



Telstra

Preparing for Interview



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Interview Techniques	2
Features and Benefits	4
Common Questions.....	5
The 'What Are Your Weaknesses' Question	9
Behaviour-Based Questions.....	10
Responding to Behaviour-Based Interview Questions	11
Handling Salary Questions.....	12
Questions to Consider Asking the Interviewer	15
Interview Preparation Checklist.....	16
Notes	17

Introduction

In the job search process, an interview is an opportunity to sell yourself in person and highlight your strengths, capabilities and experience. Making a positive first impression and being able to articulate the unique value you will bring to an organisation will ensure you put your best foot forward. Providing structured and specific answers to behaviour-based questions, clearly communicating how you fulfil the requirements of the role by providing examples of previous achievements, will illustrate the value you bring to the role.

This workbook is intended as an interactive workbook that you can update during your workshop or in the future. It contains templates, checklists and information that will support you in preparing and conducting interviews to assist in securing your next role

Additional Workshops

This workshop is one of a series of workshops designed to assist you in becoming Market Ready.

Additional workshops available include:

1. Developing Your Resume and Getting Market Ready
2. Understanding the Job Market
3. Building your Professional Community and Networking
4. Self-Employment
5. Being Retirement Ready

Please consider these workshops for more information on any aspect of your job search.



Interview Techniques

“Tell Me About Yourself” - Your 60 Second Value Proposition

1. Target Position: I’m a ... with ... experience. Some of my key strengths include...

I’m an Administrative Professional with extensive experience in office management, event planning and presentations. Some of my key strengths include organisation, diplomacy and creativity.

2. Most Recent Position: In my most recent position...

In my last position I was a Senior Administrative Assistant supporting the Vice President of Marketing for XYZ Film Production Company. In this capacity, I planned opening events for 500 to 1,000 participants, created PowerPoint presentations incorporating movement and sound, and met the administrative needs of a marketing staff of 10.

3. My background: That’s what I’ve been doing most recently but let me step back and explain how I got there...

I actually began as an administrative assistant for the marketing team of a small plastics manufacturer. Within 9 months I was promoted to Senior Administrative Assistant and managed another administrator hired to fill the position I left...

4. Reason for Leaving: I left my last position...

In an effort to increase capital resources, the company decided to sell to an international conglomerate and many departments were consolidated with others, including the Marketing Department...

5. My Future Focus: I’m proud of... I’m looking forward to...

I’m very proud of my contributions at XYZ, and I’m looking forward to contributing my strengths in organisation, diplomacy and creativity to your company.

1. Target Position: I’m a ... with ... experience. Some of my key strengths include...

2. Most Recent Position: In my most recent position...

3. **My background:** That's what I've been doing most recently but let me step back and explain how I got there...

4. **Reason for Leaving my Role.** I left my last position...

5. **My Future Focus.** I'm proud of... I'm looking forward to...

Features and Benefits

When applying for a job it is helpful to see ourselves as a product with a series of features and benefits. Our 'features' are most meaningful when we can explain them in terms of a 'benefit' to the prospective employer, the 'buyer'!

The heart of a successful interview, therefore, is asking the appropriate questions to uncover what kind of problems the 'buyer', who has the open position, is having and what the implications of those problems are. In short, you need to discover what the buyer's needs are. With this information you can then begin to 'sell' the benefits of employing you.

In job search terms, your 'features' are your skills, knowledge and experience. They may qualify the product (you), but they won't make the sale (get the job offer). The 'benefits' are your achievements, the results you have been able to produce (productivity, profitability), and the solutions you can provide. All are tailored to the interviewer's needs as you have been able to identify them during the selection process.

Preparing for an interview, then, starts with you analysing the requirements of the role. It is similar to the process of writing an application letter: first you analyse the role, then you write down how your skills and experience match the requirements of the role.

List three of your features	List the potential benefits of these features for a prospective employer
1.	
2.	
3.	

Common Questions

By anticipating the questions you can expect in an interview you can prepare by thinking through and practicing your responses beforehand so that you can walk into the interview with confidence.

To develop your responses to common interview questions, put yourself in the interviewer's shoes. Ask yourself "What is the interviewer trying to find out?"

When you have that answer, ask: "How might I respond?"

INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself

This will be asked in most interviews. Give a targeted version of your 'Value Proposition' showing you as a positive and willing contributor.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO 'CAN YOU DO THE JOB?'

2. What are your strengths?

The ability to talk comfortably about your strengths is an indication of healthy self-confidence. This is a good opportunity to verbalise them, backed by your achievements – strengths in action.

3. What are your weaknesses?

The interviewer will generally require some indication of your level of self-insight into your 'character' weaknesses so reference to your inexperience in a software package, for example, is not always seen as the best answer to the question. Nor is it effective to respond with "I don't know". It is best to respond with a weakness that is not going to be a problem for the role you're targeting. Once you have identified this weakness, explain how you have changed your behaviour so it is not a problem for the business or those with whom you are working.

4. Have you helped increase profits? Reduced costs? Improved productivity? How?

Use your relevant examples in Challenge-Action-Result (CAR) format to answer this type of question.

5. How long would it take you to become productive in this position?

Your answer to this will show how well you understand yourself and the role. It would be helpful to give an indication of the aspects of the role that you are already competent in and 1 or 2 areas that you will either need training or some coaching to understand this organisation's particular systems and processes, but that you would be productive very quickly, if not immediately. Avoid giving a specific timeframe.

6. How do you rate yourself as a professional?

7. How would you describe yourself?

These questions give you an opportunity to talk about your strengths, and what differentiates you from others in your field. If you prefer, you can answer by talking about positive feedback you have received from others. Giving an example to back up your comments is useful.

8. Don't you think you are overqualified for this position?

When interviewers ask this question, they are often concerned that you don't really want the role, and that you're not likely to stay long. If you think you are genuinely over qualified, but you're taking a step back for specific reasons, make sure your interviewer is aware of these other drivers.

9. What would your last manager say are your three best qualities? Why?

10. How would your peers, reports or last manager describe you?

In responding to either of these questions, it is helpful if the qualities you describe complement the strengths you have already given, and align to the requirements of the role.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO 'WILL YOU DO THE JOB?'

11. Why did you leave your last job?

State your reason for leaving honestly and succinctly. Also prepare responses for leaving other jobs you have had. Focus on the positive aspects of what you were gaining in each new role, rather than the negatives associated with what you were leaving each time.

12. Why should we hire you?

Express your reasons in terms of prior contributions to other organisations and your underlying attributes. Giving an indication of what differentiates you from others can also be useful.

13. What are your long-term and short-term career plans? What position do you expect to have in five years?

Your response gives the interviewer a chance to see if your plans mesh or conflict with those of the organisation, and if your goals are realistic. It is an important question.

14. What do you like to do in your free time?

This question may be used to understand your underlying interests and/or aptitudes and whether they align to the role.

15. Which of your jobs did you like best? Why?

16. What did you like most/least in your last job?

17. Given the list of job objectives, which are you happiest to see? In what order?

18. Of all your projects, which were the most satisfying/rewarding? Of all your projects, which were the least satisfying/rewarding?

These questions provide you with the chance to tell the interviewer about the specific areas in which you can be of most value in his or her organisation. If you are non-committal or vague in your response, it may suggest that you lack drive and the ability to analyse or plan for your own growth. It is normal to have preferences.

19. How did you get past jobs?

Your reply will give an indication of your resourcefulness.

20. Why are you so interested in our organisation?

If money is your honest answer, you will usually be passed over. The question is an attitude indicator that may strongly influence the interviewer's image of you. Your answer also indicates how much you have researched the organisation.

21. If you had complete freedom, what job would you choose?

Again, your answer is an indicator of your suitability for the organisation. If you have arrived at the interview through a well thought-out process, your ideal will most likely mesh with the real strengths you are presenting – and with what this organisation most likely needs.

22. Can you work under pressure and meet deadlines?

It is useful here to have an example to draw on that indicates your ability to work under pressure and/or meet deadlines.

23. If you are hired, what do you see in your future?

Indicate your interest in doing the current role for some time, as this is the type of role you are seeking at the moment. Later on, depending on how the organisation develops, you might see yourself taking on either a more focused technical specialisation, or more responsibility in a management role depending on what is most relevant to your situation.

24. What did you enjoy most/least about working in...?

25. What did you think of your last organisation?

It is important to remain professional and answer diplomatically. You can talk about the strengths of your previous organisation and its challenges, but be careful not to criticise the organisation or any specific individual.

26. Why has it taken you so long to find a job?

It's best to answer this question referring to the importance of looking for the right role in the right organisation, rather than just taking any role that came along. If you have deliberately taken a break, then say so, but indicate your keenness to get back into work.

27. What does success mean to you?

Align your answer with the goals of the position indicating that success to you is exceeding your targets, or your key performance indicators.

28. What new goals have you established recently? Did you meet any of these goals?

This question may be used to find out how self-motivated you are to achieve goals.

QUESTIONS RELATING TO 'DO YOU FIT IN?'

29. What is your management philosophy/style?

30. What is your leadership style?

Here is where the information you have gathered through networking is important. It's helpful if your style fits with the culture of the organisation, and you will know this if you have thoroughly researched the organisation and prepared.

31. Tell me about the best/worst manager you ever had.

In responding to this question, focus on the positive aspects of what you liked about their style and what you were able to learn from them. If asked to describe the worst manager you had, be careful not to be overly negative, but focus instead on the style in which you would prefer to be managed.

32. Why do you feel you have management potential?

Focus your answer on the leadership skills you have demonstrated in the past, giving examples, and your underlying attributes that make you suited for a management role.

33. What motivated you to interview with us?

Your research and networking will have revealed information about the organisation that you can use to answer this question. Information about the culture of the organisation, its strategic direction, the values of the organisation, and the specific tasks of the role can all be used here to show your motivation for the role and organisation.

34. What else should I know about you?

If there are any strengths or skills or interests that you think are relevant to the role or organisation, that haven't emerged in the interview, use this question to highlight them.

35. Why are you making a career switch at this time?

Focus on where you're headed and what appeals to you in the new direction, not what you are moving away from.

NEXT STEPS

36. What business references can you provide?

Provide 2 or 3 professional referees at this point (or more if required by the interviewer), and find out who will be contacting them and when they are likely to be in touch so that you can pass on this information to your referees.

The 'What Are Your Weaknesses' Question

In the space below, formulate your answer to the question

Behaviour-Based Questions

Behaviour-based questions require you to provide specific examples concerning what YOU have done in the past. They often begin with:

“Give an example of ...”

“Tell me about a time when you had an experience in which ...”

“Describe a situation where ...”

“Recall ...”

Typical Behaviour-Based Questions

1. Describe some of the most difficult one-on-one meetings you have had with your staff? Why were they difficult?
2. Describe an experience in which you were too persistent. What happened? What did you learn from this experience?
3. Tell me about a time when you encouraged someone to achieve more than they thought themselves capable of
4. Give me an example of a time when your ideas were strongly opposed in a discussion. How did you react? What were the results?
5. Tell me about the largest sale you made and how you did it?
6. In developing business partnerships, how did you balance the benefits to both parties in terms of goals and objectives?
7. Give me an example of a time when you had responsibility for the successful outcome of a very large project?
8. Describe a time when you were working under pressure and had to go the extra mile.
9. When have you had to bring people of differing views together to decide on a course of action? How did you gain support and acceptance from all parties?
10. Tell me about a time when you had to carefully balance meeting the needs of your customer with achieving organisation objectives. What was the situation? How did you resolve it? What was the outcome?
11. How did you actively ensure the safety of others in your most recent role?
12. Give me an example of a recent typical day, for example, last Monday, and tell me how you planned for it. (Organisational skills)
13. When have you examined and questioned the established work practices and processes? What did you do to improve the processes? How did you gain support for the changes?

Responding to Behaviour-Based Interview Questions

Position	<div></div>	Date	<div></div>
Challenge	<div></div>		
Actions	<div></div>		
Result	<div></div>		
Capabilities Demonstrated	<div></div>		

Position	<div></div>	Date	<div></div>
Actions	<div></div>		
Result	<div></div>		
Capabilities Demonstrated	<div></div>		

Handling Salary Questions

How you handle salary questions will depend on the context in which they are asked. As a general rule, it is a good idea to try to defer answering questions about your previous salary or salary expectations until you are close to an offer, or you know more about the role and the employer's idea of salary.

Naming a number may create any of the following reactions:

- The figure seems too high, and they don't yet see why you might be worth it
- The figure seems too low, and they may question your qualifications for the job
- The number is in their range, but your bargaining position is made more complicated because they know where you fall in their range, but you don't

You must be convinced yourself that your prior salary has nothing to do with what you should be paid for a potential new job, nor what the organisation is prepared to pay you to do it. Your salary history is not relevant to the position for which you are applying; the position responsibilities may be higher or lower than other jobs held, or the organisation may be one which pays more or less for the position, such as in the case of a not-for-profit organisation. Sometimes the amount an employer is willing to pay will depend on the experience of the successful candidate. The employer may have a wide range in mind which will vary depending on what they think is an appropriate market value for the person they select for the role.

Try to avoid discussing salary until an offer is made. Until an employer is convinced you are the one for the job, they have no interest in what you want. Know your bottom line, your 'walk away amount', and research position salary ranges beforehand.

Even when deferring an answer to the salary question, it is important that your response positively indicates your willingness to discuss salary.

Deferring the salary question as long as possible is a useful principle, however, there are situations when you need to give information on salary earlier in the process than is ideal. You may be asked for your salary history, your most recent salary, or your salary expectations. This is very common in dealing with the recruitment firms – so expect this question in your early conversations or meetings with them. This following section provides suggestions on how to handle the question in its different contexts.

Directly Asked by a Recruitment Agency

Most recruitment agencies will ask for your most recent salary or your salary requirements. In most instances, you will need to answer the question directly. Recruiters often want to know this information for several reasons:

- To screen you in or out if your salary expectations are too high or, in some cases, too low
- To get a feel for your level of expertise on the basis of previous salary
- To determine whether you fit the range the client has given them
- To determine how you compare to other candidates with the same expectations

There are a number of approaches you can use to defer the question.

When asked for your salary expectations:

- *“I’m more interested in finding a satisfying role than obtaining a specific salary.”*
- *“I haven’t been in the market for a while, so you probably know more about what is a reasonable salary for this type of role. What do you think I could reasonably expect?”*

However, recruiters usually need a figure from you. When you do need to answer the question, provide a range that you are genuinely comfortable with. Do not state a low salary in the hope that once you are offered the role you can then ask for a significantly higher amount.

When asked for your most recent salary, provide an accurate answer. If it’s much lower than your expectations, or what you believe to be current market value, then indicate this. For example:

- *“Although I was receiving \$X in my previous role, I believe that the current market value for my skills and experience is within \$Y-\$Z (state range that you have discovered in your research)”*

Requested in Ads or Applications

Some ads or applications ask you to state your salary history. It is usually an attempt to screen out applicants with salaries too high and sometimes too low.

It’s your decision whether or not to include this information. If you do not provide this information and you match their job qualification, you are not likely to be screened out. They will try to obtain salary information from you later. If you feel you must include your salary history, then provide an accurate one.

You may also be asked to state your salary requirements. Again it’s an attempt to screen you in or out on the basis of salary and provides a starting point for the employer on which to base the offer, without respect to what the employer might have been prepared to pay.

We recommend you leave out this information from your application. If the application specifies to fill in all information, then write ‘Negotiable’ in the space provided. If you know the employer’s salary range for the position and are compelled to provide a dollar figure, then state your requirements as a range, with the top of the employer’s range being the midpoint of your range.

Asked Early in the Selection Process

Usually asked by an HR representative conducting the initial screening interviews. These questions can usually be deferred effectively by the following comments:

- *"I'd be happy to discuss salary with you, but I'd prefer to learn more about the position and responsibilities before getting into salary discussions."*
- *"I would like to come back to that discussion after I am able to provide a better picture of what I have to offer."*

Asked Later in the Interview Process

Usually asked by the hiring manager, the person to whom you would report. You can still defer the salary question at this point using comments such as:

- *"Your company has a reputation for fair remuneration practices. I don't think salary will be a problem. I would like to ask some additional questions about the expectations in this position."*
- *"I'm sure XYZ Company has a fair remuneration policy, and I'm confident that we will be able to agree on a salary."*

If questions become more direct, communicate your desire to fit into their budget or salary structure. For example:

- *"Perhaps if you could tell me what the range is for the role, then I would be able to let you know if that's what I'd be anticipating."*

If your interviewer is insistent that you state either your previous salary or your expectations, it is important that you respond appropriately. For example:

- *"I have looked into salaries for this level position, and the market range for total package is between (give range)."*
- *"When I consider what my total package would have come to in this next year, it would have been \$X, including \$Y for base salary plus benefits."*

Questions to Consider Asking the Interviewer

The questions you ask regarding a position tell as much about your professionalism as the answers you give to the interviewer's questions. By asking the right questions, you emphasise your desire to understand an organisation's expectations and to be reasonably sure you will find the work challenging and appropriate to your strengths.

Your questions build respect for you. They also can show that you've done your research and are therefore a serious candidate.

Here are some questions you might ask at any time during the interview, if the interviewer has not yet provided the information.

- What are the main responsibilities of this position? Who would be my key colleagues? To whom would I report? Whom would I supervise? What would be the extent of my authority in carrying out these responsibilities?
- What are the major challenges this position presents over the next six months...the next five years?
- What objectives or standards would I be expected to meet?
- Six months from now, how will you know you hired the right person? One year? Two years?
- How do the goals of this position fit into the overall strategy of the organisation?
- What are the main problem areas that need attention in this new position?
- What are you personally looking for in a successful candidate? What capabilities do you feel are more important?
- What kinds of things are going very well in the department/function right now?
- What kinds of things need to be changed?
- What are the resources (budget, staff, equipment, software) available to me to do the job?
- How would you describe the work culture here?
- How will my performance be measured? What is the performance management process?
- Tell me tell me a little of the backgrounds of the people with whom I'd be working?
- What are the next steps? What is your time line for interviewing and making a hiring decision? When can I expect to hear from you, or would you prefer that I call you?
- How would you describe your management style? (to the hiring manager?)
- How is your work/life balance policy put into practice?
- How flexible is your working environment?
- I see in the Herald of last week your chairman announced the opening of a new branch in the North. Is that the beginning of further expansion plans?

Interview Preparation Checklist

As you reach the Interview stage of the recruitment and selection process, please review this checklist to assist in your interview preparation.

Prior to Interview...

1. Verbal Presentation

- ☐ Confident in explaining to others Reason for Leaving Role
- ☐ Able to articulate personal value proposition

2. Conduct Research

- ☐ Research industry, company and role
- ☐ Find out who is conducting the interview

3. Practice

- ☐ Review resume and key achievements
- ☐ Practice responses to common questions, including weaknesses
- ☐ Prepare questions to ask
- ☐ Be able to articulate personal features and benefits
- ☐ Practice CAR methodology

4. For Interview

- ☐ Arrive early
- ☐ Dress to impress
- ☐ Have a copy of your resume, the job ad/description and notepaper/pen
- ☐ Introduce yourself to reception & be polite/smile

5. During interview

- ☐ Be conscious of body language – eye contact, smile, hand gestures, how you are sitting
- ☐ Ask prepared questions & any additional ones
- ☐ Be honest & engaging
- ☐ Don't argue or be defensive

6. Post Interview

- ☐ Know decision making timeline
- ☐ If unsuccessful, send a gracious note

Notes