

Q.1 What is a personal interview? Why do organizations conduct interviews?

A personal interview is a physical/virtual interface between the interviewer (called the panel) and the interviewee (called the candidate) with the objective of assessing the interviewee's potential for a purpose.

- Organizations conduct interviews to assess the candidates' suitability for a particular role.
- Candidates are typically tested on parameters like initiative, team skills, task orientation, willingness to learn, leadership capabilities, goal clarity & stress management, apart from core technical/functional skills. Following are some of the most frequently tested areas in interviews:-
 - Art of introduction with an ability to hold on the action -reaction syndrome thus generated
 - Learning from family as a social institution, with clarity on the key responsibility areas of parents; family values and ethics
 - Learning from academic institutions/ programs, with emphasis on graduation basics, major subjects, projects undertaken and an overall application orientation of the course of study
 - Learning from extra-curricular activities with emphasis on versatility and achievements
 - Clarity of goals as demonstrated in various ways like reasons for pursuing a particular graduation stream, reasons for joining the organization, time bound career planning (short and long term career goals)etc.
 - Environmental sensitivity with special reference to current affairs
 - Personality based questions assessing multiple dimensions (with questions on hobbies & interest areas) and self-awareness levels of the candidate (with questions on strengths, weaknesses, role model etc.)

Q.2 What is a winning strategy to market yourself in a Personal Interview?

Following is the list of parameters upon which you are probable to be evaluated in a Personal Interview, accompanied with a list of things you need to keep in mind for scoring well in these areas. An understanding of these parameters will help you to assess what the panel "needs". It is only then that you can state a value proposition and market yourself well!

- **Introduction**

This is that part of the interview where you set yourself up. This is where the panel gets a first look and evaluates your personality. The question in itself is a vast one and you can cover a host of information in this area. You should make sure you mention your positive traits in this section and drop the right hints for the panel to connect with you later in the interview. This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate an ability to prioritize information and lead the panel.

- **Education**

This is the place where you portray your overall learning skills, and demonstrate that you have a well-rounded personality. Academic learning is checked with the help of your subject knowledge, questions can be sourced from favorite subjects, recent most subjects and core subjects. Technical (depending upon area of graduation) training and projects also become a probable source for questions. Your knowledge is co-related with your performance, and this gives the panel a fair idea about your learning levels. Extra-curricular activities are evaluated on the basis of their nature, relevance and level of achievement. Performance in competitions is a further proof of your passion.

- **Current Affairs**

Questions on current affairs can become an Achilles heel for many students. These questions are designed to check of your knowledge, awareness and ability to process current information. The larger challenge is to assess the candidate on an overall environmental sensitivity. Knowledge in areas such as political, economic, technical (field related), business and socio-cultural domains is required to well in these questions.

- **Career Planning**

What the panel is evaluating here is your “time bound plan” and it is extremely vital that you provide a clear and logical guide for your future plans. The important consideration here is that you should not appear to be too over-ambitious in your plans and you should strike a balance between being practical and ambitious. You can always state that you wish to start your own venture but if you have no inkling of what you are going to do or you do not have any basic plan to back up your claims, this kind of a statement can be hard to justify in an interview. You can always say that you wish to be the Leader of an organization but then you need to have a defined career path to justify the same. Making tall claims requires a lot of backing and you would do well to keep a humble profile

that can be justified easily. The focus, while discussing your long-term plans, should always be on the skills you wish to learn rather than the posts and positions that you want to occupy.

- **Personality based questions:**

Interviews often feature questions on areas such as strengths, weaknesses, role-models etc. Each of these questions is actually based on your “self-awareness levels” and the degree to which you know your own self. In case you know yourself well enough and have enough time figuring out the intricacies of your personality, you would have no difficulty in providing examples for your strengths and detailing your weaknesses and how these could be overcome.

Q.3. How to handle the challenges during the “introduction” stage of the interview?

Introduction sets the tone for the subsequent interview and is therefore of prime importance. Infact, a smart introduction helps you to leverage the wisdom in the age old saying “well begun is half done”!

- Enter the room with a mild knock on the door and close the door behind without turning your back towards the panel.
- Walk confidently towards the panel striking a proper eye contact with all panelists; ensconce yourself formally on the chair and sit upright with the interview folder/file placed on the table that separates you from the panel.
- When asked to introduce, start with your strengths and try creating innocuous teasers for the panel; these have a strong probability of translating into discrete questions if presented well. For example, starting with your name and place of “belongingness” can lead to certain questions around these elements of identity, from something as basic as the meaning of the name to something as intricate as recent industry initiatives in the place you belong to. It helps to research information surrounding these challenges—try familiarizing yourself with any mythological story that forms the genesis of your name as well as the economic, historic, geographic, socio-cultural and political environment of the place of belongingness.
- Kindly appreciate that the interview follows an action-reaction mechanism----- whatever you speak, creates the basis for the next question. For example, if you begin the introduction by telling the panel that you are “a creative and passionate person with good interpersonal skills”, the panel is likely to test you

on a basic understanding of these terms, examples to validate these traits/skills through practical experiences and the relevance of these strengths to your professional life. The panel may even graduate to the extent of asking you to prove certain traits at that very moment- a “creative” person may be questioned on doing something creative at the spur of the moment while “passion” may be assessed by the way you connect with the panel!

- There is no “right” sequence to the inputs you pass on to the panel. However, the “introduction” should reflect a gradual progression from one aspect of your life to another- random hip hop from one pedestal to another could demonstrate inability to prioritize and sequence.
- Try laying emphasis on “learning” from varied aspects of life. For example, a candidate projecting life as a wonderful learning experience with opportunities to learn from both family and education, may come across a more multi-rounded personality as contrasted to someone anchored to only academic activities. The B-school looks at your willingness to learn from diverse facets of life.
- The introduction part is also an opportunity for the candidate to highlight his/her comfort areas, leading the panel to ask questions on these desirable points. For example, an “engineer graduate” can highlight the application orientation of the program and then single out a subject or project work, particularly the ones reflecting empirical learning. Similarly, a “commerce graduate” can showcase the practical link between commerce subjects and industry performance.
- While the introduction part assesses your ability to create wishful “entry points” for subsequent discussions, it also tests your ability to exit the discussion on a smart note. A suggested way of doing so would be to conclude by asking the panel if they would like you to “highlight” any part of what you said in the introduction. This may be appreciated as an ability to exit gracefully and pass the baton back to the panel!

Q.4 How does one handle a question on a dip in the academic performance from matriculation to graduation?

- If your performance has declined over the years, it is apparently indicative of the fact that your learning ability/willingness has declined proportionately. Thus it becomes imperative to refute this deductive reasoning.
- Please appreciate that academic performance is only one of the measures of your ability to learn and not the only one. It may be conducive to show an over ability to learn from varied sources and not just the academic ones. Participation in

extra-curricular activities, with greater involvement in recent years, may be a smart way of taking the burden off the academic pedestal. Further, activities with an authentic certification come across as more convincing than the ones which are merely stated verbally but are not backed by any testimony. Any achievement in these activities will further corroborate your candidature and indicate your ability to create a potent competitive advantage. Apart from multi rounded dimensions of your personality, participation in such activities will also demonstrate the core traits of flexibility and adaptability.

- It may also be of help to tell the panel that the dip in the performance is only numerical in nature and that you are fairly confident with respect to core concepts of your graduation stream. If possible, extend this confidence to a subject or two, thereby taking the panel's attention towards these comfort areas. The panel always tends to assess you on any claims which you make in the academic arena; however, the next challenge for you is to validate these claims by responding to at least the basic questions on these concepts/ subjects. Engineering students may seize this opportunity to lead the panel towards their internship project.
- It may also be beneficial to tell the panel that the "dip" in performance was predominantly in the first year of graduation (if that was the case) and was a consequence of the transition from school to college life. Gradually as you progressed towards the final year, your performance improved, particularly in select subjects (if that was the case). This reflects your ability to analyze data and find reasons for deviation. However this statement will be counter-productive if you happen to tell the panel, somewhere in the course of interaction, that one of your strengths is adaptability.
- If none of the above is true for you and you are not able to find just about any reason for your poor academic performance, the last resort is to acknowledge this fact and take responsibility for your negligence. However, such an answer needs to be enveloped in a blanket of guilt and remorse. At the same time, this has to be supported by a promissory statement assuring the panel that this shall not be extended to your performance in the organization!

Q.5 What role does "body language" play in the interview?

- Body language is a critical part of non-verbal communication and is demonstrative of certain core elements of one's personality. The challenge begins the moment you walk into the interview room. An upright posture, with feet held as an inclined plane with both the hands, graceful confident steps and eye

contact with all the panelists, projects a composed, balanced and poised personality. On the other hand, someone walking with quick, short steps with a constant gaze at one of the panelists and the file held casually casts a negative spell.

- There are times when the panelist puts forth his/her hand for a handshake. Extend your hand in the vertical plane to reciprocate smartly by producing a firm handshake. Make sure the hand is not moist and that it is not passed on languidly. Please also note that a hand shake is recommended only if the panel takes an initiative.
- While answering questions, you are required to hold an upright posture and look at the panelist who asks you that particular question. However, you are also supposed to acknowledge the presence of other panelists. Thus it helps to start answering while looking at the panelist who initiates, and gradually spreading the eye contact to other people in the panel. It may help to conclude your answer by either looking at the same panelist who asked that question, or by converging onto someone who shows apparently more interest by means of nodding or sustaining a welcome smile.
- Typically, one tends to fumble and gesticulate anxiously while confronting a difficult question; this tends to magnify in case the question is a complete “bouncer”. In such a situation the panel is likely to put an extra ounce of stress, which may further aggravate nervousness as manifested in a parched throat, hands clamped together or shaky limb movement. Please appreciate that you are not required to be a “know all”; such situations demand even greater levels of poise and composure. However, your verbal communication has to act as a parallel anchor to help you cross this critical hurdle.
- While handling tougher questions requires you to be calm and balanced, you are cautioned not to be too jumpy while answering a question where your comfort levels are proportionately high. Success needs to be contained within and not be leaked out through jubilant gestures.
- Maintain a pleasant disposition throughout the interaction; smile appropriately as and when the situation demands. However, don't overdo the smiling bit- a question which requires you to elaborate the problems faced by our economy or finding solutions to incurable diseases should not be accompanied by smile or even worse, laughter!!
- While you must uphold the basics of “body language”, you must also be vigilant enough to gauge the body language of the panelists. This helps you to strike a better connect with the panel. A constant vigil with respect to the non-verbal

communication of the panelists may be conducive in assessing the right entry and exit points.

- While closing the interview, strike a proper eye contact with all the panelists, thank them for the opportunity and part with the interview chair “noiselessly” (without any jarring sound on the floor). Walk out gracefully without looking back and don’t let your emotions surface on your face!

Q.6 Why does the panel ask questions on strengths and weaknesses? What is a suggested approach?

- **Why does the evaluator ask you this question?**
 - To find out how well you understand yourself.
 - To find out how your strengths are related to your past experiences and to future expectations
 - Every person has some weak points. The evaluators would like to know whether you understand what your weaknesses are and how you plan to remove these weaknesses.

Most stated Strengths:

Attribute	Operational Definition
Hard work	Long hours, emotional attachment, physical energy, self-discipline
Analytical Strength	Clarity of thought, ability to see relationships among diverse concepts.
Initiative	Ability to be a 'self-starter'
Attention to Detail	Thoroughness, orderliness, self-starter
Leadership	Vision, communication by example, consistency between action, thoughts and deeds.
Persuasiveness	Logical, oral and written communication skills, negotiation skills
Entrepreneurship	Ability to seek opportunities and enlist support of low-cost resources, creativity and business acumen
Value for 'Values'	Desire for qualitative upgradations, missionary zeal
Influencing without Positional Power	Political acumen, social sensitivity

Perseverance	Self-confidence(not dogmatism), managing disappointments, innovation
Team skills	Ability to manage and work in group and with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Sensitivity to the needs of group members.
Good Communication Skills	Ability to put points across in a manner that others understand, fluency is important

Most stated Weaknesses:

The weaknesses that you state should have a positive connotation and a remedial plan.

Attribute	Negative Connotation	Positive Connotation
Over-Confident	Do not understand limits of my capability	Believe in what I do
Set Very High goals	Do not understand limits of my capability	Ambitious
Stubborn in implementation of rules, regulation, values etc.	Do not consider ground realities, difficulty in dealing with bureaucracy and real-life problems	Have good value system
Procrastination - put off things to a later period	Fall behind time schedules etc.	Take time to analyze problems, consult with others before taking decisions
Slow Starter	Take too much time to decide on ideas and plans	Take time to analyze problems, consult with others before taking decisions - so that in the long run better implementation

- **How do you decide on your strengths and weaknesses?**

Consider the following points when you decide on what strengths and weaknesses you have:

- Past Experience: You should be able to justify your strengths and weaknesses by stating past experiences with examples. Examiners usually ask you instance where you demonstrated a particular strength or where a weakness landed you in problem.

- Future Expectation: You should be able to justify how your strengths and weaknesses are going to help in achieving your future expectations. For example, if you are opting for a role in data analytics, good analytical skills would be an advantage. If you are opting for a career in project management, team skills and values become important.
- Interviewers would ask you questions on how your strengths and weaknesses can help in achieving your future expectations.
- **What other questions could be asked related to your Strengths and Weaknesses?**
 - How will your strengths and weaknesses help you in your course/job?
 - Could you tell us some instances to demonstrate your strengths and weaknesses?
 - What have you planned to overcome your weaknesses?

Q.7 What should I wear to the Interview?

The dress code should be comfortable as long as you take into account the protocol of the interview.

- **Why is it important?**
 - First impression is extremely important. A formal dress code asserts your commitment to task.
 - A comfortable dress gives you the confidence, and allows you to focus on the task at hand.
 - It is a hygiene factor (everyone else will be well dressed).
 - It shows respect to the interviewer.
- **Male Dress Code:**
 - For males, the usual dress code is formal shirts, trousers and shoes.
 - A tie is also the general norm in the interviews and should be worn for the occasion. The tie you wear, its color, the pattern should suit the protocol of the interview.
 - Some candidates wear a suit/blazer to the interviews - this is also preferred but it is important to keep the weather in mind. There is no point sweating outside the interview hall.
 - Please note that wearing slippers, jeans, informal shirts etc. gives the impression that you are not serious for the interview.
 - Recommended - Dark Blue Blazer, White shirt, Red or any Dark color Tie, Grey/Fawn Trouser, Grey Socks, Formal Lace Shoes.

- **Female Dress Code:**

- For ladies, the usual dress code is a salwar suit or a sari with suitable footwear. A formal skirt may also be worn.
- Here again, it is important that you feel comfortable with what you wear.
- If you are wearing a sari for the first time, you might feel very uncomfortable, trip over etc.
- It is important that you do not put too much of make-up and jewellery.
- Long hair should be groomed or tied and preferably, not left open.

Q.8 What are the popular “Do’s” and “Don’ts” in a Personal Interview?

Do’s

- Use a strong voice, clear diction and correct grammar.
- Make sure your personal appearance is prim and proper, and you dress appropriately.
- In case of a handshake with the panelists, make sure it is a firm one.
- Establish eye contact with the interviewer but do not stare at him.
- Do equip yourself with sufficient knowledge about the organization you are applying to.
- Do take criticism gracefully.
- Do equip yourself with a strong knowledge of projects undertaken, organizations previously worked in (in case of prior work experience).
- Do display a sense of wit as and when possible.
- Do exhibit a mixture of self-confidence, grace and poise.
- Do take sufficient time to think before answering tricky questions and do not be rushed into your answers.
- Do state concrete goals in planning for your career.
- Do demonstrate sufficient grasp of the key graduation concepts.
- Do have sufficient knowledge of your key projects & papers.
- Do support your answers with examples, wherever possible.
- Do present yourself as a multi rounded personality with ability to learn from both academic and extracurricular activities.

Don’ts

- Don't be arrogant, overaggressive or vain.
- Don't show a lack of attention or energy.

- Don't make excuses for adverse conditions in your record, such as below average marks.
- Don't condemn past institutions of education; keep comments positive.
- Don't be uncertain and indecisive.
- Don't display prejudice or bias.
- Don't be late; make sure you are on time for the interview.
- Don't contradict your own answers.
- Don't glorify experiences dating back to formative years of schooling.
- Don't forget: You are the one who provides content to the interview, and you have control over what you are sharing with the interviewer.