managers



LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

We know from our conversations with our Everywoman partners that attracting the right talent is the first step to creating diverse and productive teams. This section of the workbook is designed to help you interview with structure and confidence, whether you're a brand new manager who is interviewing for the first time, or whether you're well-used to the interview process.

A candidate hasn't prepared for his or her interview is easy to spot, and so is the unprepared interviewer. There's more to successful hiring than rushing out a job description, sifting CVs and scheduling a chat. Thorough preparation is key to a good outcome. Our checklist will ensure you've covered all bases.

“The interview is a crucial process that - if executed correctly - will ultimately help move your business forward (and, as a bonus, reflect well on you for finding this person).”

Career Builder Communications

A WORD ON UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious bias is defined as an implicit association or attitude that:¹⁷

- Operates beyond our control or awareness
- Influences our perception of a person or social group
- Can influence our decision-making or behaviour toward the target of the bias

Research reveals that bias is pervasive - even those consciously committed to equality, and those who work deliberately to behave without prejudice, may still possess negative prejudices and stereotypes.

The good news is that science suggests biases can be overcome. The tips in the following section will help you come to decisions rationally, without rushing, by weighing up the evidence, rather than basing decisions on your own snap judgements.

WRITING THE JOB DESCRIPTION

This is a crucial document, not just for the recruitment process but for in-life performance management. Do some thinking before you put pen to paper. Ask yourself:

1. WHY ARE YOU FILLING THIS POSITION

Is the team growing, is it a direct replacement?

2. IF THIS IS A BRAND NEW ROLE

What skills and abilities are missing on your team that it needs to fill?

3. IF IT'S A REPLACEMENT ROLE

What has changed in your team or organisation since the outgoing employee was recruited, which might impact the position?

4. WHAT SKILLS ARE CRITICAL

Which are you willing to train or mentor on?

5. WHICH PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES ARE CRITICAL IN THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE?

What skills and abilities are missing on your team that it needs to fill?

6. DO YOU NEED TO CONDUCT ANY RESEARCH INTO MARKET OR INDUSTRY TRENDS?

What keywords is it common to use in titles for jobs of this nature? Where do candidates for these types of roles generally look for work? What training is it common for them to have? What is the expected salary?

Once you've a firm grasp of what you're looking for, you can begin to craft a job description. Attempt a first draft without looking at previous/similar examples, so you're not led by anything that might no longer be relevant.

It should include: (always check with your HR associate as to company policy on the below)

- A descriptive job title
- An indicator of where the role sits within the team or wider business
- Who the role reports to

- The position's key stakeholders
- Key day-to-day responsibilities, along with a sense of priorities
- Long term goals
- Key objectives and measures of success
- Essential personality traits/characteristics
- Location and travel requirements
- Remuneration and benefits package
- A sense of the company and department's culture
- Location and travel requirements

It should not:

- Include internal terminology (jargon)
- Be unrealistic (featuring a wish list of skills and attributes well above the level of the role)
- Exclude others' ideas (get input from HR, your line manager, members of your team whose perspective may vary from your own)
- Use discriminatory language (look carefully at your person specification - are you describing yourself, the outgoing candidate, your team's star player? Try to keep the descriptions high level so that it appeals to and attracts a diverse candidate pool)
- Be a carbon copy of the outgoing candidate's job description (business needs change rapidly; review carefully to check what is still relevant)

DRAWING UP YOUR SHORTLIST

There are various ways you can sift through job applications, many of which are common sense. Rather than list all the many things that you could be looking out for, follow these pointers to get you thinking about what makes one designed for the 'yes' pile and another for the 'no' pile.

- Can you spot a CV that has been specifically targeted to the job description?
- Are there any CVs which immediately make you curious about meeting the owner to learn more about their experience?
- Are there links to social media or blogs which you can follow to get a more rounded impression of the individual? If not, conduct a Google search. Note how impressions change as you learn more about a candidate from their digital footprint.
- What are your key takeaways of each individual based on the quality of their application (rather than any biases positive or negative - anything from the type of education institution attended to the candidate's chosen font or layout.)
- Pull out any red flags - things that cause alarm or concern. Weigh up whether these are enough to make you discard the candidate altogether. Remember you can always query these with candidates before you make a decision about your interview shortlist.
- Get second opinions. Invite your team, line manager or mentor to review your selections and welcome any challenges.

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

Before you draw up your list of questions, consider the following:

- ☑ Are you interviewing alone or with another hiring manager? If the latter, plan together who will cover what.
- ☑ How will you position the interview to the candidate - as an informal chat, a straightforward getting-to-know-you interview, competency based?
- ☑ Where you want to locate the interview.
- ☑ How you'll help to break the ice and put the candidate at ease.
- ☑ What you plan to share upfront about yourself, your role, the organisation and the role you're hiring for - remember, your role is not just of interviewer, but of brand ambassador.
- ☑ How you'll fairly judge candidates against one another. For example, will you use a scoring system for each question to ensure everyone has a fair chance?

There are an infinite number of questions you could ask at job interview. They fall broadly into the following categories and it's up to you which you choose from.

Credential verification questions

Designed to verify the facts on a candidate's CV, e.g. "So you attended night school to get your certificate in X?"

Experience verification questions

Gives you the opportunity to probe any areas of experience mentioned or missing from their CV, e.g. "This role requires giving weekly presentations to the rest of the team. Can you tell me about a time you've had to present to a diverse audience?"

Opinion questions

Designed to understand how a candidate thinks, about themselves, the role, the organisation or the industry, e.g. "What do you think is the next big disruption for the tech sector?"

Behavioural questions

Drawing on what a candidate has done before to assess how they might behave in similar situations in future, e.g. “Can you give me an example of a time when you’ve experienced conflict with a co-worker, and what the outcome was?”

Competency questions

Similar to behavioural questions, competence questions invite the candidate to share scenarios that highlight their competencies in specific areas related to the job description, e.g. “Can you give me a specific example of where you have demonstrated leadership skills?”

Tricky questions

It’s becoming increasingly common for employers to ask brainteasers, riddles or wacky questions (e.g. “What type of animal would you be?”) These are largely used to test the candidate’s ability to think creatively on the spot: if you say you’re a ferocious tiger or a lazy sloth, what might that reveal about your working personality?

Typical interview questions

Many of these - like “Tell me about yourself?” or “What are your strengths and weaknesses?” fall into the above categories, but they’re so ubiquitous that the prepared candidates will have thought about their answers to these in advance. For this reason many interviewers choose to leave them out, but they can still act as good ice breakers, conversation starters or just give you a good sense of how the candidate presents themselves.

EXERCISE

Write an example question in each style. What are you hoping to reveal about the candidate? How will the question relate to the job interview?

Credential verification questions

Experience verification questions

Opinion questions

Behavioural questions

Competency questions

Tricky questions

Typical interview questions

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON MISTAKES

Mistake:
Not setting the scene

What you can do: You know that job interviews are nerve-wracking and that nerves seldom equal top performance. Design a strategy for putting your candidate at ease, perhaps making small talk as you show them to the interview room or establishing common ground over something you've seen on their CV (e.g. a shared associate or hobby). Give them a warm introduction to yourself, your role, the organisation and the job you're hiring for, as well as the format for the interview, before you launch into your question set.

Mistake:
Talking too much

What you can do: Ensure there's balance in your dialogue, and you don't overdo the ice-breaking by not allowing the candidate their chance to shine. Beware too of leading questions.

Mistake:
Acting on your unconscious biases

What you can do: The best way to ensure you're not acting on any unconscious biases you may have about a candidate based on their gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, accent or any other factor, is to become conscious of them and then

“Ask the same questions of every candidate. The minute you stop using the same yardstick, the yardstick doesn't measure anything.”

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work on stamping them out. There are various online tests you can do to uncover any unconscious biases you may have (see 'Further reading'). Eliminate the potential for unconscious bias to play a role in your recruiting by:

- Ensuring you ask all candidates the same/similar questions
- Using a scoring system weighted in line with the job description
- Inviting other hiring managers to sit in on interviews

Mistake:
Hoping for the 'right' answer

What you can do: In crafting your question set, beware of defining what you believe the perfect candidate would say or leading candidates in any way to give the answer you're expecting. This can lead to you forming premature decisions and may play into your unconscious biases. Try to keep an open mind about who your perfect candidate is.

“There’s no ‘magic bullet’ to getting the right answers from candidates and ensuring the right hire.”

Nancy Newell, Nth Degree Consulting.

Mistake:
Forgetting about your own body language

What you can do: You're so focussed on the candidate's handshake or posture that you forget the interview is a two-way street. Fidgeting, looking at the clock, drumming your fingers or avoiding eye contact can all add up to the candidate feeling uncomfortable, nervous and that you'd rather be somewhere else.

Mistake:
Forgetting that you're representing the organisation

What you can do: You're not just here to find the best candidate for your position; you're here to give the candidate a flavour of what it's like to work at the company and with you as their line manager. Think about what impression you want to create and be prepared to answer questions.

Mistake:
Rushing to evaluate

What you can do: Many recruiters say they know within five minutes if the candidate is a good fit. Beware of first impressions; they're just that, impressions. Make allowances for nerves. Don't stop listening because you've decided this person isn't right - they might surprise you. Avoid reaching conclusions during the interview. Gather data first; analyse later.

Mistake:
Asking inappropriate questions

What you can do: Sadly, more and more candidates - particularly women - report being asked inappropriate questions with regards their marital status, family plans or other personal factors. If in doubt, seek advice from your HR department.



Mistake:
Not giving feedback

What you can do: Your organisation may have a policy on this, but if not, always try when you can to give candidates feedback. This comes in two parts:

1) In the interview itself.

Give the candidate as precise an indicator as possible of when they are likely to hear from you, and stick to this. Remember you may cross paths in the future with unsuccessful candidates.

2) After the interview.

Nobody likes having to tell candidates they haven't been successful. Try to give as constructive feedback as possible, running it by your HR associate if in any doubt. See 'Further reading' for a new manager's guide to giving feedback. With regards your successful candidate, you may feel that a job offer is feedback enough. But it's worth highlighting exactly what impressed you, which of their skills you're looking forward to utilising, what you enjoyed about their approach and why you're looking forward to working with them. It can help with their transition into the role if they know exactly why they were hired.

YOUR CHECKLIST

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

I have:

- A solid understanding of what this position entails, how it fits into my team, the organisation and, if relevant, the wider industry.
- A clear grasp of what skills and qualities are essential and which are 'nice to haves'.
- An authentic, fully rounded job description that has the approval of any relevant stakeholders.

PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

I have:

- Decided on the criteria by which I will select candidates for interview.
- Decided on the logistics of the interview.
- Designed a question set with a clear understanding of how each question relates to the job description and the candidate's application.
- A plan for measuring candidates against one another.
- Examined any unconscious biases I may have.
- Investigated my candidates beyond their CVs, drawing on social media and my own network where relevant.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON MISTAKES

I have:

- Prepared the information I want to impart to each candidate and how I'll deliver this.
- Thought of ways I can put the candidate at ease.
- Mentally prepared myself to be open minded and avoid rushing to conclusions.
- Thought about the timelines of what happens next and what I'll communicate to the candidate regarding next steps.
- Thought about what feedback-giving models I could use to communicate with candidates post interview.

EVERYWOMAN EXPERTS

Everywoman creates workbooks on topics that matter most to our Network members. We draw on member surveys and the latest thinking from the academic and business worlds, as well our own experiences as we navigate our careers. Each workbook offers practical advice, enabling tangible actions for your daily work lives ahead of those important performance reviews.



Maxine Benson MBE & Karen Gill MBE

Co-founders of everywoman, Karen and Max have spoken to thousands of women about the challenges they face at work. Through their own experiences of starting a business, they uncovered a real need for a network where female entrepreneurs and businesswomen could interact and share experiences. The everywomanNetwork serves as a truly global tool to enable members the world over to propel their careers through online membership.

everywoman workbook team

Rebecca Lewis, Associate Editor

Mel Spencer, Managing Editor

Any topics you'd like to see covered on the everywomanNetwork?

We'd love to hear from you: contact@everywoman.com

FURTHER READING

For candidates

Writing a CV to get you promoted (workbook)

Developing your negotiation skills or Negotiating your salary (workbooks)

Confidence-boosting body language hacks for everyday workplace scenarios (see ‘The Power Pose’)

Making the most of your online profile (workbook; particularly the section on ‘online footprints’)

For hiring managers

Unconscious bias: the enemy of diversity and inclusion

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html> (Unconscious bias testing)

Delivering feedback: 3 ways for new managers

ENDNOTES

1. Survey of 1,002 employed adults by Everest College, United States (2013)
2. Survey by CareerBuilder (January 2016)
3. For a list of popular ‘cheat sheet’ websites for companies in the tech sector see informationweek.com/strategic-cio/8-cheat-sheet-sites-to-ace-tech-job-interviews/d/d-id/1323955
4. Read more and find links to related webinars in the everywoman Network articles *Using your life story to make you a better mentor* and *Tell me about yourself: 4 ways to construct your career story*.
5. Asked by 55% of interviewers according to a CareerBuilder survey (January 2016)
6. Asked by 49% of interviewers (Ibid)
7. Asked by 50% of interviewers (Ibid)
8. theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/common-interview-questions-how-to-answer
9. theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/2015/apr/27/seven-ways-to-succeed-in-a-video-or-phone-interview
10. Survey by CareerBuilder (January 2015)
11. Survey of 2,800 British workers by Debut (January 2016)
12. biginterview.com/blog/2012/11/illegal-interview-questions.html
13. theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/how-to-stand-out-job-interview
14. refinery29.com/job-interview-question-tips
15. Ibid
16. everywoman.com/personal-development/essential-skills/psychology-dealing-criticism
17. Catalyst. *What is Unconscious Bias?* New York: Catalyst, December 11, 2014.

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