

Panel Interview updated on Jan 2025

When you are facing a panel of interviewers, make your best moves.

Whether you are searching for jobs, looking for career avenues or climbing the corporate ladder, you can't escape team interviews these days. The problem is that such interviews don't have a pattern to them. They come in different forms. You could be facing your prospective team members. Or you could be up against the top brass—HR vice-president, the section head, the operations chief. Or you could also be sent to a recruitment assessment centre for multi-parametric evaluation (psychological tests for pressure-handling abilities, team-player skills and so on).

Try these ten tips for surviving, and scoring, in a team interview.

Give variety to your answers

Remember you might be interviewed by different panels. Don't give a stock answer to all of them. They'll be comparing notes.

Repackage your skills so that they sound different. If you're showcasing project X as your major achievement in your present job before one team, talk about project B before another interview panel.

A technical team will tune in to techie talk; an HR team would rather hear about your interpersonal skills.

Fine-tune interpersonal skills

Pull out the stops on your group management and group presentation skills. Interviewers are people after all. Look for the personality type underscoring each interviewer. Then try and connect with each one of them without getting personal. Usually, the best way to make contact is to project values that you feel you can share with your interviewers.

Don't quake in your boots

-Interviewers are not ogres. They are looking for excuses to hire you, not spill your guts.

-Don't be obsequious. That conveys low self-esteem.

-If you face your interviewers with fear in your eyes, they won't like what they see. They are NOT sadists.

Prepare for stress

-You'll be up against a time crunch in a team interview.

-In one-on-ones, the interviewer might be taking notes, allowing you little breathers. No such luck with four people firing questions at you. Use stress control techniques to soothe your nerves. You might even use the extra adrenaline to sharpen your responses.

Showcase the important things

-List seven important things that fit the job description of the advertised post. Prepare to present skills that fit such traits.

-It helps to talk to friends familiar with the job description. You can even ask them to prepare tests that you can take from them.

Rehearse well

-Put together three family members or friends with diverse personality traits.

-Recreate the formality of a team interview situation and ask them to fire nonstop questions at you. That will serve as a useful practice session.

-Ask for serious feedback, especially about weak areas in your answers. Questions about qualifications and work experience are usually generic, so what your mock team asks you is bound to be pretty close to the real stuff.

Create a mental picture of yourself

Boost your self-confidence by seeing yourself as star performer who's a cut above. See yourself answering with élan the questions you expect. Then replay your answers and ask yourself these questions:

-How interesting were your observations?

-Did most of your responses begin the same way?

-Did you use 'we' often, suggesting team-player attributes?

-Are there traces of humour in your responses?

Ask good questions

-Research is integral to a good interview performance. Find out as much about you can about the company concerned. Browse the Net, check company reports, put together news clips.

-Armed with your background brief, ask relevant questions about the company.

-If you think you have a bright idea about any ongoing activity, try this: "Did the company consider this option ..."

Look beyond the obvious

-Your interview team has some core queries about you. It's these they want you to address. Try and look beyond the upfront questions to decipher their exact intent. Then respond to fill in what the team is really looking for.

-Flesh out your answers to focus on the team's concerns. If they ask you about your perception of the company's ESOP policy, they want you to present your expectation from a stock option plan.

-Answer in sync with the general tenor of the interview. If your work involves individual research besides team work, don't go overboard about team-player abilities. Balance your answer. Mention how sometimes individual work is more productive though team work is needed to put into action ideas generated by individual research.