There are many reasons why you could be going for an interview: perhaps you did a great job of presenting yourself in your CV and cover letter, so you’ve landed a job interview; it may also be that you have an interview regarding selection for a study programme, conference, bursary, scholarship, funding, volunteer opportunity or leadership position. Whilst this booklet refers to interviews in the context of jobs and employment, the principles and guidelines apply to all interviews.

An interview is a structured conversation during which the interviewers will be trying to find out more about you, your skills, experience, extracurricular involvements and personal attributes. They are trying to get a real sense of your suitability to the team and organisation. It is equally important to note that an interview is a two-way conversation: it is your chance to find out more about the opportunity and environment, and to decide if the fit is good for you.

Sometimes people go into interviews with a very casual attitude and somehow feel that because they have done it before or ‘are good in interviews’, there is no need to prepare! And for others, just the thought of an interview makes them feel faint and sweaty, causing them to become stressed and overwhelmed.

Neither of these approaches is helpful. The ideal is to know what to expect and to prepare well for each interview, so that you can go into it with a clear understanding of yourself, the role, the organisation and sector. This will allow you to speak with clarity and confidence, showing the recruiter why you are suitable by giving focused and appropriate answers.

While it is a real achievement to be awarded an interview, remember that it is only one of the steps in the recruitment process, which usually looks something like this:

- Written/online application
- Screening and short listing
- Interviews and assessments
- Job offer
- Negotiations
- Hire

In guiding you through the entire interviewing process, this booklet provides information on what to expect in an interview, how to prepare properly, answer questions effectively and present yourself in the best possible way.
As a job seeker, you are interviewing the company as much as they are interviewing you. They want to know if you will be able to add value and you get to ascertain if it is an environment that could facilitate the growth or culture fit you are looking for. Keep that in the back of your mind when walking into an interview and it should help with the nerves.

Tanya Smith, L’Oreal South Africa
THE INTERVIEWER’S PERSPECTIVE

As you did when writing your CV and cover letter, it is crucial to consider what exactly it is that the recruiter is looking for in an interview.

In putting together your application, you will (ideally) have done extensive research into the organisation and sector and will have gained a real sense of the role and what is required. This is fundamental to the application process and will provide a solid foundation for an effective dialogue in the interview.

Research by the South African Graduate Recruiters Association (SAGRA) shows that it usually takes up to a fortnight for recruiters to screen applications, shortlist and invite selected candidates for interviews; don’t be surprised if you are kept waiting a little longer, as 25% of organisations surveyed take over a month. This is a busy time – large organisations with graduate recruitment programmes process an average of over 1000 applications during a graduate recruitment cycle!

Having selected you out of all those applications, what is it that recruiters are hoping to find out about during the interview? SAGRA asked employers to list the most important skills they seek out in applicants (see below).

![Diagram showing 'Very Important' Skills of Applicants]

The SAGRA Survey Summary 2011

Produced by High Flyers Research

SOUTH AFRICAN GRADUATE RECRUITERS ASSOCIATION | sagra
In a similar exercise in America, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) asked employers to rate the importance of candidate qualities/skills; these were the findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty/integrity</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical skills</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility/adaptability</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation/initiative</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer skills</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detail orientation</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational skills</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership skills</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly, outgoing personality</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tact</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic results</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: www.nace.org

As you can imagine, most of these skills and qualities are difficult to assess properly from an application. This means that, while recruiters will have used your application to screen for the key requirements, what they want to do in the interview process is to delve further and get to know you in terms of the skills and personal attributes you possess beyond your degree.
INTERVIEWS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

Every organisation and recruiter does things slightly differently, yet there are some common kinds of interviews you can expect. In most instances, a variety of interview forms are used during the selection process.

SCREENING
Many large organisations have a lengthy recruitment process and will offer you an initial interview to establish whether you are suitable and should progress to the next stage.

TELEPHONE
Telephone/video/Skype interviews have become increasingly common, especially during the early ‘screening’ stage of selection. While you may be tempted into thinking a telephone interview is just a casual conversation, it is exactly the same as interviewing face-to-face and needs to be handled in the same professional way as any other interview. (See page 10 for further tips.)

ONE-ON-ONE
This is a meeting between you and the interviewer – typically this will be the Graduate Recruiter, human resources representative or a functional specialist. In a small organisation this type of interview may well be with the Director or Line Manager. It is common to have a number of sequential interviews with different people in the organisation.

PANEL
This is an extremely popular and effective method of interviewing and involves a number of people interviewing you together – one of whom usually chairs the meeting and coordinates the questions (normally a standard list used for all candidates).

Be sure to make eye contact with everyone on the panel, even those not asking questions!

TASKS AND ASSESSMENTS
Understandably, organisations like to test specific competencies and assess various aspects of your personality and abilities. This is often done in the final stages of the interview process through group or individual tasks and by conducting candidate assessments. These are very important to understand and prepare for.

BEHAVIOURAL-BASED
This type of interview is also referred to as a competency, behavioural or situational interview. As the names suggest, in trying to find out more about your actual competencies, the interviewer asks you to talk about how you have performed in various situations. You will be asked to give examples of how you have dealt with different situations and challenges; the interviewer takes the information you present in your evidence and uses it to predict your ability to demonstrate appropriate behaviours and skills in the future. (See page 16 for more.)
RECRUITERS’ COMMENTS

TOP 3 THINGS WE LOOK FOR IN INTERVIEWS

1. Emotionally intelligent candidates who are able to work well with others.
2. Initiative and problem solving ability.
3. Ability to communicate effectively and professionally.

Nicola Grammenopoulos, Mazars

1. Someone who thinks laterally – outside their field of study – is open-minded and in touch with what’s happening in our economy.
2. Positive attitude – shows willingness, team spirit, is hungry to learn and believes in their own abilities.
3. Someone who shows good energy and interest for what they do.

Walter Tumushiime, Volkswagen Group South Africa

1. Confidence.
2. Involvement in a leadership role in social, sport, academics and professional environments, as well as personal achievements.
3. Knowledge about the company’s values, mission, awards and achievements, subtly brought up through discussion, is always impressive.

Azvir Rampursad, Unilever SA

1. Honest.
2. Well balanced.
3. Well-rounded individual.

Theresa Vermeulen, BDO

1. The ability to process and then use new information.
2. A positive, can-do attitude.

Nikki Blaser, S1 Global Ltd

1. Confidence.
2. Resilience.
3. Eloquence.

Tanya Smith, L’Oreal South Africa

1. Culture fit and personal impact.
2. Listening skills and answering what has been asked.

Lushane Abrahams, Deloitte

1. If the graduate will be an independent worker.
2. If they can cope with pressure in the working place.
3. If they will fit into the organisational culture.

Edrie Spitsbaard, KBR

1. Preparedness.
2. Professionalism.
3. Confidence, not arrogance.

Zimkita Mafenuka, Datacash

1. Energy.
2. Good analytical skills.
3. Good communicator.

Rachael Jennings, Delta Partners

1. Passionate about joining the company.
2. Attitude is important.
3. Well-roundedness (experience, diversity and academics).

Hayley Bacher, Investec Bank Ltd

1. Intelligence.
2. Confidence.
3. Passion.

Nikki Webb, Eversheds
UNDERSTANDING INTERVIEWS

SKILLS-BASED
Most jobs require specific technical knowledge (eg. marketing, journalism, actuarial skills) and so it is normal practice that at some stage in the process you may be required to participate in a separate technical interview. Be prepared to talk about your knowledge and answer questions based on real or hypothetical examples. If you are asked something you don’t know, then admit that you don’t know the answer, but stress your ability and willingness to learn. Don’t panic if you don’t know the exact answer – the interviewer is assessing not only your knowledge, but also your thought processes and logic.

ACADEMIC
When you’re applying for further study or research positions, the questions posed will most likely focus on your academic experience and achievements.

PORTFOLIO-BASED
For most creative, media, communications, design or art positions, you will be asked to submit or bring a portfolio of your work – so be prepared to have an in-depth discussion about the pieces you have produced.

INFORMAL
While some interviews may be very formal, others might feel more like an informal chat. It’s important to remember that however informal the recruiter and the discussion may seem, you always need to be well prepared and conduct yourself in a professional manner. No matter what the format, you’re being thoroughly assessed!

Interviews over a meal can be daunting: avoid messy dishes and alcohol, be polite and conversational and, when in doubt, follow your host’s lead!

SELECTION TECHNIQUES
15 minute screening interviews – to get to know candidates and identify characteristics that we look for in a grad.
Psychometric assessments – to ensure future grad meets the required cognitive levels to operate effectively in our environment.
Final interviews – panel interview with management, case study, group activity, and presentation.

Walter Tumushiime, Volkswagen Group South Africa

First round – telephonic interview.
Second round – campus interview (face to face).
Third round – panel interview and a presentation.

Lyndsay Shaw, Standard Bank

We have a young interview panel, the process is less formal than students expect; we like to assess the personality of the applicants.

Andrea Paulsen, Eversheds

We start with a technical interview with practical exercises and questions to test directly the candidate’s ability to perform the required tasks. Then we have a second interview to gauge positive personal characteristics, maturity and approach to work.

Nikki Blaser, S1 Global Ltd

We shortlist based on academic marks and qualification. We then do individual, short interviews and finally psychometric testing, which includes competency tests and a personality test.

Jacques Pienaar, Shoprite
When you’re in the process of applying for jobs, it’s a good idea to inform everyone you live with of the possibility that a potential employer may call you. Ask them to always answer the phone properly. If the caller is going to ring your cell phone, always answer professionally.

Make sure you have an appropriate voice mail/answering machine message in case you miss a call.

If a recruiter calls you unannounced to chat and it is not a good time, rather ask if you can call back or make a suitable time to be called later. Remember that these first informal discussions are often part of the screening process.

**TIPS FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

- For scheduled telephone interviews, you should ideally supply a landline number as cell phone coverage can be unpredictable.
- Make sure you are in a quiet place and at a desk or table. Have your application with you and any notes to refer to – one definite advantage of a phone interview is that you can have crib notes!
- Have a glass of water for those dry mouth moments!
- You may feel more confident standing whilst talking. It can also help to dress smartly so you feel more formal and take things seriously.
- If you do not hear something properly, don’t be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat it. If the line is consistently bad, ask to be called again – possibly on a different number.
- Because the recruiter can’t see you, your voice is of utmost importance. Try to vary your tone and rhythm – a monotone voice is particularly bad over the phone. Also make sure you talk loudly and not too fast. If you’re not sure, you can practise by recording your answers on your cell phone and listening to how you sound.
- Avoid rambling on as it is particularly easy for interviewers to get bored over the phone – rather keep your answers clear and concise.
- Try to use hand gestures and smile as you normally would when talking, as this helps your conversation style to stay natural.
- Don’t be afraid to pause before or during answering a question, and don’t be put off if you hear silence from the other side – they are probably thinking or making notes.
KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT

With all the different types and styles of interviews, it is vital that you know what is planned so that you can prepare yourself properly.

When you are contacted regarding an interview, you will usually be given all the details and an idea of what kind of interview will be taking place. If not, it’s up to you to ask:

• When will the interview take place?
• Where exactly will it be? Who should I report to?
• Who should I contact with questions or if I have a problem?
• What should I bring?
• Will I be interviewed individually or in a group?

• Will I be required to do any assessments or tests?
• Who (or how many people) will be interviewing me?
• How long should it take?

Once you have the answers to these questions, you can prepare yourself accordingly. It also means that you won’t be shocked by something that you have not envisaged or prepared for.
The great thing about having put an effort into the application process is that you will already have thought carefully about the role and your suitability. Now is the time to review all this and consider how you are going to present yourself to the interviewer.

To start with, it helps to re-read the application documents that you submitted for the role – going over the requirements and how you match, also considering where and how you can expand on what you have written.

Reflect on why you applied and what got you excited about the opportunity. Think again about what specific skills and experience the recruiter is looking for and what you have to offer.

It’s highly unlikely that you’ll be the only person being interviewed – there will be a number of other candidates very similar to you. Reflect on what makes you unique and how you can present yourself in the best possible way, without sounding rehearsed.

It may be useful to do some further self-analysis and ask yourself questions such as:

- Why did I apply for this job? What interests me about it?
- Why did I choose my area of study?
- What am I really good at? (And what evidence do I have?)
- What do I enjoy and feel passionate about?
- What achievements and personal attributes am I most proud of?
- What skills are they looking for that I possess?
- Which areas do I need to develop?
- What are some of my career hopes and ambitions?

Thinking about yourself in this way will enable you to present yourself clearly and confidently in an interview and will help you avoid falling into the trap of overselling or underselling yourself – a common pitfall if you are under-prepared. Your answers will also display self-awareness – something recruiters value and are always looking for.
RECRUITER’S COMMENT

Be yourself and truthful in your answers, it doesn’t help to portray something that you are not as you might end up being very unhappy in the end if you do not fit into the culture of that organisation.

Theresa Vermeulen, BDO
KNOW YOURSELF, THE ORGANISATION AND SECTOR

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORGANISATION AND SECTOR

Whilst applying for a position, you should have done plenty of research into the organisation and job sector, but one of the most important ways to prepare for an interview is to do lots more investigation!

Believe it or not, graduate recruiters often complain that candidates come to interviews without having a clear understanding of the position and organisation they have applied to!

As soon as you have completed your application, you need to get busy. Go over your previous research findings and then read as much as you can – at your Career Information Centre, on the internet and in the media. You can talk to career or faculty advisors, people in your network, recent graduates or alumni.... all the time trying to find out more about the organisation:

- correct and exact name of organisation (and what the acronym stands for!)
- core business: products, projects, services, divisions
- other businesses or links
- all the C’s: clients/customers, countries, competitors, current crises and challenges
- size and turnover
- recent news coverage or any awards
- organisational culture
- graduate programme, training and development options.
This research will shed some light on the sector of work too, which you can expand on by reading trade journals or magazines and specialist websites. Look into major trends in the sector, current issues or legislation that is impacting it, as well as the big players and influences.

Interviewers want to see that you know what you’re talking about and have a genuine interest. They also appreciate it if you have a general awareness of commercial and current affairs. Reading a reputable daily newspaper can help with this, as does listening to the local and international news and engaging in conversations with those in your network who are either directly involved in business and politics, or actively interested and aware.

The biggest advantage anyone can have when walking into the corporate world is a deep understanding of the actual business world. This requires keeping up to date with business. Read the Business Day and the Financial Times at every opportunity.

Luke Churchyard, BBusSci ActSc, FNB

University isn’t all about textbooks, especially because most of our textbooks are American, so you need to be ‘in touch’ with South African dynamics. Learn the theory, but read as much as you can on the South African industry. Keep abreast with current affairs. Try to do as many internships as possible, in order to get an idea of how different companies operate.

Boitumelo Seane, BBusSc Honours, Nestle
BEHAVIOURAL/COMPETENCY-BASED QUESTIONS

Behavioural-based interviewing assumes that past performance is a good predictor of future performance. In trying to ascertain if you have the desired skills and attributes, the recruiter poses questions about how you have dealt with previous situations.

Behavioural-based interviewing is the most commonly used form of interviewing in South Africa and internationally. The South African Graduate Recruiters Association (SAGRA) consistently finds that over 85% of organisations surveyed use this form of interviewing.

The interviewer is looking for evidence that confirms whether or not you actually possess the skills needed to do the job. It does not mean that you are expected to have displayed the skill in a similar work situation, but if you have developed and displayed it elsewhere (perhaps in academic, work or extra-curricular activities) the recruiter will presume that you’ll be able to transfer the skill to a different context.

EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

• Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a crisis and how you managed.
• Give me an example of when you have worked as part of a team to overcome an obstacle.
• What has been your greatest challenge?
• Can you give me an example of a position of responsibility you have held and what your role was?
Interview questions are always competency based – requiring you to draw on experiences from your academic, sport, social and professional environments. Avoid making reference to intimate and personal experiences. Think about all the exciting projects that you worked on at varsity, school and during your holidays; talk about that and make particular reference to your role, input and involvement in each of these scenarios. Refer to your own real life experiences and NOT hypothetical situations. Azvir Rampursad, Unilever SA
ANSWERING BEHAVIOURAL/COMPETENCY-BASED QUESTIONS

In posing a behavioural-based question, the interviewer is looking for you to provide evidence of your behaviour in a specific context or situation. It is vital that you give a relevant example and that your story is focused and clearly demonstrates your use of the skill or attribute in question.

A technique that you can apply to keep your answer short and to the point (rather than rambling and confusing) is called STAR. It enables you to present the exact information sought by the interviewer, who can always ask follow up questions if necessary.

So, how does the STAR technique work and help you to shape your answers? You use the 4 letters of the word STAR to structure what you want to say (see right).

Even if the overall result was not a complete success, you can present your learning and development in a positive way. Employers may ask what you learnt from the experience, or sometimes you may want to share your personal reflection – what you might have done differently, or how you evaluated the experience and your performance?

Contemplating questions and being prepared is different to sounding rehearsed and giving boring text-book answers in an interview.

**RECRUITERS’ COMMENTS**

Give specific examples – one specific example is worth 50 vague stories! Prepare examples where possible, before the interview. Give examples which highlight your successes & uniqueness. Your past behaviour can influence your future performance.

*Walter Tumushiime, Volkswagen Group South Africa*

When asked what your greatest challenge has been – don’t answer:
1) Trying to choose my tie this morning
2) Trying to decide which club to play on the 18th hole!

*Lyndsay Shaw, Standard Bank*
AN EXAMPLE: PUTTING THE STAR TECHNIQUE TO WORK

RECRUITER: Tell me about a time when you handled a difficult customer.

CANDIDATE:

Situation As part of my social work practical training, I worked at Bayside Children’s Home and often had to deal with difficult parents who wanted unauthorised access to their children.

Task One of my responsibilities was answering the phone and one day a particularly hostile father called and screamed at me when I told him that he could only visit his son at the next scheduled time, which was 3 weeks away.

Action I explained the rules to the gentleman and managed to stay very calm, simply repeating the clear legislation. I realised that while his anger was directed at me, it was not personal, and that he was probably genuinely sad and worried about his child. So I also reassured him that his child was happy and healthy and being well cared for.

Result The father managed to calm down and we talked about when he would be able to visit and how nice it would be for both him and his son.
EXERCISE: PREPARING MY EVIDENCE

Having done extensive research into the position, the organisation and the sector, you should have a very good idea of which skills are required and what you’re going to be asked about in the interview. It will help you in your preparation to think of a couple of examples to draw on – these can come from studies, sport, societies, jobs and other involvements. Use the space below to create a portfolio of evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILL REQUIRED</th>
<th>EXAMPLE 1</th>
<th>EXAMPLE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td>When class rep for Anthro II, entire class failing so I had to mediate and resolve with difficult prof and Dean</td>
<td>When team leader for Genesis project: team was slipping and blaming one another, had to pull everyone together</td>
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**SKILL REQUIRED**

**EXAMPLE 1**

Conflict resolution

When class rep for Anthro II, entire class failing so I had to mediate and resolve with difficult prof and Dean.

**EXAMPLE 2**

When team leader for Genesis project: team was slipping and blaming one another, had to pull everyone together.
TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Here’s a list of common questions that you can expect and be prepared to answer in your interview. But don’t be surprised if you are asked some unexpected or unusual questions, such as: “What book are you currently reading?”.

PERSONAL OVERVIEW
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What are you passionate about?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- How would your friends describe you?
- How do you make decisions?
- Who are your role models and why?

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION
- What can you offer us?
- What do you know/like about our organisation?
- What did you think of our website/application process?
- Who do you see as our major competitors?
- What do you see as the organisation’s biggest challenge right now?

CAREER PLANS
- Why did you apply for this job?
- Where else have you applied?
- Describe your ideal job.
- Where do you see yourself in 3-5 years?
- What kind of challenge are you after?
- What rewards do you expect from your career?
EXPERIENCE
- Where you have worked while at university?
- What have you gained from your work experience?
- Have you had any experience related to this position?
- What job did you enjoy most/least?
- How would a past supervisor describe you?
- What have you gained from your community/volunteer work?

EDUCATION
- Summarise your educational background.
- What aspects of your degree have you enjoyed the most?
- Why did you choose that course of study?
- What courses did you like most/least?
- How would you explain your low grades/failures?
- How do you balance your studies and personal life?

OTHER INVOLVEMENTS
- How have you spent your long holidays?
- What campus activities have you been involved in?
- What else are you involved in?
- What have you gained from your extra-curricular activities?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- Have you taken on any positions of responsibility?

CREATIVE QUESTIONS
- If you were an animal, which one would you be?
- What is your favourite product and why?
- List as many uses as possible for a paper clip.
- If you were going on a trip to the moon, who would you take with you and why?
- If you were a colour, which one would you be?
DIFFICULT AND INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

Some questions are really hard to answer and then there are those that are inappropriate and should never be asked in an interview. How do you handle them?

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS
No matter how prepared you are, not all questions you face in interviews will be easy to answer. Here are some of the common tricky questions and ideas for managing them:

Tell me about yourself. The interviewer is not asking about your family, favourite food, or your recent break up! They are asking about you in an academic and work context. And they want a brief overview, not a long story. Try to plan a 60 second summary, covering school to university, what you studied and enjoyed, relevant experiences and what brought you to the point of applying for this opportunity.

Why should we hire you? Here is your chance to differentiate yourself from the other candidates. What specifically are you going to bring to the job that makes you extra interesting? Eg. ‘I believe that I possess the skills you are looking for, plus the research I did for my project on green buildings is directly relevant to the work you require this junior architect to do.’

What is your greatest weakness? This is not an easy question and may cause you to feel the pressure. Whilst seeing how you handle such pressure, the interviewer is wanting to assess your self-awareness and openness to personal development. We are not all brilliant at everything, so think about what you’d like to be better at. You should not reveal things such as the fact that you are always late or very intolerant; try to discuss something that you have worked on: eg. ‘I am not very fond of public speaking, so I have to push myself in this area and volunteer to do group presentations, for example. Joining the debating society has also helped me develop in this area.’

Where do you want to be in 3 years? This allows you to show you are serious about your career and have looked into the development of staff within the organisation. You can talk about your career ambitions and interest in things such as training or management opportunities, possible secondments or overseas experiences.

INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS
Most interviewers will not ask personal and inappropriate questions, as they are governed by South African labour legislation that protects individuals from unfair discrimination. So, they can’t ask you if you’re HIV positive, gay or planning to have children in the near future. But if they do – or if they ask you about personal issues in a slightly more discreet way – stay calm.

If you’re comfortable answering certain inappropriate questions very simply, then you can do so: eg. ‘Yes, I do have a child and a very strong support system in place’. However if you do not feel comfortable answering the question, or feel that they could use your answer to discriminate against you, then say something like this:

• ‘I’m wondering how this is relevant to the role.’
• ‘I make a point of not mixing personal and professional matters.’
If you have been asked inappropriate questions, you may wish to speak to the human resources department about the interview; you may also need to reflect on whether you actually want to work for that organisation.

**CASE-BASED QUESTIONS**

Some interviewers like to ask for feedback on an actual case or business problem, as this is a useful way to assess the problem solving skills and business acumen of potential employees.

When asked a question about a business dilemma or case, it is vital to approach it in an interactive manner: you are expected to ask questions, clarify issues, express your thoughts for feedback and make recommendations. In posing case-related questions, employers want to hear you ‘think aloud’ and communicate each step of the way. While your answer does not necessarily have to be ‘correct’, it needs to show evidence of logical thinking and the application of relevant principles.

**CASE STUDIES**

In the classic case study you will be presented with a business issue to analyse and discuss with the interviewer, making your recommendations. The interviewer wants to see how you understand and solve the problem and what you demonstrate in terms of competencies, such as: analytical thinking, creativity, logic, judgement, communication skills, resilience and mental maths.

Although for most case studies there probably is a right answer, there is no need to
panic about this too much. Recruiters know that you are in unknown territory and under pressure, so they will be more interested in your approach to solving the problem than your getting it right.

A typical case could look something like this:
- An international airline is considering introducing a daily half-price flight. What issues need to be thought about?

It’s important to handle the case study as if you were in a real situation: what would you actually consider and do? Try to think clearly and not miss the obvious! Keep it simple by breaking things down and communicating each step logically.

**BRAINTEASERS**

These questions may seem odd, but are posed to assess your quick thinking and maths, conceptual skills and ability to think creatively.
- How would you weigh a plane without a scale?
- Why are man-hole covers round?

**ESTIMATION QUESTIONS**

Sometimes recruiters ask questions to check your reasoning. For these, there is no correct answer – they are simply interested in how you analyse, make assumptions and communicate. An example of this could be:
- How many cars do you think there are in South Africa today?
- How many soft drinks would you estimate were sold at the FIFA World Cup final?

Don’t give up on a technical question: we want to see how a candidate thinks and approaches problems. Even if the candidate does not know how to solve a problem now, they should be able to articulate a strategy to change that. We hit tough problems all the time and sometimes we’re stumped at first, but the buck stops here – we have to find a way to solve it.

_Nikki Blaser, S1 Global Ltd_
WHAT SHOULD I BE ASKING?

Keeping in mind that an interview is also about your getting to know the organisation, you should compile a list of questions to ask at the end of the meeting.

As the interview draws to a close, you can expect the interviewer to ask you if you have any questions – if they don’t, simply mention in closing that you have a few questions you’d like to ask. Sometimes your questions may have been answered as you went along, or you may have asked a few in the course of the discussions.

It is still good to have some remaining questions at the end, as posing no questions at all makes you look disinterested (or scared!). For this reason, you should prepare at least 10 questions ahead of time, so that you have enough to choose from and then ideally ask just 2-3 questions.

There may also be a few spontaneous questions that occur to you during the interview – make a note of these and ask them at the end (or during the interview if it is appropriate).

WHAT ARE SOME USEFUL THINGS TO ASK ABOUT?

- Who does this incumbent report to?
- What sort of training, induction and mentoring would I be given?
- What can you tell me about the team this person would be working in?
- What do you think are the main challenges of this role?
- What kind of performance appraisal system is in place?
- Where do you see the company in the next 3-5 years?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

You are entitled to know what the recruitment process is going to entail and what the time scale will be. If nobody clarifies this at the end of the interview, you should ask questions such as:

- What are the next steps in your selection process?
- Who should I expect to hear from and in what time frame?

Then, if you don’t hear from them in the stipulated time, allow a few extra days before getting in touch with your designated contact.

ASKING ABOUT SALARY

If the salary is not clearly stated, you need to do your homework and establish what an employee of your level in a similar role and organisation/sector generally earns. If you’re asked in an interview what salary you are expecting, it’s advisable to give a range. If salary does not come up in an interview, delay the discussion until the job offer and negotiation stage. In the final stages of the recruitment process, it is reasonable to ask about the employment package – salary, healthcare, pension and any other benefits – if it has not been clarified.

WHAT NOT TO ASK

- Information covered on the company website
- Anything that has been explained in the interview
- Overly challenging comments or questions related to the organisational practices.
ON THE DAY

So, the day has finally dawned and you are off to your interview. Nervous? Of course! But also on time, organised, neat and prepared.

PRACTICALITIES
Plan carefully how you are going to get to the interview, giving yourself plenty of extra time for traffic, delays, public transport issues and unforeseen circumstances. Have an early night and avoid any excesses!

Take with you:
- address of organisation (and map if needed)
- details of where to report and who to ask for
- name and number of your contact (in case you get lost or are unavoidably delayed)
- names of those interviewing you (if you have them)
- your CV, cover letter and any other application documents
- anything else they have asked you to bring
- your list of questions (refer to previous page).

DRESS
If you look good, it can help you to feel good and confident too! Choose an outfit that fits with the culture of the organisation, while making sure that you feel comfortable in it. Imagine that you’ve got the job and picture how you would go to work – erring on the more formal and conservative if you’re not sure. (You can also enquire as to the company’s dress code when communicating about the interview.) If you have an unconventional hairstyle, obvious piercings and tattoos, you need to consider how much you are prepared to adapt for a job and what kind of organisation suits you best.

Remember that it is not only what you wear, but how you wear it: is it clean and ironed and are you well groomed? Your shoes and bag/briefcase also say a lot about you.
ARRIVAL
Aim to arrive at least 15 minutes early. Be pleasant to the receptionist and inform him/her of your name and who you are coming to see. Waiting in reception is a good chance to get a feel for the company environment and browse the brochures or other reading matter.

NERVES
It is perfectly normal to be nervous, although hopefully being prepared will help you to feel confident. Remind yourself that you have a lot to offer and that the interview is a two-way exchange. It helps to breathe deeply and slowly, as this tricks your mind into thinking you are calm! It’s best to avoid that last-minute cigarette and its lingering smell. Go to the bathroom if you need to; try running some cold water on your wrists. Or sit back and imagine you’re in your favourite place...

RECRUITER’S COMMENT
Interviewers so desperately want YOU to do well – they are on your side. No need for nerves. Be on time. 15-20 minutes early is acceptable. Reception areas in corporate environments are designed for a 15-20 minute wait.
Zodwa Mhlanga, Barloworld
INTRODUCTIONS
First impressions count, so when you greet your interviewer/s, do so with a firm (not crunching!) handshake and a warm smile...no matter what you’re feeling inside! Tell them your name clearly – even though they should know it – and try to remember who they introduce themselves as. It is common that you will engage in some small talk as you settle down to start the interview and this is a good opportunity for you to display your social and interpersonal skills. You can also show your enthusiasm for the interview, without overdoing it!

CONDUCTING YOURSELF IN AN INTERVIEW

EXPERT COMMENT
Frank Bernieri is one of the world’s foremost authorities on non-verbal communication. His research at the University of Toledo (Ohio) shows that first impressions are usually formed within the first 30 seconds of meeting and often make the crucial difference in job interviews.

“People do judge books by their covers,” Bernieri concluded. “First impressions are going to predict final impressions.” He offers this advice for interviewees:

1. Make yourself a better candidate for a good first impression: while first impressions are indeed pre-rational, there are things that you can do before an interview to improve the odds. For example, being well dressed and nicely groomed is in your control. You wouldn’t believe the impact of attire on the first impression.

2. ‘Contrast Effect’ will affect an interviewer’s impressions of you: remember that an interviewer may see a dozen people or more in a day. He or she remembers those who stand out, either good or bad.

3. The handshake is in your control: I’m the first one to admit that when things aren’t in your control, don’t worry about them, but this critical first impression element can be practised. The important thing isn’t the strength of your grip, it is meeting ‘web to web’ and matching up hands so that the interviewer doesn’t get a handful of fingers.
DURING THE INTERVIEW

You’ve thought about yourself, researched the organisation and sector, and even contemplated what questions you may be asked. So, you really are ready and prepared. What counts now is how you present yourself and your answers.

Normally interviews with a recruiter or a panel follow a similar pattern: introductions, small talk, brief overview from them, questions to you (majority of time spent on this), your questions and a wrap up.

The best thing you can do when being interviewed is to listen to the questions and answer them clearly, concisely and with relevant information. Ideally, you should also use the opportunity to reveal your personality and enthusiasm and make a lasting impression; speaking with honesty helps to build a rapport with the interviewer.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

• speak clearly and audibly
• listen carefully and pause to think before answering questions
• avoid yes/no answers – give a bit of detail, even to questions that can be answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’
• be concise rather than rambling (which we tend to do when nervous)
• don’t use jargon, slang or fillers (eg. ‘um’ ‘er’, ‘like’)
• focus on the positive
• try not to undersell yourself (eg. ‘I haven’t really achieved or managed any projects as such, but...’)
• express your genuine interest in the organisation and role
• don’t let pauses or silent moments worry you
• don’t be casual or flippant, and only use humour moderately (where and if appropriate)
• don’t interrupt
• if you can’t answer a question (maybe you have no knowledge of it or no example), you should say so
• ask the interviewer to repeat a question if you did not hear/understand properly
• try to use examples from a variety of experiences and situations.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

• sit comfortably in the chair in an upright position
• try to relax your jaw, shoulders, arms and hands (and don’t fold your arms)
• avoid fiddling and strange, repetitive movements (eg. pulling hair, wringing hands, tapping foot)
• make eye contact with everyone, not just the person posing the question/s
• smile occasionally.
1. Try to avoid speaking negatively of previous employers or colleagues.
2. Even if the recruiter is fairly informal be careful not to become too friendly, and always remain professional at all times.
3. Avoid the use of bad language or slang.
4. Never lie or inflate your experience and competencies.

Nicola Grammenopoulos, Mazars

Candidates sometimes make reference to a brand that is not part of a company’s portfolio of brands. This is a serious oversight and impacts negatively on your interview and credibility as a candidate.

Research and understand the company that you are being interview by, i.e. the industry, brands on sale, competitors and competitor brands.

Azvir Rampursad, Unilever SA

They come unprepared, try to name drop and tell you that they are going for other interviews and are arrogant in the interview.

Nadia de Bruin, Public Investment Corporation

Graduates don’t use enough examples to demonstrate practical experience.

Zodwa Mhlanga, Barloworld

They have not done enough research about the company they are applying at. They do not actually know what the job entails that they are applying for and/or if they can actually apply for the job with their specific qualification.

Jacques Pienaar, Shoprite

1. Not knowing what position the interview is for, or anything about the company.
2. Not looking professional, arriving late for the interview or not even pitching.
3. Not speaking clearly, talking in circles and not answering the questions.
4. Coming across as arrogant (fine line between confidence and arrogance).
5. Letting their cellphone ring the whole time.
6. The candidate should never flirt with the interviewer!

Jodene de Klerk, SAB&T

1. Giving the impression that they are in demand in specific industries (e.g. actuarial) when in fact the competition is stiff.
2. Arriving late and not communicating until you call them to find out.
3. Not knowing what the organisation does – it shows disinterest.

Smanga Ncube, Liberty Group

1. Arriving late for the interview.
2. Not having any questions for the interviewer about the position or the company.
3. Taking a call on your cell phone during the interview or not switching it to silent.

Lyndsay Shaw, Standard Bank

1. Not staying on point: don’t ramble – read the interviewer’s body language.
2. Talking over the interviewer – often this is as a result of nerves.
3. Not listening to the question.
4. Not making eye contact with the interviewer.

Carol van Blerck, Ernst & Young Inc.
DISCLOSING YOUR DISABILITY

If you have a disability, it is entirely up to you as to whether and when you choose to disclose it.

If you will require help getting to or during the interview, then you will need to raise this in advance. You may also want to inform people before an interview if you have a visible disability and want to avoid your interviewers being surprised by it, or spending too much time asking questions about it rather than focusing on what makes you suitable for the job.

Some people are happy to talk about personal matters, and don’t mind tackling questions about a disability if they arise during an interview. Others would prefer not to be put on the spot in such an environment and opt rather to disclose any such information at the application stage.

It may be that it’s easier for you to explain your disability verbally rather than in writing – or the other way around. What is important is to handle any disclosure of your disability in the way that makes you feel most comfortable and which will allow potential employers to be supportive and focus on what is relevant to your doing the job.

It is obviously also vital for you to ascertain that the organisation for which you choose to work, is non-discriminatory and accommodating when it comes to issues such as disabilities.

RECRUITERS’ COMMENTS

TOP 10 INTERVIEWING TIPS

1. Know where to go and arrive 15 minutes early.
2. Dress professionally.
3. Be prepared: bring copies of your application and any other documents needed.
4. Understand the position and do extensive research into the company and sector.
5. Be honest and convey confidence, not arrogance.
7. Listen to the question and answer it – don’t ramble.
8. Prepare some relevant examples for core competency questions.
9. Ask questions that indicate your genuine interest.
10. Relax – we want to get to know you, that’s why we asked you!
You will typically have a number of interviews and assessments before any final decision is made. Each one can be an important learning experience and a step towards your final goal.

It is always polite and appreciated to write a short email thanking those who interviewed you, possibly highlighting something that you particularly enjoyed or found to be interesting.

Also a good idea is to reflect on how each interview went so as to constantly improve – either by discussing it with a Careers Advisor or friend, or by making a few notes to refer to later. This is a chance to review your interview performance and think about anything you could have done better and answered more effectively.

**REJECTIONS**
If you are turned down for a position, it is always best to accept such news graciously – you never know what may happen at a later stage. You can ask for feedback on your interview performance, and/or if they can tell you any of the reasons why you were not selected. Sometimes it is simply because there was someone stronger or it may be that you did not come across well in the interview or possibly the recruiter fears you will get bored in the job. In asking for feedback, make sure you are not doing it so that you can argue or challenge the decision, but for your personal development and understanding.

If you are constantly unsuccessful in interviews, it could be that there is a mismatch between you and what you are applying for, or between the ways you present yourself on a CV and in person. You may want to see a Careers Advisor to explore this. Careers Services usually offer interview training and have excellent resources, such as DVDs, to assist you in improving your interviewing technique.

In some instances, you might decide after an interview that an organisation or role is not right for you. It is polite to then communicate this with your contact person, simply thanking them for their interest and informing them that you no longer wish to be considered for the position.

**JOB OFFERS, CONSIDERATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS**
Being offered a job is very exciting, but it is not quite the end of the process. Before starting a new job you need to ensure you are happy with the organisation and the role, understand the terms of employment and sign a contract.
If you have not already been to the offices, you should ask for a tour and to meet some employees at your level, or with whom you will be working. If it is not geographically possible to visit, you can ask to read the staff code of conduct, as this can give you useful insight. Make sure you know who you will be reporting to, and that you have met or spoken to them.

As a new graduate, you don’t normally have much room for salary negotiation, but you should still be very clear on what you will be earning (and that it is market-related), what deductions you can expect, and what other benefits are available. This is normally a conversation to have with someone in the human resources department. Benefits may include medical aid and pension or provident fund; it is highly unlikely that you will receive perks such as a cell phone, laptop or company car at entry level!

All employers must adhere to the South African government’s Basic Conditions of Employment Act, which means you will be entitled to a certain amount of leave (e.g. sick, annual, family responsibility or maternity/paternity) and your contract will stipulate the terms of aspects such as termination and remuneration. You should also know what the working hours will be and have a clear description of your job functions.

When you are given an offer letter or contract to sign, ask for a couple of days to look over it and ensure that you know when the signed paperwork needs to be returned. You should not be expected to sign anything immediately, as you need to read through any offer very carefully. Ask a professional friend or advisor to look at the contract, get insight into anything you are unclear about and request the future employer to address any questions you may have.

It is important to have complete clarity and agreement on all the terms and benefits before signing and starting with an organisation – once you have signed a contract and begun work, you can’t then try to negotiate and change the terms of your employment.

What do you do if you get offered a job while you are awaiting feedback from another organisation you have interviewed with – perhaps even one you see as more suitable? Timing is often not ideal, and sometimes you will have to make a decision to accept a position, even though you’d prefer to be able to weigh up the offer. However, you may be able to ask for an extension of time to consider an offer, allowing yourself the opportunity to compare and make an informed decision.

Attend as many interviews as possible. The more practice, the more at ease you’ll become, and the more at ease, the better the interview will flow.

Carol van Blerck, Ernst & Young Inc.
## INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWING CHECKLIST</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
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<td>You have identified the skills required for the job and which ones you possess?</td>
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<td>You have examples of where you have displayed each skill?</td>
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<td>You have thought about why you want the job and why they should employ you?</td>
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<td>Knowledge of role</td>
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<td>You have a clear understanding of what the role entails?</td>
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<td>You have noted the requirements and how you meet them?</td>
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<td>Knowledge of organisation</td>
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<td>You have reviewed the organisation’s website?</td>
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<td>You have researched the organisation in the media, online and elsewhere?</td>
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<td>Knowledge of sector</td>
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<td>You have talked to people in your network about the organisation and sector?</td>
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<td>You have read up on the sector, key players and issues?</td>
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<td>Interview details</td>
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<td>You know the exact date and time?</td>
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<td>You have the address and know how to get there?</td>
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<td>You know who to report to and who will be interviewing you?</td>
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<td>You have checked if you need to bring anything?</td>
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<td>You know what type of interview/assessment to expect and how long it will take?</td>
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<td>On the day</td>
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<td>You have an appropriate outfit planned and ready?</td>
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<td>You have allowed more than enough time to get there?</td>
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<td>You have all the documents you need to take with you?</td>
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<td>You have prepared your questions and have them with you?</td>
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<td>Follow-up</td>
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<td>You know when to expect an answer and who to contact with queries?</td>
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<td>You have emailed the interviewer/s to thank them?</td>
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<td>You have reflected on the interview?</td>
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