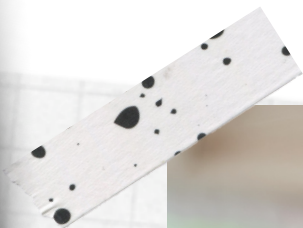
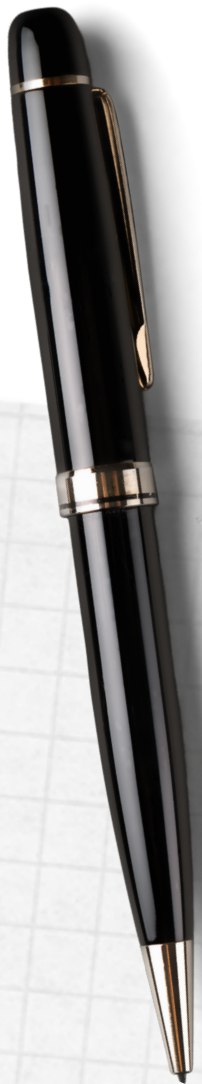




Preparing and managing German job interviews

YOUR WORKBOOK AS
PREPARATION FOR JOB
INTERVIEWS IN GERMANY



THIS WORKBOOK HELPS YOU TO PREPARE FOR YOUR INTERVIEWS: SO THAT YOUR TALENT CAN BE SEEN!

To reach the interview stage of the hiring procedure, you have already made a considerable effort in crafting the perfect CV and application documents. You may also have spent time writing a cover letter if the job ad required it.

The application documents give a first impression and help recruiters to choose applicants that might fit the position. However, they are only the first step towards the selection of a new employee or intern.

The interview -or several interviews- are now used to confirm the first impression gained from the application, to get to know the candidate more, to clarify any remaining doubts and of course also, to give the candidate a chance to get to know the company and position better.

To summarise, the interview is your chance to:

- **Convince** that you really bring to the position what you've promised in your application;
- **Impress** by being well-prepared and showing your motivation for the job;
- **Clarify** any questions that your documentation may have entailed: CV gaps, career changes, upskilling needs etc.;
- **Get to know** the company and learn more about the position, your future team etc.

GOOD TO KNOW



German worker protection laws are quite encompassing. This has several implications on the general hiring and also the interviewing process.

German companies tend to be risk-averse when hiring.

Due to the strong protection of employees in Germany, many companies invest a lot of time and effort into finding a perfect match. The German Termination Protection Act protects employees in companies with more than 10 employees against unfair dismissal and termination. So companies want to make sure they have an employee who really fills the position well and will also be a good member of the team.

Interview candidates are also protected by the law, in Germany.

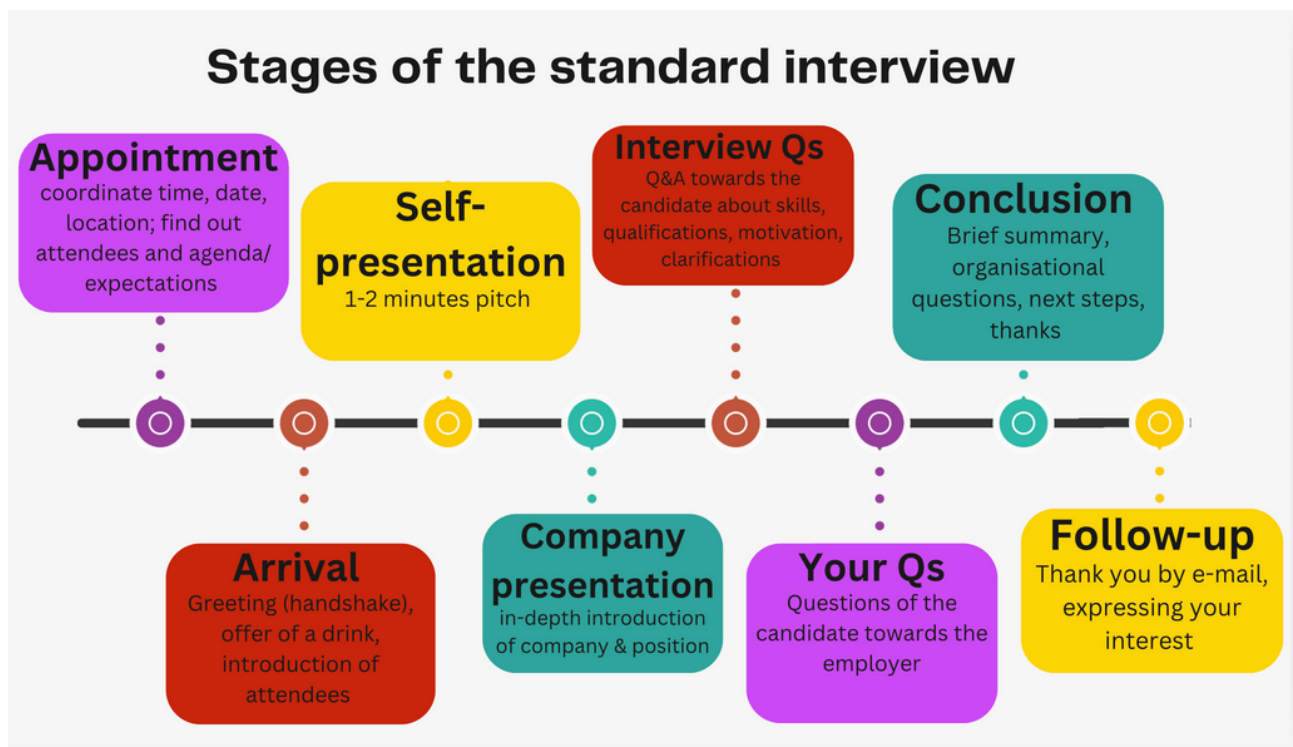
The General Equal Treatment Act stipulates that questions regarding your health, sickness, pregnancy, parental planning, children, marriage status, race, ethnicity, gender, identity, sexual orientation, religion, or political opinions can usually not be asked in interviews. Of course, if the job requires knowledge about some of these, for example, health conditions in the case of a very physical job, there can be exceptions.

You can inform yourself, by reading through the [Guide of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency](#).

Disclaimer: This section is intended to give you helpful background information, not legal advice. For legal advice, please consult with a legal professional or read through the legal documents.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A STANDARD INTERVIEW

The following section will describe the typical stages of a standard job interview to you. Please note, that very often additional stages, such as tasks or tests, are included. What these are, will be explained further into the workbook. Please also note that the order of the stages can vary.



Stage 1: Receiving your interview invitation and setting the appointment

Once you are invited, setting the appointment is the next step: there can be more or less flexibility here from the side of the interviewers. Sometimes, you will be invited to an already fixed appointment, sometimes you will be asked to hand in your availabilities.

Your answer to the invitation e-mail is your chance to confirm your interest and to make sure you have all the details you need:

- time, date & location,
- name of the person in charge of the interview

It is also a sign of interest (and very helpful for you) to ask:

- if there will be multiple interviewers, and if you could know their names in advance
- if it is possible to share the agenda for the interview with you. We only recommend to ask for an agenda, if the time slot for the interview is longer than 2 hours.

Stage 2: Arrival at the interview

Punctuality is of major importance in German interviews. It is the standard to arrive 10 minutes before the interview is set to start.

The usual greeting with your interviewers will be a short and firm handshake with a slight smile and eye contact. Since the pandemic, some companies have shifted away from this. It is best to follow the lead of the first person you meet at the door of the interview room.

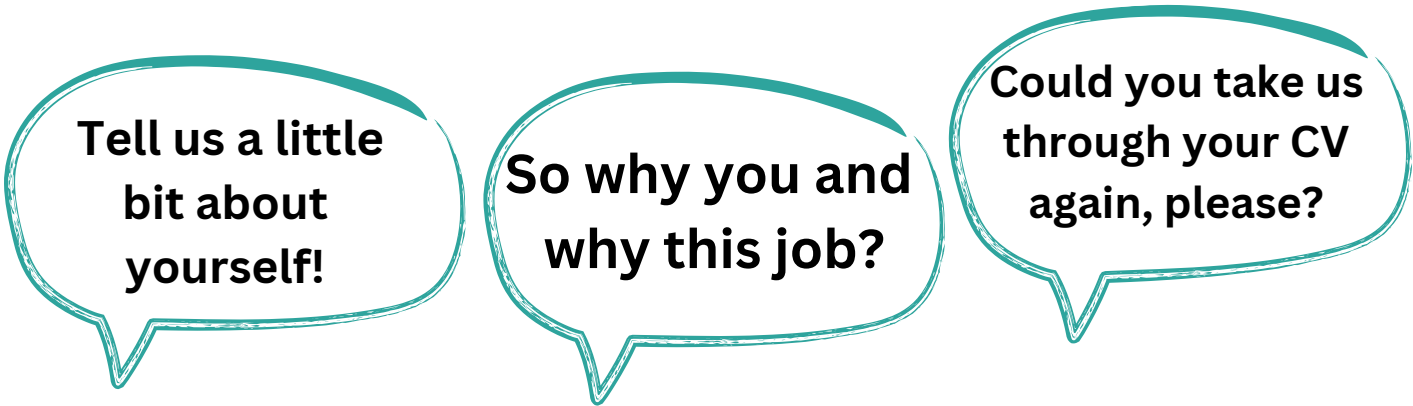
You may be offered a drink and it is perfectly fine to ask for a glass of water. Having the possibility to take a sip of water can be a strategic asset to you later on in the interview if you need to calm your nerves or have a few seconds to think.

If you don't know the names of everyone in the room, pay particular attention now, to remember the names later on.



Stage 3: Your self-presentation

This stage is usually right at the beginning of the interview, once everybody has settled in. Your cue is a question from the interviewer, asking you to speak about yourself. It may go like this:



**Tell us a little
bit about
yourself!**

**So why you and
why this job?**

**Could you take us
through your CV
again, please?**

What you want to achieve in this stage is that you tell them:

- Who you are,
- What you bring,
- What your impact on the position will be,
- In maximum 2 minutes!

Some applicants find it irritating that they are asked to introduce themselves again when the interviewers already have a CV and other application documents from them. However, this question is critical for your success! Let's see what the reasons behind this question are:

- Getting a first idea of who you are and how you present yourself as well as your manner of speech and body language.
- Seeing, how the candidate links their own life experiences and choices to the position they applied for.
- Seeing that the candidate can identify what is essential and what is not.

You can find more guidance on how to prepare for the self-presentation on pages 12-14 of this workbook.

Stage 4: Company presentation

In this part of the interview, the interviewers will give you more information about the company and the position.

It is possible that they will expand on topics like:

- A short recap of general company facts
- Why is this position open
- What are the expectations towards this role
- Who you would be working with
- Topics this role would include

Please listen carefully to what is being said. This is your opportunity to answer well in the next stage, by capturing what they really want and need from you.

It is also a great basis for the questions that you are going to ask at a later stage in the interview. Listening well now means that you can avoid asking questions that have already been answered.

Stage 5: Interview Questions

After both you and the company have been introduced, now comes the central part of the interview, where the candidate is asked to answer the questions of the interviewers.

Preparation for this part of the interview is essential. However, not in the sense of having ready-made answers that you can learn by heart. Your goal here is to understand the company so well and to have things thought through so well that when a question comes, you can answer professionally, calmly, and with an answer that is true to you but that speaks to them.

To give you the opportunity to prepare well, please find the non-exhaustive list of question types and exemplary questions for each type on pages 16–19. You can also learn how to do a preparatory brainstorm on pages 20–21 and how to structure your answers well on page 22.

Stage 6: Questions the candidate asks

After having answered a lot of questions, the candidate now gets the opportunity to ask their own questions.

It is important not to skip this part or state that you have no questions. If you do not have any questions, this is likely to be interpreted as being disinterested or showing little initiative.

Instead, ask 2-3 well-prepared questions.

Make sure that these are:

- Non-googleable
- Non-repetitive (if it has been answered during the interview, don't ask again)
- Focused on the position you are applying for

You could think about questions around topics such as:

- The onboarding process
- The position and role
- Work-life and routines
- The product or service
- The team
- Your future career development (but be careful: make sure you convey that you are not just taking the position to quickly move to the next one!)



Stage 7: Conclusion

The final part of the interview will usually be started by the interviewers, who might give you a small summary of the interview. If there are any organisational questions that need clarification, they will be asked at this stage. These could include topics like the termination of your current employment or the time of your graduation, visa requirements, or your availability for further interviews as well as the next steps.

After this, if there are no further questions, the interview will end. Use the opportunity to say thank you while you say goodbye.

Stage 8: Follow-up

After the interview, your job is not entirely over! Make sure to send a follow-up e-mail within 24 hours, in which you thank the interviewers for their time and state your interest again. Ideally, you address all interviewers with their names and titles (Dr., Prof.) if they hold any.

Here is an example of a follow-up e-mail



Dear Ms Schmitz, dear Dr. Müller,

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration at today's interview for the position of (fill-in position). It was an absolute pleasure to meet you and learn more about the company and the position.

I am excited about the potential to contribute to your organisation and look forward to the next steps in the hiring process. Please let me know if there is anything else you need from my end.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,
(your name)

OTHER INTERVIEW-STAGES

You now have an overview over the stages of a standard job interview. In some interviews, there can be additional stages included. For this reason, especially if the interview slot looks long to you (e.g. more than 2 hours), it is advisable to check the agenda of your interview with the interview organisers.

Additional stages can include:

Practical tasks:

You might be given a task to carry out in a certain amount of time. Usually, the task will be linked to the position that you have applied for and will demand you to use the skills that the job description asked for. The task and the outcome that you generate help the interviewers assess your level of skill.

The task stage is often placed before the questions that you will be asked.

Once the task is completed, the interviewers may also ask you to self-evaluate how well you did on the task. This allows them to see how well-reflected you are and, in the case of you not completing the task or not having all the skills, it helps them evaluate how you deal with challenges and/or failure.

If you did not have enough time or all the skills to fulfil the task it is best, to be honest, and transparent about it, to explain clearly what you were able to do, and to let them know that you are aware that you may still need to learn and that you are willing and happy to learn more on the job.



Psychometric tests:

Some companies may also present you with psychometric or personality tests.

The goal here is to make sure that you are fit to the culture of the team and the company or to see if you have the soft skills and work attitudes that the organisation is looking for.

This is an opportunity for you to answer as honestly as possible. After all, you also want to work in a place where you fit in well and can play to your strengths.



Assessment Centers:

Assessment Centres are more encompassing than singular tasks or tests. They usually span from half a day to several days and may include practical task-solving, presentations, interviews, stress simulations, psychometric tests, and sometimes even teamwork.

As they are so encompassing, you will usually receive a dedicated invitation to an assessment center.

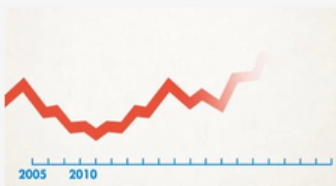
HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

Preparing your self-presentation

In this workbook, we would like to show you two easy structures, with which you can formulate your own 1-2-minute answer to this question!

Preparing this part of the interview well is crucial. It reduces nervousness, helps you to make a perfect first impression, and allows you to reflect on how you fit into the role you've applied for. Most importantly, it protects you from going into an unstructured and too-long monologue or from mentioning side information that isn't actually relevant.

Two easy methods to help you structure, prepare and memorise your perfect self-presentation:



Method 1:

- **Past:** Your studies, previous work, background (the elements that match the job!)
- **Present:** What are you currently doing, interested in, looking for - why this company, why now?
- **Future:** Where do you want to go with this position? How will you help the company achieve their goals?



Method 2:

- **I am:** professional background; what is unique about your background?
- **I can:** Which experiences and skills qualify you for the role? Which positive characteristics & qualities that are great for the role?
- **I want:** Why are you interested in the job? What makes a great job for you and why do you think this job is great for you as well as you for it?

Best practices: examples of good self-presentations

Method 1:

- **Past:** Your studies, previous work, background (the elements that match the job!)
- **Present:** What are you currently doing, interested in, looking for - why this company, why now?
- **Future:** Where do you want to go with this position? How will you help the company achieve their goals?

Hello, I am (), I've always been passionate about engineering and that's why I chose to study this in my bachelor's. I really enjoyed specialising in medical imagery in my two main courses as well as my thesis and group assignments, in which I was always happy to cooperate with others and learn from each other. Right now, I love supporting my professor in researching new imagery techniques as his research assistant for the last 6 months. Since this is ending soon, I would love to gain more practical and on-the-job experience in this field and I think I can bring a lot of new insights from my studies into your team, as I saw that that's also what you're looking for.

Method 2:

- **I am:** professional background; what is unique about your background?
- **I can:** Which experiences and skills qualify you for the role? Which positive characteristics & qualities that are great for the role?
- **I want:** Why are you interested in the job? What makes a great job for you and why do you think this job is great for you as well as you for it?

Hello, I am (), I am very happy to be here and highly motivated to join your team in the role of investment analysis assistant. As a graduate with a Bachelor's degree in international finance, in which I have specialised in asset allocation and management, I think I can be a valuable asset to your team.

Next to my theoretical knowledge from my studies I also have practical experience in asset management from two internships, in which I learned how stocks are chosen for a private investor portfolio. I found it particularly interesting to see the interests and concerns that private investors can have.

What particularly appeals to me in this position is that it would be a very meaningful step that builds both on my theoretical and practical background.

I am hoping that I can deepen my skills and bring my qualifications into practice since your clients are mainly private investors. I also saw that you are very committed to equal treatment, which really resonates with me, as in my university I was on the students' committee for equity and inclusion.



Preparing your answers to the interview questions

Step 1: Get to know the questions

You will now get to know the different types of questions that you may have to answer in a job interview.

On the following pages, you will get many example questions. This is a non-exhaustive list and sometimes questions can be phrased slightly differently. You can use the example questions to get to know broadly, what you may have to answer. You can not however pre-craft answers and only rely on those. A better approach is to self-reflect about what you bring to the position, get used to a good answering structure with those questions that you are anticipating for the interview and remain in a flexible mindset for the rest.

Question types & aims

1	Behavior	To assess how you do things: your approach to work
2	Hypothetical Scenario	To see how you deal with concrete scenarios that you may not have experienced yet
3	Skills and Qualifications	To get a deeper understanding of what you are capable of
4	Motivation	To show what is behind your application: what are you hoping to reach and achieve
5	Problem-Solving	To see how you create solutions and learnings from problems
6	Self-Reflection/ &-Assessment	To see how you deal with failure, how you learn and how realistic you are

NON-EXHAUSTIVE EXAMPLE LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

01 Behavior Questions

- ① Have you ever dealt with an overly upset customer? How did you handle the situation, and how would you handle it today?
- ① Describe a case where you went above and beyond for a customer to deliver exceptional service.
- ① You mentioned in your cover letter that you are a good team player: can you explain to us what that means to you and what you do to be a good team player?
- ① Describe a time when you had to handle an unfair or unreasonable complaint or a request from a customer. What did the customer ask, and how did you handle it?
- ① How would you describe your working style?
- ① Can you tell us about a time when you resolved a conflict? How did you do that?

02 Hypothetical Scenario Questions

- ① Imagine that you stay late on a Friday evening to help your supervisor with a report that has to be delivered to the board of directors (BOD) on Monday... When you are about to print the final version for all BOD members, you discover that the printer is out of paper. The person who keeps the key to the storehouse has gone home for the weekend. What do you do?
- ② If you had to choose between completing a task fully at an excellent level or delivering more tasks at an acceptable level, what would you choose?
- ③ Imagine a very important client request comes in but your agenda and to-do list are already very full and you think you will have a hard time fulfilling the client's request: what would you do?

03 Skills and Qualifications Questions

- ① We need someone with very deep knowledge of Windows Excel: what are the most advanced tasks you have done with this programme so far?
- ② You mentioned coding skills in your CV: can you tell us a little about your previous coding projects?
- ③ We like that you have a degree in XYZ, but we are not sure what it entails exactly, since your diploma doesn't specify and it is from a country we do not have any experiences with. Could you let us know what we can expect from you in the area of ABC?

04 Motivation Questions

- ① What is the biggest reason you want this job?
- ① What makes you happy at work?
- ① What is important in a company's culture to make you feel engaged at work? How do you contribute towards building that culture?
- ① How do you plan to add value to this organization?
- ① Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- ① Describe a time when you went above and beyond to deliver more than was expected. What motivated you to do so and how did you go about it?

05 Problem Solving Questions

- ① How do you overcome the challenges of working with limited resources?
- ① How do you handle high-stress situations at work? Provide an example of a recent high-stress situation you were in. How did you handle it?
- ① How do you deal with unexpected tasks?
- ① What do you do when you find that you have made a mistake that affects others?
- ① What hurdles or obstacles have you overcome at work recently?

06 Self-reflection & Self-assessment Questions

- ① What do you think will be the most challenging part of this role for you?
- ② Did you ever have a setback in life, and how did you handle it?
- ③ Describe a past failure you experienced. What did you learn? What are you doing differently now?
- ④ We are fostering a culture of openness about mistakes: how do you usually handle mistakes of yourself or of others?
- ⑤ You mentioned that you are still in the learning process of XYZ (a skill, e.g. German, coding...). Can you describe your level as well as your challenges? How are you planning to make sure to continue learning? Which support are you hoping for from an employer?
- ⑥ What is your biggest strength that you bring to a team?

FOCUS ON QUESTIONS ABOUT WEAKNESSES



A question that may come up during your job interview and that is important to prepare is the question about your weaknesses. It may sometimes be formulated directly or less directly. Some hiring committees also refrain from asking it. However, since many candidates find it difficult to answer this question spontaneously, let's zoom in and look at it.

Ways in which the question may be asked:

- Please tell us, what your biggest weakness is.
- Please tell us about your strengths and weaknesses.
- Where do you see room to improve, for yourself?
- Is there any characteristic you would change about yourself, if you could?
- How do you cope, when you reach your limit?
- What are situations in the workplace that you find very hard to deal with?
- etc.

The intention behind this question:

There can be several motivations for the interviewers to ask this question, amongst which we find:

- Assessing your capacity to remain calm and collected.
- Assessing your degree of self-reflection and honesty.
- Getting an idea of how willing you are to improve yourself and keep learning.

It is not a trick question and nobody wants to cause any harm or bring about a negative atmosphere, by asking this. Hiring managers know, that every person has room for improvement, and they would like to see where yours is!



How can you answer this?



- **Be authentic and use examples:** Speak about something that is unique to you and that you really think you can improve on (or have already improved on). By using concrete examples, you can underline your authenticity.
- **Choose the relevance for the position wisely:** Choose one or two weaknesses that do not play a central role to the position you are applying for. Avoid any key competencies that the hiring managers are looking for in this position.
- **Show solution orientation:** Show that you are aware of your weak spot and that you are actively working on improving it. You can explain how you have managed to deal with this in the past, or which adult education formats you have visited to get better.
- **Show a positive development:** Explain how your active improvement work is already having a positive impact on your weakness.
- **Remain self-confident:** Present your answer calmly and rest self-assured. Remember that the intention is not to put you on the spot, but rather to get to know you better and see your self-reflection as well as self-development attitude. It is okay to have weaknesses and there is no need to self-depreciate!



What should you definitely avoid?

- **Inventions:** Inventing fake-weaknesses or using pseudo-weaknesses would ruin your trustworthiness.
- **Using standard-answers:** Hiring managers have heard these a million times and will get the impression that you are not being authentic.
- **Using irony or humour to dismiss the question:** Some candidates think it is best to not mention any weaknesses at all and brush the question off with a humorous remark like “Chocolate is my weakness!”. We strongly advise against this: take the question seriously to be taken seriously!



Avoid these top No-Go-Answers at all costs:

“I’m too perfectionist.”

Even if you are a perfectionist. This answer is actually a strength disguised as a weakness. It has been overused and therefore often comes across as dishonest and unauthentic.

“I’m too impatient.”
or
“I’m a workaholic”

Again, this answer is actually an attempt to express how hard-working and goal-oriented someone is. Unless there are very concrete and unique examples, it is again a hidden strength and thus does not pay justice to the actual intention of the question.

“I don’t have weaknesses.”

This is highly unrealistic as every person has their weaknesses. This answer would therefore let you seem like someone who is either not good at self-reflection and self-improvement, or like someone who has something to hide.

“I hate doing the dishes.”

While this may be honest, it most likely is not a weakness relevant to any job you are applying for. While you want to avoid the key competencies of the job description, you should still talk about something that shows up in your work.

Two examples of a successful answer to the question about weaknesses:



I get nervous when I have to speak in front of big audiences.

I get nervous when I have to present things in front of a lot of people that I do not know, so I am not a huge fan of taking over such tasks. But I am working on this, as I would like to one day be able to give big presentations. What I have done in my studies is that I have participated in group presentations in my seminars, which gave me a good platform to learn: I already knew the people in my seminar and I wasn't presenting alone. This already works really well by now. In the future, I would love to learn how to get better at public speaking.

I sometimes get lost in details.

I have to admit that I sometimes lose the big picture because I over-focus on details. It has happened on my first project, that I got so lost in clarifying details that I missed a deadline. Luckily, I had a really good supervisor and she taught me how to manage myself by setting very clear milestones for myself. So since that first project, I have never missed any deadlines. I recently realised that sometimes my over-focus on details comes from a fear of missing important information. So, when I set my milestones I also made it my new habit to write up a priority list of questions that absolutely have to be answered. This helps me from getting side-tracked by details that actually aren't top priority, which are all the topics that aren't on this list.

Preparing your answers to the interview questions



Step 2: Brainstorming your experiences

As you can not know beforehand, which questions you will be asked exactly, we recommend that you carry out a brainstorming session that pairs your experiences and qualifications with the skills, qualifications, and tasks described in the job offer.

Creating such a list, allows you to think of answers faster and answer flexibly as well as to keep a focus on what you bring to the job!

Here is an example:

Job offer asks for	What I bring
Team work	<i>My group projects in uni; always manage to bring ppl with different opinions back to the table; this was also true in my job at a bar and in my internship</i>
Make an impact in sales	<i>Managed to remember clients' favourite drinks and snacks = always made them come back; on my shifts, the tipps were always 5 % higher and 10% more drinks sold</i>
Computer skills	<i>Got a reward for my visualisations in my B.A. thesis; love learning new programmes; know all standard progs by heart; am usually the one who teaches everyone around me</i>
German	<i>Have B2 level and diploma; will sit for C1 in December and am member of a conversation group that meets 2/week</i>

ACTIVITY: FILL IN YOUR OWN LIST

Job offer
asks for

What I bring

Preparing your answers to the interview questions



Step 3: Structuring your answers well

Of course, not all your answers should have the exact same structure. It is important that you speak freely and stay true to your own style of speech. To excel at an interview, you can however prepare by using a standardised structure for a few questions that are very important in your eyes and where you really want to make an impression.

The structure we recommend here is the so-called S-T-A-R method. It was developed for recruiters by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and is often reflected in the way questions are designed. By using it for your answers you will speak the language of those that are interviewing you.

S-T-A-R stands for:

- Situation
- Task
- Action
- Result

When you prepare your answer, try to describe the situation that you were in, the tasks this situation brought about, the actions you took to handle those tasks, and the results that you achieved.

HANDLING NERVOUSNESS

If you get nervous before an interview, you are not the only one and it is normal. Here are some tips that can help you settle your nerves during an interview.

It is okay to request thinking time:

If you don't have the answer directly, it is fine to take a moment to formulate your answer. Silence is normal and you should not feel pressured to speak immediately. You can also say "Thank you for this question, I need a little moment to collect my thoughts."

Drink a sip of water:

Having a sip of water has two effects: it buys you a few seconds of time and it can calm your nervous system.

Prepare the most important answers with the "rule of three":

For answers where you want to make sure that you don't forget anything important, you can use the rule of three to remember what you wanted to say. Luckily for you, both methods that we explained in the section "self-presentation" are based on the rule of three. When we have three elements to our answer, our brain can process and remember them more easily.

Mistakes:

If you have made a mistake you can calmly restate what you really meant to say. You do not have to apologise excessively. It is better to recover quickly and get back into the flow of the interviews.

WELL DONE!

As you finish up this workbook, we trust that the insights you've acquired on preparing and managing job interviews in Germany will act as a valuable reference for you.



A portrait of Nevena Paesler, a woman with long brown hair, smiling and sitting at a desk with a potted plant. The image is framed in a circular shape with a colorful gradient border.

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