

THE INTERVIEW

You've done it: after all the hours of scouring the job sections of newspapers and magazines, attending careers fairs and writing to employers, you've secured an interview. Getting that first interview is an achievement in itself.

It's good to talk

There are some golden rules to remember when you first encounter a prospective employer

Having waded through tens, if not hundreds, of CVs, the employer has put your résumé at the top of the pile. They want to know about you almost as much as you want the job.

But this is no time for complacency. If you truly want the post, you're going to have to knock the employer's socks off at the interview stage too, which is where things can get even more challenging. Interviews can be daunting, particularly if you're inexperienced. Keeping a few simple things in mind can make the difference between landing the job or being shown the door.

For a start, get to the interview on time. Yes, it's blindingly obvious, but you would be surprised how many first interviews are ruined because of poor timekeeping. Excuses about delayed trains, broken-down buses and traffic jams on the M25 won't wash with an employer looking for a highly responsible as well as a highly capable new recruit. Allow plenty of time for the journey as punctuality is the foundation of a successful interview.

Second, dress appropriately for the occasion. Again, it may seem obvious, but it's a mistake worth avoiding. If in doubt, err on the side of smart to the point of conservative in your appearance. People are rarely offended by what some could consider as dull clothes, and it's best not to take risks until you know the culture of the company. "Companies are shopping for people who can represent them," says Richard Spragg, of engineering recruitment specialist EPCglobal. "Don't give them the wrong impression."

Third – and this is vital – thoroughly research the company you are seeing before you arrive. Demonstrating knowledge of the business scores big points with an employer and helps to oil the wheels of conversation. It suggests somebody who is genuinely keen on the organisation, and likely to remain with it beyond initial training.

The fourth piece of advice is also simple: relax. "If you are relaxed, you are going to give a better interview," says Spragg. "It's a straightforward premise, but very true. Everybody gets nervous before interviews but you have to remember that the people interviewing you have been there themselves. Don't get yourself into a state. Again, the company is looking for somebody who can represent them with clients – if you are extremely nervous, that sends out the wrong signals."

A final point: if you want the job, make it clear to your prospective employer when the interview concludes. Let the interviewer know that you've enjoyed meeting them and you are excited about the position.

Overall, the good news is that skilled, motivated engineering students are in demand, so there's every reason to believe in yourself. You are sizing up the employer as much as it is judging you. "You should feel empowered – as if the world is your oyster," says Spragg.

"People are desperate for good engineers, so remember that this is also about you choosing the right company – you're interviewing them as well."