

## Job Interviews

Congratulations, you have been selected for interview. You are among perhaps 5–10 candidates who have reached this far, how do you make sure that you best present yourself on the day? The following guidelines suggest ideas for a successful approach to interviews and outline a few of the pitfalls.

### Before the big day

Thorough preparation before an interview is essential.

- Make sure you review a copy of the job advertisement and detailed job description.
- Find out all you can about the recruiter. Most companies, universities and research establishments have informative websites, these are a good place to start. Brochures or annual reports contain summaries of activities. Look out for details in newspapers and the scientific press. If you are applying for an academic post, it is a good idea to have a look at past publications of the research group.
- Think about what questions you can ask at the interview, if you leave it until the last minute your mind will go blank.
- Check travelling times, you do not want to be late.
- Some employers have a particular dress code. If this is likely to be the case, ask in advance for guidance so you can dress appropriately on the day.
- Think about the questions you may be asked. If the job requires particular technical knowledge or skills, brush up on them.
- Many jobs require good communication skills. Work out how to describe your particular research project in a clear, concise way to a non-specialist (who may be on the panel). This is easier said than done and can require a great deal of thought.
- You may be asked to give a brief presentation, prepare it well and make sure you stick within the stated time limit. Find out in advance what resources you will have available for the presentation.
- For some jobs, particularly those outside academia, you may be required to undertake a psychometric test as part of the interview process. You can familiarise yourself with the types of questions asked in these tests at websites such as [www.prospects.ac.uk/psychometric\\_tests.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/psychometric_tests.htm) and [www.kent.ac.uk/careers/psychotests](http://www.kent.ac.uk/careers/psychotests).

# Microbiology Careers

[www.sgm-microbiologycareers.org.uk](http://www.sgm-microbiologycareers.org.uk)

## The interview

There is no doubt about it, interviews can be very stressful. Employers know this and do make allowance for nerves, but you still want to make the most of this opportunity to stand out positively from the other candidates.

- Bear in mind that the person showing you around or having an informal chat with you will almost certainly be giving feedback to the interview panel. He/she will probably end up working closely with the successful candidate and his/her opinion will be valued.
- An interviewer will look at how you view your skills and experience. You should turn them into advantages or benefits for the employer.
- You may be asked how you overcame difficulties and challenges in a previous project. Answer succinctly, the interviewer wants to know how you viewed and managed the situation.
- Do not waffle, good verbal communication skills are important in most jobs.
- Ask about training and job development in terms of how it can improve your performance and contribution to the team.
- On a more personal note, if you are aware of any potentially irritating habits you may have (fidgeting, extremely loud laughter) try to suppress them. Once you are appointed it does not matter, but in the interview you do not want the interviewer distracted from listening to the important information you are telling them.
- Remember what you wrote in your CV and make sure that there are no discrepancies between it and the real you. It will soon become obvious if you are not a 'gregarious, ambitious go-getter'!

## On a final note

Interviews are a two way process and you should take the opportunity to find out more about your future employer (be wary of asking questions about salary, hours and working conditions during the interview – this information may be more suitably obtained from the Human Resources department).

The interview is a chance for you to assess the recruiter, you want to be comfortable in your job and feel that you will be working in a positive environment. Try to relax and let your enthusiasm for the job shine through.

If you are not successful try to view this positively, all interviews are good experience. If possible get some feedback from the recruiter, it may help you to alter your approach next time.

Written and edited: Karen McGregor and Jane Westwell  
© Copyright SGM January 2011

Design: Vicki Symington

Image: ThinkStock

SGM Careers, Marlborough House,  
Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood,  
Reading RG7 1AG  
t 0118 988 1807; f 0118 988 5656;  
careers@sgm.ac.uk; www.sgm.ac.uk

society for general  
**Microbiology**