

What you need to know about exit interviews

An exit interview is a meeting, discussion or survey you might be asked to take part in when you're about to leave a company or workplace, to share information about your experience there.

While the process varies from one organisation to another, you'll most likely be asked questions either in person one-on-one, or through an online survey.

Often, exit interviews are organised by human resources departments, and surveys might be conducted through third-party companies.

Exit interviews help businesses find out why an employee is leaving and learn about that person's time at the company. It's also a chance for businesses to get feedback on things like culture, management, structure, morale, and workload.

What should I say in an exit interview?

As an employee, the exit interview is your chance to reflect on your experience and provide feedback about it in a confidential way, says Brendan Kavenagh, CEO of Davidson Technology.

"If you feel safe, you can offer suggestions for improvement," Kavenagh says. "You may or may not have felt comfortable doing that with your direct line manager."

Not everyone feels comfortable revealing all during exit interviews, so don't feel that you have to discuss anything you don't want to.

What questions will I be asked in an exit interview?

Your exit interview might include questions like:

- What is your principal reason for leaving and why?
- What do you think we do well as an employer?

- What could be done differently?
- How would you describe to other people what it's like to work here?
- What triggered your decision to leave?
- What advice could you give us in recruiting someone to fill your position?
- Is there anything we could have done to retain your services?
- Do you think this organisation provides a working environment free from sexual harassment and discrimination?
- What will your new position be?
- How do the salary and benefits compare to your current salary and benefits?

Do I have to do an exit interview?

Exit interviews are entirely voluntary, so it's up to you whether you take part or not.

You might request an interview because you've enjoyed working for the organisation and you'd like to pass on positive feedback, Kavenagh says.

"You might be leaving the company on really good terms and you've got some great feedback to provide and say thank you, and you'd like to pass on that gratitude. Often people do it because they care."

Can I bring up complaints in an exit interview?

It's best to stick to constructive feedback. It's important to remain professional during the exit interview, says Eliza Kirkby, Regional Director of Hays.

"If you're frustrated with an aspect of your job, don't lose your temper. Maintain your professionalism and be diplomatic in your exit interview.

"Be grateful for the opportunities that you've had and remember that a simple thank you will go a long way."

Why do businesses have exit interviews?

Exit interviews give your employer a chance to connect with you from a different perspective, Kavenagh says.

"It encourages open dialogue and discussion and can be a learning opportunity for the employer within a safe, no-consequences environment."

If your workplace conducts regular “pulse checks” to gather feedback from employees, the information you reveal in an exit interview shouldn’t come as a huge surprise.

“An organisation that is in constant development and wants to learn, change, progress and engage its workforce will run interim interviews, so there aren’t too many surprises at exit,” Kavenagh says.

“Exit interviews might be reinforcing some of the gaps in the organization they are already aware of and trying to change.”