



OUR SECRET PHOBIA...?

CVS AND
INTERVIEWS

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INTRODUCTION



Look up 'interview advice' on Google and you'll get more than 94 million web entries. Try searching for 'CV advice' and you will receive nearly 17 million results.

What does this tell us? A couple of conclusions seem fairly obvious.

That there is a huge demand for help when looking and applying for a job. That many people don't feel confident when it comes to penning their CV and aren't sure what prospective employers most want to see on it. And that, when they do get to an interview, they feel even more uncertain about what's the best way to conduct themselves.

Nobody really teaches you this stuff. It's often a life lesson. You learn it as you go along. This is, of course, as true for the person conducting the interview as it is for the person being interviewed – although this is usually forgotten.

Most interviewers aren't experts in CV assessment or interview techniques themselves. They too have learned as they go.

CVs and interviews are one of those universal rites of passage that we all go through. They don't have to be frightening. They are an opportunity to showcase your skills and your personality to someone who has a vested interest in, well, being interested.

We wanted to get to the truth of some of the basic but important questions that candidates frequently ask us.



ABOUT THIS REPORT



Our report is split into four main chapters. The first tackles CVs – how long should they be? Should you follow up on them? The second looks at your behaviour before entering the interview room. Do employers assess your body language? Do they notice if you are friendly to the staff in reception?

Chapter three concentrates on the interview format itself. What is the type of interview most favoured by employers? Is it an exploration of your competencies? Or is it biographical – more of a review of your background and your past roles?

Finally, we look at what employers said about the interview questions themselves? What's their favourite type of question? How do they like candidates to respond?

Throughout, we've included some of the interesting and quirky things that employers fed back to us. For example, one employer told us that the most unusual CVs they'd seen was an online "Flash" version, which was emailed to them and included an animation and a song!

Much of this is fun – but there is a serious point here.

Following one of the deepest recessions, there are many people who have been unfortunate enough to find themselves unemployed though no fault of their own. The job market is more competitive than ever.

Lots of the people currently seeking jobs are doing so after years of security. They have not written a CV or been for an interview for a long while. It is absolutely understandable

that these people feel apprehensive about having to now put pen to paper or finger to keyboard and describe themselves, their experiences and skills. It is inevitable that they will find an interview situation one for which it is difficult to prepare.

They will be asking, have things changed? After all, the last decade saw us move into the internet age. People have less time than before to read content for their day job, let alone CVs from prospective employees. We're told that people's attention span is shorter, thanks to email, instant messaging, text messages and social networks. Many companies only accept online applications.

What might the impact of all of this be on the job application process? Should CVs be shorter than might have been the case in 1990 or 2000? Have interview styles changed?

As well as being interesting and, in some cases, fun, this research is designed to answer these questions and reassure candidates who are nervous about the whole jobhunting process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



1: CVs

Despite our ever more time-precious world, two pages remains the optimum length for a CV, according to 57 per cent of employers. In fact, a surprising 38 per cent of people surveyed said that three pages is ideal – suggesting that, when it comes to assessing a candidate's suitability for a job, people are prepared to put in the proper time to screen people at the CV stage. This is not a process that employers want to skip over.

Employers strongly believe that a CV should include a mix of responsibilities and achievements, with an appropriate balance. One or the other is not really good enough for most organisations.

Perhaps surprisingly, only 13 per cent of respondents said they are likely to read the 'education' section of a CV. This could be a consequence of years' of media criticism of 'slipping standards' in national qualifications such as A levels or GCSEs. Whether this is true or not, it seems clear that relevant experience is more critical than ever: 88 per cent of employers say they read this section.

We looked at the issue of speculative CVs, the act of sending a CV to an organisation that is not advertising on the off chance they may be interested. The majority of employers see speculative CVs as proactive, although nearly a third (30 per cent) say they find people that follow up with a call or email after a couple of days "a nuisance". Even for an advertised role.

There are some absolute CV dos and don'ts. According to our survey, any gaps should always be explained and a professional summary at the top is a very good idea. Including logos of companies you've worked for, and other 'visual' flourishes can, by contrast, backfire.

2: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It is still true that your interview starts the moment you enter the building – not the moment you sit down across the table from your interviewer.

Formal business attire is still rated as important, along with, unsurprisingly, good hygiene. Practising a firm handshake is also wise – 125 out of 184 people rated this as important or highly important.

In the interview room itself, body language is noticed, so candidates should keep those arms uncrossed, laugh, smile and generally look enthused. Sarcasm is a big no no. And, in a very modern twist, employers' most hated behaviour is... leaving the mobile phone on.

3: THE INTERVIEW – STYLE

There are no major surprises in terms of the things employers wish to see here: they want candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the company and give answers relevant to the job.

Nearly three quarters (71 per cent) of employers prefer a competency-based interview, seeking to draw out the areas in which a candidate excels, the traits that will fit with and contribute to the company. Nearly half (49 per cent) like to start with informal chat. Building a rapport during the process is rated as highly important, as is sharing a sense of humour, and avoiding yes/no answers.

The results back up the sense that 'hard-nosed' interviews are largely a thing of the past. Interviewers today are rarely trying to 'catch anyone out' or see how people perform under stress. Two thirds (68 per cent) say they would prompt or help a candidate that was taking a long time to answer a question, for example. However, 28 per cent of interviewers did admit that they would consider "testing" a candidate by seeing how they respond to an aggressive question.

Conversely, 90 per cent say they would never test a candidate to see how they respond to deliberate unfriendly/cold behaviour.

Overall, it is about getting to know the person you are looking to hire – and seeing if they would be a positive fit within the organisation.

4: THE INTERVIEW – QUESTIONS

Asking sensible, relevant questions is one of the things rated most important by employers. So far, so good – that seems fairly logical.

Respondents were completely split, though, when it comes to one of the age-old quandaries: at what point should you first query the salary and benefits of the job?

One quarter (27 per cent) think candidates should have asked before the interview, but 25 per cent say the first interview stage is the more appropriate time. 23 per cent say you should wait until the second interview and another 20 per cent think you should wait even longer – right up until the offer stage. This uncertainty highlights the advantage of candidate's working through a recruitment company as consultants will almost always have the salary information available and candidates' should always ask for this before moving forward with a vacancy.

There is no consensus and this is one area where candidates will need to make their own judgement call based on the particular job they are applying for. In general, our advice would normally be to investigate basic remuneration details before applying – after all, it seems common sense to want to know this information in order to make an informed decision as to whether you are right for the job, and if it is right for you.

CHAPTER 1: CVS

SIZE MATTERS. HOW LONG SHOULD MINE BE?

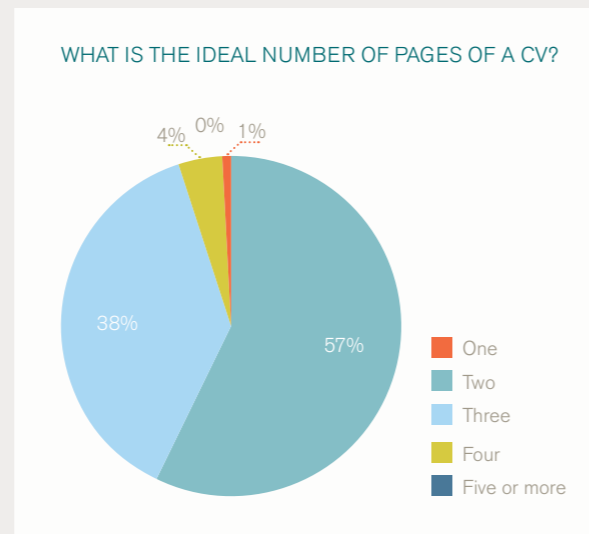
We see CVs of all shapes and sizes. Some are fitted neatly onto a page. Some are crammed onto the page – with margins and font sizes slashed to within an inch of their life in order to make room.

Others stretch for pages, every job title, course undertaken and qualification gained explained in impressive detail.

Most are somewhere in between.

WHAT'S THE BEST?

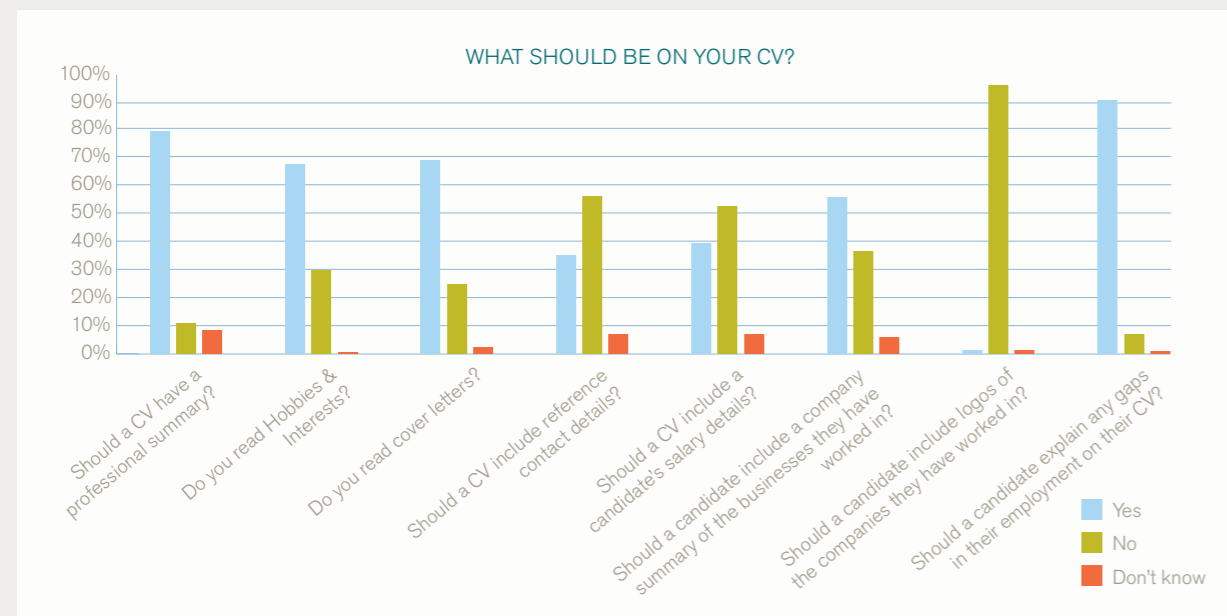
According to our survey – definitely try and stick to two neat, succinct pages. BUT – don't try and cram. If there really is too much to fit on the two sides of A4, and you absolutely can't edit it down, then don't feel too bad about stretching to three. Three sides of easy-to-read copy is better than two pages chock-full of text.



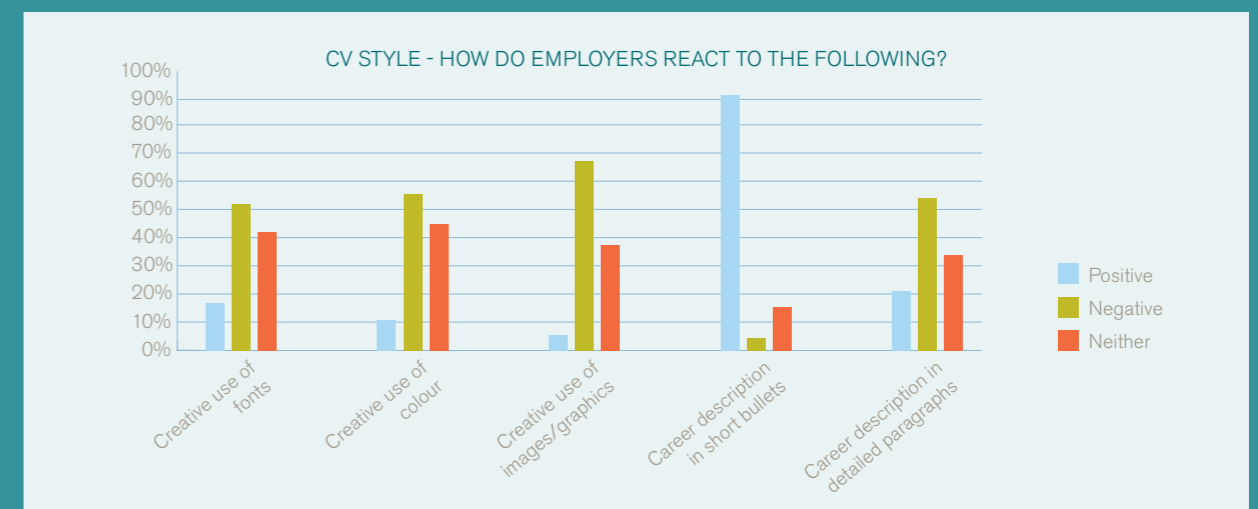
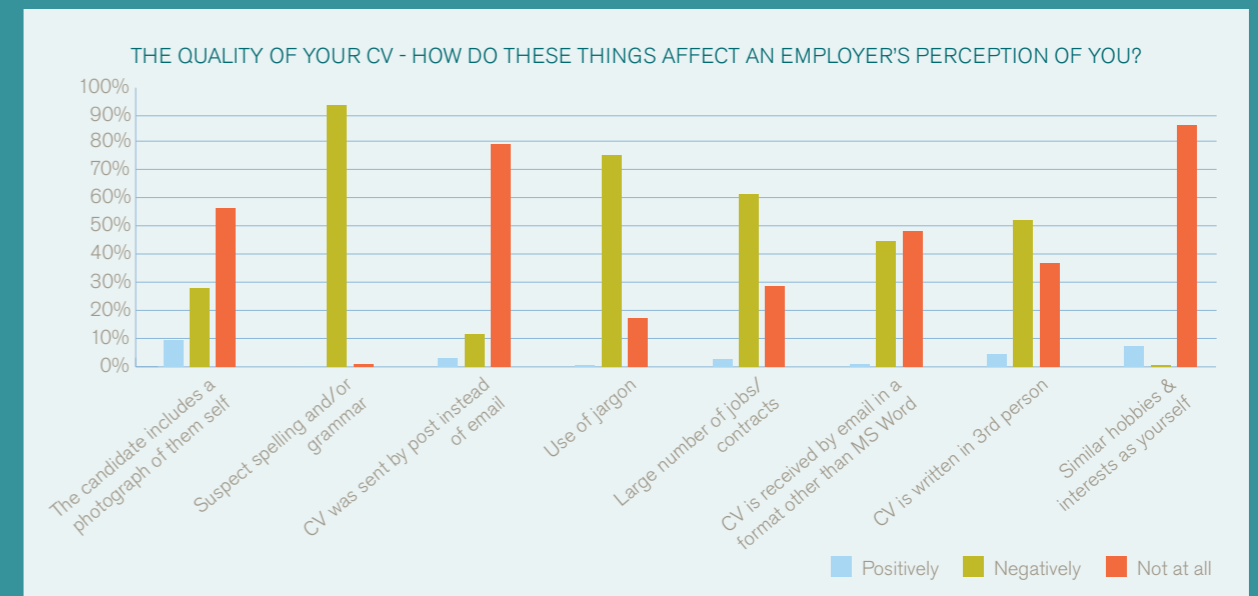
WHAT SHOULD BE ON MY CV?

Simple: your experiences. 70 per cent of respondents said that when a candidate outlines their experience within, it should be described in terms of "responsibilities" and "achievements."

Experience rates as more important than education, with 88 per cent of employers preferring to read the experience section first. Employers are fairly neutral when it comes to hobbies and interests. The screening decisions are based predominantly on experience – but also on accuracy and style.



Spelling mistakes, incorrect grammar, use of jargon should all be avoided at all costs.



Be careful about too much follow up of CVs. While sending speculative CVs out into the market is part and parcel of jobseeking – particularly in a tough and competitive climate such as we have endured the last two years – some employers can find follow ups by phone or email an unwanted nuisance.

It is naturally tempting to want to follow up if you have not heard anything from a company you have applied for. While we wouldn't discourage candidates from doing so as a rule of thumb, it's important to apply discretion. Nearly one third (30 per cent) of employers we asked told us that they would see a candidate that makes follow up calls a nuisance rather than proactive.

"A hobby of 'taking drugs' (think it was meant to be a joke!)"

"An online 'Flash' CV which included animation and a song."

"A tea bag attached so that I could have a cuppa whilst reading it!"

"WHAT'S THE MOST UNUSUAL THING YOU'VE SEEN ON A CV?"

"Pictures of an aeroplane designed to show what a high flyer they were."

"Family photographs!"

"The first sentence started... 'We moved to Coventry when I was four...' It was 64 pages long!"

CHAPTER 2: PRE-INTERVIEW

IT'S TRUE! FIRST IMPRESSIONS REALLY DO COUNT



PREPARATION

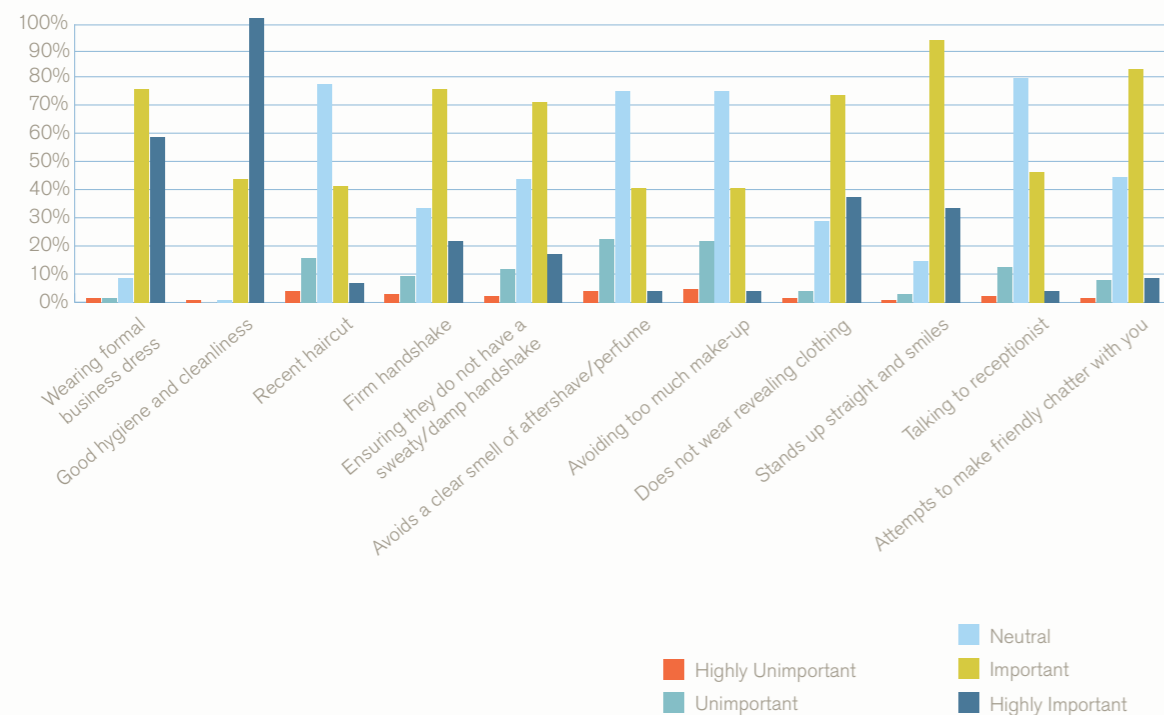
There is so much information readily available regarding this subject – but how much is relevant? What can be safely disregarded? Remember, you never get a second chance to make that desired good first impression.

Unsurprisingly, our survey indicated overwhelmingly that good hygiene and cleanliness was a major factor in

promoting a good first impression, with 69% of employers citing this as highly important.

Formal business attire also figures highly with prospective employers. More than half (52%) rate this as important. Unless specified, candidates should always dress up rather than down. Ask friends or relatives for feedback and advice on how you look and how you could improve your presentation. Make a conscious effort to project success.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE FIRST IMPRESSIONS?



Remember that the interview is very much the main event. It doesn't start with the first question you are asked. It doesn't even start when you enter the building. It starts

with your preparation prior to that. How you prepare signals how you will handle the prospective position.

Research the company via their website: what it does, who its competitors are, its history.

Study any sent corporate literature; relating to it as a passing reference could make a difference to the interviewers impression of your enthusiasm for the job.

Obviously, be conversant with your own CV, practice answers to questions you think may be asked. In planning answers ensure they are succinct.

Be certain of the route to the interview and allow plenty of time prior to arrival to compose yourself.

A considerable percentage (32%) of employers rated talking with the receptionist or secretary prior to the interview as important. A personable and informal chat will make a good impression and also put you at ease prior to entering the interview room.

Always, always ensure your mobile phone is off! Some 78% of employers surveyed were extremely unimpressed by this lapse.

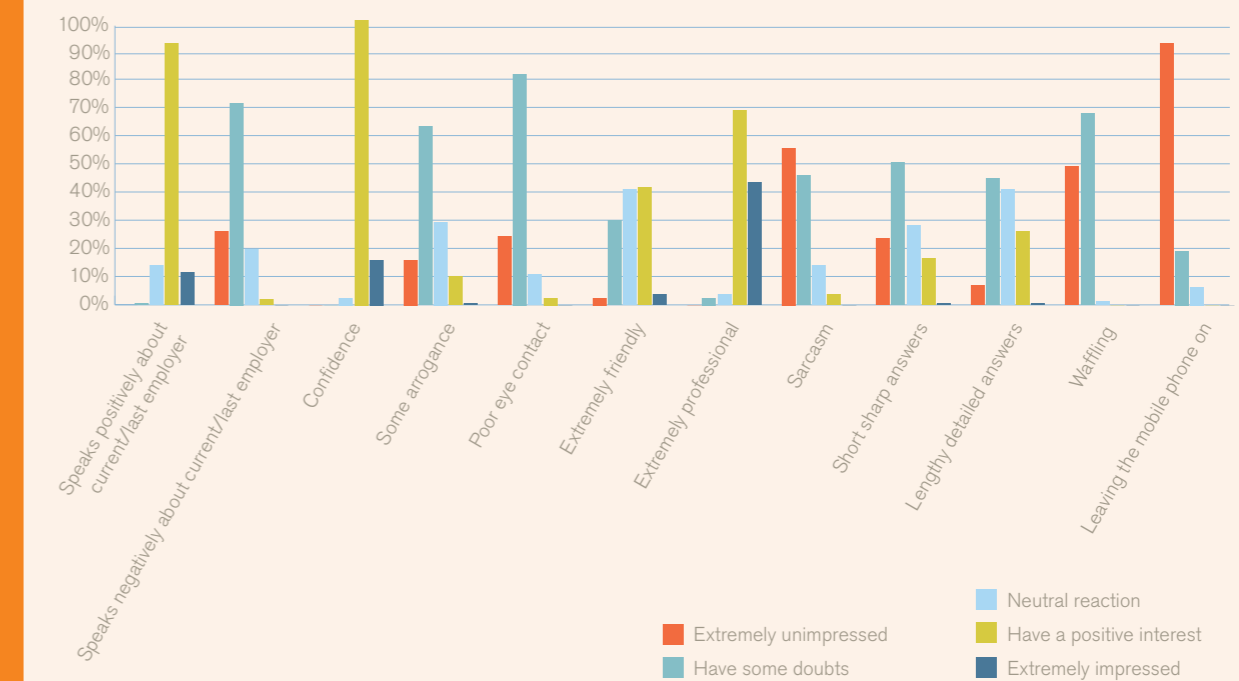
ENTERING THE LION'S DEN

It's almost a cliché that we judge people on a handshake, but a firm handshake was rated as important by 53% of employers. And, despite society today being more relaxed and informal than ever before, the majority (51%) of employers remain reasonably conservative, saying that it's important clothing isn't too revealing.

On meeting with interviewers, two thirds (64%) of respondents would be impressed with the candidate standing up straight and smiling.

Attempts to promote friendly chatter impressed some 57% of employers. Such informal banter can do much to settle nervousness prior to the interview proper.

BEHAVIOUR IN THE INTERVIEW



CHAPTER 3: INTERVIEW



TECHNIQUES AND BEHAVIOUR DURING INTERVIEW

How you start the interview is critical. Use a formal address to your interviewer unless invited to do otherwise. This would be the professional approach, favoured by some 58% of employers surveyed.

Remember basic body language. Leaning on the table or desk is probably a bad idea – this is the interviewer's private territory! A high 59% of employers told us they would harbour doubts over perceived negative body language.

THE THREE 'E'S ARE VITAL!

Maintain **eye contact**, exude **energy** and **enthusiasm**. Energy and sureness of self-expression can count higher in interview than your accomplishments. Some 84% of interviewers said they would react positively to this, whereas appearing unhappy would cause three quarters of potential employers (77%) to harbour doubts.

Qualitative attributes can substitute for experience. Always stress the prime qualities of willingness, motivation and enthusiasm. And don't be afraid to ask for feedback. In fact, often, this is a good strategy. It can stimulate the interviewer's thinking process and help you to determine whether to supply further information or improve presentation.

Ask questions that demonstrate the sophistication of your thought processes. The interviewer would want to see your ability to achieve results. Translate past accomplishments into qualities that relate to the employer's requirements for the position. Ensure your answers relate to the job position under discussion as this was rated highly important by 51% of employers surveyed.

Stay on top of the game. Use your imagination to expand the employer's expectations for the position into future potential.

Be positive without exuding over-confidence. Assert your assets. Focus on your willingness and ability to accept challenges and master complex change. Some 85% of employers surveyed had a positive feel about a candidate's ability to show confidence. Even a candidate who is not blessed with natural confidence can do this by focusing on their strengths and highlighting their achievements.

Prepare for the unexpected. There is a growing tendency among employers for a more interactive form of interview to stimulate a more open discussion along the lines of a project meeting. This gives the opportunity to promote a proactive attitude offering insights into your abilities to develop improvements.

Inject humour as appropriate (without reverting to your trusted stand up comedy act!), rated important by 72% of employers, but never lapse into sarcasm. An overwhelming number of interviewers would harbour doubts and/or be extremely unimpressed by this trait.

Waffle is not great. It shows uncertainty and lack of focus and clarity. Also, avoid the temptation to go on too long. It is a fine line between emphasising your abilities and overstating your case. Some 57% of employers stated this would give them cause to doubt with 42% being extremely unimpressed.

Unless you have something vital to add, let the interviewer take the lead in any inter-question pauses.

If an opinion is invited over some sensitive issue, beware! Sometimes it is good to appear opinionated (if you can back your viewpoint up) but an interview is rarely the place to get on your soapbox. Strongly expressed opinions are unlikely to do you any credit. Present a balanced viewpoint on such issues.

Don't leave the interview empty-handed. Should the employer indicate there are other candidates for interview, try to find out as much information about the process as possible. How many stages? Any further testing? Who else is likely to conduct interviews? Armed with this information, it can put you at an advantage when preparing for further interviews. The interviewer may indeed conclude by inviting questions. Anticipate this with pertinent query's related to the position, not necessarily about salary or benefits (see below).

On leaving, thank the interviewer, emphasising how much you enjoyed the experience and how confident you feel about having the ability, skills and experience to meet the requirements of the position.

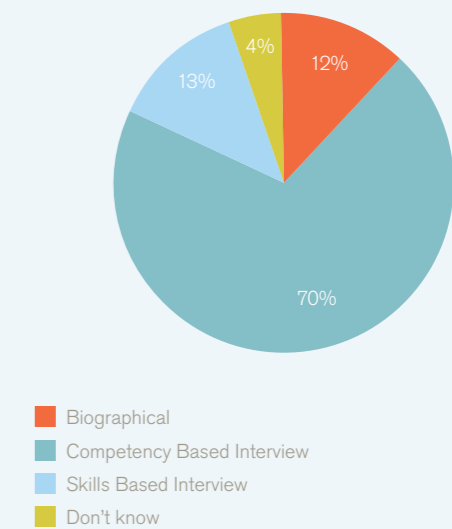
INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

One of the reasons we undertook this project was to be able to offer candidates statistical reassurance about how

an interview is likely to proceed. Knowing what to expect, after all, will help with confidence and preparation.

The good news is that most employers like small chat. They want to get to know the person they are interviewing – even if on an initially superficial level. Only a small percentage of employers say they move straight into interview without any kind of preamble. Nearly half (49%) of those surveyed opting for informal chatting, some 26% opting for an overview of their company and 15% for an overview of the position.

WHICH INTERVIEW FORMAT HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE THE MOST USEFUL?

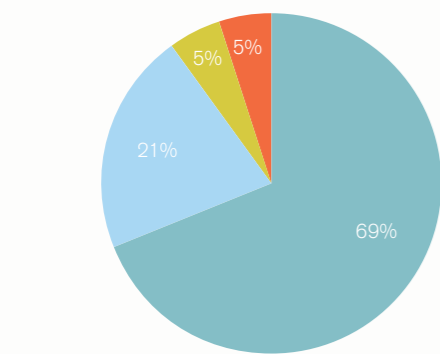




Others outline the interview format prior to launching into overviews with some asking the candidate for their understanding of the role they had applied for.

A biographical approach to interview is a historical discussion on your career. This format was favoured by 12% of employers whereas an overwhelming 71% opted for competency-based approach which will focus on the job's key competencies and the candidate's ability in relation to them. 13% prefer a skills based format. This means that you are best preparing how you will tell your 'story' in terms of the things you are good at, knowing what the interviewer is looking for – the areas of competence that will benefit an employer... and how.

WHAT WOULD/DO YOU DO IF A CANDIDATE TAKES MORE THAN AROUND 30 SECONDS TO ANSWER A QUESTION?



- Prompt/help the candidate
- Continue to wait for an answer
- Move onto the next question
- Other (please specify)

THE BIG THREE QUESTIONS

In terms of preparing for interviews, we get asked some questions a lot.

One is how to respond to questions about previous jobs. Our advice is always clear – and our research backs it up. Basically, if asked about previous jobs, avoid criticism of former employers at all costs! A very significant 60% would view this as unattractive while 78% of interviewers would respond positively if you spoke favourably of a past employer.

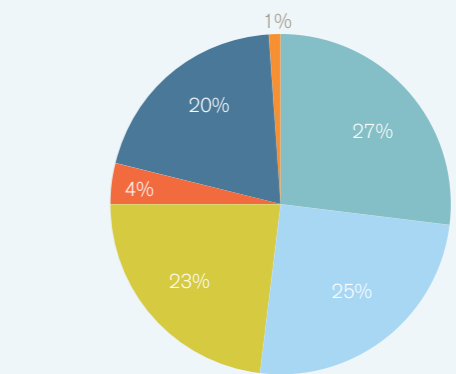
Another is, 'What do I do if I don't know the answer to a question?'

First of all – don't panic. Interviewers rarely expect people to know everything. And, sometimes, your mind does just go blank. Most employers we asked said they would support a candidate that is struggling - some 68% of those surveyed would offer help or prompt if you were obviously struggling with a question.

That said, don't go into any interview without already preparing answers for obvious questions. Nearly all (89%) respondents said they would be likely to ask candidates to comment on their own strengths and weaknesses.

Finally – the biggie. Salary. Convention has it that the salary and benefits should not be discussed at interview stage. Most people tend to find this out earlier. However, this survey indicated that employers are evenly split on this. One in four (27%) employers expect some form of query prior to interview, but 25% expect it at first interview stage and 23% at second interview. The candidate should use his own intuition to gauge the mood of the particular interview and assess when would be the appropriate time. Of course, when going through an agency, always make sure you ask your consultant for the salary details beforehand and this will save you the worry of when to ask the hiring company.

AT WHAT STAGE SHOULD A CANDIDATE FIRST QUERY THE SALARY/BENEFITS OF THE JOB?



- Before the interview
- First interview stage
- Second interview stage
- Additional interviews
- Offer stage
- Never

CHAPTER 4: VIEW FROM THE INTERVIEWER'S DOMAIN

OFF-PISTE TACTICAL QUESTIONING

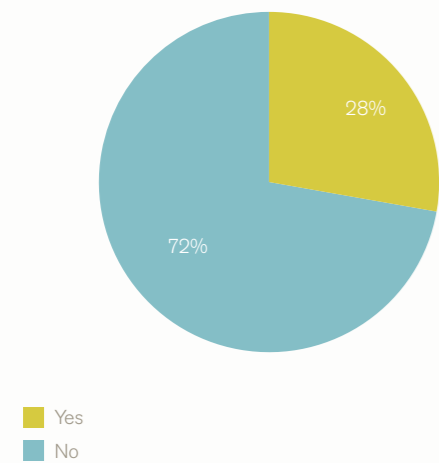
We've all heard stories of 'horrible' interviews, where candidates have been instructed to tell a joke, or sell the interviewer a paperclip, or some other such unhelpful demand.

In the 21st century, are these urban myths or do employers think such tactics have their place?

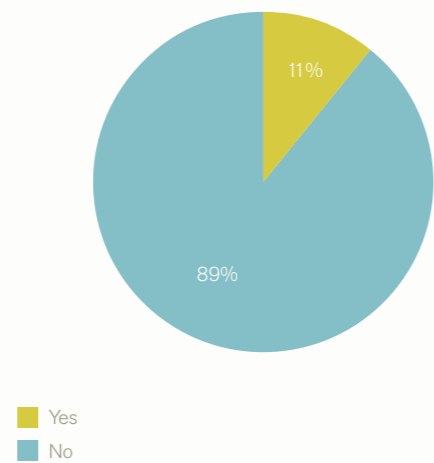
Aggressive questioning seems to be largely a thing of the past, with 72% of those surveyed not condoning it. However – it would be prudent to be wary, as 28% did admit they might test a candidate in this fashion.

Similarly, while the vast majority (89%) of respondents would not use a deliberately cold or unfriendly attitude as a means of testing a candidate, a not-insignificant 11% indicated they would.

WOULD YOU EVER TEST A CANDIDATE BY SEEING HOW THEY RESPOND TO AGGRESSIVE QUESTIONING?



WOULD YOU EVER TEST A CANDIDATE TO SEE HOW THEY RESPOND TO DELIBERATE UNFRIENDLY/COLD BEHAVIOUR?



BEYOND THE EXPECTED – INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE CHANGES

When questioned about interview format changes in the last 12-18 months some 73% of respondents indicated no change but 27% had instigated change to some degree in that period.

Changes varied – some dependant on type of position that the post warranted and some were rolling changes due to increased competency on the part of the interviewer. More technical questions were introduced in some cases, due

to internal 'resistance to 'the right buzzwords' while others asked less straight-out questions to let the candidate 'feel their way' to the answer.

But beware – some respondents were using more in-depth probing, re-defining competency based questions and even adding role-play for certain positions.

BEYOND THE PALE – USE OF UNUSUAL TECHNIQUES AND QUESTIONS

Sleight of hand, or a legitimate interview tool? Well, the jury is out but some 27% of respondents admitted to having gone down this road. As always, prepare and beware!

Techniques used varied from telling candidates they 'cannot be seen' in the particular role, playing the 'good cop bad cop' routine, trying to put the candidate off the job even holding the interview in a pub or station!

Surprise questions have been bounced on candidates such as being asked what they are passionate about, dropping in random general knowledge questions, asking candidates to imagine they are a biscuit even asking the candidate to tell a joke!

It's a minefield! Candidates will have little insight into what is coming when they enter the interview room. As highlighted throughout this report prior preparation and composure before the event are key.

BEYOND A JOKE – INTERVIEWERS ON THE RECEIVING END

Remember – the person(s) in front of you haven't always occupied the high ground! Respondents gave insights into how they had been wrong-footed by candidates. Beyond parody – or a message as to where not to goread on!

Some of what the interviewers have had to put up with – candidates have: Applied as a man but appeared at interview as a woman, left part way through the interview 'to get some fresh air', walked into the interview room with a can of Red Bull, worn sunglasses throughout, one person even spent five minutes on the phone!

Some candidates have displayed extreme arrogance or rudeness, have cried, fainted and tapped pens continually on the desk. Some have even asked the interviewer for a date, sent a relative with better English skills, brought their mother, requested biscuitsone candidate even conducted his interview as a member of the Starship Enterprise!

A light-hearted insight maybe and candidates would do well to follow the lead of interviewers and file these examples away under 'experience'. But be aware that the extreme does not sit well with employers and adjust your game-plan accordingly.

It's too late if you leave the interview room thinking 'if only I hadn't'!

“WHAT IS THE MOST UNUSUAL SITUATION YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED WHEN INTERVIEWING A CANDIDATE?”

“I was conducting a telephone interview with a candidate who was shopping and at the checkout who seemed to think this was acceptable.”

“Candidate fainted!”

“Someone who identified Hitler as their hero.”

“Someone who's hobby was bee keeping and they spoke about bees for an hour.”

“Candidate spent five minutes on the phone!”

“When a candidate had a gap in their experience, they claimed to have been travelling in Europe. When asked where in particular, they replied “here and there”. Even after further probing they could not expand.”

“The candidate who had just completed an 80 hour week in an American law firm who did not seem to remember her own name.”

CONCLUSION



We started by saying there is a lot of CV and interview advice out there. Hopefully, this report puts some good hard data behind some of that, suggesting that a lot of what you should do and say is common sense.

What's also worth remembering is that interviewing is hard for the interviewer as well. We talk to lots of business leaders, and he or she will usually admit firstly to feeling unconfident when interviewing job applicants, and secondly to having made bad errors of judgement when assessing the suitability of a person for a role.

The truth is interviewing will never be a piece of cake. Most people find it tough. And that's perhaps not a bad thing. It shouldn't be easy. That's not to say it should be a bad experience, but let's not forget that you are supposed to be tested, asked questions that will identify whether you are right for the organisation – and if it is right for you.

For candidates, following the simple advice we've laid out in this report will help you know what employers are looking for at CV and interview stage. For employers, seeing what other interviewers say and do will reassure you that everyone faces the same challenges and uses, to a large degree, the same tools.

Talk to us if you want more advice.

We have been helping candidates and employers for many, many years. And our new interactive online career portal will make the job seeking process, including interview feedback, simpler than ever.

my.hudson.com is your designated personal, secure area within our website that allows you to manage your applications, set up job alerts, access personal career advice, search for international jobs and monitor your progress.

- | Set up job alerts and be the first to know about our open positions
- | Control your profile and access your application history
- | Log in to see updates on how your application is progressing

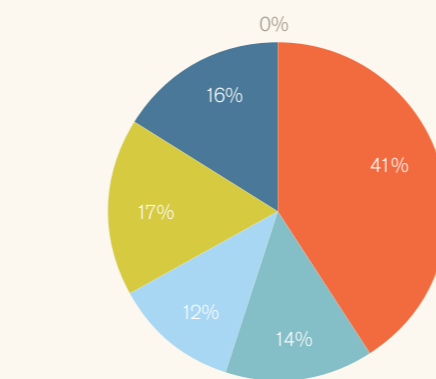
Explore it now at <http://jobsearch.uk.hudson.com/>

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The majority of companies have roles in the Human Resources department of their organisation, so were ideally placed to comment on CV and interview techniques, but we also surveyed people working in other areas of their organisation, from finance and IT, to sales and marketing.

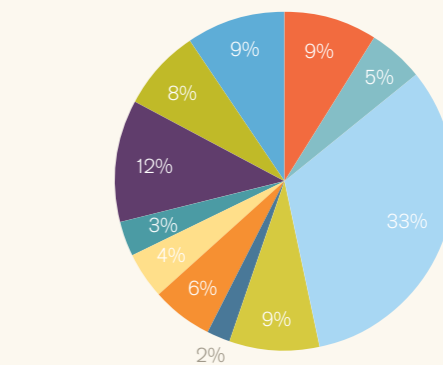
We surveyed 233 of our clients and contacts across England, Scotland and Ireland during December 2009 & January 2010.

WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED?



- England South
- England Midlands
- England North
- Scotland
- Ireland (including N. Ireland)
- Wales

WHAT IS YOUR JOB ROLE?



- Accounting
- Banking
- HR
- IT
- Sales
- Marketing
- Supply Chain/Logistics
- Engineering
- Procurement
- Legal
- Other (please specify below)

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