Welcome to
How to prepare for a
Job Interview
Career Service

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Job application process

- written application/online form or combination of both
- online selection test (AC, Cultural Test, Intell. Test, Personality test, Case study.....)
- selection test offline (AC, ...)
- telephone interview
- Video Interview
- Job interview

March 2019
Job Interview
Universität Konstanz
Outline

- Structure of a job interview – typical questions
  - Beginning
  - Main Section
  - End

- Preparation for the interview

- Final advice and etiquette

- Telephone interview & online formats
What is the purpose of the interview?

To find out if there is a good match –

both from the company’s perspective and your perspective!
Before the interview: Typical outline of a job interview

1. Beginning: Greeting and small talk

2. Getting to know the applicant
   - self presentation
   - motivation

3. Qualification and suitableness
   - Requirements – competences (details from your CV)
   - Personality, soft skills

4. Description of position and your questions

5. Parting/farewell
Beginning – Greeting and small talk

• Introduce yourself with a hand shake and your full name – pay attention when your conversation partners introduce themselves.

• Sit down when the seat is offered to you.

• If they offer a glass of water, take it. It is useful to take a sip if you need a second to think about an answer during the interview.

• Be aware of your body language.

• Typical German introductory question: „How was your journey? Did you find our building right away?“

• Possible question: „Are you nervous?“ – Possible answer: „A bit, but I am happy to be here.“
Getting to know the applicant: Self presentation

Common questions at the beginning:

Your (career) history

“Please give us an overview of the most important stages in your CV to date.”
“Please tell us something about you, what you have done until now and where you want to be in 10 years."

- Do not expect that the interviewer knows your CV by heart!
- Only give relevant information (focus on your professional life)
- Take three to five important facts and present them in a logical manner.
- There should be a red line.
- You should “sell“ yourself, but don't exaggerate.
- Prepare an “Elevator pitch“.
- **Always keep an eye on the benefit for your counterpart!**
Beginning: Self presentation of applicant

Questions about your CV, for example gaps or unclear information:

“Why did you decide for this field of studies/for this internship?”
“What was your main focus of studies?”
“What else have you done during your studies?”
“What did you do in the two years between your Bachelor and Master studies?”

Questions about your motivation

“…and tell us your motivation to apply at our company.”
“Why is this position interesting to you?”
“What do you know about our company?”

- Give a believable reason
- Interest in products/services?
- Previous experiences?
- Never talk bad about third parties (old employer, competing company)
- Give “Win-Win“ reason, do not only think about your own benefit
Main section: Qualifications and suitability
- Questions about professional skills and personality

Questions related to qualifications and suitability are based on the requirements for the position (see job advert). For preparation, think about how you can fulfill the requirements → Matching requirements and competences

Important: Name an example for every skill and strength you have!

“Do you have experience in organizing events?”

While I was doing my PhD, I organized an international conference with 80 participants. I was responsible for…

Think about these points for preparation:

What are the requirements for this position?
What could the interviewer ask? Which experience do I have for certain tasks? (outside the box)
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

Situational questions

Assumption that there is a close relation between declared intention for action and the real action later pursued. Applicants are asked how they would act in specific situations:

“What would you do, if...?“

Examples for situational questions:

“For your boss wishes to not be disturbed. How do you deal with undesired visitors or callers?“

“Imagine you are receiving a task or order which seems inappropriate and counterproductive. How do you act?“

“The performance of one your co-workers declined, as a result the success of your project is in danger. How do you act in this situation?“
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

Biography related questions

To estimate your reaction to a given situation, biography related questions are used. The asset of biography related questions is the fact that they relate to real events and can therefore

- Show the applicant’s authentic ways of reaction
- Allow to understand how the applicant usually addresses problems
- Prevent the applicant from giving answers “from the book“
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

Examples for biography related questions

Dealing with conflicts:

“In some situations, you cannot make everybody happy. Please tell us a situation in your own life when you made this experience with your fellow students, friends or in work groups.“

Supporting questions: “How did you deal with this situation?“
“How were the reactions of the affected persons?"

Ability to work in a team:

“When was the last time you have worked in a team?“

Supporting questions: “Which role did you play in the team? What was positive? What was less positive?"
“What would you do differently the next time?"
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

Questions about strengths and weaknesses

Don’t name weaknesses which will have a great effect on the success of the work you are asked to do in the position:

An accountant who gets bored if he has to do the same process over and over again.

A consultant who does not like to travel.
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

Questions about strengths and weaknesses

- be authentic
- name a success strategy or development perspective in dealing with your weaknesses

Success strategy:

“It happened in the past that I got lost in details while working on a complex task. Now I make sure to get an overview first and draft a working plan."

Development perspective:

“I am often scared to speak German even though I can speak it well. To overcome this fear, I agreed with my German flatmate to only speak German in our flat."

Toning it down with „but“

“I usually need a while to get fully awake in the morning, BUT I am very productive in the afternoon."

March 2019
Main section: Qualifications and suitability

**Strengths** should be supported by giving an example.

„I have strong organisational skills which I like to put in use. This is why I joined a group of PhDs which organise international conferences for young researchers. We hosted one at University of Konstanz and it was my task to schedule the talks of 15 speakers as well as managing the conference admissions. On the day, everything went smooth and it was a great success.“

„I not only have a passion for research, but also for distributing scientific findings to larger parts of the society. I have a talent for communicating complex matters in an understandable way and participated in open lectures as well as at a science slam where I presented evolution theories and received a price for the best presentation.“

Be honest to yourself – only name strengths that you do have.

If you don’t know your strengths – ask your friends and family.
Main section: Brainteaser

“Is it legal in Germany that a man marries the sister of his widow?”

“How many months per year have 28 days?”

A correct (but surprising) answer exists.

„How could you find out if the light inside the fridge is burning when the door is closed?“

Find creative practical solutions.

“How many dogs live in Germany?”

Show your ability to use logic and estimation.
Main section: Brainteaser

These questions aim to examine your

- resilience
- problem solving abilities
- creativity
- understanding
- logical thinking

These questions are not about knowing the right answer, but how you approach the problem to find a solution.

Take a moment to think
Think critical
Think outside the box
Main section: Brainteaser

Analyze
• Take your time and analyze the question/task. The first analysis is important for understanding and planning the approach. Nobody expects you to rush this point.

Ask back to clarify
• Ask your interviewer back if some points of the question/task are unclear.

Summarize the situation
• Summarize the situation briefly in your own words to clarify the structure for you and the interviewers. Then you start with working on a solution.

Express your way to find a solution
• Speak the thoughts about your approach to find a solution aloud so your interviewer can follow your approach.

Explain your outcome
• Present your outcome and explain how you have found this conclusion.
Main section: Stress questions/unusual questions

“You couldn‘t convince me with your skills since they are rather average. I assume you know that you are quite average?“

“If you were an animal, which one would it be? “

**Keep calm and show confidence – take your time.**

**Five useful tips for stress questions**

1. Expect this kind of questions.
2. Don‘t regard them as personal offences.
3. Don‘t act offended or aggressive, shy or very insecure.
4. Don‘t try to be very witty or funny.
5. Don‘t let these questions get to you! Your application convinced the recruiter to invite you for the interview, so your qualifications match the requirements. Otherwise they would not have invited you.
Main section: Prohibited questions

You are not obliged to answer questions about these topics truthfully:

• your relationships or family
• your health
• your sexual orientation
• membership in a union, political party or religious organisation
• your financial situation
• why you left your previous job
• previous salaries (although you can use it to argue for your salary expectations)
• criminal record (only for certain positions)

“Do you have children or plan children in the near future?“

Keep calm and answer in an evasive way:

→ “At the moment I am focusing on my career and am looking forward to start a job.”
End: Your questions – What questions can you ask to show your interest?

Possible examples:

“In which department of the company is the position located?“

“Which areas of responsibility will have the highest priority?“

“How many persons would be on my team?“

“What further training opportunities do you offer?“

“In your opinion, what strengths should an applicant have for this position?“

“When can I expect your decision?“

Consider carefully which questions
• are of interest for you.
• are relevant for the position and the company.
Before the interview: Preparation

1. Intensive preparation of the conversation

- comprehensive research on company and position: information on the employer (homepage), industry, products, corporate values, interview partner

- standard questions

- Prepare your professional self presentation

- Reflect on your motivation and skills/strengths

- Collect examples and arguments – review your application documents

- Think of questions you would like to ask during the interview.
Before the interview, you should have an idea about these topics:

- Your skills and strengths (with examples)
- Challenges in the desired position
- Work culture
- Corporate values and your own values
Before the interview: Preparation

2. Be aware of organizational matters!

- Plan how to travel to the interview venue with buffer time
- Bring copies of the most important (application) documents
- Get enough sleep, eat and drink before the interview.
- Wear a suitable outfit (Company dress code, tidy and clean, be aware for your body language)
- Before you enter the room, switch your phone off.
Job interview etiquette

• When invited to an interview, try to make the proposed time/date and confirm it soon.

• Be friendly to all people you meet at the company (before, during, after the interview).

• Be early but rather take a walk outside than waiting in front of the office for 20 minutes.

• Be prepared to discuss your salary expectations (if there is no fixed tariff) – but do not initiate the topic (but ask once you receive an offer).

• Eye contact, small talk, the interview is a conversation where both sides should speak – don’t talk too little, don’t talk too much.
Final advice

• Be honest and be yourself
• Use specific examples, preferably from internships or studies
• **Language:** If the job advertisement lists another language than English, be prepared to answer some questions in this language!
• Expect to hold some small talk (for example about your hobbies and interests)
• Sometimes, small practical tasks are included in the interview

Dealing with nervousness

• Accept nervousness!
• Test run: Ask someone to practise the interview with you
• Don‘t forget to breathe, drink enough

Depending on the company/institution, the interviewer, the position, the conversation might differ – but if you prepare the beforementioned questions, you are well prepared.
Telephone interview

• usually a first (shorter) interview which is often followed by a personal meeting at a later stage
• Time and date for the interview are usually set beforehand
• Difficulty: You can present yourself through language only. Therefore: Be prepared to give structured answer. Body language and a professional surrounding can still help you to put yourself in the right mind for the interview.

• Find a quiet place to answer the call where you will not be disturbed.
• Have your notes/application documents/job description at hand.
• Take notes.
• Don‘t forget to prepare your own questions.
Online formats: Video Interview per Skype

Preparation:

• Prepare all important documents and utensils. You should not leave your seat during the call.
• Dress adequately for an interview – treat it as face to face
• start your computer early and close all other programs.
• Check your internet connection, microphone/speaker, lightning.
• Make sure there is no background noise or visual distraction.
• Choose the background carefully.

During the interview

• Speak clearly, pay attention to delays in transmission - let the other party finish speaking.
• Be present and be sure to look into the camera. Unnecessary movements distract.
• You can take notes by hand, don't start typing.
Online formats: The time-shifted video interview

• A link to the video interview will be sent by email. With this you can log in and do the interview on your own.

• There is no direct contact with the applicant during the interview. He/she alone decides when and where he/she would like to do the interview independently within a specified interview period.

• The applicant is given the opportunity to check the technical details in advance and is guided step by step through the interview.

• There is a preparation and response time for each question. The questions are displayed on the screen and the candidate's answers are automatically recorded on the webcam.

• Recording is done only while the applicant is answering. Questions as well as preparation and response times of the video interview are fixed and are the same for all invited applicants.

→ The time-shifted video interview does not replace the classic interview. It helps companies to get a meaningful impression of the applicant flexibly and cost-effectively.
Thank you!
Any questions?

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Walk-in consultation for internationals:
Monday 14.00-15.30 Uhr D411 (please sign up on the list at the door)

Other appointments by arrangement:
Career.Service@uni-konstanz.de