Dos and don'ts at a job interview

We all know that feeling, don’t we? The day of the interview for that job that you so badly wanted is upon you and now it feels like you’re going to fall apart before you even arrive. We all go through it, we know the symptoms and the thoughts that cross your mind.

Sweaty palms?
Check.

Suddenly concerned that you have lost all knowledge and experience from your career to date?
Check.

Fretting that the seat-belt in the car will crease your meticulously ironed clothes?
Check.

Well, here’s something to comfort you. Everyone who has ever had employment is likely to have gone through this same scenario at some point and come through the other side.

The concern is natural, isn’t it? I mean, it’s only your career, salary, car, mortgage, family and pet dog resting on the success of this interview?

Well worry no longer, because here is our list of do’s and don’ts for that big job interview.

DON’T aim to do any of the following:

1) Don’t show up late, ever. Or early.
If you show up late for an interview, then you may as well walk into the room with your earphones in your ears, listening to music while reading a magazine. After all, nothing says “I’m not really bothered about this job” like turning up late for an interview.

Like most things in life, it’s about preparation. If you do not know where the location of the interview is, then do your research before the big day arrives. Use Google Maps or better still, do a dry run driving from your home to the office/business.

Leave yourself plenty of time to make the journey as well – if your dry run is on a Sunday, don’t make the mistake of thinking “oh, it took me 20 minutes to get there” if your interview is at 9am on a Monday morning. Factor in traffic, roadworks, and other scenarios that could throw a spanner in to the works.

Just to balance this slightly, the only acceptable reasons for being late to an interview are if you’ve been hit by a bus, train or other mode of public transport, or had some other horrendous accident. Otherwise do not, under any circumstances, be late. You’ll be wasting both their time, and ultimately your own.

Also, being really early is a no-no. If you arrive for your interview in plenty of time, then go grab a coffee somewhere, sit in the car or find another way of occupying your time. You can use this time to revise any preparation you may have done.
If you go in too early, the person(s) interviewing you could feel pressured to hurry up and see you and worse still, you could knockout their schedule for the whole day. Aim to arrive 5-10 minutes early, nothing more.

2) **Do not be negative toward your current/former employer**
   Bad-mouthing your current or former employers during an interview is going to raise red flags with your prospective employers about the kind of person you are and the attitude you may bring. Employers will do all they can to avoid taking someone on who is negative or appears to be confrontational. We’ve all had (or got) bosses who we think are morons and would love to give a mouthful of abuse to, but save it for another time. Be professional throughout an interview.

3) **Don’t stink the place out**
   Okay, basic human hygiene should be a given, especially at a job interview. But we’re not talking about taking a shower here (while we advise you do). Quite the opposite. Even if you wear the most expensive aftershave/perfume that money can buy and you love it to bits, it’s probably not advisable to wear it for an interview.

   While you may adore the scent, the interviewer may not and it may tempt them to rush through the interview just to get you out of the door and open the windows. Your cologne could even remind them of an ex-partner, and that would be really awkward.

   So take a shower, make sure you’re fresh and clean, but leave the scents for another day.

4) **Don’t wear strange clothing**
   This one is simple. Unless you’re being interviewed for a position that requires some sort of special uniform or outfit, then keep the dress code simple. Smart shirt/blouse with jacket and trousers/skirt will do it. Usual office fayre, no crazy loud colours.

5) **Know when to listen**
   Do you ever get really engrossed in a great conversation with someone, only to see them losing interest and perhaps yawning after a while? If so, this is probably one for you to pay particular attention to.

   An interview is the opportunity for the employer to get to know you, and for you to learn about the employer. It is not the platform for you to talk at the interviewer incessantly. If you know that you often like to ‘lead’ conversations, then consciously think about it during an interview and know when to talk and listen.

6) **It's all about the money, money, money...**
   Well no actually, it isn’t. For the employer, they are looking for the right candidate to fill a specific role and have set the salary according to the level of experience they are looking to hire. While the odd question about salary or benefits may be acceptable, do not ask more than one or two (at a stretch). It will appear to the interviewer that you’re only interested about the money and what’s in it for you.

**DO on the other hand, try to do the following:**

1) **Smile, be happy and have confidence**
   Whether you’re going in to a business meeting or sitting on an interview panel, there is nothing worse than someone moping in and meekly shaking your hand. It feels like they may be about to melt in to a quivering mess on the floor.
When you attend an interview make sure you come across as friendly, positive and confident. The prospective employer wants to know that you could be someone they want to work with and that you have confidence with people.

Come on, it only takes a smile, a firm (don’t squeeze) handshake and a “Hello” and things are off to a good start. Easy, huh?

2) Make the interviewer comfortable too
If you’ve never been on the other side of an interview, this may sound hard to believe. But it can be a nervous experience for them too, especially if they’re new at it. So having entered the room as per instruction number one, if you detect nervousness on the part of the interviewer, try your best to break the ice a little. If they run out of questions, then offer some useful information about yourself, your experience, etc.

If this scenario occurs and you act well, it could already put you way ahead of the pack.

3) Know the company you are applying for
Any hiring manager who has held interviews previously will be able to tell you stories of candidates who turn up knowing little, if anything at all, about the business itself. In today’s age of the internet, there is no excuse whatsoever for being under prepared. A common question on interviews is “what do you know about our company?”.

Make sure you have a detailed answer, or it will probably be game over.

4) Know your own CV
This is often overlooked by candidates, but it is vital that you spend some time ahead of your interview studying your own CV. Make sure you know the roles that you have stated and more importantly, have some answers ready in regard to the experiences that each role has provided you with.

An interview is an opportunity for an employer to dig deeper and find out more about you and your career history, they will almost always have your CV on the table when you enter the room. Be prepared to talk about it.

5) Research and practice answering questions
There are a wealth of resources available online for prepping for interviews, many of which will include the types of questions you will be asked. Familiarise yourself with the types of questions that are asked during interview and practice answering them ahead of time.

Relate your answers back to the original job advert and person specification whenever possible. Many interviewers are looking to tick boxes from the original job description, so if your CV hasn’t answered something from the job advert in detail, you will be asked about it.

6) Prepare stories from past experience
By stories, we mean fact, not fiction. This is a real opportunity to make a mark with the interviewer. If you can relate one of your key skills or experiences to a memorable story, and ensure it sounds genuine, then you are more likely to stick in the mind of the interviewer.

Be prepared for them to ask a question that starts with “can you tell me a time when you have had to...”. It’s important you have prepped some answers to this kind of question in advance.
7) Ask questions

In every single interview you will probably be asked at some point, usually near the end, “do you have any questions you wish to ask us?”. As we covered above, now is not the time to quiz them on the bonus scheme or holiday allowance.

Instead, it's an opportunity to prove to the interviewer how much you know about the company itself and the role you have applied for by asking a few questions. Make sure they're relevant. If you do the preparation beforehand, you are much less likely to have a mental block when it comes to this part of the interview. This is one part of the interview you can almost certainly have some questions prepped for and know what you need to say.

Obviously if you have some relevant questions that follow-on from discussions during the interview, then that would be great. But always prep just in case.

8) Make notes and ask for feedback

Many jobs will have a second round of interviews before hiring. Therefore, even if you think you have smashed it, the work does not end when you walk out of that first interview. Instead, take half an hour to make some notes about the interview. Who did you meet, what were the main things you discussed, did you learn anything new, etc.

Having all of this information to hand means that you can quickly scan your notes to prepare before a second interview, if invited.

Also, if you’re not successful in your application following interview, contact the company and ask for feedback and do so politely. This shows that you are genuinely disappointed not to get hired and that you are looking to improve yourself. You never know, next time they’re hiring they may just give you a call for that second chance.