

9

Interviews

OBJECTIVES

You should study the chapter to know

- the importance of interviews as a psychological tool
- the various objectives, types, and modes of interviews
- the factors responsible for failure at interviews
- how to prepare for and participate in job and media interviews successfully
- what press conferences are and how to prepare for and handle them

INTRODUCTION

An interview is a psychological and sociological instrument. It is an interaction between two or more persons for a specific purpose, in which the interviewer asks the interviewee specific questions in order to assess his/her suitability for recruitment, admission, or promotion. It can also be a meeting in which a journalist asks somebody questions to determine their opinions. It is a systematized method of contact with a person to know his/her views and is regarded as the most important method of data collection. In addition, interviewing a person gives an idea of how effectively the person can perform a particular task.

We may have to face interviews at different times in our life. If we consider an interview just as an interaction between two or more people, we may not feel nervous to face the panel members of an interview. However, the thought 'I am being observed and assessed by each member' often makes one nervous.

Although the nature of interviews may be different for different organizations, several rules are common for all. For example, for any job interview, one needs to prepare or update one's résumé, know the profile of the company, prepare answers for commonly asked questions, etc. This chapter throws light on how you can achieve success by adopting certain strategies before, during, and after an interview, especially a job interview.

OBJECTIVES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviews may be conducted for various reasons. Generally, interviews are conducted to achieve some of the following objectives:

- To select a person for a specific task
- To monitor performance
- To collect information

- To exchange information
- To counsel

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Depending on the objective and nature, interviews can be categorized into the following types:

- Job
- Persuasive
- Evaluation
- Conflict resolution
- Termination
- Information
- Exit
- Counselling
- Disciplinary
- Media

Each of the above types has a slightly different approach. For example, in a job interview you may have to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job, whereas in a termination interview your *employer* may have to convince you that your services have been terminated for reasons that are specific, accurate, and verifiable.

Comparing the involvement and contribution of the interviewer and the interviewee, an interview can be divided into three types: *telling*, *telling and listening*, and *problem solving*.

Telling In a telling interview the flow of communication is almost entirely one way—downwards. It is used most effectively in a directing, time-constrained situation; but it can cause hostility and defensive behaviour when the employee does not have the opportunity to participate.

Telling and listening In a telling and listening interview, more feedback from the subordinate is allowed, but the interviewer still maintains control over the flow of communication.

Problem-solving In a problem-solving interview the flow of communication is two-way. The bulk of communication is upwards, a genuine rapport is established, ideas are pooled, and exchange facilitated.

Job interviews ✓

In job interviews, the employer wants to learn about the applicant's abilities and experiences, and the candidate wants to learn about the position on offer and the organization. Both the candidate and the employer hope to make a good impression and to establish rapport. In the initial round, job interviews are usually formal and structured. But later, interviews may be relatively spontaneous as the interviewer explores the candidate's responses.

Information interviews ✓

The interviewer seeks facts that bear on a decision or contribute to basic understanding. Information flows mainly in one direction: one person asks a list of questions that must be covered and listens to the answers supplied by the other person, e.g., doctor-patient, boss-subordinate, etc.

Persuasive interviews

One person tells another about a new idea, product, or service and explains why the other

should act on his/her recommendations. Persuasive interviews are often associated with but are certainly not limited to, selling. The persuader asks about the other person's needs and shows how the product or concept is able to meet those needs. Persuasive interviews require skill in drawing out and listening to others as well as the ability to impart suitable information, adapted to the situation and the sensitivities of the interviewee.

Exit interviews

In exit interviews, the interviewer tries to understand why the interviewee is leaving the organization or transferring to another department or division. A departing employee can often provide insight into whether the business and human resource is being handled efficiently or whether there is a considerable scope for improvement. The interviewer tends to ask all the questions while the interviewee provides answers. Encouraging the employee to focus on events and processes rather than on personal gripes will elicit more useful information for the organization.

Evaluation interviews

A supervisor periodically gives an employee feedback on his/her performance. The supervisor and the employee discuss progress towards predetermined standards or goals and evaluate areas that require improvement. They may also discuss goals for the coming year, as well as the employee's long-term aspirations and general concerns.

Counselling interviews

A supervisor talks with an employee about personal problems that are interfering with work performance. The interviewer is concerned with the welfare of both the employee and the organization. The goal is to establish the facts, convey the company's concern, and steer the person towards a source of help. Only a trained professional should offer advice on problems such as substance abuse, marital tension, and financial trouble.

Conflict-resolution interviews

In conflict-resolution interviews, two competing people or groups of people with opposing points of view, such as Smith versus Jones, day shift versus night shift, General Motors versus the United Auto Workers, explore their problems and attitudes. The goal is to bring the two parties closer together, cause adjustments in perceptions and attitudes, and create a more productive climate.

Disciplinary interviews

In disciplinary interviews, a supervisor tries to correct the behaviour of an employee who has ignored the organization's rules and regulations. The interviewer tries to get the employee to see the reason for the rules and to agree to comply. The interviewer also reviews the facts and explores the person's attitude. Because of the emotional reaction that is likely, neutral observations are more effective than critical comments.

Termination interviews

A supervisor informs an employee of the reasons for the termination of the latter's job. The interviewer tries to avoid involving the company in legal action and tries to maintain a positive relationship with the employee. To accomplish these goals, the interviewer gives reasons that are specific, accurate, and verifiable.

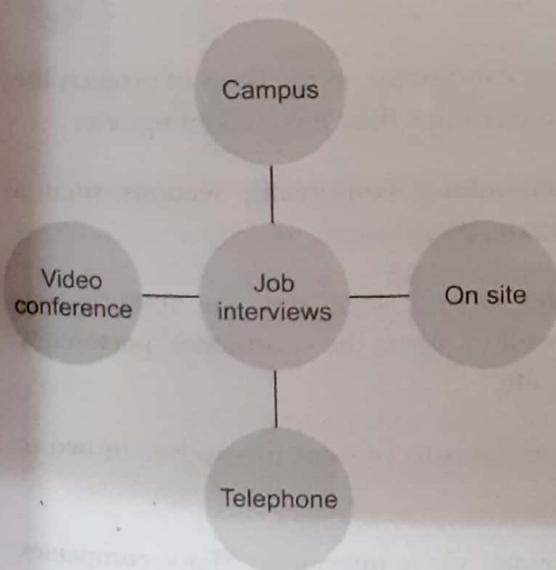
Media interviews

Most of us might have watched programmes such as *Walk the Talk*, *Meet the Entrepreneur*, etc., as well as press conferences organized by the government/businesses/industries on television. Many a time, reporters call up over the phone the head of an educational institution, an important person in the government, or the chief executive officer (CEO) of a company to ask about their success stories or their alarming anomalies. We might have watched the interview given by Mr Ratan Tata, Chairman of Tata Group, during the release of Tata Nano or the one given by Mr Shashi Tharoor, the former Minister of State for External Affairs, during the IPL Kochi Franchisee controversy. All these are media interviews, which are generally conducted to disseminate information to the public on the lifestyle and achievements of an individual/business or on the new policies introduced by the government. When there is an emergency, such as a terrorist attack, internal disturbances, etc., the media conducts interviews with the people in power and also with the experts in order to get their views, interpretations, and more information on the steps taken by the government. At times, we may give some news and the media may interview us over the phone to confirm some part of the message or to get more information on some issue. Thus, media interviews can help viewers to get quick updates on the issue.

In our professions, we may come across most of the types of interviews mentioned above. However, in this chapter, we will focus mainly on job interviews, and later on provide some tips for taking control in media interviews and press conferences. In the following section, we will discuss the various aspects of job interviews such as employer's expectations, certain critical success and failure factors, preparation, process, follow-up, and guidelines.

JOB INTERVIEWS

Job interviews can be classified into four major categories as depicted in Figure 9.1.



Campus interviews

Campus interviews are the interviews conducted at the campuses of colleges. The companies inform the students well in advance through the placement department of the college that they would be visiting their campus to select students for jobs. Once the companies arrive at the campus they would deliver a presentation (known as *Pre-placement Talk*) to the interested students about themselves, the type of projects they carry out, the selection mode (aptitude test/group task/case study/technical interview/HR interview), etc., and also answer the students' queries if any. As a company has to conduct several rounds of interview in a limited time, it may be able to spend only a little time with students. Hence, these interviews will be brief and to the point.

Figure 9.1 Categories of job interview

On-site interviews

On-site interviews are the interviews conducted at company premises. Many companies shortlist candidates after going through their résumés or talking to them over phone and call

them to the company for a face-to-face interview (services such as www.placementindia.com, www.monsterindia.com, www.naukri.com, and www.bestjobsinindia.in give information about the job openings in various industries and forward the candidates' résumés to the companies). At times, shortlisted candidates of the campus interview may also be called for a final interview at their office. As the interviewers have more time on hand in this type of interview, they may be able to spend more time with each candidate. Hence, this type of interview may be more detailed than the campus interviews.

Telephonic interviews

Telephonic interviews are the interviews conducted by the companies over the telephone. This type of interview may be used for shortlisting the candidates by talking to them and verifying the details of the résumés that they have submitted. The interviewing company informs the candidates well before, seeks their convenience, and sends an email to confirm the date and time of the interview. Generally, a telephonic interview will be shorter than the face-to-face interview and may not be the final interview for selecting the candidates.

Video conferencing interview

With hiring becoming increasingly global, many companies especially multinationals conduct video conferencing interviews to select candidates for jobs. Generally when hiring for senior positions from countries across the world, companies may use this mode of interviewing. Nevertheless, it can be used for recruiting within the same country as well. If the interviewers inform the candidates about the video conferencing facility they have arranged in the candidates' institute or campus, they can use such facility. Otherwise, the candidates need to go to a nearby agency that provides video conferencing facilities. In either case, they will attend the interview in a professional setting as they do in an in-person interview.

Stages of Interview*

Appraisal of résumé Some companies may shortlist candidates on the basis of projects they have completed, specific courses they have done, internships they have taken up, etc.

Tests Companies conduct aptitude tests (written/online) comprising sections such as technical, quantitative, verbal, reasoning, psychometric, etc.

Group discussions Most recruiters use this as the second stage after the aptitude tests. Some companies may conduct group activities as well to assess the candidates' personality, leadership skills, knowledge, communication skills, etc.

Presentations A few companies may ask the candidates to present themselves in two or three minutes in order to shortlist.

Face-to-face interview This may be the final round of an interview. Many companies these days give the candidate a short or long case containing a hypothetical problem in the business/industrial context, ask the candidate to present the case, and suggest a few alternative solutions in a limited time.

* Please note that all these stages are not mandatory. Companies may choose according to their practice.

Video conferencing interview This could be a technical-cum-HR interview.

Negotiations This stage comes after the candidate has been selected. The company makes a job offer out to the candidate after discussing the candidate's expectations about salary and other benefits.

Medical test Once the job offer is confirmed, the candidates may be asked to go for a medical examination. This is done by the companies that offer the benefit of medical claims. Since the amount that can be claimed is substantial, the company ensures that the candidate is suffering from a major ailment. This is also done to ensure that the candidate is not suffering from any condition that would prohibit him/her from performing the duties required of him/her.

Face-to-face Interviews: Campus and On site

A face-to-face interview for any job is a personal communication between the interview panel and the interviewee. It gives adequate scope for both the parties to know about each other and to get immediate feedback during the various stages of the interview. As this is the most commonly used form of interview, let us discuss how one can give a face-to-face interview whether it is conducted on campus or at the company site.

Skills and attributes most employers look for

The following is a list of the skills and attributes most employers look for in prospective employees.

- **Technical skills:** The candidate's subject knowledge suitable for the post he/she has applied for. For example, for a 'programmer-analyst trainee' the company may look for the candidate's ability to plan, develop, test, and document computer programs, and apply knowledge of computer techniques and systems. Interview Situation 4 in the CD demonstrates the importance of in-depth subject knowledge.
- **Analytical skills:** The candidate's ability to examine and assess a situation, look at it from different perspectives, improve upon, and streamline it. For example, there may be a complex process that one may be asked to analyse critically.
- **Career objective:** The candidate's goals and aspirations—what the candidate wants to pursue in his/her life and whether he/she is clear about it, whether the candidate's background and aptitude matches his/her career objectives.
- **Mental agility:** The candidate's ability to quickly grasp things/mental alertness.
- **Communication skills:** The candidate's skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- **Interpersonal skills:** The candidate's skills to build relationships with colleagues, seniors, and subordinates, and ability to move with team members.
- **Flexibility/adaptability:** The candidate's multi tasking skills or ability to adapt himself/herself to the changing situations or environment and handle multiple concurrent projects. The candidate's ability to adapt himself/herself to culturally diverse work environment.
- **Management/leadership skills:** The candidate's ability to plan, organize, motivate, inspire, manage, and lead the colleagues to achieve the organizational goal.

- Creativity: The candidate's *out-of-the-box* thinking and ability to innovate. For example, if others suggest *imposing fine* for an employee for violating a rule and you suggest *appointing him* as the guardian of rules, and justify your solution, you are creative.
- Positive/can-do attitude: The candidate's positive way of looking at things and people. For example, if one thinks of and projects good aspects of one's college/organization, parents/employers/job, one has a positive attitude.
- Social skills: The demeanour in public or with strangers/employers or how a person conducts himself/herself with others—the way one meets and greets others, stands, sits or moves in front of others, shakes hands, reacts to opinions, eats or drinks, etc.
- Honesty and integrity: The candidate's candidness and trustworthiness
- Determination/steadfastness: The candidate's ability to accomplish the given assignment despite several odds.
- Professionalism: The candidate's maturity and fairness in handling business activities
- Inclination for learning: The candidate's willingness to learn with an open mind

Your attitude, not your aptitude, will determine your altitude.

Factors responsible for failure

There may be many reasons for failure in an interview. The following are ten common reasons for a candidate being rejected and some tips for handling them:

Arrogance It refers to overconfidence. If you exhibit overconfidence the panel may take you as arrogant. Avoid interrupting even before the interviewer completes his/her question. Do not display a facial expression that conveys, 'Why this silly question? I know the answer. It is very simple'. Do not lean on the back of your chair all the time airing arrogance.

Apathy It refers to lack of enthusiasm or interest. Avoid *frozen* or *nil* expression on your face. A smile on your face, eye contact, confident posture, timely gestures, etc., may convey that you are enjoying the interview and that you have really come for an important occasion in your life.

Uninhibited nervousness It refers to *explicit nervousness*. Though nervousness is common during an interview, you should try to control it rather than showcasing it through your clammy hands, dry lips, sweaty forehead, shaky hands or legs. If you are nervous, avoid keep clearing your throat/placing your hands on the table/wiping your forehead with tissue handkerchief. Try to place your hands on the armrests of the chair and tell within yourself 'I am fine/all is well' and look confidently at the interviewers.

Equivocation It refers to *evasion* or *beating around the bush*. When you do not know the answer to a question even after spending a few minutes on thinking, tell the interviewer politely, 'Sorry, I am unable to recall the correct point. However, can I make a guess?' Similarly, when you are unable to understand a question correctly get it clarified either by asking, 'Excuse me sir, could you please repeat the question?' or paraphrasing in your own words rather than answering incorrectly.

Lack of concentration It refers to *inadequate focus because of poor listening, wandering mind or apathy*. The panel gets an idea of this quality when you give irrelevant answers or look elsewhere when the panel speaks to you. Remember to listen attentively exhibiting non-verbal cues and maintain eye contact. Listen completely and then answer.

Lack of crispness It refers to *lack of precision, conciseness, and clarity in your communication*. Time is precious for everybody, and hence keep in mind that the interview panel is busy with many interviewees like you. If you are well-prepared you can be focused and clear in your answers. Avoid being verbose and sounding artificial. Preparing answers for certain anticipated questions will enable you to be concise and clear.

Lack of social skills It refers to *using inappropriate/not following certain etiquettes during your interview*. Meet the interviewers with a firm handshake and a warm smile. If some snack or beverage is offered to you during interview, either refuse politely or take it exhibiting appropriate table manners. Use polite expressions such as, 'could you please..., sorry, pardon, excuse me, thank you, etc.' Thank the interviewers when you are offered a seat, speak softly but assertively, thank the panel before leaving the room, use positive and powerful words and be excited about your interview. Consider it as a learning experience.

Lack of firmness It refers to *lack of determination consistency/decisiveness*. Do not keep on changing the areas of your expertise. For instance, if you have mentioned in your objective that you are specifically interested in computer programming, your answers should reflect the same. You cannot suddenly change your interest to some other unrelated area. Try to look into your skills and knowledge while preparing for the interview. Know well what you want to become in life and what your interest areas are.

Inadequate quantitative/qualitative skills It refers to *inability to justify your answers or points of view*. Keep ready some examples to prove your skills or personal qualities. If you keep on speaking without adequate justification, the panel may not trust you.

Unsuitable personality It refers to *a personality that does not match the job requirements*. For instance, if you are appearing for a marketing manager's position, you need to be an excellent communicator. If you need to handle a lot of employees you need to be cordial, patient, and a good listener. If your personality does not match the demands of the job you are applying for, the panel may not be interested in selecting you. Hence, it is important to know the job description well before you appear for the interview.

Preparing for interviews

The key to success in an interview is not one's experience, grades, extracurricular activities, but one's attitude. To rise above others with better experience, grades, or skills, a highly positive work attitude is needed. The way most employers differentiate among candidates at the entry level is by the candidates' attitude towards work. They look for those who have the 'can-do' attitude and are sincerely willing to put forth their very best effort. In the following paragraphs, we will touch upon the various aspects of preparing for interviews.

Preparation of résumé A résumé is a written record of a candidate's education, and past and present occupation, prepared when applying for a job. This document enables the

employer to judge the candidate's potential fit for the post. The résumé should be modified as per the requirements of the job and the organization. Please refer to Chapter 17 to get an idea as to how to prepare a job-winning résumé and a cover letter.

Personal attributes One needs to analyse one's own hard and soft skills, strengths, weaknesses, attitude, likes, and dislikes. At least two unique strengths and weaknesses must be distinguished. For example, if you think of your *hard work and commitment* as your strengths, many candidates may have this. On the other hand, your *passion for a particular job, your strong foothold in certain areas of study and research, etc.*, may differ from others. Likewise, *being very sensitive or short tempered* may be a weakness common with many candidates, whereas *taking many responsibilities at one time and struggling with the same need not necessarily be*. Hence, analyse yourself carefully and note down your important strengths and weaknesses. Think whether you look at things in a positive perspective or negative perspective. If you have a negative attitude, try to change yourself. Knowing yourself or

- introspecting your qualities and skills is a very important step in the preparation of your job interviews. Interview Situation 8 in the CD demonstrates a confident and convincing answer to the common interview question of strengths and weaknesses.

Mock interview A mock interview is more than just a chance to work out the interview jitters. It is an opportunity to practise interviewing technique and answers live. It is also a chance to hear constructive feedback from someone who can guide towards improving the style and presentation during the real interview. Just one mock interview may bring about a marked improvement in the interview skills. Ideally, the mock session should be videotaped, and thereby one can have two opinions—the mock interviewer's and one's own. Go through at least one mock interview. For maximum effectiveness, review your answers and then go through a second mock interview. This will give you confidence in your first real interview.

Knowing the prospective employer You need to know the company that you wish to apply for. You can collect information about the following factors:

- Age of the company
- Services or products
- Competitors within the industry—both national and international
- Growth pattern
- Reputation/where it stands in the industry
- Divisions and subsidiaries
- Locations/length of time there
- Size of organization
- Sales/assets/earnings
- Provision for career growth
- Ongoing projects
- Mission, culture, and values

You can collect the information through the company website, annual report, CD-ROMs, brochures, columns/articles in newspapers and magazines, personal contacts, if any, in the company, etc. The depth of information that is collected beforehand is far greater than that provided in the pre-placement talks or at the interview.

Awareness of job description The nature of the job should be understood thoroughly. You can get an idea about the job profile from the company website. Also, you need to acquire a clear idea about the subject knowledge and skills that the job demands and also

the knowledge of the type of activities you will be required to do. Such exercise will enable you to match the requirements with what you have in hand. If necessary, you can seek clarification from the person concerned at the company.

Subject fundamentals You need to quickly go through the contents of basic courses done in the college. The job description generally gives an idea about which subjects you need to refresh in mind. Interviewers generally ask very basic questions (e.g., What is an array? What is the difference between RAM and ROM?). Knowing your main subjects well before an interview gives you immense confidence, which in turn leads to a better performance.

Examples corroborating skills Besides testing the technical skills, the interviewers may also assess the candidate's team skills, decision-making ability, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, etc. Hence, pick up at least four or five such examples that show the above-mentioned qualities. Then prepare the narration of these examples using the STAR (situation, task, action, and result) approach. The STAR approach provides the outline for the answers. Preparing examples saves time and makes one feel more confident while answering behavioural questions. The STAR approach has been explained in the Students' Resource.

Appropriate dressing Campus fashions and work fashions are two different worlds. You should be doing the talking, and not your clothes. Select conservative, good-quality clothes. They should be neat, clean, and ironed. Make sure your shoes are conservative, clean, and polished. Arrange all your documents systematically in a briefcase or neat folder and carry it with you.

Questioning the employer Interviewers expect you to come in with a working knowledge of the company as well as with a list of questions. When you have really done your homework you may not be able to think of any questions because you already have the company's history. Still, make up some questions ahead of time to ask during the interview. They can be based on the job that you are applying for or your prospects in that job.

Questions That You can Ask the Interviewer

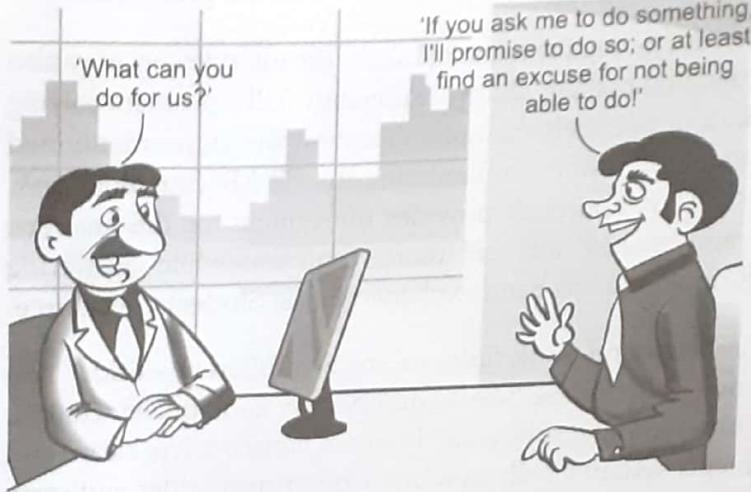
- Whom will I report to?
- Whom will I be working with?
- What training opportunities are there?
- What promotional prospects are there?
- When will you be making a final decision?

Memorizing your résumé Imagine the embarrassment if your interviewer asks you to elaborate on the project which you have done during your course of study, and you fumble. For every item on your résumé, try to have a paragraph's worth of information in addition to what is already said; even better, try to think of a way in which each item illustrates one of your particular strengths or weaknesses. If you are too nervous to remember everything, it is all right to hold a copy of your résumé in your hand to jog your memory.

Punctuality The waiting room is your initial face-to-face connection point with your potential employer. Always arrive at least ten to fifteen minutes early. This will give you the time necessary to do a quick mental review before the actual interview. Have a glass of

water to avoid the 'cotton mouth' syndrome. Check in with the secretary or administrator. Ask how long the interview is scheduled for, so that you have an idea of how much time you will have.

Relaxing the nerves By the time the interview day comes closer, you should be set. Get a good night's sleep, eat well, and take a relaxing walk beforehand. And remember, it is just a job interview. If you do not get it, it is not the end of the world—take it as something better being in store for you in the future.



Knowing the possible types of interview questions Interview questions may either be open-ended or close-ended. While open-ended questions allow one to give more information, close-ended questions restrict the responses to 'yes' and 'no'. For example:

Open-ended: How good a manager are you?

Close-ended: Are you a good manager?

There are basically six types of questions you may face during an interview:

1. Experience questions

The main purpose of this type of question is to objectively measure the features of your background.

What is your C.G.P.A. (cumulative grade point average)?

How long were you at ...?

2. Credential questions

This type of question aims at subjectively evaluating the features of your background.

What did you learn in your network programming class?

What were your responsibilities in that position?

3. Opinion questions

This type aims at analysing subjectively how you would respond in a series of scenarios.

What would you do in this situation?

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

4. Questions requiring innovative answers

These questions are asked to find out if you are capable of an original thought:

Can you sell this pen to me in one minute?

What kind of animal would you like to be?

5. Behavioural questions

The purpose of this type of question is to anticipate future responses based upon your past behaviour.

Can you give me a specific example of how you did that?

What were the steps you followed to accomplish that task?

Behavioural questions are gaining greater acceptance by the trained interviewers because past performance is the most reliable indicator of future results.

6. Tough questions

Good interviewers often ask difficult questions to establish the weaknesses as well as the strengths of each candidate. They want to find out how you stand out from the other candidates who possess almost the same skills as you. Look at your curriculum vitae from the interviewer's perspective. List out the gaps, weaknesses, and any problems you can see. If you were the interviewer, what would you ask? Work out your answer to each question.

What can you do for us that someone else cannot?

What do you look for when you hire people?

The interview process

In its simplest form, an interview consists of three distinct steps:

- Establishing rapport
- Gathering information
- Closing
- Using body language effectively

Understanding and successful completion of these basic steps are critical for one to reach the next step in the process, whether that be another interview or the actual job offer.

Establishing rapport The rapport-establishing step is where the vital first impressions are formed. Some employers may claim to be able to make a decision about a candidate in thirty seconds or less. The truth is that you set the tone for the interview through your physical appearance and initial responses. When you enter the room, look around and establish eye contact with the people there. Smile warmly and greet them. Shake hands with a firm grip, if required, and sit when invited to do so. Address the panel members as 'Sir/Madam' or use their surnames if you know correctly. Do not call them by their first names unless they insist you to do so.

Interviewers will analyse you in reference to the company culture. Further, your initial responses will greatly affect how you are perceived in the eyes of the interviewer. It is not necessarily the words you say, but how you say them. This is where your positive attitude and confidence will establish the tone for the interview.

Information gathering At this stage, the employers will ask questions and match your answers against their expectations. Your honesty and sincerity in answering the questions should be evident; remember that interviewers are experienced and can judge whether you are speaking the truth or telling a lie. Most interviewers are keenly aware of when they are being deceived or tricked. Questions in this step will usually be probing questions that drill deep into your background, attempting to get past the interview veneer. In fact, this is the stage in which you will need to consolidate the employer's view. You will be judged on attitude, work ethics (will you really work hard or are you just looking for an easy job?), intelligence, and honesty. Interview Situation 9 in the CD demonstrates undesirable and desirable answers to an ethics-based question.

Closing If your interview has been successful, there will usually be an indication of what is to come next. You may be given further company information that is reserved only for



the select few. You may get a hint from the interviewer's body language. No matter what your view of the interview is up to this point, it is important to personally close the interview by establishing continuity of the process. Ensure that you understand the next step and be prepared to follow up from your side. Always pursue each interview as if it were your last.

Using body language effectively Various aspects of body language, namely personal appearance, facial expression, posture, gesture, eye contact and personal space—all need to be used effectively during a job interview as they communicate your confidence, sincerity, enthusiasm, interest, seriousness, social skills, etc., to the interview panel.

Personal appearance Take care of your attire, accessories, and personal hygiene. Keep at least two sets of neat, well-ironed formal attire (men: pants, shirt, tie, belt, shoes; women: pants and full sleeved top/salwar suit/sari and blouse) specially for your interview. Clip your nails. Be well groomed. Avoid gaudy colours, chunky jewellery, and excess perfume.

Facial expressions Your face is an excellent tool to communicate your interest, sincerity and enthusiasm about your interview to the panel members. Wear a smile on your face while entering and meeting the interview panel and use appropriate expressions while answering the questions. Even if you do not like some questions, try not to show your dislike on your face. Be happy and sporting and answer the questions patiently.

Posture Do not sit on the edge of the chair and do not lean on the chair either. Sit in a straight posture in the beginning and after some time you can change the posture. Be natural but at the same time try to control nervousness if you have any by resting your hands on the arms of the chair.

Gesture Use small gestures (e.g., if you wish to show two fingers to tell 'I have two points' keep the fingers close to you rather than stretching close to the panel) while speaking as there will be little space between you and the panel. Exhibit suitable gestures, such as nodding head, tilting head, shaking hands, etc., at appropriate times.

Eye contact Maintain eye contact with all the panel members right from the time you meet them till you leave the interview room. While answering a question, look first at the member who posed the question and then at other members as well. Remember that if you do not look at the panel, you may appear to be diffident. Eye contact will also help you in getting feedback from time to time about how the panel members receive your answers, thereby enabling you to change your approach.

Personal space As you will be sitting just on the opposite side of the panel, the space between you and the panel will be very less (a table may separate you and the panel). Hence, do not bend too much or stretch your hands on the table.

(Note: It will be helpful if you observe the interviewers' body language when they ask questions and also when you answer them. You can understand their intention and interest in asking the question and also their reaction to your answers.)

Interview Situation 1 in the CD demonstrates the importance of appropriate body language in interviews.



Answering techniques

Behavioural answering technique

- Talk about how you have done rather than how you would do.
- Be prepared to use examples from your work, classes, and extracurricular activities.
- Be ready to offer not just any example, but your own example.

Compelling story technique

- Expand your answers by developing the specific examples into compelling stories with personality, flair, and interest.
- Captivate your interviewer by providing the details and nuances that bring your story to life.
- Do not, however, be tempted into lengthy monologues that will stretch the interviewer's time.

Personality matching/mirroring technique

- Take your cue from the interviewer in terms of tone and approach. For instance, if the interviewers are using minimal gestures or facial expressions, you can also follow the same approach. If they speak in low tones, you can also do so. However, do not be too casual, even if the interviewer seems to be. Watch and learn.
- Bring under control the 'too much' area (too loud, too pushy, too confident, too egoistic, too formal, or too conventional) in your own personality.

Parroting technique

- Do not assume or make a 'best guess' of what the interviewer is looking for.
- If a question is unclear to you, it is absolutely appropriate to 'parrot back' the question in your own words to make sure you have understood the correct meaning.
- Use it as a temporary stall when you do not have a ready answer. You will get some time to think and answer.

Reframing technique

- Always attempt to answer the questions as straightforwardly as possible, initially.
- Reframe the original question to illustrate an area of your background that can further enhance your overall image. For example, if you are asked who your favourite professor is, you might give a short answer about a particular professor, and then reframe the question by explaining why that professor is your favourite—'... in fact it was her inspiration that encouraged me to participate in a two-week internship over the winter break, where I combined my classroom knowledge with practical experience in the field of ...' Thus, you can use this technique to your advantage in the interview.

Answering 'Problem' Questions

If you are asked an awkward question, you should try to turn this into an advantage. Do not evade the question or lie. Answer in a straightforward manner, dealing briefly with the negative aspects and move on, giving more time to detailing the positive aspects of the situation. Compare these two situations:

- A Interviewer: Priya, you seem to have worked for just six months at CompuSoft. Why?
- Priya: They were going through a financial crunch and I was laid-off.
- Interviewer: Why?
- Priya: I just told you. They were ...
- Interviewer: No, no, I meant why did they lay you off, and not someone else?

B Interviewer: Deepti, you seem to have worked for just six months at CompuSoft before leaving. Why?

Deepti: They were going through a financial crunch and laid me off. That gave me time to do a course on web design which came in most helpful in my next assignment.

Interviewer: Was that at Worldcom?

Deepti: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me more about that.

As you can see, Priya has painted herself in a bad light, whereas Deepti has turned a negative point into a positive one by emphasizing the new skill she has acquired.

Some More Interview Tips

- Ask permission if you wish to take notes.
- Remain calm if you sense prejudice or any preconceived notion on the part of the interviewer. Keeping yourself cool will keep the situation from getting out of hand.
- Turn off your cell phone. If it goes off accidentally, apologize and turn it off.

- Respond to both verbal and non-verbal cues of the interviewer.
- Ask relevant questions. Avoid becoming familiar or indulging in unnecessary chit-chat or gossip.

Abraham Lincoln technique Abraham Lincoln, while arguing in the court, would usually argue both sides of the case to the jury. He would first take the opponent's side of the issue and then his client's side.

- Point to your strengths instead of making excuses for shortcomings.
- First speak well of others when the interviewer asks why you are lacking in a particular area (be it grades, work experience, extracurricular activities, etc.) or how you are better than others for a particular job.
- Then establish your own strength in the specific area.

Refer to the Students' Resource for details on the STAR approach. The Resource also lists 50 standard interview questions as well as sample answers to some frequently asked questions.

Overcoming nervousness

The interview is your opportunity to be at your best. If you allow your nervousness to control your presentation, that may be the dominant impression you have on the interviewer, blocking out any other positive aspects you may present.



Why do we get nervous? Because of fear of the unknown. In most cases, the fear of not getting approval makes us nervous, which in turn makes it more difficult to gain that approval. Uncontrolled nervousness can destroy our ability to perform effectively in the interview.

The Rowboat Technique

The Rowboat technique is a simple contraction of the abdomen in combination with rhythmic breathing that will allow you to fully overcome your nervousness in any situation. The steps are as follows:

- Sit forward in a chair, with your arms outstretched as if you are grabbing oars in a rowboat.
- Take a deep breath.
- Slowly pull back your arms and contract the abdomen muscles just below the rib cage.
- As you continue to let out air, roll the contraction of the muscle downward, just above your pelvic region, centering on your naval.
- Keep your muscles tight until all the air has been expelled.
- Count to three (do not breathe in yet), and then inhale deeply.
- Repeat this two/three times.

In the box given below, a simple technique is shown that you can apply to overcome nervousness in any interviewing situation. This is known as Rowboat technique and will help you overcome your fears and successfully meet with and speak to people you have never met before in the interviewing situation.

You will find your body completely relaxed. Even if you are not nervous, it is always a good idea to use this technique when you are waiting to meet your interviewer. If you feel nervous during the interview, you can still effectively apply this technique. Simply take in a deep breath through your nose, and then contract your abdomen muscles in the 'top-to-bottom roll' discussed above, as you slowly exhale through slightly parted lips. Hold it at the bottom, take in a deep breath, and you are ready to go. If you are overcome by nervousness while answering a question, simply pause, take a deep breath, exhale and contract, and then continue.

This technique is virtually unnoticeable to anyone nearby. Make it a habit to apply this technique several times before going on stage or for an interview, whether you are feeling nervous or not. The rationale behind this technique is that the muscle contractions prevent the introduction of chemical imbalances into the body system that can cause nervousness. The deep breathing helps to dissipate any chemicals that have already been released. It forces the body to prepare physically for the upcoming task. The body begins to produce endorphins (hormones that produce feelings of excitement), which will be needed for the anticipated rowing ahead. And, this exercise will help your mind focus positively on the interview.

Few interviewers may wish to check how good you are in handling stress during your professional career. They may suddenly turn a smooth interview into a stress interview for you by asking questions or passing on comments. For instance, even when you give a correct answer they may say, 'Are you sure? I feel something is wrong in your approach' or they may ask, 'I think that you have done a very poor interview. What do you have to say on this?' (in fact, one student answered to this question like this: 'I think you are good in cutting jokes!' and the employers enjoyed that answer!). Some interviewers may pose a puzzle before you and ask you to solve or ask you to tell a joke. Do not get nervous at all in these situations. Such questions or comments are included to check your presence of mind, creativity, ability to handle stress, etc. They expect you to be clear and consistent and not carried away by



- emotions or performance anxiety. You can handle such questions if you keep the evaluation aspect aside and perform the interview considering it as a learning opportunity. Interview Situation 6 in the CD shows four different answers to the stress interview question 'On a scale of one to ten, I rate you four. How do you rate yourself?' This technique can be used in a variety of circumstances in which we need to focus our mind and body: overcoming anxiety, anger, fright, tension, nausea, etc.
- Attempt the static animation interview given in the CD. Answer the questions keeping the preceding discussion in mind, so that you can assess the effectiveness with which you will perform during an interview.

Intelligent listening at interviews

Assume that during your interview, you are speaking enthusiastically and your interviewer looks at the ceiling of the room or looks at his/her watch. How do you feel? You may get a hint that he/she is not interested in what you are saying. However, as an interviewee, you may not have the privilege to ignore the interviewer like he/she has done. You need to be an active and intelligent listener.

We have already learnt the difference between active and passive listening. Active listening consists of two parts: analysis of and response to the message communicated. In both these activities, we need to use our intelligence, knowledge, and power of concentration. To become an intelligent listener, we need to keep our eyes, ears, and mind open. The following guidelines may help you become an intelligent listener at interviews:

- Listen to the questions with an open mind. Do not get upset when the interviewer criticizes you.
- Keep aside your personal agenda (during interview it may be to get the job) and minimize your internal distractions such as thinking about something that happened on the way, at home, etc., while listening.
- Concentrate on the main issue emphasized in the question. For example, 'Tell me a time when you were under stress and the measures you had taken to control your stress.' This question is on stress and the strategies you have taken to do away with that stress.
- Learn to read between the lines. While listening to the words, observe the interviewer's body language as well. At times what has been left unsaid may have more impact on you than what is being said. For instance, when the interviewer comments, 'Do you think your answer is right? I don't think so', you may listen to these words, but at the same time try to read him whether he is planning to trap you. If you are an intelligent listener you may understand your interviewer's intentions along with his words.
- Intelligent listeners show their interest and sincerity in listening by exhibiting body signals. When your interviewers say something, you can nod, smile, lean forward, etc., to show that you are concentrating on what is being said. Listen not only with your ears but also with your mind and body.
- Listen patiently and completely for the whole message. Some interviewees do not allow their interviewers to complete the question and interrupt bluntly, maybe because they know the answer, and hence get very excited. You should never make such mistakes. Control your urge to respond when the interviewer is still speaking. In fact, you will be appreciated and will be considered as a mature person when you react after listening completely.

- During your interview, there may be some distractions such as somebody entering the room, a knock on the door, some noise outside, etc. Do not get perturbed by these disturbances. Listen with concentration on what is asked and what is to be told.
 - When you implement intelligent listening, you may be able to ask good questions to the interviewer. For instance, when he speaks more about ongoing projects in a specific area, you can pose your question on projects; when he speaks more about career growth, you can ask question relevant to that domain.
 - Show your curiosity while listening.
 - Manage your feelings and emotions while listening to the interviewers. Let them not overrule you, thereby showing you in poor light.
 - Whenever necessary, check whether you have understood the question correctly by paraphrasing (you can start with so, what you are asking is ...) and seeking clarification.
-  Watch the video clips on various interview situations in the CD to understand the effective use of body language as well as other guidelines.

Follow-up

There are two simple steps you can take to make a lasting impression after your interview, which greatly increase your chances of success.

1. Call the interviewers to thank them for their time. If possible, you may want to add additional information which was not discussed in the interview. This phone call should ideally take place the same day. If you are unable to reach the interviewer directly, leave a voicemail message. But it is a good idea to assess the situation before the call.
2. Immediately write the interviewers a short note-mail, thanking them for their time and restating your interest in the position. These simple gestures of a phone call and a thank-you email can make a big difference in distinguishing you from your competitors. It has taken a great deal of effort to get this far. Take the extra time to make this final impression a positive one.

Tips for Face-to-face Interviews

- Be well prepared.
- Brush up your subject and general knowledge.
- Prepare, update, and memorize your résumé.
- Know yourself.
- Know about the company.
- Dress appropriately. Unless advised otherwise, wear business attire. Limit make up, perfume/aftershave, and jewellery.
- Be smart, clean, and well groomed.
- Carry a briefcase or neat folder containing all relevant papers.
- Show up ten to fifteen minutes early. In case you feel you may get delayed, call up and inform.
- When you meet your interviewer(s), shake hands confidently.
- Stay calm, do not fidget or twiddle your thumb.
- Be polite.
- Never chew gum or smoke during the interview.
- Be yourself, be honest.
- Show a real interest in the job.
- Be aware of all the answering techniques.
- Do not answer a question you did not understand; ask for clarification first.
- Speak clearly using positive words and phrases, such as 'enjoy', 'enthusiastic', 'positive attitude', 'excellence', 'striving to be my best', 'passionate', etc.
- Use the following appropriately: non-verbal eye contact (shows interest and confidence), facial expression (tells about your delight and excitement), posture (reveals confidence and power potential), gestures, space (shows your respect to the interviewer and awareness about the organizational culture).

- In the end, restate your interest in the job.
- Smile and say 'thank you'.
- Tell them how you look forward to seeing them again.
- Shake hands firmly.
- Tell them how much you enjoyed the interview.

When you leave an interview, you should leave the building as gracefully as you entered it. You should be as cordial to people on the way out as you were while coming in. Then, as you return, take time to review the interview while it is still fresh in your mind because an interview is a learning experience to help you in future.

Tips for Videoconferencing Interviews

If the interviewers want you to attend a video conferencing interview, they will inform you well in advance the date, time, and duration of the interview.

- Confirm the date and time of the interview through email.
- Send all the necessary documents well before the interview.
- Assume that you are attending an in-person interview.
- Wear a formal dress as you would do for an in-person interview to give a professional appearance.
- Reach the venue early so that you get settled, familiarize yourself with the equipment, and use it with ease.

- Face the camera and speak a few words to test the focus and your voice. Use the picture-in-picture feature to see how you look on the screen.
- Do not clutter your table with papers. You may keep your folder containing copies of the relevant documents you had sent to the interviewer.
- Try not to be conscious of the camera in front of you. Just concentrate on the questions and your answers.
- Listen very carefully. If there is any technical problem, inform the interviewer and then seek assistance from the agency that has provided the facilities for the interview.



Go through the PowerPoint presentation given in the CD to get a comprehensive overview about the types, preparation, and process of a job interview.

Telephonic Interviews

The telephone is a very useful communication tool; as a basic business instrument it has proved to be very essential. Many people make the first contact over the phone, and this first conversation can leave a lasting impression over them. A little tact and attention to what we say and how we say it, we can use the phone as an effective tool in getting and keeping cooperation, sales, and goodwill.

Many people do not take telephonic interviews as seriously as face-to-face interviews. A telephonic interview is also an interview and not just a phone call, and hence it has to be treated with all the importance given to a face-to-face interview.

There are three types of telephonic interviews:

1. You initiate a call to the hiring manager and he/she expresses express interest in your background. The call from that point forward is an interview.
2. A company calls you based upon a previous contact. You are likely to be unprepared for the call, but it is still an interview.
3. You have a pre-set time with a company representative to speak further on phone.

Preparation

One can prepare for the first and third type of interview call mentioned above. In these cases, you will have prior information regarding the date and time and possibly the duration as well of your telephonic interview. The following points will help you be prepared for the call:

- Keep all your documents within easy reach of the phone so that you can refer to them. In this respect, you have a major advantage in a telephonic interview that does not exist in a face-to-face interview.
- Have a note pad and pen ready to take notes.
- Keep a mirror nearby. Look into that mirror consistently throughout the phone call and smile. You will improve your telephonic presence by using this simple technique. This will help you sound friendlier, more interested, and more alert. If you feel self-conscious about seeing yourself in the mirror, you can use the mirror as an occasional checkpoint. But for most of us, seeing our reflection gives us the kind of feedback necessary to make instant modification towards a more positive presence.
- Always stand up when you are talking with a potential employer on the phone. It gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, and improves your response time. It helps give an action perception to your telephone call.
- Try to match your speaking rate and pitch with that of the interviewer's. Remember to stay within your personality range, but venture towards that portion of your range which most closely matches that of your interviewer.
- Place a 'Do Not Disturb' note on your door.
- Turn off your stereo, television, and any other potential distraction.
- Warm up your voice while waiting for the call. Sing an uplifting song to yourself.
- If your phone interview is at a set time, make sure you answer nature's call first.
- Have a glass of water handy, since you will not have a chance to take a break during the call.

Guidelines

Many interviewees feel that they can perform telephonic interviews better than face-to-face interviews, as they can have the details in front of them. However, the most obvious (and often most neglected) point to remember is this: during the interview, the interviewer has only ears to judge you with, and that is something you must exploit. Here are some tips.

Take a surprise call in your stride If you receive a call as a result of a mailed résumé or a telephonic message you left, and you are unprepared, be calm. At times even the scheduled telephonic interviews may not happen as per schedule. The company may call you ten or fifteen minutes earlier or later than the specified time. Sound positive, friendly, and in control of your thoughts and feelings; take control of the situation like this: 'Thank you for calling, Pranay. Would you wait just a moment while I close the door?' Put the phone down, take three deep breaths to slow your heart down, pull out your résumé and a scratch pad to take notes on, put a smile on your face, and pick up the phone again. Now you are in control of yourself and the situation.

Be enthusiastic During the start of the interview, when normal pleasantries are exchanged, greet the interviewer enthusiastically. Make a conscious effort to infuse enthusiasm and pep

in your voice. Allow the company representative to do most of the talking. Keep up your end of the conversation and be sure to ask a few questions of your own that will reveal you as an intelligent person and provide you the opportunity to promote your candidacy. For example, ask what immediate projects the interviewer's department is involved in. When the interviewer answers your question, you will either have a clear picture of how to sell yourself or you will ask a follow-up question for clarification. For example: 'What specific skills and personality traits do you think are necessary for a person to succeed with those challenges?

Beware of giving yes/no answers Yes/no answers give no real information about your abilities. Also, try giving answers that give details about you to the interviewers so that he or she can ask you more questions. Be factual in your answers. If a situation arises where you are forced to say, 'I do not know', do so gracefully and try and cover up your shortcomings with your strengths by saying, 'I do not know, but I can study that and I am confident that given the opportunity, I can master it in a short span of time.' Do not try to hide your shortcomings, but every time you acknowledge your shortcomings, do it in a positive manner.

Speak directly into the telephone Keep the mouthpiece about one inch from your mouth. Do not smoke or eat while talking on the phone.

Take notes Notes taken during a telephonic interview are invaluable. Towards the end of the interview, you will get an opportunity where the interviewer will invite you to ask questions, if any. You can make good use of your notes here. If, for any reason, the interview is interrupted, jot down the topic under discussion. When he or she gets back on the line, you can helpfully recap: 'We were just discussing ...'. That will be appreciated and will set you apart from the others.

The interviewer may talk about the corporation. A little flattery goes a long way (but do not overdo it): admire the company's achievements and you are, in fact, admiring the interviewer. Likewise, if any areas of common interest arise, comment on them, and agree with the interviewer when possible—people hire people like themselves. If the interviewer does not give you the openings you need to sell yourself, be ready to salvage the situation and turn it to your advantage.

In a Nutshell

- Use your voice effectively to express your genuineness.
- Always greet the interviewer with enthusiasm.
- Do not answer questions with one word. Try to give details of your area of expertise. Keep notes handy. If necessary, prepare a write-up on your responsibilities and refer to it during the interview to make sure that you do not forget anything.
- Do not use any words of your native language.
- If you have not understood the question, ask the interviewer politely to repeat/elaborate.
- Avoid repeating yourself.
- Do not raise your voice during the interview.
- Exhibit appropriate non-verbal cues while listening and speaking.
- Do not interrupt the interviewer while he/she is talking.
- When talking about your project, instead of trying to sell the product or your present company's capabilities to him, explain how you went about doing it and sell your capabilities to him/her.
- Even if the interviewer appears to be asking trivial or irrelevant questions, take all of them seriously. Maybe he/she is trying to check your communication skills.
- Do not ask the interviewer any personal questions.
- At the end of the interview, always thank the interviewer for his/her time.

The telephonic interview comes to an end when you are asked whether you have any questions. Ask any questions that will improve your understanding of the job requirements. If you have not asked before, now is the time to establish what projects you would be working on in the first six months: 'It sounds like a very interesting opportunity, Pranay, and a situation where I could definitely make a contribution. The project you just described sounds very exciting.' Once the details are confirmed, finish with this request: 'If I need any additional information, can I get back to you?' The company representative will naturally agree. No matter how many questions you get answered in the initial conversation, there will always be something you forgot. This allows you to call again to satisfy any curiosity—it will also enable you to increase rapport. Do not take too much advantage of it, though—one well-placed phone call that contains two or three considered questions will be appreciated, four or five phone calls will not.

MEDIA INTERVIEWS



Media interviews are an important aspect of public relations. Such interviews can do a lot to promote business or government policies, and create awareness and acceptance of sensitive issues concerning the public. These can be in the form of print, radio, or television interviews, each mode with its distinct pros and cons. Generally, media gets prior appointment for the interview and also informs about the topic focus. However, if they call up without any notice, you can certainly ask for time—at least an hour or so. The following guidelines will help you successfully tackle interviews to the media.

- Be clear with your message and be ready with your points.
- Stay cool and smile.
- Ignore the camera and maintain eye contact with the interviewer/reporter.
- Correct errors in questions. For instance, if the interviewer asks, 'How many courses do you offer in your three campuses?' If the number of campuses is incorrect, you may interrupt and say, 'Please note, we have FOUR campuses'.
- State the most important information first and then provide the background.
- Do not exaggerate.
- Split complex/multiple issues in a question (For example, 'Can we have your views on reservation policy, disability issues, and the women's rights bill?') and then answer.
- Avoid saying things off the record/informal.
- Be honest. If you are asked about any negative information, try to explain what you are doing to correct it rather than hiding or refusing to give the information. For example, for the question 'Why your organization was ranked low last time by XYZ survey?', you can explain the measures you are taking to come up the list rather than getting annoyed over the question or refusing to answer.
- Do not be in a hurry to respond. Pause for a few seconds after the reporter completes the question and then answer.

- Do not take the reporter's mistakes personally. The reporters may err sometimes because of some communication gap.
- Maintain professionalism throughout your interview.
- Be assertive but do not be pushy.
- If a reporter asks you a question that you may not want to answer, explain why. ('We do not have enough information right now. We will inform you later on this.') Some people even say that they do not want to answer. Remember, you have the control when you are approached by media for an interview or you yourself are organizing it.
- Avoid using business/academic jargons.
- Finish the interview before the scheduled time if reporters misbehave.
- Take care of your appearance—dress, make up, accessories, etc.
- Use your body language and voice effectively during the interview.
- Do not try to force the information. If you spend time in pushing a particular point, you will lose your time for other issues.
- Never refuse a media interview.
- Stay on track with the message, and project enthusiasm through your messages.
- Make sure to track/monitor the results and get reviews of your performance.

PRESS CONFERENCES

Press conferences (also known as news conferences) are voluntary interviews or presentations given by the governments, businesses, or other organizations to various media to get their stories or information across various television channels or newspapers across the nation. There may be more than one speaker in such a conference. Sometimes only questioning occurs; sometimes there is only a statement with no questions permitted.



'I am happy to say that both parties agree to disagree on the issue.'

The party initiating the press conference decides what information to be made public through the media and informs the media about the date, time, and venue of the press conference. The party starts the conference by presenting the prepared information and then answers the questions posed by the reporters invited from various media. Press conferences serve as powerful tools for organizations to publicize themselves in a new light that has not so far been covered by the media.

Press conferences are often held by politicians, sports teams, celebrities or film studios, commercial organizations to promote products, attorneys to promote lawsuits, and almost anyone who finds benefit in the free publicity afforded by media coverage.

These are also often used as a tool to clear up any public doubt on any individual's or organization's actions. Every one of us might have watched several press conferences on the television channels during the deliberations on the nuclear deal between India and the USA.

Preparation

Guidelines for an effective and efficient press conference:

- Define your goal clearly: Why do you want to invite the media? To get publicity/to inform a new decision (your new admission process, your new mergers and acquisitions, etc.) taken by your organization/to convey the growth of your organization/to persuade people to accept your point of view.
- Ensure that the information you are going to convey through press conference has not been covered by any media so far.
- Decide upon and prepare the message you wish to convey.
- Prepare all necessary background material for the conference. For instance, if your press conference is about a new policy, you should have a clear idea about the existing policy, their shortcomings, why there is a need for change, etc.
- Prepare visual aids, handouts, etc.
- Set the venue, date, and time of the press conference.
- Inform the media at least one week in advance unless it is an emergency press conference.
- As your interview will appear on television, arrange the stage, public address system, etc., and prepare a good backdrop for the stage on which you and your colleagues will be sitting and addressing the media.
- Decide who else other than media representatives should attend the press conference. You may like to invite some senior officers from your sister concerns or other organizations as guests. Inform them the venue, date, and time.
- Choose/appoint your spokespersons for the conference so as to avoid too many people talking at one time. The person should be knowledgeable and should be a good speaker.
- Appoint a moderator who will be able to control the proceedings in case the reporters deviate from the issue to achieve their personal agenda, if any.
- Rehearse at least once with your team—the spokespersons, moderator, etc.

Process

The following points are guidelines to start, handle, and end the conference effectively.

- Arrive with your team at least ten minutes before the scheduled time.
- Invite the media personnel and distribute the material—a copy of the press statement.
- Register the contact addresses and names of attendees.
- Facilitate the media to set up their equipment and to be comfortably seated.
- Start the conference on time.
- Ask the moderator to welcome the gathering, introduce the speakers, and then allow the spokesperson to give the message.
- After the message is spoken, allow the reporters to ask questions. Answers from your side should be simple, brief, and to the point.
- Control the repetition of questions. Keep the conference short and crisp and do not stretch it too long.
- Be tactful in controlling the media. Keep yourself cool and do not get emotionally upset over any question.