



A CRA Perspective: Interviewing for the Perfect CRA Position



There are an unlimited number of resources and articles providing guidance on interview techniques and how to prepare for an interview; almost universally guided by the requirements and perspective of the employer.

But what does it feel like to be interviewed for a CRA position and how important is it?

Let us first consider the role of a CRA:

- It is a highly specialised role, with experience often valued above all other factors.
- CRA roles are largely the same across companies and trials, but specialised to therapy area differences.
- CRAs are heavily in demand in the current marketplace.
- By nature, CRAs are meticulous, detail-oriented and driven people who should have good negotiation and communication skills. This enables them to ensure trials run smoothly at their sites.

For all the reasons listed above it is important to remember that just as a company is interviewing you, you should also be interviewing the company. You should be looking for a position and a company that you really want to work for. In spite of this, it can still be a very daunting, nerve-wracking and a stressful experience going through the interview process.

Since becoming a CRA in 2010, I have worked as a contractor and have, as such, experienced many interviews ranging from a full-day process at a large pharmaceutical company to an informal meeting at an airport cafe.

Prior to working as a CRA, I worked as research scientist coordinating studies from a site in much the same way a research nurse would do. My first interview as a CRA was for a large pharmaceutical company.

So how did I prepare? I was given a good overview of what would be expected of me. I had never worked as a CRA before but I had spent a lot of time working with CRAs so I knew what made a good CRA and, unfortunately, what made a bad CRA. I used this experience to find good examples in my own role to demonstrate my relevant skills. Finally, I went through the job description very carefully making sure I could fulfill their requirements and was able to articulate this clearly during the interview.

I remember it clearly. I was intimidated by the expensive corporate building in the more formal environment at the large pharmaceutical company – with people walking around in suits. I was used to working in labs and was not accustomed to working in such a formal environment. I had driven four hours to the interview, pouring over the preparation I had done in my mind all the way to the interview. But my fears soon subsided. Once through the initial security the people were friendly and welcoming. I was also interviewed by a panel of three staff.

As part of the final steps of the interview I was asked to write a follow-up letter based on a pre-written monitoring visit report. I learned I didn't have to worry because I had the experience they wanted otherwise I wouldn't have been invited to interview and I enjoyed the whole experience. I had a professional connection with the interviewers which resulted in a very good conversation. The feedback and results of this interview were fairly immediate as they called and offered me the job while I was at a service station on the way home. Timely follow-up from an interview is fantastic and I accepted the position immediately.

Unfortunately, however, the timing of feedback is often unknown and is completely out of your control as an interviewee. Remember there may be many people interviewing and it can take some time for a decision to be made.

I compare this to the second interview in a cafe at Manchester airport. This was a short discussion with my potential new manager who fit me in between her other commitments. In many ways it could not have been more different than that first interview, now years behind me, because of the environment and the interviewing approach used by the interviewer. However, in many respects, it couldn't have been more similar based on the position I had applied for. We had an interesting and enthusiastic discussion about the projects they were working on. I was able to discuss my strengths as well as the enjoyment I experienced in being a CRA. Similar to the other interview, I connected with this interviewer and felt that I would be able to work well with this person.

Remember that there is no harm in also asking for feedback if ultimately you are not successful in getting the position.

Looking back I have learned many things from my interview experiences, but two things have really stood out:

Firstly, both of the interviews relayed opportunities where I could be good in my role and thrive. The approach to the interview didn't matter and didn't affect my ability to receive job offers. In a CRA role you need to be able to perform well in a variety of situations and interact effectively with professionals whom you might find intimidating, such as a team of doctors and managers at a site initiation visit, or giving a presentation at an investigator meeting. Likewise, being thorough and organised can help you lead an important meeting with a consultant in the 10 minutes he can give you between seeing patients. Performing well in these interview situations is evidence that you can cope with these types of scenarios and, of course, as an established CRA an eight-hour trip soon becomes part of a normal working day!

Secondly, as previously noted, CRAs tend to have many of the same traits: detail-oriented, thorough, provides good attention to detail, etc. Often CRAs will also have similar work experience because CRA roles tend not to differ extensively between companies.

So what is it that you and your potential employer are looking for that will separate you from your fellow interviewees? Is it in fact that mutual enthusiasm, respect and interest that I experienced in both these interviews? For me it certainly is. Finding a manager and a company who will value you and who you can work closely with you is one of the most important aspects of an interview. In this kind of environment you can thrive and give 100% to your job.

In conclusion, it is never easy to interview for any job but my experience has taught me to expand outside your comfort zone and enjoy it. If you are well-prepared and enthusiastic about the role, you should be able to relax and make the most of the interview experience. Remember this is also an opportunity to find out more about the company and the role you have applied for. And its not often you get the time to talk about yourself and how good you are at your job! I wish you the best of luck with any future interviews.

About the author

Hazel Madoc-Sutton is a CRA II who works for TalentSource Life Sciences. She obtained a degree BSc hons Neuroscience at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. She joined the industry in 2008 and has worked in CRA roles on both pharmaceutical and medical device projects.

About TalentSource Life Sciences

TalentSource Life Sciences, a division of CROMSOURCE, is an international provider of global resourcing solutions including Functional Service Provision (FSP), Contract Placement, Permanent Placement and Executive Search to the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical device industries.

About CROMSOURCE

CROMSOURCE is a highly-qualified ISO-certified international provider of outsourced services to the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and medical device industries, specialized in clinical development and staffing solutions.

Operating through offices across all regions of Europe and North America, CROMSOURCE delivers a comprehensive breadth of services. We seamlessly move biopharmaceutical products from first-in-human, conducted in our exceptional early phase unit, through all subsequent phase of pre- and post-approval research. Our medical device experts oversee projects through regulatory strategy and submission, to pilot and pivotal clinical investigations in Europe and North America. Our TalentSource Unit ensures that high quality professionals are available to support your work whenever you need more resources.