

HELP NOTES

Succeeding at Interview



Having seen your CV or biog, typically, an employer will make a decision on whether to hire you after interview. There is a theory that once invited to an interview, you can only talk yourself out of the job. So why is it that some people are better than others at interview? These Help Notes will give you some ideas about how to succeed at interviews in the creative industry.



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From Recruitment to Selection

Typically there are four key stages to recruitment:

- 1) Recruitment – the specification and promotion of a vacancy
- 2) Application – applicants apply and employers shortlist
- 3) Interview – meeting with the recruiter
- 4) Decision – acceptance or decline

Research

In broadcasting and the media generally, research is essential to content generation. And it is no different when it comes to your job search; researching the employer which has invited you for interview is essential to success.

Top research tips include:

- **Tailor your CV or bio** – in most cases your CV will have helped you to secure the interview. Make sure this key document is tailored to the job on offer both in terms of language and the emphasis given to key skills and experience. (Check www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes for advice on CV writing).
- **Check the company's/employer's website** – what language do they use, what are their aspirations and how can you sell yourself to match those aspirations? What projects, productions or events are currently happening and what can you find out about them?
- **Use your network** – the theory of Six Degrees of Separation is useful but in the creative sector, we are all probably only one or two people away from the interviewer. Find out as much as you can to help you to understand how they work. Check the various professional or membership based sites to try and build a picture of the person and of the organisation they are part of. (Be wary of social media websites in this context as they do not always give the best, or the most accurate, picture).

Once you have done your research, you should then turn your attention to interview preparation.



Practice, Practice, Practice

Familiar advice maybe, but still the most powerful and useful. In theatre, film and television imagine productions without practice. Interviews are no different. It is worthwhile thinking about the key stages of a standard interview and then preparing and practicing your key messages and responses for each stage. Typically an interview will be structured this way:

- **Format** – formal introduction to who will be interviewing you, how the interview will be conducted and for how long.
- **Background** – you may be asked to give a brief introduction to yourself and to your experience.
- **Role** – a more in-depth discussion on your capabilities and suitability for the vacancy. Remember an interview is about why *you* rather than other applicants.

- **Questions** – any questions from the interviewee?
- **Next** – what happens after the interview and how you will be contacted.
- **Close** – final remarks and thanks.

Depending on the profession and organisation, the interview could last anything from 10 to 45 minutes. Either way, you need to prepare three key statements which you'd like the interviewer to remember about you and practice building these statements into your communication.

Preparing Your Message

In the creative sector, we are very much our own brand. If you think of yourself as a brand, what do you want the interviewer to know about your abilities and why do you think you should be hired?

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Think about three key words you'd like to be identified with e.g. professional, creative, reliable, commercial, driving, innovative, detailed; and build your communication around your brand. This is what will make you stand out from others.

Practicing your response to questions will be invaluable. Good interview questions are open and should begin with Who, What, Why, Where, When and How. That's because the employer needs to know all about you and if you are the right person to invest in; open questions are designed to encourage you to speak.

Many larger broadcasters and theatres use something called 'competency based interviewing', this method requires you to demonstrate your competency and experience against a set of behaviours or company competencies. If you can get hold of these before an interview then you can prepare responses to each.

To help you prepare, ask the organisation to send *you* the following before interview:

→ **Job Description** – an outline of the key purpose of the role and the main tasks associated with the role.

→ **Employee or Job Specification** – typically a description of the most desirable person they can find for the job. This, if used, list experiences sought, qualifications, knowledge, special aptitudes, competencies and the like. This can also be split into descriptions of 'essential' factors and 'desirable' factors. Pure gold for your preparation.

→ **Behaviours and/or Competencies** – what the person will be expected to know and do, or how to behave in the role. If you would like to understand competencies a little more, the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development have a useful Fact Sheet on how competencies work and why employers use them. Visit www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/competence-competency-frameworks.aspx

→ A great tool for preparing and responding to questions, especially against competency or behaviour questions, is **STAR**:

→ **Situation** – an example of a situation where you clearly used that competency or behaviour positively.

→ **Target** – what was it you were trying to achieve and why that was positive or beneficial to the situation?

→ **Actions** – what specific actions did you take and why?

→ **Results** – the results or positive outcome or outcomes of the situation based on your actions.

Before any interviews, you should develop and practice STAR responses combined with your key branding words.

If you are expected to demonstrate your skill, or projects you have worked on, do have a showreel ready on a memory stick, or possibly on a web link or on your laptop or smartphone. Do have some content in 'the cloud'. You never know when this will prove useful.

The final two key elements to think about when preparing for an interview is the 'Tell us a bit about yourself' question and 'Do you have any questions for us?'

For the first, concentrate more on successes, awards and productions you have worked on – that gives the interviewer more knowledge of what you can do for them.

For the second, try and work out what questions you would ask. Be careful here because your initial thoughts could be seen as predictable. We are in the creative sector so try and show insight and innovation. We tend to remember difference. Your job is to influence the interviewer to remember you more than the others. That said, whatever you come up with, do prepare at least one question to ask at this point in the interview.

The Interview The Big Day

A number of obvious points here but some still sadly missed by interviewees:

→ Know where you are going – check location, timings, transport and who you should report to.

→ Dress for the interview – what to wear for an interview can be tricky, especially with media, broadcast or entertainment roles. Aim to make a positive first impression and dress up from 'the norm' for the particular role.

→ Do check your stress levels and take deep breaths before you go in. Be polite around reception or ticket areas as the person behind the desk could have some influence. Arrive at least 10 minutes before the agreed time to allow you feel the atmosphere of the location and to compose yourself.

→ Small talk – you may be escorted to a meeting room or rehearsal area. Do clarify the name of the person taking you there and think about



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some fairly small talk just in case they too are part of the interview process.

Making Positive Connections

The actual interview can be nerve-racking but the more you have prepared, the more confident you will be. Here are some thoughts to help positively influence the thinking of the interviewer.

- **First Four Seconds** – typically, people make a judgement about others within the first four seconds of meeting another. This has its roots in fight or flight – do I trust you or not? Am I safe, or are you a threat? Think about how you want to project yourself as you walk into the room. Your smile, posture and appearance.
- **Drink** – many interviewers do ask people if they would like a tea, coffee or water. Asking for a glass of water is usually a good option as you may need this later in the interview.
- **Language** – communication is about connecting and getting others to understand. Listen to their language and reply accordingly. Some of this you might have identified in the research. Do they 'see what you are saying' as visual thinkers, or do they 'hear what you are saying' as they are into auditory language or do they 'feel what you are saying' as they prefer to think with emotion or feeling. Are they big picture or detail? For a bit more on VAK language, follow this link: www.skillschannel.co.uk/VAK
- **Active Listening** – show you are listening. Paraphrasing what has been said, checking understanding or summarising to show you are engaged in a conversation.
- **Talking** – keep to the point. Be fairly succinct with your responses. Reply to questions using STAR (see above).
- **Any questions** – do make sure you have a number of well researched questions ready for this part of the interview. Often pre-prepared questions will be answered during an interview. On that basis, asking a couple of well crafted and thoughtfully researched questions



makes a big difference at the end of the interview.

- **Close** – when meeting new people, the first impression counts as we have already said. The same applies for a strong and positive close to a discussion. Think about how you would like to end the meeting, with a statement that is memorable for example, and how you will appear as you leave the room.

Presentations

Many of the larger organisations are now beginning to ask people to give a short 10-15 minute presentation for behind the scene roles. Typically this will include themes such as:

- How would you improve customer service
- Ideas for using social media in promoting productions

- Planning an OB sports event
- Dynamic lighting on a budget

The best way to develop short presentations is to start off answering the following:

- 1) What is my objective?
- 2) Who are the interviewers?
- 3) How much time do I have?

Try to concentrate on a simple structure with a clear introduction, the main part of the message and a strong and memorable summary. Don't go PowerPoint mad. This is a communication industry and good old-fashioned story telling is still very powerful. Do make sure you keep to two or three main points only and never go over or under the allocated time. If you go under, you've wasted valuable selling time. If you go over, their attention may focus on that rather than on your message.

Your Interview, Your Opportunity

Right at the start of these Help Notes we mentioned the notion that you can only talk yourself out of a job at interview. If your CV or bio has done its job by securing the interview, you then need to match your CV, better still build on it, through your presentation at interview. Your research, preparation and practice will strengthen your performance. And remember, you are not on your own; family and friends will be more than willing to help you, especially with practice. The impression you leave with the interviewer is down to you. Good luck!

Useful Links

www.bectu.org.uk/training-development
www.creativeskillset.org
www.creativetoolkit.org.uk/help-notes
www.cipd.co.uk/hr-resources/factsheets/competence-competency-frameworks.aspx
careers.guardian.co.uk/interview-help

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