

# The Job Interview – Tips and Frequently Asked Questions

## INTRODUCTION

The job interview is an opportunity to make a strong initial impression to a prospective employer to demonstrate that your knowledge, skills, experience and abilities make you the right person for the job.

Job interviews can be stressful, but the better prepared you are, the less stressful the interview, and the more likely that you will demonstrate what you bring to the job.

The following information provides some tips on how to prepare and conduct yourself in an interview.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

### ***1. Make yourself reachable for an interview***

Screening applications and arranging interviews can happen quickly or slowly, depending on a number of factors such as the type of job, the number of applications received, and the availability of selection board members.

On your application, cover letter, or resumé, provide an email address and telephone numbers where you can be reached.

In most cases, a limited number of attempts will be made to contact you if you are screened in for an interview. It is essential to respond promptly.

If you are going to be away for any period of time beyond one day, please provide an alternate contact number.

### ***2. Prepare yourself for the interview to avoid drawing a blank***

Selection board members understand candidates may get nervous during an interview. The selection board will take time at the beginning of the interview to try to put you at ease.

Preparing thoroughly prior to the interview will help. Have a friend or colleague ask you sample interview questions, so you can practice listening carefully and responding effectively.

### ***3. Do some research on the position, relevant issues, and the duties***

If you are not familiar with the department or its programs and services:

- Review the position description. Obtain a copy by contacting the telephone number in the “apply to” section of the job advertisement.

- Research information on the department, and read the department’s annual report to determine what the main programs, initiatives, projects, and services are.
- If you know someone who works for the department, speak with the person to get a better understanding of the job and the department.
- Visit the relevant department website here: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/government/departments.html>
- Review the department’s mission, vision, mandate, and values. Consider what you will bring to the position in this context.
- Review news releases to see what departmental issues are topical, as they may appear in an interview question: <https://news.gov.mb.ca/news/index.html>
- For some positions, it may be beneficial to familiarize yourself with pertinent legislation. If you are not sure what is pertinent, check the annual report. Usually, the specific legislation will be named in the job advertisement.

#### **4. Analyze the job advertisement**

Look at each qualification in the job advertisement to prepare yourself. Think of potential questions that the selection board may ask you related to each qualification, and write down your responses.

#### **5. Prepare for behavioural-based questions**

Qualifications such as interpersonal skills as well as the ability to work independently or on a team are examples of skills or competencies where the selection board will likely ask behavioural-based interview questions.

These interview questions help to evaluate a candidate's experiences and past behaviours related to a qualification.

Candidates can use examples from work experience, internships, volunteer work, classes and school projects, activities, team participation, community service, and hobbies.

The selection board will be looking for candidates to provide their best examples to demonstrate relevant experience and skills.

Consider your best examples in relation to each selection criterion, starting with recent experience and working backwards.

In choosing your examples, frequency may also be considered.

The more often a particular task or behaviour has been repeated, the more likely it will be that the candidate can perform it effectively in the future.

When responding, use the STAR approach to ensure your responses are clear, thorough, and concise:

- **S** – Describe the **situation**.
- **T** – Explain what the **task** was.
- **A** – Explain the **action** that you took.
- **R** – Describe the **results**.

#### **Examples of behavioural-based interview questions:**

- Tell us about a time when you had to cope with strict deadlines or time demands.
- Describe a time when you had to solve a complex problem on the job.
- Describe a time when you were under pressure to make an immediate decision.
- Tell us about a specific situation where your listening skills helped you to communicate effectively.

#### **6. Spend some time on your competencies**

Competencies are the characteristics of an individual that underlie performance or behaviour at work. They can include knowledge, skills, abilities, physical competencies, and qualifications.

In an organizational context, they are the attributes that are critical to the strategic success of the organization.

Competencies are often called soft skills. Examples include:

- Values diversity
- Interpersonal communication skills
- Analytical and decision-making skills
- Problem-solving
- Organization skills

#### **7. Understand the difference between essential and desired qualifications**

In job advertisements, the essential qualifications are critical to the job. You **must** meet all of the essential qualifications, and you must demonstrate how you meet the qualifications in the interview, or through other assessments. Desired qualifications are complementary and are not essential to the job.

Interview questions may be asked about both the essential and desired qualifications, so you should be prepared to talk about both.

#### **8. Understand what academic qualifications means versus equivalent knowledge and experience**

If you are applying for a position where an academic qualification or professional designation is required, you will be required to supply documentation/certification about your academic or professional record, where necessary.

If you are outlining related equivalent experience in lieu of an academic requirement, provide examples that demonstrate the full range of your abilities, skills, or knowledge that the stated academic requirement provides.

## **PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW**

### ***1. There may be tests, so come prepared***

You will be advised prior to the interview if a test will be conducted.

### ***2. Manage your travel time***

Interview times are estimated and schedules are prepared accordingly.

Interviews are usually 45 minutes to one hour in length, but may run shorter or longer, depending on whether or not there are exercises, tests, or other requirements.

Early arrival gives you a chance to relax and mentally prepare yourself for the interview.

## **AT THE INTERVIEW**

### ***1. Establish a cordial rapport***

Introduce yourself and greet the interviewer and/or the selection board.

- Smile. A sincere smile will help to put you, and the interviewer, at ease.
- The selection board members will take the lead and set the tone.
- Do not use acronyms, slang, or abbreviations.

- Be presentable, professional and use appropriate language.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand a question.
- Keep a positive attitude.

### ***2. Using notes and/or your cover letter and resumé/application in the interview***

You may be allowed to bring in notes and/or your cover letter and resumé/application to reference during the interview.

Using these documents may help refresh your memory during the interview. However, some selection boards may not allow you to use any notes to ensure a spontaneous response.

To confirm what information you are allowed to reference in the interview, call the telephone number in the "apply to" section of the job advertisement.

You will be supplied with paper in case you wish to take notes during the interview, to help you respond fully and concisely.

### ***3. Don't be afraid to sell yourself at the interview***

Even if information is already mentioned in your resumé or application, don't make any assumptions of the selection board's prior knowledge of your background and qualifications.

Don't downplay your abilities and skills. The selection board wants to hear why you are qualified for the job.

Be prepared to summarize the significant details of your resumé or application that correspond to the qualifications in the job advertisement.

### ***4. Understand what transferable skills are***

Transferable skills are ones that you can bring to the job from both current and previous experience. For example, you may not have the opportunity to supervise others in your current job, but you might have relevant supervisory experience from a previous job, or through coaching, volunteer or community work.

Consider the full range of your skills, experience and knowledge, and draw relevant examples from these areas as well.

### ***5. How to reference your present job***

Focus on those qualifications stated in the job advertisement that you are currently performing.

The selection board wants to know what skills you demonstrate on a regular basis that are applicable to the position you are being interviewed for.

### ***6. Be specific about your role in any examples***

If you are using an example where you were a member of a team, talk about your specific role and responsibilities.

Describe the scope and complexity of your duties and responsibilities.

### **7. When you know selection board members**

If you are applying for an internal competition, it is quite likely that you may know one or more of the people on the selection board. One of them may even be your current supervisor.

Selection board members cannot bring outside knowledge of candidates into the assessment process. The selection board will base their assessment on your responses to the interview questions and other assessment methods, if applicable.

When responding to interview questions, assume the selection board members know nothing about you.

### **8. Listen carefully to the question and respond appropriately**

Pay close attention to what you are being asked in an interview, to ensure you respond to what is being assessed.

Take your time. Stay organized. If you need the question repeated, don't be afraid to ask. Make sure your answers and examples are relevant and appropriate to the question asked.

If you are having difficulties formulating an answer, you can ask that the question be skipped and revisited at the end of the interview.

### **9. Know the terminology**

Review all of the terms in the job advertisement so you are able to provide a response if asked. Examples include job-specific program names/acronyms as well as commonly used words and phrases, such as transferable skills, competencies, diversity, and initiative.

If you are unsure of a term in the interview, ask for clarification, a definition, or an explanation.

### **10. Be honest – don't take credit for someone else's work**

When providing examples, make sure to use examples of your best work, not someone else's. Anything you use as an example in your interview can be validated during the reference check.

If another assessment is used (e.g. preparing a written document or presentation), ensure the work is your own. It is likely that the selection board will ask questions about your thought process, how you developed the material, or how you arrived at your conclusions.

### **11. Employment Equity**

The Manitoba government is committed to the principle of employment equity. It is the government's goal to achieve a workforce that, at all levels, reflects the citizens it serves.

The employment equity policy designates four groups: women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities and visible minorities.

Every applicant is provided with opportunities and is encouraged to voluntarily self-declare as an employment equity group member.

Declarations must be bona fide. **Bona fide means in good faith, without fraud or deceit.**

Employment equity is considered a **bona fide selection criterion**, where one or more of the designated groups are underrepresented in the relevant classification level, promotional level, or occupation in the department or in government.

Employment equity seeks to remove discriminatory barriers and ensures equality of treatment within the civil service.

### **12. Merit is always considered.**

The recruitment and selection process used in the government is based on the principles of **merit, equity, and fairness.**

During an interview, candidates are rated based on the qualifications, also known as selection criteria, in the job advertisement.

### **13. At the end of the interview**

You will have the opportunity to ask questions about the position itself or the process.

## **14. Reference Checks**

You will be asked to provide at least two work-related references from direct supervisors, who are able to validate information you provided in the interview.

It is recommended that you receive prior approval from your references to share their names and contact information.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

### **1. If you are not the successful candidate**

If you are not the successful candidate, it does not mean that you would not be a great addition to the Manitoba government. Some positions are more competitive and there may only be one vacant position.

Ask for interview feedback from the selection board chair. The selection board chair can provide you with information on which criteria you answered well and where you can improve.

This can be invaluable when you prepare for your next interview, helping you to focus on those areas of improvement.

## **RESOURCES**

- Civil Service Commission website on preparing your resumé and cover letter: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/govjobs/info/resume.html>
- Civil Service Commission website on employment equity in the competition process: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/govjobs/info/eequity.html>
- Register for an Information Session for job seekers. To register, call between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday at 204-945-2332 or TTY at 204-945-1437 or toll free 1-800-282-8069 ext. 2332, or email us at [csc@gov.mb.ca](mailto:csc@gov.mb.ca)
- A schedule of information sessions for members of the public can be found at: <http://www.gov.mb.ca/govjobs/info/index.html>