

Questions to Ask

Before we explore the type of questions to ask, let us first address the way in which you deal with the subject of asking questions. In an hour long interview, a client interviewing a senior executive for a major post is unlikely to expect the time to consist of 50 minutes of client questions, followed by 10 minutes of candidate questions.

Rather, they are likely to expect a one hour discussion in which both parties ask questions and clarify matters. Whilst there are no rules around this point, a reasonable ratio of talking would be 60% candidate, 40% client. Remembering that your objective is to inform and impress the client... note their manner, eye contact and general body language in order to check their reaction. Adapt your approach accordingly.

In terms of questions to ask, this changes between the first and final interview. In the first interview it is unlikely that financial packages will be discussed in any detail, other than perhaps the client gaining clarification as to your current package. However, at a final interview, this may take up a large portion of the time.

It is important that your questions:

- Are tailored to the person and company with whom you are dealing
- Are pertinent, in relation to the discussion you are having

Be prepared to ask insightful questions about the organisation. A first interview is not the time to get into detail about cars, pensions etc. Try to ask questions that the client is interested in talking about e.g. strategic matters. It is difficult to detail precise questions to ask, as the situation will differ significantly between roles and companies. The key point is to ask questions that illustrate that you have researched their business and are genuinely interested in it.

Good subjects to explore are:

- "In terms of the job that we are discussing, what is the most important thing you are looking for?" This is a great question. Ideally it is best to try and weave it into the conversation at an early stage in order that you are able to react accordingly throughout the rest of the interview.
- What are the company's goals for the next 3-5 years / where do you see the company being in the next 3-5 years?
- How do you see the role developing over the next 3-5 years?

- What challenges and threats does the company anticipate in meeting these goals? How will they be overcome?
- In terms of the role we are discussing, what do you expect to be achieved... and in what timescale?
- What challenges am I likely to encounter in reaching these objectives?
- How is XYZ doing in relation to its major competitors... why?
- What level of mandate will I have?
- What are your staff attrition levels?
- What impact is the current economic climate having on XYZ Company?
- Is growth planned... if so, organically or through acquisition?
- How is the board structured?
- How are relationships between XYZ and its parent structured?
- Can you describe the company's culture and personality
- Typically, where do new board members come from... within or externally, if externally, from where?
- What is your background... how did you get to where you are?