

Preparing for a Job interview

One never knows precisely what to expect at a job interview. Interviews can take many formats but most common are 1:1 interviews, 2 interviewers to 1 candidate and small group interviews, although some employers may also use telephone and/or webcam interviews. However, all types of interview require thorough preparation and by following the suggestions below, you can be confident that you will be your 'best self' on the day.

Please note, if you are in a group interview, make sure you treat your fellow candidates with respect and as potential colleagues not as the competition!

General Preparation Tips

- **Research the Company**

What do they do, who are their customers/clients, who are their competitors, what are their main products/services?

- **Understand what the job entails**

To effectively prepare for interview you need to know what the likely duties and responsibilities will entail. If you know what will be expected of you, you can prepare the evidence in advance of your relevant skills, experience and aptitude for the job.

If you do not have a job description, the advert for the position may provide the clues as to the main duties/responsibilities. Even better, can the employer provide a person specification for the job? This is the list of skills, qualifications, and personal qualities or strengths the ideal applicants would have - either essential or desirable. Some employers write a person specification to help them match applicants to the requirements of the job.

Preparing for a Competency Based Interview

Being able to demonstrate the right skills and strengths for a job is essential. As such, competency based interviews are increasingly common. This is when you demonstrate ability, knowledge, personality and experience as well as interest and motivation. Most particularly, employers expect you to provide *specific examples* or anecdotes of how you have demonstrated a particular competency. By following the advice below it will help you to prepare for a competency based interviews along with traditional or less formal interview situations.

- **The STAR Method – Situation, Task, Activity, Result**

Before the interview think of an example of when you demonstrated each skill or personal characteristic required for the job and then apply **STAR** method to this. What was the **Situation**? What **Tasks** did you undertake? What **Activities** were undertaken, who were you with and what challenges did you have to overcome? What were the **Results/outcomes** and skills/strengths you demonstrated?

Example:

Q: Tell me when you have demonstrated team working skills?

A: **Situation:** Whilst in year 11 I successfully completed my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award.

Task: As part of the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, I undertook an expedition with a small group of fellow students. Working as part of a team, we had to navigate across the countryside and spend time camping out over a weekend. We also had to achieve this journey within a specific period.

Activity: This involved planning the equipment needed and packing our own provisions. It also involved working with the team to negotiate the best routes given the weather conditions – it was very wet and windy. We worked together as a team by using each of our strengths, for example, one member had particularly good map reading skills whereas I did well at motivating the team to keep walking at a good pace. One incident included encouraging a particular team member who was struggling to keep up as he was very tired. His bag was heavier than mine so I suggested we took turns to carry each other's bags.

Result: We achieved our goal of getting to our destination on time with all team members in good spirits and without injury, demonstrating resilience, determination and excellent team working skills.

Examples of skills you have may include:

- communication (written and verbal)
- IT competence
- numerical skills
- research and analytical skills
- presentation skills
- time management and organisational skills
- negotiation skills
- practical skills (ranging from sports, DT, music to art and drama)

Examples of strengths or personal characteristics you have may include:

- honesty
- sociability
- determination
- self-reliance/self-motivation
- flexibility/adaptability
- time management
- resilience

Examples of how you might evidence your skills/strengths:

- Written skills - projects, course work, essay writing or writing a blog, creating content for a website, church or community newsletter etc.

- IT skills - qualifications (GCSE's/ A Levels/key skills), social media, creating apps, computer packages, use of the internet for personal or academic research
- Team working - participation in sports, drama, music, Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizen Service, volunteering/part time work, group activities in class/clubs
- Communication skills - participation in classroom discussions/group work, engaging with people during voluntary work (in or out of school e.g. peer listening), engaging with visitors at school open days, customer contact during work experience/part-time work
- Time management and self-motivation - successfully managing coursework/school work deadlines with extra-curricular activities/part time work

Standard Interview Questions

Q - Tell me about yourself

Often used as an 'ice breaker' question at the beginning of an interview. Prepare a short presentation (approx. 3 mins) which should include a brief summary of your background, education and hobbies. However, most importantly you need to mention the key skills and experience that make you a good candidate for the job. End on a positive statement like 'I am now looking forward to starting my career with a quality organisation like your company'. You do not need to memorise the speech by heart as your response needs to be natural, but you will need to have the key points clear in your mind.

Q - Why do you want to work for this company?

- Familiarity with its products, services, customers.
- Its reputation for being a quality/dynamic organisation (locally, regionally or nationally depending on the size of the company).
- The training or potential career progression it can offer.
- Sharing its culture and values.
- You have a genuine interest in the duties and responsibilities of the job and want to make a positive contribution to the company.

Q - What do you know about our organisation?

See the points above, but add knowledge about the organisation's competitors, number of employees, office/site locations.

Q - Why do you want this job?

- It is a good match for my skills/strengths/personal characteristics – of course you will need to give specific examples of your skills and strengths and how you match the requirements of the job.
- It sounds interesting/stimulating – you are looking to make a positive contribution.
- A new challenge – looking for professional/personal development.
- It will provide the experience/training/opportunity to fulfil your career ambitions.
- A desire to work for a quality/reputable organisation.

Other questions might include providing specific examples of when you have demonstrated your competencies/aptitude for the job (skills/strengths).

Depending on the role prepare examples of how you have demonstrated a selection of skills and strengths: organisational ability; team working skills; how you overcame a difficult situation; interpersonal skills; effective communication; IT competence; a flexible/adaptable/'can do' attitude.

Questions You May Like To Ask

Q - Who will I be working with/ be reporting to?

Q - What type of training will I receive?

Q - What are the hours of work?

Q - Are you developing any new products or services?

Q - Who are you main competitors?

Q - Is there opportunity for progression within the company?

Q - What is the dress code or is there a uniform?

Make sure you are not asking questions that one could answer by looking at the company website – you want to ensure that you appear well prepared. DO NOT ask questions about salary, holidays, sick pay or any company benefits until *after* you have a job offer.

Practical Considerations

- What to wear? Make sure you are smart and clean (includes shoes, hair, fingernails). Male candidates are advised to wear a shirt and tie even if the job does not require this. Keep jewellery simple and the choice of clothes business-like. Always better to be too formally dressed than be too casual.
- Consider how you will get to the interview and how long the journey will take (particularly in busy traffic).
- Arrive 10 minutes before your appointment time
- Be polite and cheerful to everyone you meet including reception staff as you are being judged right from walking through the door.
- Smile and be prepared to shake hands with the interviewer. (You might want to practice your handshake if this does not come naturally to you.)
- Sit up straight and make appropriate eye contact with the interviewer.
- Listen carefully to the questions. If you do not understand what you are being asked then politely, say 'Please can you repeat the question?' or 'I'm sorry – I am not clear what you are asking, can you clarify that?'
- At the end of the interview thank them for their time and say you are looking forward to hearing from them. Smile and shake hands.

Good luck!