

Tips to Help Prepare for Panel Interviews

It's like a normal interview, just with more assessors staring at you. Panel interviews needn't be daunting with a little preparation and a few tips on how to cope with answering more than one interviewer.

Why Do Panel Interviews?

- It is easier to bring several staff together at once to interview a single candidate than to organize individual sessions.
- Panel interviews often include prospective teammates who would not be on the schedule for individual sessions.
- Some HR professionals believe that the "real" person emerges when an applicant is put under the intensive interviewing stress that a panel can engender.

How to Succeed in a Panel Interview

Most panel interviews take place in the company conference room, which is unlikely to be a warm and friendly space. This affects the proceedings a great deal. There will be a variety of people present and an equal number of viewpoints. There won't be a lot of small talk--after the introductions, the group will get right into the subject matter. And unlike the one-on-one interview, in which both sides may be uncomfortable, interviewers are much forthright when they're members of a panel. They won't be asking only about your technical and job-related skills, either equal weight is often placed on questions that try to draw out what kind of person you are.

Be Prepared

So, now you know a bit more about why and how companies conduct panel interviews. Below is a list of some tips to keep in mind before you head off to your next interview.

1. **Eye Contact.** Remember the importance of eye contact. You must visually engage all interviewers, regardless of their locations in the room and their levels of seniority in the company. If you don't know who to look at during the interview, the safest thing to do is to give most of the answer back to the person who asked the question with a few brief glances to the others. Don't be thrown if one of the panel starts scribbling notes or looks bored or falls asleep. The bigger the panel, the greater the likelihood that some of its

members are not experienced interviewers. Sometimes it helps to know who's who on the panel. Knowing who they are, and therefore what their special interests are, can determine how you answer their individual questions.

2. **Don't Panic.** Don't get too worked up about panel interviews. Firstly, they are often fairer than individual interviews. If a single interviewer takes an irrational dislike to you, that's the end of the story. But if the same person is part of a panel, they could easily be overruled by the others. Secondly, they usually give you greater opportunities to set the agenda.
3. **Prepare your own questions.** Despite the fact that panel interviews are loaded in the company's favour, most firms will allow you a few minutes to ask questions of your own. Don't wing this. Make sure you have memorized a list of questions that will reflect positively on you. Try not to refer to questions you have written down; make your questions a more natural part of the conversation.
4. **Pace yourself.** Although it is normal to be uncomfortable when being interviewed by a group, remember that you can't allow nervousness to take over. Concentrate on responding to the person who asks a question, just as you would in a personal interview with that individual. Take it one question, and one interviewer, at a time.
5. **Prepare your responses.** Always have a response ready for the "Tell us about yourself" question that often starts things off in the panel interview. Have both a short version and a longer version, and ask the panel members how much detail they want. At this stage of the selection process, they will expect you to have a high level of enthusiasm for the job and be very clear exactly why you should be offered it. Don't disappoint them!

In Conclusion

Don't panic preparation for panel interviews are the same as one on one interviews, the more you prepare in advance the more you will be able to mentally prepare yourself and not be taken off guard. It is more than likely that the the same kinds of questions would be asked of you as in a "normal" interview. Try your best to concentrate on one question and one interviewer at a time, don't get flustered.