

Is there an advantage to being interviewed early?

Your Questions Answered

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I'm going for a series of interviews at the moment and want to maximise my chance of getting the job. Is there any evidence as to whether I am best to ask for the first or last interview, or the one in between? Is it better to ask for an interview in the morning or the afternoon, or at the beginning or end of the week? What does the research say?

Simon Broomer, managing director at Career Balance, a career advisory service in the City, says:

Some of us have "good" and "bad" times of the day. Try to go for the time of day at which you tend to perform better because you usually feel more alert, more positive and energised. We all have our own best times, and I am definitely a morning person.

If the interview is for a job you really want, then try to cancel other commitments, rather than making the interview fit around them. A meeting at work might seem important – but not if it is going to stop you getting your next career opportunity.

Also bear in mind that the

interviewers are likely to be more attentive at the beginning of the day than at the end when they might have interviewed a number of candidates.

In order to stay fresh and alert, I suggest you avoid heavy meals before the interview and try to cut back on your caffeine intake if you are a heavy drinker of coffee. Many of our clients are working, so having an interview at the end of the day holds the risk that they may feel tired and stressed out.

In this job market you should also try to get in early in the interview process if this appears to be spread over a number of days. Jobs advertised on the internet using an online application process can attract hundreds of applications and I have heard of cases where the employer has decided to stop interviewing or looking at new applications prematurely because they already have a good pool of candidates from which to choose.

Often the first interview is used by the panel to get their processes sorted out, and so they call a weak "practice" candidate up first. At this stage they are also more cautious about their judgments – but first candidates do have the advantage of being remembered.

By the last interview, they are

tired but you'll have the advantage of being most recent in their minds, and they will be polished.

Personally, I doubt order and time of day, or week, matter much. When do you think you are at your best?

I would focus on other things – interviews are careful mixes of showing that you are professional and fit for the job – demonstrating your competencies, and also revealing who you are so they think they know (and like) you as a person. Try and be memorable – in the right way.

Helen Pitcher, chairman of Iddas, which provides coaching, mentoring and consultancy services to boardroom members and senior executives, says:

There is little hard evidence on these issues, but lots of "urban myths" built out of anecdotal experience.

The reality is that there are two sides to this transaction, yourself and the interviewer, and while there is little you can do to control the latter, you can control yourself.

Whether the interviewer is good in the morning or late afternoon is an unknown. But with a modicum of self-reflection you should be able to know your own "prime time".

It's important you're not rushed

into a time that doesn't suit you and that gives you enough time to prepare. "Can you come and see me at 8am tomorrow", will probably give you a long and sleepless night hunched over your preparation and research, so you arrive bleary-eyed and focused on getting through rather than giving your best.

Whether you are first, third or last in the interview process your job is

to provide a lively interaction, which focuses on how you can solve the interviewer's needs and make an impact on their company.

It is important to manage your energy which will ebb and flow during the interview. This is particularly true where you have been lined up for a series of interviews one after the other. It might be the third time you have

answered that question that day, but to each interviewer it is their "killer question" that sorts the wheat from the chaff.

Do be sensible. While 5pm on a Friday might be your prime time, insisting on a slot then might not go down too well.

Email your recruitment questions to: recruitment@ft.com