

## **Interview Preparation Guide for SMC Executive Candidates**

Congratulations! Your application made a good impression and you have been successful in securing an interview. The interview may happen in a variety of forms, starting with a telephone interview, being asked to prepare a case study or an invitation for a face-to-face interview. All of these steps are equally important in impressing prospective employers and landing your next career job.

Planning is now critical to make sure you're successful. No matter how it turns out, don't look back on the interview wishing you had been more prepared.

### **Preparation**

Preparation is essential and greatly enhances your chances of performing well at any interview and will often be the difference between your success and failure. Good preparation not only gives you an insight into the organisation, it can also give you clarity and confidence. Surprises can catch you off guard and often throw your poise, being the tipping point of an interview.

Here are some tips and information that may provide support to help you successfully overcome the hurdles of attending an interview. Some things you may find obvious, but these are often the things we forget.

Knowing what you need to prepare can be difficult so consider writing a checklist of things. For example:

1. Research the company
2. Look up your role
3. Think of some potential questions your interviewer may ask
4. Find the address and prepare your attire
5. During the interview and preparation of questions you can ask at the end of the interview

#### **1. Company research:**

- Interviewers will expect you to have a good grasp of what their organisation does, who their customers are, how big it is, how it's divided up and who its main competitors are. With these facts under your belt, you'll be able to hold a meaningful conversation about the company and put any details you've learned ahead of the interview into context.
- Showing you've done some independent research on the company also shows that you really want the role and understand the underlying values of the organisation.

#### **2. Role research:**

- You need to make sure you understand the job description fully and know how it fits into the overall structure of the company. If you have any queries about it then try to raise them before the interview or be prepared to bring them up as you go along.
- Ask yourself what the key skills for the job are and think of examples which enable you to demonstrate those skills.

### 3. Interview research:

- Make sure you find out what format the interview will take. Often they can be combinations of standard interview and behavioural interview questions (core competency questions requiring specific examples to support your experience).
- Know who your interviewer(s) will be and their roles within the organisation. If you're expecting a relaxed chat with a HR person and you get five senior people grilling you, it's likely to throw you. You can look these up on the company website, or try finding them on LinkedIn. Remember, the fewer surprises on the day, the better.
- Work on answers to the most common interview questions. The "tell me about yourself" or "talk me through your CV" questions are normally asked to ease you in, so make sure you're ready for them.
- Have a short, two or three minute response that you can give comfortably. Start with a strong statement, such as: "I am a project manager with 10 years' experience of business side projects in the financial services sector." Then follow this with a summarised chronological story showing how you got to your current career position. No career history is perfect, but if you have gaps in your CV – or lots of short jobs – have a way of telling the story around them without becoming defensive.
- Read carefully through the job and person specifications, identifying your experiences that demonstrate the skills or knowledge gained. Again, practise articulating each one. Writing down an answer is a good way to do this — reading it aloud, recording yourself or having a mock interview with a trusted friend is even better. Using the STAR format for behavioural interview questions will ensure you structure your answers correctly. For example:

**Situation** – briefly describe the background to the situation

**Task** – specifically describe your responsibility

**Action** – describe what you did

**Result** – describe the outcome of your actions.

Here is an example of an answer to a competency-based question that is testing teamwork as a competence:

**Question:** "Team work is critical in our organisation as we take a collaborative approach. What evidence do you have to prove that you are a good team player?"

**Answer:** "There are a number of examples I could share with you. One that stood out was when I was working as a fund analyst at XYZ Company, the front office sales team were putting together a bid for a large piece of work and the analyst that normally helps them was on leave. I knew it was critical and offered to help them, working late every night for 2 weeks to ensure they had all the information they needed for the pitch and my own team were still supported. They took on my suggestions regarding pricing and also some creative ideas I had on formatting the proposal. As it turned out we won the bid and I was promoted as a result".

- You can't predict every question that you'll encounter, so approach the interview with a list of important points about yourself that you want the interviewer to know.
- For example, if you apply for a job as a Business Analyst, you might want to list the products and applications you have worked across as well as providing a strong foundation across the projects you have been engaged in. Think of the level of stakeholders, technical expertise,

personal experiences and industry related knowledge that would benefit the job and organisation.

- Each question you address will be an opportunity to provide some of this information to the interviewer and demonstrate the core behavioural attributes you can bring to the organisation.

#### **4. Location and attire**

##### **The day before the interview:**

- Get everything ready for the interview, so that the following day you can just grab your things and go. This includes what you'll be wearing, your CV, and a map of the location.
- Work out where you're going, travelling times and transport options. If you can factor in more time and locate a coffee shop nearby, it may help to reduce travelling anxiety. Have a copy of the job description and the person specification on you, all in a neat folder or portfolio case. Read through them again before you head in. Always remember to take important information with you or any certificates of merit or qualification levels that may have been requested.
- Even if some of these things are not needed during your interview, you'll not only be prepared – you'll look prepared too.

##### **On the day of the interview**

- Take special care to dress appropriately - most of the time smart business dress will be appropriate. On some rare occasions, smart casual may be appropriate but ensure you err on the more formal side.  
Prepare your interview outfit: shine the shoes and plan grooming things like getting a haircut. Dressing well can increase your confidence as well as boosting your professional image.
- Finally, always make sure you're punctual to your scheduled interview time. If you're going to be late for any reason then make sure you inform the interviewer as early as possible.

#### **5. During the interview and preparation of questions**

- It's very easy to be so intently focused on giving a good interview that you forget that it's a two-way process. Read the body language of the interviewer and how the interview is flowing. Engage and maintain eye contact.
- Don't be afraid to pause and think. You don't need to fire back an answer in the first millisecond — and sometimes it's good to acknowledge that you'll need a few moments for consideration. In general, people speak too quickly in interviews because they're nervous, so slow down if you notice yourself racing..

##### **Always ask questions**

Show spontaneity, ask a question that relates to something the interviewer told you, something that you're genuinely interested to hear the answer to. It demonstrates you have been listening and it is important you understand the expectations of the successful person in this role.

- It was exciting to hear that the department's growing, what do you put that down to?
- What's the personality of your department?

### ***Avoid the obvious***

Don't ask about things you should already know, that could be answered later or where the answer is obvious. Such questions are pointless, a missed opportunity to ask something better and could irritate the interviewer:

- What skills are you looking for?
- What hours will I have to work?

### ***Engage***

Ask a question that relates to the interviewer themselves, as a person – engage with them on a personal level:

- What are the one or two things that you personally see as the key success factors in this role?
- What do you enjoy most about working in this company?
- What are the key things that you expect from people who are working for you?

### ***Finish strong***

Make sure you're clear about the next steps following the interview. Many organisations take a lot longer than they say to get back to you, so it may be worth asking about the next part of the process

Tell the interviewer that you are excited by this opportunity and give genuine positive feedback.

Ensure you follow up with feedback to your consultant as this helps facilitate the process through to the next phase. It makes a positive impact in demonstrating your enthusiasm for the role if you have been proactive with feedback.

Whether or not you are successful in securing the role, look at it as a good opportunity to engage people, grow your network and get better for next time round. If you're not successful then ask for constructive feedback that may assist you in your next interview.

And if you're successful, well done!