

Tongue – tied?

Well, don't be! Read on and find out how to tackle those tricky interview questions and get the job you really want

Sue Livingston is a
pharmaceutical writer from
London

The secret of a successful interview lies in the preparation. So, it is worth spending some time doing your homework. If you are well prepared, this will lead to you feeling more confident during the interview. You will need to find out as much as possible about the job, as well as the organisation or company.

There may be a website or company report you can look at and most employers will have some sort of information pack they can send you. Hospitals will produce an annual report and often encourage you to visit before the interview. Or why not ring up your potential employer for an informal chat?

You will need to keep up-to-date with any topical issues that affect the type of job you are applying for. It is a good idea to make sure you are up-to-date with what's going on in the world of pharmacy, so now is a good time to get stuck into that pile of Pharmaceutical Journals you haven't quite had time to finish reading through! You can also search for up-to-date information about the company or organisation on the internet using your internet browser or *PJ Online*.

Be on time

Don't be late for your interview. In fact, it is a good idea to try to aim to get there about ten minutes early. Make sure you know how to get to the interview and take the relevant paperwork with you:

- ▶ Your letter of invitation — which gives the time, date and location of the interview along with the name of the interviewer(s)
- ▶ Your CV — useful to have to remind you of key dates in your employment history
- ▶ Any certificates or references you have been asked to bring — make sure you have these to hand and are not looking around for them on the morning of the interview
- ▶ Any notes that you have made — take along the notes you have prepared about the organisation and answers to any questions you have prepared (see below)
- ▶ You might also want to take along your CPD portfolio if you have one.

Questions, questions

Prepare some answers to the standard interview questions and think about

the questions that you might want to ask at the end of the interview. There is no harm in rehearsing the answers to a few of the standard interview questions listed below. Try not to embellish your answers and don't lie. Keep your answers brief and try to avoid lots of "umms" and "ahs". Speak clearly and steadily when you answer questions. Don't mumble and try to maintain eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking.

Make sure you listen to the questions asked by the interviewer very carefully. Don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat the question if necessary. Don't annoy the interviewer by answering a question that has not been asked and don't provide superfluous information. Here are a few of the most probing questions based on those in the book 'Great answers to tough interview questions' (see useful resources, below):

Why do you want this job?

To answer this question, you will need to have researched the company or organisation in order that your reply will include the company's attributes as you see them. You might want to elaborate on any specific experiences that you would

gain from the position, as well as the experiences you will bring to the post.

What did you dislike about your last job?

You should never be negative about your previous employer. Rather say that you enjoyed the work and the experience you have gained. Criticising an old employer could signal that you might be a problem employee. You can elaborate on the reasons you are applying for this new post. Keep your answer short and positive.

What would you like to be doing in five years time?

You will need to prepare an answer to this question carefully and it will depend on the type of job you are applying for. You will need to research the direction in which the company or organisation is moving to predict what will be happening in the future. Make sure you are aware of any new innovations that will affect the progression of the job.

What is your biggest success?

This question aims to find out whether you can use your initiative or not. You

should talk about your own achievements but try to keep your answer job-related. You might want to point out that there are, of course, many things that you would like to achieve in the future and prepare a few examples to discuss at the interview.

Describe how you have handled a difficult situation?

This question is looking for information on how you define "difficult" as well as on how you handled the situation involved, which probes your analytical skills. You need to prepare a good answer to this question in advance, using an example where you dealt with a difficult situation in a positive way.

Do you prefer working with others or alone?

This question is designed to find out if you are a team player or not. In all jobs you will be required to interact and communicate with people at some level but some jobs might require you to work for long periods alone on your own initiative. Your answer will depend on the type of job you are applying for.

What do you think is your greatest weakness?

The best way to answer this question is to reply with an answer where your weakness is really a positive characteristic.

Why did you leave your last job?

You should have an acceptable reason for leaving any position that you held but if you don't, here are a number of reasons why people move on:

- ▶ You want a new challenge
- ▶ You want to work for a more prestigious company or organisation
- ▶ You want to work for a more stable company or organisation
- ▶ You want to advance your career
- ▶ You want more experience in a certain field.

Tell me about yourself?

This question is not an invitation to ramble on about yourself at great length. It would be better to ask the interviewer in what context he or she means and then formulate your reply appropriately. Try and make sure your answer has some relevance to your professional life.

Asking questions

When the interviewer asks you whether you have any questions, this will usually signal the end of the interview. Try not to ask too many questions and limit yourself to three or four well-considered ones. You might want to clarify the objectives and responsibilities of the position you are applying for. You can also use this time to mention any attributes that you feel would increase your suitability for the job that you have not had chance to talk about yet.

Don't be afraid to ask about training and career progression. It shows initiative if you have some questions to ask. If your mind goes blank it can be useful to say that you think everything has been covered during your previous conversations or visits.

Dress and body language

It goes without saying that you should arrive at your interview well groomed. Plan what you are going to wear in advance. Choose something smart and conservative. In general, it would be appropriate for a man to wear a business suit, shirt and tie. Women should avoid plunging necklines, too much make-up and jewellery.

You should greet your interviewer(s) with a smile, a firm handshake and a brief exchange of pleasantries. Usually you will be asked to take a seat. Don't sit down until you have been asked to do so.

Do

- ▶ Lean slightly towards your interviewer
- ▶ Try to speak clearly and steadily
- ▶ Try to maintain eye contact with the interviewer and shift your glance if there is more than one person interviewing you
- ▶ Try not to gesticulate too much
- ▶ Be positive — avoid saying “just” or “only” when referring to previous jobs
- ▶ Be enthusiastic.

Don't

- ▶ Fold your arms or cross your legs, if at all possible, and don't put your briefcase on your lap — these will create a physical barrier between you and the interviewer
- ▶ Fiddle with your hair or hands and keep hands out of pockets
- ▶ Smoke or chew gum
- ▶ Rush your answers
- ▶ Be negative
- ▶ Lie — answer questions as truthfully as you can.

Your body language during the interview is very important but taking a look at the body language of the interviewer can help you assess what he or she is thinking too (see Panel, based on information from the book 'Your executive image', see useful resources, below).

The job offer

After all this useful advice, hopefully, you will now be offered your dream job. But, it is a fact of life that you will probably get turned down for a job at some stage in your career. If this happens, be positive and try to get some feedback from the interviewer about why you weren't selected. This can help you better prepare for your next interview or find out exactly why you weren't suitable for the job. It may also be useful to note down some of the questions you were asked at the interview straight after you come out so that you can research the answers for next time. Happy job hunting! 🍀

Useful resources

Martin Yate. Great answers to tough interview questions. London: Kogan Page Ltd; 1990.
Martin Yate. Knock 'em dead — the ultimate job seeker's handbook. Boston, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation; 2002.
Victoria Seitz. Your executive image. Boston, Massachusetts: Adams Media Corporation; 2000.

Non-verbal behaviour	Interpretation
Sitting with crossed legs and kicking slightly	Boredom
Arms crossed on chest	Defensiveness
Hand on cheek	Evaluating or thinking
Pinching the bridge of the nose.....	Negative
with eyes closed	evaluation
Touching and slightly rubbing the nose	Rejection, doubt or lying
Rubbing the eye	Doubt or disbelief
Head in hands, eyes downcast.....	Boredom
Rubbing hands	Anticipation
Tapping or drumming fingers.....	Impatience
Fiddling with hair	Lack of self confidence
Head tilted	Interest
Chin stroking	Making a decision
Pulling at the ear	Indecision
Looking down face turned away.....	Disbelief