

Heidi Wright

RECRUITMENT

STANDARD INTERVIEW GUIDE

How to prepare for a conversational interview and communicate your experience with clarity and confidence.

ACCOUNTANCY & FINANCE • CUMBRIA & DUMFRIESSHIRE

Conversational does not mean unstructured. Good preparation still matters.

Understanding a conversational interview

A conversational interview is often less formally structured than a competency-based interview. The conversation may move through your career history, motivation, strengths, experience and interest in the organisation, with follow-up questions arising naturally from your answers.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

Do not mistake an informal or friendly style for a casual meeting. The interviewer is still assessing your suitability, judgement, communication and likely fit with the organisation.

“Tell me about yourself”

This is usually an invitation to give a concise professional overview - not your personal history. Aim to cover your current level, relevant qualifications, scope of responsibility, strongest areas of experience and one or two points that connect directly with the vacancy.

Less effective

“I have lived in Cumbria all my life, have worked for my employer for many years and enjoy football at weekends.”

Stronger

“I am a CIMA-qualified Financial Controller currently leading a finance team of four within a multi-site business. My remit covers monthly reporting, budgeting, cashflow and business partnering, and I have recently led improvements to our forecasting process and management information. I am now looking for a role where I can combine strong financial control with broader commercial involvement.”

INTERVIEW CHECK

Keep this opening answer to roughly 60-90 seconds. It should give the interviewer clear areas to explore rather than trying to tell your entire career story at once.

Know your CV

Conversational interviews often follow the chronology of your CV. Be ready to explain your progression, changes of employer, promotions, key achievements and reasons for moving. Dates, responsibilities and qualifications should be consistent with the information you have submitted.

Questions to prepare for

- What attracted you to this opportunity?
- What do you know about our organisation?
- Talk me through your current role and responsibilities.
- What would you bring to the finance team?
- What are your strongest areas of experience for this role?
- How do you manage competing deadlines?
- What achievement are you most proud of recently?

- Why are you considering leaving your current employer?
- What are you looking for from your next role?
- How would your manager or colleagues describe you?

Make strengths specific

Avoid relying on broad labels such as “hard-working”, “organised” or “good communicator”. Choose strengths relevant to the vacancy and briefly evidence them.

Example

“One of my strengths is translating financial information for operational managers. I run monthly reviews with budget holders and have simplified our reporting so they can see the key variances and actions more quickly.”

Reasons for leaving

Keep your answer factual and constructive. Focus on what you are moving towards - broader responsibility, progression, a new sector, location, culture or type of organisation - rather than criticising your current or previous employer.

Career gaps, redundancy or change

There is no need to be defensive. Give a concise, honest explanation and then bring the conversation back to your experience and what you are looking for next.

RECRUITMENT INSIGHT

A brief pause before answering is perfectly acceptable. A considered response is stronger than rushing because you feel every answer must be immediate.

Keep the conversation relevant

Because a conversational interview can be conversational, some meetings will explore your relevant experience in depth while others may remain quite general. If an important area has not been discussed, you can introduce it naturally rather than waiting for the interviewer to ask the perfect question.

Useful ways to bring in relevant experience

- “That links closely to a project I recently led - would it be useful if I talked you through it?”
- “One area I thought may be particularly relevant to this role is my experience of...”
- “You mentioned improving reporting. That has been a significant part of my current role...”

INTERVIEW CHECK

The aim is not to take over the interview. Listen first, answer the question asked and then add relevant evidence where it genuinely strengthens the conversation.

If you need more information

You can also use thoughtful questions to understand what the employer values and then discuss relevant experience in context.

- “What would be the main priorities for the successful person in the first six months?”
- “Where do you see the greatest opportunity for the finance function to add value?”
- “What are the main challenges the team is currently working through?”
- “What experience or qualities would distinguish someone who performs particularly well in this role?”

Salary and package

If Heidi Wright Recruitment is representing you, salary expectations will normally have been discussed in advance. If the interviewer raises package, answer consistently with those discussions. Detailed negotiation can then be managed through your recruiter. There is no need to introduce salary simply because the interview feels conversational unless it is important to clarify at that stage.

Close the interview professionally

Towards the end of the meeting, make sure you have enough information to understand the role and next steps. Ask any important outstanding questions and, if the meeting has strengthened your interest, say so clearly.

Simple closing example

“Thank you, I have really enjoyed meeting you and learning more about the role. What you have described has strengthened my interest, particularly the opportunity to work more closely with the operational teams.”

Final preparation checklist

- I can give a concise professional introduction.
- I know my CV and can explain my career moves clearly.
- I understand the organisation and why the role interests me.
- I have recent examples that demonstrate my most relevant strengths.
- I can explain why I am considering a move positively.
- I have thoughtful questions to ask.
- I know the practical details: time, location or video link, interviewers and format.
- I am ready to confirm my interest clearly if the meeting goes well.

FINAL CHECK

A conversational interview may feel natural and conversational, but the strongest candidates still leave the interviewer with clear evidence of what they can contribute and why the opportunity genuinely interests them.

Candidate support

Heidi Wright Recruitment can help you prepare for the specific interview, including the likely areas of focus, information about the organisation and how your experience aligns with the role. Contact us promptly after the meeting so we can gather your feedback and speak with the client while the conversation is still current.

PREPARE. LISTEN. EVIDENCE. ENGAGE.