

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWS



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

In a recent survey of 49 graduate employers, 92% of respondents reported using behaviour based questions during interviews - ie. "behavioural interviewing". The popularity of this method means that you would be well advised to learn about the technique, and practice answering behavioural questions. Even if you don't encounter this technique in an interview, the very process of preparing will help you perform well in any interview situation.

What are behavioural interviews?

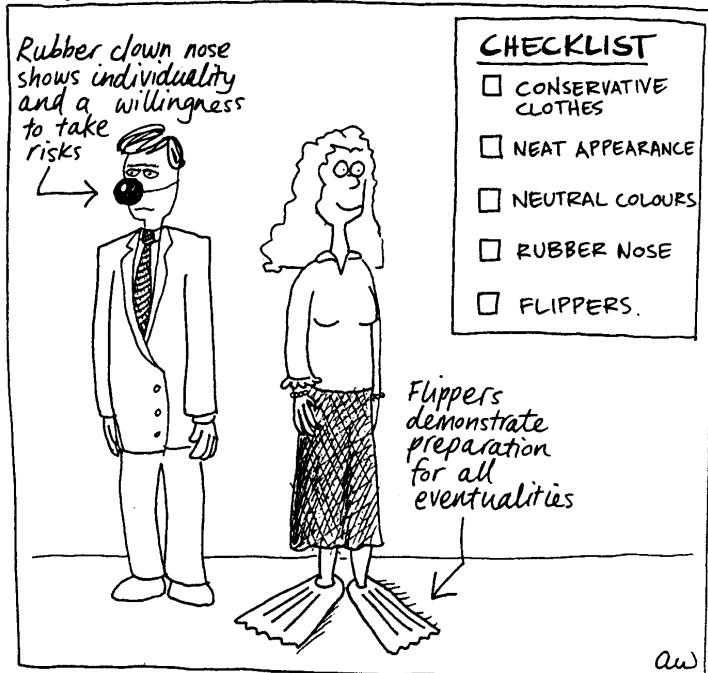
Behavioural interviewing is based on the assumption that *past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour*. Before entering into any interview - behavioural or otherwise - an employer must identify what skills and qualities (often referred to as competencies, dimensions or success factors) they seek in an employee - for example, leadership, initiative and problem solving ability. By asking you very detailed questions about your thoughts, feelings and actions in *past situations*, the employer can then look for clear evidence as to whether or not you possess the qualities they are seeking.

For example, if an employer is trying to assess your ability to work in a team, a *non-behavioural* interview question might be: "What would you say is your greatest contribution when you work as part of a team?" The risk with this kind of question, however, is that the interviewee may provide a well thought out answer, with all the correct ingredients (eg. "I listen to other people's ideas, I encourage the quieter members of the group") - however the answer may not reveal the person's teamwork ability in 'real life' at all. This type of question measures the interviewee's ability to answer questions well, rather than their actual ability to work as part of a team.

A *behavioural* question, however, might be: "Tell me about a time when you got co-workers or classmates who disliked each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?" The interviewee would be expected to describe a time when they encountered such a situation. The interviewer would then probe for specific details with questions such as: "What were you thinking? What were you feeling? Then what happened?"

Because of the level of detail required, it is very hard to lie convincingly when answering behaviour based questions. Therefore, preparation - reminding yourself of a range of experiences you can talk about if appropriately questioned - is essential.

DRESSING FOR INTERVIEWS:



Examples of behaviour based questions designed to reveal your...

- **research/written communication skills**

"Describe a situation in which you had to use reference materials to write a research paper. What was the topic? What journals did you read?"

- **oral communication skills**

"Give me an example of a time when a co-worker or classmate criticised your work in front of others. How did you respond?"

- **assertiveness/persuasiveness**

"Describe a time when you tried to persuade a person or group to do something they didn't want to do. Who was involved? How did you go about it?"

- **creativity/imagination**

"Tell me about a time when you came up with an innovative solution to a challenge your company or class was facing. What was the challenge? What role did others play?"

- **decision making/problem solving skills**

"Tell me about a time you had a problem to solve. What happened? What was the outcome?"

- **teamwork skills**

"Tell me about a time when you got co-workers or classmates who disliked each other to work together. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?"

- **time management skills**

"Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?"

Other sought-after attributes include:

Conceptual ability; analytical ability; planning/organising ability; leadership ability; flexibility; ability to learn how to learn; initiative; motivation; critical thinking; capacity for change.

How should I prepare for behavioural interviews?

Find out as much as you can about the skills and qualities an employer seems to be seeking.

This kind of information is sometimes revealed in the advertisement (if there was one), the position description, or in the general literature provided by the company.

Tap your memory for stories that illustrate your skills and successes.

Think back over your university projects, part time work experiences, extra-curricular activities, personal achievements and ask yourself, "When did I demonstrate teamwork/time management etc?"

Think through each situation, remembering who was involved, what your role was, and what the order of events were.

Practice out loud explaining your role in the situation as though you were telling a story to someone.

Remember... it is important that you LISTEN to the question in the interview.

Use the above process to remind yourself of situations you may call upon, but only use them if they are appropriate.