

The job interview

If you have been invited to a job interview, you have already successfully overcome the first hurdle in the application process. Your application was successful and the company would like to get to know you personally. In order to be convincing in the job interview, a good preparation is important.

The following points should be kept in mind during preparation:

- **Confirm the appointment.** If you have received a written invitation to the interview, it's best to confirm the appointment by telephone or by E-Mail. Take advantage of this opportunity to inquire about the names and positions of the people involved. On this occasion, you can also inform yourself about the course of the conversation and, if necessary, you can ask for further information about the position.
- **Inform yourself well about the company and the future field of work.** In the course of the interview, HR managers often test whether information about the company has been carefully researched in advance.
- **Try to obtain information about your interlocutors** as well. It is pleasant if you already know the names of your interlocutors and can address them directly during the interview.
- **Know your application documents.** Usually you have to introduce yourself at the beginning of an interview. In this short self-presentation, name above all the stations in your previous life that have to do with the job. It is a good idea to think about this part of the interview beforehand, in order to be able to explain the reasons for all stations (including any gaps in your CV) and to present yourself authentically.
- **Be prepared for different kind of questions.** Every interview is different, so it's impossible to be prepared for everything. However, there are certain questions that occur again and again and to which you should have a suitable answer ready. A selection of frequently asked questions with examples of suitable answers can be found on various pages on the Internet. The links at the end of this checklist are also helpful.
- **Think about your own questions.** At the end of the interview at the latest, you will be given the opportunity to ask your own questions. You should definitely make use of it, this shows your interest for the job. For example, you can ask about the following points: expected working hours, training opportunities, typical daily routine, direct employees, salary, period in which you will get feedback from the company.
- **Practice the conversation in a role-playing game** in which a friend or family member takes on the role of the HR manager. Always get feedback and practice different situations. The more often you practice the conversation, the more confident you become. It is also helpful to record the conversation or to observe yourself in the mirror.
- **Prepare yourself for the conversation to take place in German** (unless otherwise specified). Don't worry, your German language skills don't have to be perfect, your qualifications and experience are usually the focus of attention. Nevertheless, in order to be more confident, you should practice the conversation in German. After getting some practice, the answers in the actual conversation will be much easier for you.
- **Choose suitable clothing.** Normally, men should wear a suit and women should wear a trouser suit or something similar. How chic your outfit must be depends on the industry in which you apply. Try to pay attention also to the details - too much make-up, jewellery or perfume is not well received by most of the HR managers.
- **Pack your bag.** You should have the invitation to the interview, the names of the interview partners, your application documents, a copy of the job advertisement, a notepad, a pen and possibly a prepared list of your own questions.
- **Plan enough time for your journey to the interview.** Calculate a buffer for traffic jams or train delays. In case of an emergency, you should have the interlocutor's number at hand to inform about your delay. Punctuality plays an important role in Germany. A good journey planning can save you a lot of stress.

If you have considered all these points, you are well prepared.

However, there are also a few things to consider during the conversation itself:

- **The first impression counts.** Convince from the beginning, because the first moments of a conversation are often decisive for sympathy or antipathy. Make sure to have a short, strong handshake and eye contact when saying hello to the interlocutors. Smile friendly, be authentic and polite and use the short small talk at the beginning of the interview to collect sympathy points.
- **Watch your body language.** In an interview, it is not only important what you say, but also how you say it. To make sure you don't seem bored or anything like this, make sure you have a relaxed, open and upright sitting posture. Keep your hands and feet still, even if you are upset.
- **Do not be disturbed by unauthorized questions.** You do not need to provide any information about your origin, religion, family circumstances or political views. The same applies to your personal and health situation. Questions

such as "Do you intend to become pregnant in the near future?" or "Do you have debts?" have no place in the interview and are not legally correct. If you're still being asked, stay calm. You don't have to answer unlawful questions truthfully and instead of an angry "That's none of your business!" you could answer with a counter-question like this: „Do you think that qualifies me for the job?“.

- **Formulate meaningful answers.** Make sure your answers are not too superficial and general. The best way to convince HR managers is to support your answers with concrete examples (situations/experience from previous study or professional life). But get to the point and don't go too far.
- **Be honest.** You shouldn't pretend skills and interests. Experienced personnel managers usually recognise quickly when applicants dissimulate. Dishonesty is always interpreted negatively. If you do not meet all the requirements, you should deal with this openly. Nobody is perfect. Try to highlight other skills that are important for the position.
- **Be curious and show interest.** By asking your own questions you can show that you are professionally competent and eager to learn. However, do not ask questions whose answers can be found easily on the company's website. But if you have done a good job in researching, concerning this „website-information“, you can score points with specific questions. At the end of the interview at the latest, you can ask your prepared questions. If you do not ask any questions, this can be interpreted as disinterest or shyness.

Example of the interview procedure:

- **Greeting.** Presentation of the conversation partners, small talk.
- **Information for the applicant.** Company presentation. Description of the field of activity of the job.
- **Self-presentation.** Career, reasons for application, professional suitability, personal characteristics.
- **Questions of the interviewer.** Verification of professional knowledge and personal skills.
- **Questions from the applicant.** Asking for missing information and showing motivation.
- **Farewell.** Discussion of the next step. Thanks for the interview. Farewell.

Sometimes in Germany a telephone interview is held before the personal interview. Prepare yourself for the telephone interview as thoroughly as for a personal interview. The same applies if you are invited to an assessment center. There you have to solve tasks together or against each other with other candidates. Here you are compared directly with the other candidates. Be aware of the competitive situation and prepared for group discussions.

The job interview is done, now it's time to wait. In many companies the selection of applicants can take a little longer and may require your patience. Ideally, you have already asked in the interview when you can expect a decision. If there is no agreement, then it is okay to ask for this after one and a half to two weeks. This can be done by telephone or e-mail. You should emphasize that you are still interested in the position and look forward to hearing from them.

Continue your applying. It would not be advisable to put everything on one card when looking for a job. Even if you have a good feeling after the interview, you should still apply and take part in invitations to interviews. So you don't waste any time if it doesn't work out and who knows, you might even find a job that suits you even better. If it doesn't work, don't let it get you down. Cancellations after an interview are normal and should not be taken personally. Every application requires a little bit of luck and sometimes another applicant simply fits in better with the job. It may be helpful for future interviews to ask for the reasons for the cancellation.

You will find further information on job interviews in Germany under the following links:

- Information portal of the online job exchange StepStone: <http://www.bewerbung.de/bewerbung-in-deutschland/>
- Application tips from the Make-it-in-Germany project: <http://www.make-it-in-germany.com/arbeiten/ratgeber-arbeiten-in-deutschland/bewerbung/>
- Website of the training park publishing house: <http://www.ausbildungspark.com/vorstellungsgespraech/>
- In the brochure „make it work!“ of the project „WelKMU – Hochqualifizierte Migrantinnen und Migranten für kleine und mittlere Unternehmen“: http://www.welkmu.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/WelKMU_Broschuere_InternationaleStudierende.pdf