

# Mastering job interviews and cultural differences (in Germany)

Congratulations! You have successfully prepared an excellent Cover Letter, Selection Criteria responses and a Resume and the employer believes you have the relevant skills and qualifications to fit within and benefit their organisation.

## What's the interview about?

The interview is not a "one way street". Two parties are concerned with the interview. The employer, who is being represented by the interviewer, and you.

### The employer wants to assess:

- your ability to handle the job at hand
- your ability to fit in with the organisational culture, and
- whether you will represent the company favourably

### And you want to:

- secure meaningful employment
- present yourself in the most favourable manner, and
- assess the roles and responsibilities of the job they have to offer.

Everything that happens in an interview relates to the employer attempting to find out three things:

1. Can you do the work; do you have the skills and capabilities to perform the job?  
Generally, if you have gained an interview, they have already made a bit of a judgement that they believe you can.
2. Are you enthusiastic, motivated and willing to carry out the roles and responsibilities of the job at hand?
3. Will you fit in with their culture, and will you get on with the rest of the team?

So, the process is designed to determine what the advantage would be of having you over someone else, and do you have more to offer than anyone else does.

## How can I make a good impression?

It is important to build rapport between yourself and the interviewer. The first 2 minutes is where critical first impressions are formed.

The key words, which keep coming up from employers keen to select you, are 'confidence and enthusiasm'.

Some strategies to use from the interview door to the seat:

- Introduce yourself - introduction help to build rapport
- Shake hands firmly
- Use the interviewer's name when speaking with him/her
- Make good eye contact and smile. Take the initiative to engage in positive small talk. Be sensitive to the interviewer and follow his/her lead
- Sit well back in the chair so that your upper body displays good posture and emphasises your enthusiasm (be careful not to just lean back). Leaning your upper body slightly forward shows you are engaged and interested
- Be prepared to talk about yourself as a person. Include some details of your University study, work history and extracurricular activities
- Be aware of your body language and ensure you appear open and motivated
- Don't fidget or distract the interviewers away from your answers

## What questions will be asked?

There are various types of questions that could be asked with the most common being:

- Biographical

Usually, the interview starts with a very general question asking you to talk about yourself, your experiences and motivation for the particular job. Try to prepare that one in advance as a longer sequence (up to 2 min) – as it will be always asked!

- Strengths & weaknesses
- Behavioural
- Situational or scenario

## How shall I answer?

An answer comprising 6-8 sentences is a rule of thumb. An interview is a two way conversation and the interviewer will guide you in most cases.

- Master the art of storytelling. Using stories to sell your skills is a highly effective interview technique. In less than three minutes, you can tell a story that will make interviewers remember you favourably. Employers believe that the best predictor of future success is past success, so tell stories that vividly describe your achievements. Don't be concerned if your stories are not highly impressive, as long as the experience demonstrates your effective use of a particular skill.
- Use the formulas below to help you give concise and specific examples for your answers. It is also a really useful way to address selection criteria.
- Remember to always have a positive attitude when answering these questions!

## STAR-L formula

<b>SITUATION</b>	Where these experiences occurred and what was the context
<b>TASK</b>	What was required of you? This could be a technical performance, project, or dealing with a problem
<b>ACTION</b>	What action did you take to deliver the task, resolve a problem or present a case?
<b>RESULT</b>	What was the outcome and how did your actions affect this positive result?
<b>LEARNING</b>	What did you learn from this process and how could you apply this to other tasks. This will show employers evidence of the application of your skills and how this contributes to your personal and professional development.

## CAR formula

<b>Challenge</b>	Situation and what was required from you
<b>Action</b>	What you did
<b>RESULT</b>	What was the outcome

## How to finish?

It is important to finish on a good note and leave the interview with a lasting impression. By asking thoughtful questions you have the opportunity to:

1. Demonstrate your interest/knowledge in the organisation and employment prospects.
2. Find out any more information about the job that may help you make an informed decision.
3. Find out exactly what is expected of you

When approaching the end stage of an interview, consider:

- Being sensitive to the interviewer's moves to close the interview
- Having a few questions to ask
- Enquire about the next stage and a possible timeframe of the interview process
- Thanking the interviewer(s) for their time and consideration, using their names if possible

- Shaking hands and leaving promptly in a confident and positive manner
- Ask for advice about other leads if it is very clear they have no immediate plans to hire you
- Even if you do not intend to take the job, be polite as you never know when you may meet or work with these people from this organisation in the future

## What about cultural differences?

Germany does have a hierarchical structure in its workplaces, but it might differ in some aspects compared to Asian countries. In Germany, hierarchies are typically more subtle and less overtly emphasized than they might be in other culture's workplaces.

### How Hierarchy Works in Germany:

1. Respect for Authority: Germans generally respect authority and rank within the workplace. However, it's often based more on expertise, competence, and experience rather than purely on seniority or age.
2. Open Communication: While hierarchies exist, German work culture often promotes open communication across levels. Employees are encouraged to voice their opinions and ideas, even if it means challenging the opinions of superiors. Constructive criticism is usually accepted if presented respectfully.
3. Team Collaboration: Germans value teamwork and cooperation. While there might be hierarchical structures, teamwork is encouraged, and decisions are often made collectively after discussions and consensus-building.
4. Directness and Professionalism: In interactions, Germans tend to be direct and straightforward. However, this doesn't necessarily undermine hierarchy; it's more about effective communication.

### Focusing differences to India:

- Formality: While both cultures value hierarchy, in India, the hierarchical structure is often more formal and explicit. Titles and positions may carry a greater weight in daily interactions.
- Communication Style: In India, respect for hierarchy might influence communication styles significantly, whereas in Germany, it's more about professionalism and expertise.
- Decision Making: In Germany, decision-making often involves discussions and consensus-building among team members, whereas in India, decisions might more frequently come from the top down.

Understanding and respecting these nuances will be helpful during your interactions in a German workplace. While hierarchies exist in both cultures, the approach, communication styles, and emphasis on collaboration can differ.