

Brill

**HOW TO
SUCCEED IN ANY
INTERVIEW**

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how to succeed in any interview

We've already established the importance of first impressions. But it doesn't stop there, of course. You have to continue to give the best possible impression throughout the interview. Quite apart from what you say, the way you say it will have a big impact on your interviewer's opinion of you – and of whether you're the best person for the job.

This doesn't mean you have to do a crash course in acting at your local drama school, and transform yourself into someone completely different. There's no need to put on an act – just be yourself. But your natural personality will have many different qualities, and you need to make sure it is the positive and relevant ones which stand out at interview. So projecting the right image is about being you, but using the behaviours which will most impress your interviewer.

Spot check

Here's a quick test. See if you can tell which qualities most influence interviewers, according to a survey by Career World. Put them in order of importance:

- your personality, how you present yourself in the interview
- your experience
- the qualifications you have for the position
- your background and references
- the enthusiasm you have towards the organisation and position.

It's worth reinforcing that all five of these qualities are important, and you need to demonstrate your suitability in each area. But what's the right priority? In fact, the order they are listed in above is the order of importance in which interviewers placed them. Yep, how you come across in the interview is the single most important factor in whether you get the job. So what do you need to do?

Essential qualities

There are a few essential qualities you need to project.

Be responsive

Make an effort to give full (but not rambling) answers to your interviewer's questions, and to volunteer relevant information. Don't give one-word answers – they sound sullen and unhelpful, even if that's not your intention. So if they say, 'I see you trained originally in marketing?' don't just say, 'Yes'. Answer, for

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example, 'Yes, I did. But in my first marketing job I did a lot of PR work, and particularly enjoyed the press side of it, so I decided to specialise in press relations.'

Be confident

You may be feeling anything but confident, but confidence is an attractive quality in an employee so you need to show you have it. Research shows that interviewers just don't like giving jobs to people who put themselves down. Of course, this doesn't mean you should be pushy and arrogant, but don't apologise for yourself. If your interviewer says, 'So it's two years since you did any actual face-to-face selling', don't say, 'I'm afraid so'. Say something like, 'It is, but I always feel it's one of those skills that you never lose once you've learnt it.'



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You've got all the right experience, and your qualifications are better than any of the other applicants. You have brilliant references and you've done your research – and it shows. There's just one problem. You give the impression that you don't believe in yourself. You keep saying things like, 'I'm sorry, I haven't got much experience of that software. I've only been using it for a few months' (when you could have said, 'Sure, I know it well. I've been using it for the last few months'). In the end, the interviewer comes to share your low opinion of yourself, and the job goes to someone else. **Whoops!**

Be energetic

People who project life and energy come across as so much more positive, capable and even inspiring than those who seem flat and sluggish. So stay upbeat, sit up straight, speak clearly and make eye contact (with all your interviewers if there's more than one).

Be enthusiastic

This is closely related to being energetic, and goes alongside it. We've seen that enthusiasm towards the job and the position is important to interviewers (yes, I know it was number five on the list, but they were all important). The best way to transmit this enthusiasm is by seeming interested in what both you and the interviewer are saying. If you genuinely are interested, you shouldn't find this too difficult – just make sure you let it show.

Body language

The way you come across visually can be as important as the way you come across verbally. And in fact, your body language

can affect your verbal communication too. Here's an interesting exercise for you.



exercise 2

Cause and effect

- Sit on a chair and fold your arms.
- Cross your legs.
- Slump in the chair.
- Now imagine you're at an interview and the interviewer is sitting in front of you. Don't look at them – stare at the floor instead.
- Don't allow yourself to use any facial expressions.
- Now answer – out loud – the question: 'What do you enjoy most about your present job?'

That was Part 1 of the exercise. Now for Part 2:

- Relax your hands in your lap.
- Put both feet on the floor.
- Don't slump, but lean slightly forwards.
- Look straight at your imaginary interviewer.
- Smile.
- Now answer – out loud – the question: 'What do you enjoy most about your present job?'

You should find that there is a marked difference in your tone as you answer the question using these two, very different, physical approaches. When you adopt positive, upbeat body language (Part 2, as I'm sure you realise), your whole tone lifts and sounds more confident, energetic and enthusiastic – all qualities that we've just established you need to project.

You'll find, just as we saw earlier with relaxing your body to ease nerves, that the cause and effect can work both ways. If you are positive and upbeat, your body language will largely follow. Or start with the body language – get that right and you will become more positive and upbeat.

So it's worth knowing what the optimum body language signals are, but don't get hung up on them. If you're projecting the right qualities, and feeling the appropriate emotions, the body language will follow naturally. But if you sense that you are flagging, that you sound less positive than you would like to, you can monitor your body language and adapt it in order to lift your mood and your verbal tone.

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Professional interviewers say that good eye contact from the candidate is essential to giving them a good impression.

So what are the essential points of body language to project during an interview? Here are the most important things to bear in mind:

- Don't perch on the edge of your chair. Sit well back in it – unless it's a very deep, upholstered chair in which case there's a danger of looking too relaxed if you get lost right in the back of it.
- Sit with both feet on the floor, leaning slightly towards the interviewer.
- Make frequent eye contact with the interviewer. If there is more than one of them, make eye contact with them all but look chiefly at whichever one asked the question you are answering.

- Smile readily.
- Don't hide your face with your hands.
- Don't give off defensive signals by crossing your arms and your legs.
- Try to keep your hands still except when you're gesturing. Don't play with your hair or put your hands in your pockets.

Mirroring

When we are feeling empathetic towards someone we are talking with, we unconsciously mirror their actions. You can observe this chatting with a friend across the dinner table or relaxing on the sofa. You often shift position as they do, or cross your legs or put your elbows on the table when they do. This contributes to the empathy.

Of course you can get this working for you in an interview. If you mirror your interviewer's actions and facial expressions (smiling when they do, for example) they will feel more at ease and in tune with you. Obviously it's not a good idea to deliberately copy every move exactly, but just be aware of the power of the subconscious, especially where body language is concerned, and use it to build empathy with your interviewer.

Your voice

Your speaking voice at interview will say a great deal about you. Make a point of observing other people's voices – especially people you haven't met before – and thinking about the impression they give. Some voices sound weak, or apathetic,

you need to practise your speaking voice to be sure you give the best impression

or uncertain. People who speak too fast or who mumble can appear to be less sure of themselves. You need to practise your speaking voice to be sure you give the best impression.