## How to shine in interviews

***This second part of a series of articles taken from Brigittte Kaviani’s book* Succeeding at interview in an imaging department *looks at the dos and don'ts in preparing for a job interview, plus how to create the right impression...***

The very fact that you have been called for interview means that the selectors are seriously interested in your application and believe that you have the potential to be a successful candidate.

Now they want to see whether you are able to meet (or exceed!) their expectations and build successfully on the statements you made about yourself in your initial application, either to enable them to offer you a position or invite you to the next stage of selection.

Remember that the employer believes you to be as capable of doing the job as any other candidate. Interviews test out this positive impression and assess your suitability for the job.

They also indicate whether you will fit in with colleagues, present a confident and professional image with patients and cope with the pressures of the job. Interviews vary a great deal. Interviewers may be trained, experienced and astute judges of character or inexperienced, untrained and as nervous as you.

Some employers use just one interview as the basis for their decision. Some ask candidates back a second time. Interviews are also your opportunity to find out more about the job and the organisation. Employers want you to have enough information to make your decision to accept a job offer with confidence.

**The basic format of the interview**
1. You report to the interview venue and wait to be called.
2. You enter the interview room, introductions are made and handshake.
3. General ‘small talk’ to put you at ease and establish rapport.
4. Questions about why you want the job.
5. The interview questions relevant to the job.
6. Information given to you about terms and conditions.
7. An opportunity for you to ask questions.
8. Information about when you will hear of the outcome, you are thanked for attending.
9. You leave the interview room.

**Preparation for the interview**
Careful and thorough preparation is essential and will help you cope with any interview. Prepare well prior to the interview by:

Find out how to get there and allow plenty of time for your journey. It takes time to find your way around a hospital when you don’t know where you’re going.

Visiting the department prior to the interview in order to consider potential questions about the post or the organisation.

Decide what to wear. Make sure it's appropriate and comfortable.

If you have any particular needs for the interview, for example, if you are visually impaired, hard of hearing, use a wheelchair, etc, let them know. Interview panels should provide support/access for candidates where required.

Read over your CV and application form. Think about your personal skills, motivation and personality. Read the job description and think about how your skills and experience match what the employer is looking for. Identify why you will be able to do the job, with specific reference to the job description and person specification.

Think of at least three examples of what you have actually done in relation to each of the areas of the job description and person specification. If you have not had direct experience, think about what you may have done in other areas of your life (domestic, voluntary, student rep roles, etc.), which may have given you transferable skills and experience. Think about your successes, big or small, also the lessons you have learnt from where things haven’t gone as well as you had hoped.

Research information about the organisation and department via the internet, personal contact or the organisation’s annual report etc. You could have questions at the end of the interview about either.

If applying to the NHS, get yourself up-to-date with key government policies for the NHS and the contribution that this post can make, now and in the future. Write yourself notes under these headings, and then condense your notes into key bullet points that you can go over the night before the interview.

Make sure you are clear about your understanding of clinical governance and its implications for the imaging department, have a good understanding of the legal responsibilities of the profession and ensure you can demonstrate use of reflective practice.

Feel confident that you know whom you have applied to and be aware of any current issues that are likely to be relevant to them eg expansion of department, new procedures or equipment.

Prepare a list of questions that you would like to ask about the post or department and bear in mind that some of your questions might be answered during the interview. Write these questions down if you wish.

Start by reflecting on the questions that are usually guaranteed to be asked at every interview, in some form or other, namely “Why do you want this position?”, “What can you bring to the job?”, “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”, “Do you have any particular development needs?”Make sure you are able to answer these enthusiastically and your interview is off to a good start.  And if you aren’t asked those particular questions, why not consider telling them why you want the job anyway  .

Turn awkward questions to your advantage with the “yes but” technique eg “Yes I know I did not do as well as I expected in my ‘A’ Levels but my degree performance is more a measure of my true ability. They may, for example, ask about any gaps in your career/education history.

Try to think logically when answering particularly tricky questions and ask for some time to think if you need to.

Be yourself, be positive and be interesting. In general terms, answer questions as fully as you can without being too longwinded.

Make it a pleasure for the interviewer. Remember, they might be almost as nervous as you.

Stay calm and unruffled and do not get on the defensive, you may well be challenged deliberately to see how you may react.

Drink plenty of water immediately before the interview, but not hot drinks, as they tend to dry the throat.

If you can, hold a mock interview with someone else acting as the interviewer and try to replicate the interview experience. Ask the ‘interviewer’ to try out questions that require you to think about your response and whether it is likely to be what your employer-to-be would want to hear.

**During the Interview**
Establish rapport: smile, relax, and address interviewers by name. Make good eye contact with the interview panel, especially the person asking the question, but don’t hold it long so that the person is forced to look away to break the contact.

A panel of at between two and three people normally conducts interviews.   Try not to fiddle with pens, your hands, etc, or shift around in your chair too much as this is distracting to interviewers.

Interviewers will normally write notes during the interview – don’t be put off by this, it is so that they have a record of the interview to refer to at the end – it is not a sign that you have said anything particularly good or bad!

Good interviewers will ask open questions, ie, questions that don’t elicit a one-word answer. They tend to begin with “How..”, “Tell me about…”, “What…”, “Why….”, etc.

  Take time to think about the question you have been asked – it’s better to do this than to rush in and realise afterwards that you could have given a better response. Try and make a good impression. Ask for clarification if necessary.

If your mind goes blank in response to a particular question, be honest about this and ask if you can return to the subject later in the interview.

Present yourself as confident and friendly.  Show humour during the interview, but don’t overdo it.

Speak clearly, and try not to rush. Be alert to verbal/non-verbal prompts from the panel, which may indicate that you need to either give more information, or have already given enough.

Don’t talk too much! If the panel do want you to expand further they will use prompts, asking open, probing questions.

  Concentrate on your achievements, experience and strengths. Give examples in your answers wherever you can. If you are asked about your weaknesses, try to turn this into a strength, eg, “I can sometimes be overly critical of myself if I make a mistake – but I’m conscious of this, and on the positive side it means I always work to as high a standard as possible.”

  Use every opportunity to show you are interested in this particular job/Trust.

Remember, a good panel will do their best to put you at your ease to ensure you present yourself as well as possible. They want to find the best candidate for the job, so there should be no trick questions or attempts to make things difficult for you. Try to relax!

Do not:

• Be over prepared eg read a learnt script.
• Be late.
• Look scruffy.
• Drink alcohol before the interview.
• Worry about appearing relaxed.
• Give the wrong body language signals.
• Be apologetic.
• Antagonise the interviewers.
• Make false statements that you cannot justify.
• Feel a need to fill all awkward pauses.
• Ramble on.
• Dry up.
• Panic if you are taken by surprise.
• Lose your cool if aroused or antagonised.
• Gratuitously admit your weaknesses – but be suitably modest and honest or you may not be able to live up to the image you have represented.
• Take the job just because it is offered to you.

FIVE useful things to remember:

1. Preparing for the interview

 2. Establishing rapport with the interviewer

 3. Think on your feet

4. Being remembered for the right reasons

5. Standard interview questions

**At the end**
At the end of the interview, the interviewer may ask, “Do you have any questions?” It is a good idea to have one or more questions prepared, about the job or place of work, as this demonstrates your interest in the post. But there is unlikely to be time for a long list of questions. This could also be an opportunity for you to tell the panel anything important which you think you have missed or didn’t have an opportunity to say during their questions. If the questions have been answered during the course of the interview, explain that the questions you had have been covered.

**Post Interview**
The panel will normally tell you when you are likely to be given the result. If they don’t, it is perfectly acceptable to ask.

**Reflection after the interview**
Reflect on your performance and think about what went well and what you were not prepared for, and think about how you might answer differently in the future. Every department has its own system about when they will inform you if you have been successful. Some inform you soon after the interview and some can take up to one week. It is usually the case that the successful candidate is informed first.

  Request feedback particularly if you are unsuccessful. Constructive feedback can be very useful in helping you to get it right next time, but do not leave it too long before you ask as memories fade and notes may well be shredded.

Do some homework on areas that you have identified in need of improvement; it may be helpful to talk this over with a friend or a career adviser.

**If you would like further advice on how to shine at interview, including invaluable hints and tips on presentation and dress-codes,**[**purchase Brigitte's book**](https://archive.sor.org/files/u2/Order_form_for_book.pdf)**today.**