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INTERVIEW TIPS FOR
ACCOUNTANCY GRADUATE JOBS

Job candidates appear to have brushed up on their résumé skills, but they're still struggling to come off as polished in a job interview.

In a recent survey of US CFOs, 43% said that they believe those seeking employment make the most mistakes at the interview stage, up from 32% percent in 2010, the last time they asked the question. The next most common trouble area is the résumé (or CV), which got 19% of the vote recently but 28% in 2010.

Common interview mistakes include showing up late, getting tongue-tied, paying more attention to a mobile device, and failing to fully research the company. Here's our top tips for accountancy graduate job interview survival.

First Impressions Count

You will undoubtedly have been told that first impressions count more than ever when it comes to interviews. **A survey by Accountemps**, says a majority of interviewers form a positive or negative opinion of job candidates within 10 minutes. Very few human resources managers asked (10%) said they wait longer than 20 minutes to make up their mind.

With this in mind job seekers should be on alert the moment they get out of their car, press an elevator button or check in at a reception desk. The basics of a firm handshake and a warm, I'm-happy-to-be-here expression set the tone.

Be enthusiastic, but not over the top. It's important to show genuine interest in the job and in the questions asked, but don't be three-cups-of-coffee maniacal. Maintain an amiable, even-keel demeanour.



Body Language

Your body language speaks a thousand words. Without even knowing it, your interviewer(s) are picking up on your every move. The basics of sitting up straight, and not having your hands in your pockets go without saying, but if you suspect you may fidget - sitting on your hands may help.

Be clean and fresh - there's no use looking polished and then eating garlic fries before the interview. But do eat something; you'll need the energy. No matter what you choose to eat, stopping to check your teeth is probably a good idea. It'll also help you practice another skill you'll need to make a good impression: Smiling.

Arrive On Time!

As one CFO recently said, "If you're not 10 minutes early, you're late." If you're even a minute or two late, that reflects poorly on you. Get specific directions, especially if you have to navigate an unfamiliar building. Plan to arrive early, but not too early. Bursting into an office at 9:40 for a 10:00 interview shows a lack a concern for your interviewer's schedule. Instead, get to the site early, use a mirror to check for any grooming emergencies, rehearse a few of your answers, and then enter with time to spare.

What You Say

Watch your language! This should go without saying, but apparently some people get excited telling a story, and they might drop a no-no word in there. Bad move, especially before a hiring manager has had time to form an opinion. Similarly, complaining about old jobs is a big no-no. One day you could be their ex-employee, they don't want to think of you speaking ill of them, so however awful your last job was, be professional and highlight the positives; that shop job may have been tedious but you undoubtedly gained experience in some shape or form.

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In terms of what you say in answer to questions, be sure to talk about your knowledge in real terms; the last thing an interviewer wants is a textbook answer. Show you understand how everything you learnt during your degree relates to real business, accounting and finance situations.

Be Prepared

Experts have said that preparation for an interview can go a long way toward eliminating stress. **According to the Hays survey of 451 job-seekers in the UK** between July and September 2012, half said job interviews were more anxiety-inducing than public speaking or taking a driving test.

Know The Company

The most common mistake during an interview is little or no knowledge about the company. In the age of the internet this just won't do. Ideally you will have some knowledge before you even apply for the job, but certainly once you have an interview lined up you should begin in depth research. Search news articles as well as the company's own website, and research their clients and any notable projects they have been involved in.

Know Your Interviewer

Nik Pratap, a former national director for senior finance at global recruiting firm Hays, says candidates should prepare for different types of interviews from different departments. A finance executive, for instance, might focus on a different skill set than an HR director would.

Job candidates "need to appreciate that any interview with HR or a financial director will be different," said Pratap, now a partner at **Brewster Pratap Recruitment Group**.

"Most finance managers will do a competency-based interview. If the interview is conducted by a recruiting team or HR, candidates must also demonstrate that they've got a self-development plan, that they've thought about their career, and that they have the soft skills needed".

Nik Pratap

Know Yourself

About two-thirds of job-seekers said their **biggest fear before an interview** was not knowing the answer to interview questions. Even with preparation, sometimes of more than an hour, the job-seekers still worried about their answers, according to

a survey by global recruiting firm Hays.

Women seem to take job interviews more seriously than men, at least in terms of preparation time. Sixty-three per cent of women, compared with 50% of men, spent more than an hour researching or practicing interview techniques. Overall, 42% of respondents spent up to an hour preparing.

One of the simplest ways to ensure you know yourself as well as possible is to have a read through of your own CV. If you wrote it a while ago, or even if you didn't; re-reading is a worthwhile task in order to jog your memory, and remind yourself of the skills you have highlighted in the résumé. This will allow you reinforce these in the interview too.

Similarly, taking some time to sit and think will ensure you are prepared - put yourself into the mind of the interviewer and run through some questions and answers. Knowing yourself as well as you can by recalling past experiences will put these at the front of your mind and mean you are not racking your brains at the interview.

The Right Paperwork

Print copies of your résumé and other materials the night before. If you've been given a list of people you'll be talking to, email materials in advance. It is an easy way to make sure you don't run out of copies, and it gives your interviewers prep time as well. Take certificates of qualifications too - you never know if they may be called upon.

Practice, Practice, Practice

In the days before your interview, go over questions you expect to be asked. Then, out loud, answer those questions. Role-playing with a friend or significant other can really help, they can provide feedback on your answers and pointers too. If you're having trouble with a practice answer, write out or type your responses, then practice those words. Two questions to be sure to practice answering: Why are you interested in this job? Why are you looking to leave your current job? Asking questions such as "Can you tell me about a time when you increased productivity at your last job?" helps employers gain insight from a job-seeker's work experience that could relate to the open position.

Come Prepared with Your Own Questions

This will show you've done research and that you're thinking seriously about the job. If an interviewer asks a job candidate, "Do you have any questions?" and the answer is a casual, "Nope, I'm good," then that's not good. If the interviewer hears that, they will be close to saying the interview is over.

The best questions to ask are ones which put you into the working position in the interviewer's eyes. Make them envision you as part of the team with questions such as -"What is the single largest problem facing your staff and would I be in a position to help you solve this problem?" or "What skills and experiences would make an ideal candidate?" - Follow these up with any relevant experiences you may not have already covered; this is your chance to tick boxes. A few other top questions to ask include:

What types of training opportunities do you offer?

In what way is performance measured and reviewed?

When can I expect to hear from you and what are the next steps?

Armed with these questions you will show genuine interest in the company and the role, as well as coming away with vital information, and impressing the interviewers.

Alternative Interviews

Many companies are using alternative interview techniques and formats. Be prepared for any of the following -

Panel interviews: Now we don't mean to scare you, but companies may opt for a panel interview where two or more staff members form a panel. This is a time-saving strategy for companies, but it can be daunting for the job-seeker. For example, an accountancy firm may choose to have a HR person present, as well as a manager or partner, and an accountant or consultant who you may be working alongside.

Top tips for this situation include making eye contact with each interviewer and

requesting business cards from each person. Laying these in front of you in the order they are sat will allow you to use each interviewer's name when answering questions; and you can send personalised thank-you notes to each. Thank you notes?!An article from Forbes has declared that the thank you note is not dead in this modern age, it merely exists in the form of email. **For more tips on expressing your thanks after an interview head here.**



Video interviews: We are in the digital age, so it is no surprise that this means alternative interview techniques. Video interviews are a cost-effective way to meet candidates from all over the world.

Job-seekers should treat a video interview as if they are going to be in the same room. It is definitely worth have a practice run with a friend or family member in this situation.

Other top tips include avoiding anywhere with background noise - particularly public places, and ensuring the physical backdrop is not distracting. Also looking into the camera helps when answering questions in particular, as this comes across as eye contact.

Beyond this, avoid slouching, fidgeting or fiddling with items. Connect five minutes early to test sound and video quality, and be sure that you have a professional username if using software such as Skype.

Finally, remember technology can fail despite thorough testing, so always have an alternative on stand-by. This can be as simple as having a phone and the contact

details of the interviewer handy, what’s more, this should come across favourably with the company, and win you some problem-solving recognition.

Phone interviews: Similar to video interviews, phone interviews are increasingly common when recruiting from further afield. Candidates should ensure they are in a quiet place where than can concentrate, and somewhere with good phone reception.

A challenge for this type of interview is that of course, you cannot see the interviewer. Be sure not to talk over them, to listen well and above all smile! It is said that smiling whilst you speak will carry across in your voice and set a positive tone!

The No Experience, No Job Cycle

Getting work experience whilst at university can give accounting and finance students an edge in their post-graduation job search. This works for employers too, businesses that provide work opportunities for students can build a network of promising talent that can pay big dividends in the future.

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Katerina Rüdiger

If you’ve got experience in the finance sector you are undoubtedly at an advantage. If not, hopefully you are reading this ahead of time and are able to gain some experience in the coming months. The lack of access to the labour market for young people can trap them in a frustrating “no experience, no job” cycle, Katerina Rüdiger, head of skills and policy campaigns for the UK Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, said in a news release.

“This is as much a disadvantage for employers as it is for young people, as organisations risk not being able to recruit individuals with the skills and attributes needed to make their business a success,” Rüdiger said. “Offering high-quality work experience placements is an easy way for employers to ensure they will have access to a wide range of talented new recruits who have the work-based

experience they crave.”

To Gain Experience

When you do work experience be sure to display a strong work ethic and use the job to improve technical skills and interpersonal skills. Be sure to stay connected to people after leaving the organisation at the end of the internship or job, this kind of networking can often lead to future opportunities.

Consider volunteer opportunities to build experience if paid jobs are not available. Volunteer work always looks favourable on a CV, and volunteering to gain experience in a relevant industry will give you a good working insight and grounding of knowledge when it comes to interviews.

Finally...

Be confident - Whilst all the tips above will give you a fantastic grounding for interview survival, you also need to be confident. An interview is your opportunity to market yourself. Be genuine, but be sure to highlight your experience and knowledge.

Good luck!