

CV makeovers

Showcase your career with a Dynamic Power-CV!

Interview Guidelines

This e-Book guides you through the interview process



*A potential employer forms
an opinion within the
first 15 seconds of
meeting you.*

- How interviews are structured.
- Questions likely to be asked.
- How to handle difficult questions.
- Salaries and contracts.
- Why interviews go wrong.

For new Graduates

Author: Antoinette Tigar, Founder of CV Makeovers

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
1. TYPES OF INTERVIEW	4
1.1 One-On-One Interview	4
1.2 Psychometric Profiling	4
1.3 Panel Interview	6
2. TYPICAL INTERVIEW PROCESS.....	6
3. INTERVIEW PREPARATION	13
3.1 Set Your Communication Objectives	13
3.2 Research And Prepare.....	14
3.3 Materials You Will Need In The Interview	14
3.4 Practice Key Questions.....	15
3.5 Who Is The Interviewer?	15
3.6 Before The Interview	16
3.7 The First 60 Seconds	18
4. WHO IS INTERVIEWING YOU?.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.1 Recruitment Consultants.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2 HR Managers.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3 Line Managers	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.4 Skilled Interviewers	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.5 Bad Interviewers	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5. QUESTIONS MOST LIKELY TO BE ASKED.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.1 Opportunity Questions.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.2 Achievement Questions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
5.3 Your Potential	Error! Bookmark not defined.
6. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
7. SALARY ISSUES	Error! Bookmark not defined.
8. END OF INTERVIEW	Error! Bookmark not defined.
9. WHY INTERVIEWS GO WRONG.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

FOREWORD

Antoinette Tigar – Author

I have written more than 2000 CV's for a variety of clients at all levels, working in every type of profession here in South Africa and overseas. Many of these clients were graduates, who contacted me to give feedback on their progress. I realised that very few people actually understand how the recruitment and interview processes work, and find the job search experience highly stressful and frustrating. I decided to develop an eBook, which is divided into three sections, available as PDF downloads. The information in these guidelines is the result of intensive research with employers and recruiters. I also worked closely with two HR professionals, who have contributed with the latest information:

- ▶ **Sandy Smith** Sandy was the **Senior Manager: HR and Payroll** for a large financial services company in Durban until 2009. She is now working on a special career planning and placement project, which includes a work readiness programme, in collaboration with schools and universities. Her input is from the perspective of an in-house recruiter / employer.

- ▶ **Jenni Higgs** Jenni is a professional recruiter with over 20 years of experience in the field. She has worked for several large agencies in South Africa, and is the owner of **Accredited Candidates**, a generalist agency in Durban. She assists with Job Linkage Training and also provides Work Readiness Training to students as well as more senior job applicants wishing to re-enter the job market. Her advice to candidates is from the viewpoint of an independent recruiter working with a variety of corporate clients.

Visit the CV Makeovers website at www.cvmakeovers.co.za for more information. You are also invited to connect personally at www.facebook.com and www.linkedin.com.

1. TYPES OF INTERVIEW

Your CV has made the short list, and the recruiter contacts you for an interview. Sometimes the interview process is very straight-forward, but many companies today – especially the larger ones – put their candidates through a very thorough and in some cases, exhausting and stressful process.

There are 3 main types of interview:

One-on-one interview

Psychometric profiling

Panel interview

1.1 ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

This is the first interview with the Recruitment Consultant or, if the employer recruits in-house, an HR Officer / Manager.

1.2 PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

This may consist of two different types of tests: Personality Assessments and Competency (or Aptitude) Tests. It is usually the second step after the initial interview with the recruitment agent or in-house HR manager, before the panel interview with the decision-makers.

TERMINOLOGY

There is a lot of confusion around the different terms. The definition of **psychometric test** is any test used to quantify a particular aspect of a person's mental abilities or mindset – e.g., aptitude, intelligence, mental abilities and personality.

McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine. © 2002

PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

Companies use Personality Assessments to measure your motivation and preferred culture. The results will describe distinct features of your personality such as leadership qualities, results orientation, creativity, the ability to work in a team, and so on. These are not tests, but may have a time limit. There are no right or wrong answers - they are intended to give the employer a profile of your interests and working style. You should answer honestly and avoid trying to second-guess 'correct' answers. Below are a range of practice personality assessment sites for you to try out:

- SHLDirect.com
- [Keirseley temperament tests](#)
- [Team technology](#)
- [People Maps](#)
- <http://kisa.ca/personality/>

IMPORTANT

Personality is hugely complex and incredibly difficult to measure. Although the results of a questionnaire can suggest what your personality type is, these "DIY" assessments are general indicators ONLY.

COMPETENCY / APTITUDE TESTS

These are formal, timed tests, taken either online or by filling in a printed answer sheet. They usually take the form of multiple choice questions. You will be given full instructions before you start the test and there will be some example questions to try, with no time limit. If you have special requirements, it is advisable to declare this before the test, as the organisation may be able to make reasonable adjustments, allow you extra time or grade your results more appropriately.

The tests most commonly used in recruitment are:

- verbal tests - such as verbal reasoning, analysis and word sort;
- numerical tests - such as reasoning, analysis and sequential tests;
- diagrammatic and spatial reasoning - testing your logic and ability to deal with shapes;
- specific tests - for example syntax for computer programming; typing speed tests for admin staff or technical tests for mechanics.

Practice tests

Below are a range of practice aptitude/ability test sites for you to try out, either in preparation for the real thing or just to find out more about yourself and your abilities.

[Aptitude Tests Online](#)

[Numerical Reasoning](#)

[Psychometric Success](#)

[SHLDirect.com](#)

[Morrisby](#)

[Saville Consulting](#)

1.3 PANEL INTERVIEW

The Panel usually consists of:

- The line manager / direct report that the position reports to.
- An objective participant (HR Officer) who may facilitate / co-ordinate the interview.
- Any other relevant manager / senior staff member who will be directly involved in the individual's duties within the organisation.

EXAMPLE

If you are applying for a position as a **Sales Coordinator**, the interview panel may consist of the following key players:

- HR Officer - coordinating / facilitating the interview
- Sales Manager - would be your direct line manager
- Admin Manager - would work closely with you in respect of generating invoices, delivering products and solving queries.

2. TYPICAL INTERVIEW PROCESS

Below follows an example of how a typical interview is structured. This Interview Guide would be used by the company's HR Officer to ensure that all interviews are consistent. Each candidate would be asked the same questions. *Source: HR BizNiz*

Interview Guide

Position: _____ Reporting to: _____
Candidate: _____ Agency (Y/N): _____
Date: _____ Time: _____
Interviewer/s: _____

A. Introduction and welcome:

- Candidate is welcomed and introductions are made.
- Process of interview is outlined.
- Advertised job is discussed and questions are welcomed in this respect.
- Share the organogram of the department.
- Share some history about the organisation and the nature of business/industry.
- Share the reason for the vacancy existing /coming about.
- Explain the culture for the company and department.
- Ask the candidate if she/he wishes to continue with their application for job?
- Ask candidate if she/he has any questions before beginning?
- Make candidate feel relaxed and comfortable (offer coffee/tea/water).

B. Interview questions:

1. GENERAL QUESTIONS

- 1.1 Discuss candidate's CV.
- 1.2 Explore the skills learnt by the candidate, in previous jobs or studies.
- 1.2 What are your key strengths and weaknesses or areas of development?
- 1.3 What value add will you bring to our company?

2. COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

2.1 Dimension: Problem solving

Definition : Identifies potential difficulties and their causes. Generates workable solutions and makes rational judgments.

Behavioural Indicators: Positive	Negative
<input type="checkbox"/> Is able to identify the cause of a problem quickly. <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluates all available information. <input type="checkbox"/> Selects an appropriate alternative for solving the problem.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fails to recognise the cause of the problem timeously. <input type="checkbox"/> Missed important information. <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to effectively solve the problem with the solution selected.

Behavioural Question

Tell me about a time where you were faced with a problem or challenging situation, which required careful thought. What did you do to generate a solution and what was the outcome?

2.2 Dimension: Stress management/Resilience

Definition : Remains calm and self-controlled under pressure. Reacts well to change and remains positive despite setbacks. Keeps difficulties in perspective.

Behavioural Indicators: Positive	Negative
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintains enthusiasm and performance after disappointment. <input type="checkbox"/> Takes criticism in stride. <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains self control. <input type="checkbox"/> Deals calmly and rationally with stressful situations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiasm and performance drops after disappointment. <input type="checkbox"/> Feels debilitated by disappointment and criticism. <input type="checkbox"/> Loses self control and allows emotional outbursts. <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to deal calmly with stressful situations.

Behavioural Question

We all have times when we are disappointed or stressed, because things didn't work out or we're having a difficult time. Give me an example of when this happened to you? How did you react and what was the result?

2.3 Dimension: Decision Making

Definition : Identifies and understands issues, problems and opportunities; comprising data from different sources to draw conclusions; using effective approaches to choose a course of action / develop an appropriate solution; taking action consistent with available facts, constraints and probable consequences.

<p>Behavioural Indicators: Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies issues, problems and opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Gathers and interprets information <input type="checkbox"/> Generates alternatives <input type="checkbox"/> Chooses appropriate action and commits to the action <input type="checkbox"/> Involves others in the decision making process as warranted. 	<p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Fails to recognise the cause of the problem timeously. <input type="checkbox"/> Misses important information. <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to generate alternatives <input type="checkbox"/> Unable to choose appropriate action and commit to the action.
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Behavioural Question

We all make decisions that turn out to be mistakes. Describe a decision that you regret making. What happened, how did you handle this and what lesson did you learn from this?

2.4 Dimension: Teamwork

Definition : Fits in with the team. Develops effective and supportive relationships with colleagues. Is considerate towards them and creates a sense of team spirit.

<p>Behavioural Indicators: Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interacts effectively with other team members. <input type="checkbox"/> Recognises the efforts of others. <input type="checkbox"/> Supports others where necessary and without being asked. <input type="checkbox"/> Willingly stands in for others. <input type="checkbox"/> Contributes to team discussions. 	<p>Negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Interacts ineffectively with other team members. <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom contributes to the team beyond what is required. <input type="checkbox"/> Remains aloof from fellow team members. <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom stands in for others. <input type="checkbox"/> Seldom contributes to team discussions.
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Behavioural Question

Tell me about a time when you worked in a team to accomplish a specific goal. How did you build relationships with other team members to ensure that you worked successfully as a member of the team?

2.5 Dimension: Customer Focus – (internal and external sales only)

Definition : Quickly builds rapport and establishes relationships with customers. Related well to different types of customers, listens and gets on with them. Puts the customer first and is eager to please them.

<p><u>Behavioural Indicators: Positive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Quickly builds rapport <input type="checkbox"/> Shows empathy <input type="checkbox"/> Relates well to all kinds of people <input type="checkbox"/> Makes people feel like individuals <input type="checkbox"/> Aware of the types of people that they find difficult. <input type="checkbox"/> Listens carefully <input type="checkbox"/> Puts customers first <input type="checkbox"/> Is driven by customer demands <input type="checkbox"/> Works hard to meet customer needs 	<p><u>Negative</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Uncomfortable being with some new people. <input type="checkbox"/> No evidence of being especially sensitive towards others. <input type="checkbox"/> Only relates to certain types of people. <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely tailors his / her way of greeting Individuals. <input type="checkbox"/> Can feel intimidated or defensive with angry people. <input type="checkbox"/> Only moderately concerned about helping others.
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Behavioural Question

Describe a time when you had to help a customer with a particularly difficult query or problem? How did you go about to resolve the issue? What was the result?

2.6 Dimension: Using Initiative/Innovative

Definition : Takes responsibility for own actions and makes decisions without referring to others. Acts on own initiative.

<p><u>Behavioural Indicators: Positive</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Actively seeks solutions to problems / situations without being asked or told. <input type="checkbox"/> Initiates new and improved ways of doing things. <input type="checkbox"/> Generates new ideas/solutions. <input type="checkbox"/> Takes responsibility for actions. <input type="checkbox"/> Makes own decisions without referring to others. <input type="checkbox"/> Seizes opportunities. 	<p><u>Negative</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Accepts the status quo. <input type="checkbox"/> Needs to be directed to initiate something new. <input type="checkbox"/> Has few new ideas / solutions to contribute <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks accountability. <input type="checkbox"/> Refers decisions to others. <input type="checkbox"/> Misses opportunities.
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Behavioural Question

Give me an example of a situation where you had to take control to sort out a problem or get something done. It could be something that happened at school, college or a job.

2.7 Dimension: Quality Orientation (Dependant on the position this can be asked)

Definition : Quality Orientation – Is committed to achieving and maintaining high quality results. Follows through, to ensure that quality and productivity standards are met. Sets high standards of performance for self and others. Is concerned about details. Is reliable, follows direction from supervisor and respects policies and procedures.

Behavioural Indicators: Positive	Negative
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintains high professional standards. <input type="checkbox"/> Thorough and accurate. <input type="checkbox"/> Pays close attention to quality. <input type="checkbox"/> Is reliable. <input type="checkbox"/> Follows guidance and directions from superiors willingly. <input type="checkbox"/> Respects policies and procedures. <input type="checkbox"/> Accepts the need for rules and regulations. <input type="checkbox"/> Completes tasks on time. <input type="checkbox"/> Shows commitment to the organisation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Struggles to maintain high standards. <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely checks work. <input type="checkbox"/> Omits points of detail or makes errors <input type="checkbox"/> Is unreliable. <input type="checkbox"/> Follows guidance and directions from superiors grudgingly. <input type="checkbox"/> Cannot see the need for policies, rules or regulations. <input type="checkbox"/> Makes excuses about incomplete work. <input type="checkbox"/> Little organisational commitment in the past.

Behavioural Question

At one time or another, everyone is pressured to sacrifice quality in order to finish a job or an assignment on time. Tell us about a time that this happened to you. What did you do?

3. Job Specific Questions

Interviewer to put in questions specific to the advertised job....

4. Career Aspirations

4.1 What are your short, medium and long term career aspirations/goals?

5. Leadership Style

5.1 What kind of leadership style do you prefer to work under and why?

C. CONCLUSION

Ask candidate if he/she has any questions?

Ask the candidate what is his/her salary expectation.

Thank the candidate and close interview.

D. ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATE: Only for the Interviewers

Ratings

5	Much more than acceptable	Significantly exceeds criteria.
4	More than acceptable	Exceeds criteria.
3	Acceptable	Meets criteria.
2	Less than acceptable	Generally does not meet criteria.
1	Much less than acceptable	Significantly below criteria.

Communication (Observable):

- Mechanics – appropriate grammar and vocabulary
- Organisation – Clear and brief
- Delivery – rate, volume, gestures, eye contact
- Listening

Impact (Observable):

- Speak with a confident tone of voice
- Maintain an attentive posture
- Respond warmly and openly
- Dress appropriately

Job Competencies	Rating (Tick)					Comments
	1	2	3	4	5	
Problem Solving						
Stress Management/ Resilience						
Decision Making						
Teamwork						
Customer Focus						
Using Initiative/ Innovative						
Quality Orientation						
Communication						
Impact						

Recommended for position: **Yes** **No**

Reasons:

3. INTERVIEW PREPARATION

3.1 SET YOUR COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The objectives for a successful interview are –

- ◆ Establish a positive connection with the interviewer.
- ◆ Identify what the needs of the organisation are.
- ◆ Explain how you can make a contribution.

Prepare and have clear in your mind one or two messages or statements about yourself and what you have to offer to the potential employer – your **'mini profile'**.

“I am very self-driven, with a high level of energy, and enjoy engaging with a variety of people. I’m happy to take on a challenge and use initiative to “get the job done”. After school I gained valuable experience travelling and working overseas for two years, before returning to Durban for degree studies. I am now seeking a career opportunity in a dynamic and innovative company that offers scope for growth.”

“I am an ambitious, career-driven graduate currently enrolled as a Level 1 CFA Candidate. My key strength is that I am extremely methodical and detail-orientated, which I feel is essential when working with figures. I’m now seeking an Internship opportunity in the Financial sector, with the aim of gaining experience in Banking and Investments.”

“I have completed three of the four years of an Honours degree in Psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. This degree has been very demanding. From the second year as students, our work included supervisory Social Work roles. This has taught me many valuable lessons in time management, deadlines, diplomacy and concise report writing.”

3.2 RESEARCH AND PREPARE

Knowledge about Prospective Employer

Evidence that you have prepared thoroughly for the interview always impresses.

- ✓ Read the 'quality' newspapers such as The Financial Mail, Finance Week, Finansies en Tegniek, Business Day and Business Times. They will keep you up to date on major new industry developments as well as background, policies and problems of different companies.
- ✓ Visit the company website.
- ✓ Talk to anyone who knows the company.

Job Knowledge

Always remember that interviews are also to enable you to ascertain whether the job and the company are right for you. To do this:

- ✓ Read all the information you have about the job to identify its technical requirements. Jot down any questions you wish to ask.
- ✓ Try to find out whether the organisational climate is one in which you will thrive and be happy. Prepare some key questions.

3.3 MATERIALS YOU WILL NEED IN THE INTERVIEW

Interview Portfolio / Portfolio Of Evidence

This is a presentation folder with plastic sleeves inside (don't use a ring binder file, get a proper display folder with the plastic sleeves bound into the spine). Into the sleeves, insert your CV, reference letters, certificates of qualifications, as well as anything relating to community / leadership roles at church, school or college. **For example**, if you helped to build homes with Habitat for Humanity, or worked in a charity fundraiser, include the photo (which shows where you are) or newspaper clipping.

Note: Never leave this Portfolio behind – it may be passed around to other people and you'll struggle to get it back!

Meeting Folder

In addition to your Interview Portfolio, take along another folder with all the material you will need in the interview room – a pen, small notebook, the e-mail from the company confirming the interview in case there is confusion in their diary; also, if you were unavoidably delayed on your journey you would have the telephone number to make a call; a summary of the notes you have prepared on the company and its activities – and a list of job-related questions which you have compiled. It is essential that the interview is not a one-sided affair and that you participate in the process.

3.4 PRACTICE KEY QUESTIONS

Make a list of the kinds of questions most likely to be asked (see further in this document) and plan the most appropriate answers for each of these questions. You should identify where you are most vulnerable and focus on them, preparing an honest, forthright and considered response for each question.

When you have prepared for the interview, have someone ask you those questions, out loud. We use a different part of the brain to verbalize, so just thinking about possible answers is not sufficient – you may still get lost for a word or become tongue-tied under the pressure of the moment.

3.5 WHO IS THE INTERVIEWER?

Another important aspect of preparation is for you to learn as much as possible about the person who'll be questioning you. This will not eliminate all surprises, but it will provide some helpful insight into the kind of interview situation to be encountered. The person who contacted you to set up the interview, may not be the same person who is conducting the interview.

3.6 BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

The receptionist / secretary (PA)

It may be necessary for you to speak to the assistant of the person who is going to interview you. It is important that you get on with the secretary, because if she goes back to her boss and says that you sound a bit of a pain, you are already a loser.

There are two things that you should ask the secretary. Firstly, confirm the time and place of the interview and try to find out who will be there. Secondly, ask 'Can you give me some idea how long the interview is going to take?' You may be told 'You are meeting X at 2pm and he has another meeting at 3pm.' This will help you to plan the interview.

When you get there, remember that you are being watched. Don't squirm, don't scratch, or slump back in the chair. The manager may ask the receptionist 'What does he look like?' and she may say 'Well, he's lying back in the chair and scratching'.

Try to arrive 20 minutes before the interview; go to the toilet, prepare yourself for the interview, return to the reception area, relax yourself and observe the environment and how people interface with each other. Is it a place you would like to work in?

**Remove facial studs
and piercings!**

Your image

Your image is your clothing, hair and make-up. Obviously your look will vary depending on whether you're applying for a creative job at an Advertising Agency or a corporate job at a bank, but think carefully about the image you are projecting. If you're not sure, ask the recruitment consultant or company HR manager what the company's dress code is – remember though that you should dress a bit more smartly for an interview than you would for a normal day's work.

Ladies: avoid tight or revealing clothes. Wear well-defined but subtle make-up. Watch these YouTube videos for more tips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpMQLe2pCD0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89QypHm4ilY&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OX73l-aRQI&feature=related>

Men: clean shaven, neat hair cut, collared shirt, smart jacket, dress pants and a tie. Watch these YouTube videos for more tips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpUvygEgVk4&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otd5OfQRli8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OX73l-aRQI&feature=related>

Your Mood

The next important point is your mood, your enthusiasm and your belief in yourself. Put some energy into your actions. If you're feeling tired or anxious, you will project a negative vibe. Look forward to it. Don't fear it. Programme yourself beforehand to like the person you are going to meet.

The recruiter hopes that her search will be over. She is not there to stop you from getting the job - she's hoping you'll be the right candidate so that she can fill the post. Help her make the right decision - you!

3.7 THE FIRST 60 SECONDS

When we meet people for the first time, we tend to capture our first impression – this is a list of major points that will affect the interviewer:

- Stance, posture, how you walk into the room
- What are you carrying? How are you carrying it?
- Eye contact – very, very important
- Opening words
- The energy you project
- Voice
- Handshake
- Confidence
- Clothes
- Personal Grooming

All this is taken in during the first 60 seconds. Analyse all these separate factors. Decide whether you need to work on any of them.

Never dash in and breathlessly exclaim about the traffic jam or the parking difficulties you've experienced. Smile, and pretend that someone's just told you that the interviewer has heard about you and is really keen to have you join the company. Try to be quietly confident.

Step forward with your hand held out to shake, smile and say your name clearly. 'Good morning, Mr Brown. My name is Jane Wesley. Pleased to meet you'. Always call yourself by your first name as well as your surname. Never presume he knows you. Always use his name. It is a mark of confidence. If you don't know his name, just ask him.

VERY IMPORTANT!

Always shake hands firmly, even if the interviewer is a woman. A 'lady' shake (holding just the fingers of the hand softly) is considered good manners in some cultures, but **not** in a business situation.