



MSN Careers - Powered by CareerBuilder UK

Panel interview dos and don'ts

Rachel Burge for CareerBuilder.co.uk



Interviews can be nerve wracking, which is why it pays to practise and work on your technique, but when you're faced with a whole panel of people, you need to adopt a different approach. Read on for our dos and don'ts guide.

1. DO: Establish rapport but keep it formal

As with any interview, part of what is being assessed are your people and communication skills, so take time to establish rapport.

'Member(s) of the panel may engage you in small talk at the start or end of the interview. Treat this as your opportunity to show them that you understand the importance of small talk for establishing rapport,' advises [Rob Williams](#), a chartered occupational psychologist and author of "Brilliant Verbal Reasoning Tests".

'Even if this feels like an informal part of the interview - remember that you need to demonstrate that you get on easily with other people.'

Do keep in mind though, that panel interviews are formal and structured rather than casual conversations. While you need to establish rapport, it's best to keep it formal.

'This means formal handshakes and smiles all-round, smart outfit and grooming, no slouching in the chair and no bad language,' says Corinne Mills, Managing Director of [Personal Career Management](#) and author of "Career Coach: Your personal workbook for a better career".

'A casual, matey or even jokey approach usually goes down badly in these types of meetings, so don't even attempt them.'

2. DON'T: Just look at one person on the panel

Knowing where to direct your gaze can be tricky when you're faced with a row of people.

'Focus on one panel member at a time,' suggests Rob. 'Remember that the each member of the panel will have a say in their assessment of your overall performance. Any of the panel could form a



strong opinion that you are a pass or a fail.

'Don't focus all your efforts on the member who asks the questions, you should also engage with the one who is introduced as the most senior or who seems in charge throughout the process.'

At the same time, don't forget to look at every panel member.

Corinne explains: 'Direct your answer at the person who asked you the question but at some point in your answer, sweep your eye contact at least once across the rest of the panel.'

'This will make each panel member feel that you have included them in your answer and will give you the opportunity to gauge how you're doing by assessing their body language.'

3. DO: Hold your nerve

Panel interviews can be intimidating and feel more like an interrogation than a rapport building opportunity, so it's more important than ever to keep your nerve.

'The panel will understand that you may be nervous so if you fluff a question or start to waffle, it's not the end of the world, but you do need to recover yourself,' warns Corinne.

'Give yourself time to think before you answer the next question so that you can deliver a well thought through answer and get back on track.'

4. DO: Ask who will be there

Find out who will be in the room before you attend the interview - this will give you a clue as to the questions that will be asked.

'Panel interviews usually comprise of the manager, a technical expert to advise on your levels of expertise, and HR, who will be looking at your interpersonal skills and ensuring that the selection process is fair,' says Corinne.

'Other stakeholders may also be invited onto the panel - this could include other functional heads, a key customer, a member of the board or governance body etc.'

'Research the panel before the interview to work out what their agenda may be and what they may be looking for in a candidate. For instance, the technical expert will want to test your current knowledge and awareness of trends or developments in the field. Prepare answers in advance that are likely to satisfy their particular requirements.'

5. DON'T: Be surprised by repetition

Panel interviews tend to be very structured with panel members assigned particular questions to ask. Don't be put off if they seem to ask you a question that you may have already answered in response to a different question.

Corinne explains: 'They will need to ask this question because that is the pre-agreed format and procedurally there is a need to be seen to be fair in asking the same question to all the candidates. Just reprise your earlier answer, ideally by supplying a different example to illustrate what you mean.'

6. DO: Take multiple copies of your CV



Typically your interviewer will have a copy of your CV and application form in front of them. In theory this will be the case for a panel interview too. However, in practice you may find that the interview panel are sharing copies of your CV - or only have one copy between them.

'There is always a lot of paperwork that needs to be prepared in advance of interviews and if a lot of interviews are being conducted that day then there simply might not have been enough time to produce copies for everyone on the interview panel,' explains Rob.

'Always take multiple copies of your CV - it shows the panel that you're organised.'

7. DON'T: Be put off by the amount of note-taking

Given the number of people in the room, you can guarantee that there will be notes taken of your answers - so don't be put off by scribbling.

'The panel may each have an interview script to follow and have been trained to write their answers onto this document,' explains Rob. 'It's also possible that the interviewers will have assigned different roles amongst themselves; one of which may be an assigned note-taker.'

8. DO: Remember at the end of the interview to thank each panel member

It's good interview practice to thank your interviewer once you know that your interview is over.

'This might seem challenging with a large panel of interviewers,' says Rob. 'In some respects it's even more important to smile and thank each member of the panel in turn before you leave.'

'This shows respect and that you understand that each panel member is playing a part in the overall interview process and outcome.'

Source: http://msn.careerbuilder.co.uk/Article/MSN-443-Interviewing-Panel-interview-dos-and-donts/?SiteId=int_ukmsn_a443&sc_extcmp=int_ukmsn_a443