

Part 8 – Presenting Yourself at an Interview:

Meeting and Greeting

First impressions count – there's no denying it. They can also be changed and influenced. Some people make their minds up less quickly, and are initially objective, forming their opinion of you over a longer period of time. Again, influencing them early on helps them make the right decision about you.

Breaking the Ice

Never be afraid to initiate conversation if necessary. It shows confidence without being pushy. Safe comments are things like 'It's a beautiful day, isn't it?' or 'What a lovely building; have you been here long?'

'If a conversation is started, don't rush in too quickly. 'Small talk' is an appropriate phrase – most interviewers start off with a few quick and easy questions and comments to get people relaxed and comfortable. So don't give a great long explanation to a question at this stage. Keep your answers short, to the point, and positive. Even if you have had the journey from hell to get to your interview, play things down if asked about it.

Starting off on a negative footing isn't really ideal. It may not do you any harm, but it is unlikely to do you any good either. Journey and travel details are often a potential pitfall.

Body Language

With body language, three things seem to make people relate to each other quickly and easily at first meeting:

- Make eye contact – look them in the eye.
- Smile – to show you are pleased to see them.
- The 'eyebrow flash' – quickly raising your eyebrows when being introduced apparently shows interest in the other person and indicates a willingness to establish a good relationship. The golden rule with body language is to match your interviewer's body language.

The Perfect Handshake

Engage the whole hand, palm to palm. Match the hand pressure of the other person. If they are a person with a firm handshake, you want to shake back just as firmly. For people with a weaker handshake, you should soften your handshake grip in return. It shouldn't last longer than how long it takes to say 'One, two, three'. Accompany the handshake with a smile and eye contact.

Sitting Down

Never sit down before being invited to do so. Waiting is not only polite, it gives a nervous interviewer confidence, and gives them the lead.

The aim in an interview is to appear alert and interested. You can't do this if you are slumped. Lean slightly forward – not too much or you will look odd! Sit up straight. Defensiveness

These actions convey the impression that you have something to hide:

- Crossing or folding your arms
- Sitting at too much of an angle to the interviewer, so you have to turn your head to look at him/her
- Pointing your finger when making a point
- Using your hand in a 'karate chop' gesture when making a point
- Looking down when speaking
- Not making eye contact
- Suspicious and Distrusting
- These actions suggest you are distrusting:
 - Crossing or folding your arms
 - Looking at your interviewer from underneath your eyebrows
 - Looking at your interviewer sideways – out of the corner of your eye (usually caused by sitting too much at an angle to him/her)
 - Rubbing your eyes
- Frowning
- Touching nose or face
- Rubbing the back of your neck
- Nervousness
- All these convey nervousness:
 - Pinching your skin
 - Fidgeting.
 - Jiggling the contents of your pockets
 - Running your tongue along the front of your teeth
 - Clearing your throat
 - Running your fingers through your hair
 - Wringing your hands
 - Biting on pens or other objects
 - Twiddling your thumbs
 - Biting your fingernails (both the action itself and evidence of it)
 - Tongue-clicking
 - Gritting your teeth
 - Biting your lips

Positive Body Language

All these actions, on the other hand, will enable you to establish a good rapport with the interviewer:

- Good eye contact
- Leaning forward slightly in your chair
- Tilting your head whilst maintaining eye contact with your interviewer
- Open-lipped smiling
- Open hands with palms visible
- Unbuttoning your coat or jacket upon being seated
- Keeping your chin up
- Putting tips of fingers of one hand against the tips of fingers of the other hand in the 'praying' or 'steepling' position
- Having your hands joined behind your back when standing

Body language can be a lot to take in and master. Concentrate on identifying the bad habits and eliminating them and add a few good ones.

The Importance of Eye Contact

Eye contact is important as it conveys confidence and trust. It establishes a rapport with the other person – i.e., a link, a connection or relationship between you.

When speaking to someone, establishing eye contact allows you to check that they understand and are still interested in what you are saying.

When listening, establishing eye contact conveys your attention and is a gesture of politeness.

Lack of eye contact shows evasiveness and makes it almost impossible to establish rapport with someone.