

## Section 5:

# Preparing for the interview

## Preparing for an interview

Getting invited to an interview means you've passed the first test – your application must have made a good impression.

Now you need to prepare yourself for the interview to make sure you make the best impression.

## Before the day

Find out about the employer and the job – you could ask the employer if they have an information pack or you could look at their website.

It's helpful to find out the following things about the employer:

- What they do, make or sell?
- Who are their customers?
- What sort of organisation are they?
- What is the job likely to involve?
- How can you best fit your skills to match the job?



## Plan for the interview

Find out about what the interview will involve to make sure you're prepared.

- If you have a disability, all employers must make reasonable adjustments for you so it is possible for you to have an interview. So, if you need the employer to make particular arrangements (for example, to help you get into the building), contact them before your interview to make sure they can make these arrangements.
- Think about who will be interviewing you. If it is the person who would be your manager if you got the job, the interview may be more detailed. If it's the personnel manager, the interview may be less detailed but could still be as testing.
- Find out how many people will be interviewing you and what their positions in the company are. This will help you prepare for the kinds of questions they may ask.
- Find out how long the interview is likely to last. This will give you an idea of how detailed it's likely to be.
- Find out whether you will have to take a test or make a presentation.

## Plan your journey

- Consider travelling to the company the day before the interview to check how long the journey will take.
- If necessary, ask the employer for directions, bus routes or details of where you can park your car.

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- Plan another way of getting there in case something unexpected happens (such as an accident blocking the road, or if your train is cancelled).
- If you have a disability, let the employer know so they can make any special arrangements (for example, arrangements for you to get into the building).

### Creating the right image

This will depend on what sort of work you will be doing.

- Decide what to wear and get your clothes ready the day before.
- You don't have to buy a new outfit! Aim for a neat, clean and tidy appearance – if you look good it will help you feel good.

### Gather together the information you'll need at the interview

- Take a copy of your CV or application form to refer to.
- Prepare notes or cue cards to help you if think you might need a prompt during the interview.
- Bring items the employer has asked for (for example, references, certificates or your driving licence).
- Re-read the job advert to refresh your memory – make sure you haven't missed anything.

### Prepare for the questions you might be asked

The following is a list of 20 popular interview questions and some suggested answers to help you prepare.

#### 1. Why do you want to work here?

Mention the following:

- the good reputation of the firm
- any other positive information you have about them (for example, their training record, or their equal-opportunities policy), and
- that the job will give you the opportunity to do work that interests you.

#### 2. Why did you leave your last job?

Be positive. Don't use this as an opportunity to criticise your previous company. For example, if you left for health reasons, point out that you are now able to carry out all the duties for the job you are applying for. If you were dismissed, say that you take responsibility for your actions and have learnt from the experience.

#### 3. Have you done this kind of work before?

- If you have, tell them the skills and experience you have and how you can use them in this job.
- If you haven't, describe other work experience that is relevant to this job or which will help you learn this job quickly. Emphasise your interest and your enthusiasm to learn.

### 4. What did you do in your last job?

Describe the following things:

- skills and duties relevant to the new job
- your responsibilities
- how you worked with others
- if you worked with customers and, if so, how you worked with them
- how long you were there
- whether you were promoted, and
- responsibilities you volunteered to take on.

### 5. What kinds of equipment can you use?

- Name the types of equipment you can use that are relevant to the new job.
- Mention any relevant qualifications or training you have had.
- Tell them the length of time you have used this equipment.

### 6. How long have you been out of work and how do you spend your time?

Describe the following:

- what you have done to look for a job
- mention any voluntary work you have done
- mention any further education, study or training you have taken part in, and
- mention your hobbies and leisure activities – if appropriate!

Try to link what you did to the skills and experience the employer is looking for.

### 7. What makes you think you are the right person for this job?

Tell the interviewer about the following:

- the skills and experience you have which are relevant to the job, and
- the personal qualities that you bring to the job.

### 8. Why have you had so many jobs?

You could say the following things:

- you wanted to widen your experience in different types of work or in different companies
- many of the jobs were temporary, and
- you would rather be in work than out of work.

### 9. Why have you only had one job?

You could say the following things:

- you had several jobs within your last company
- the job offered you the opportunity to develop, and
- you enjoyed the work.

### 10. Why should I take you on?

Be ready for this question and answer confidently and positively:

- describe your skills and experience and how relevant they are to this job
- tell them you are enthusiastic and willing to learn, and
- tell them you are hard-working, reliable and capable.

### 11. Aren't you over-qualified?

Emphasise the following:

- you are looking for something different, and
- you can take as well as give instructions.

### 12. How do you get on with people?

- Describe how you have worked as a team in the past.
- Give examples of your ability to get on with people at all levels.
- Give examples of how you have provided good customer service, if this is relevant.

### 13. What makes a good team member?

Describe the skills needed, for example:

- good communication skills
- flexibility
- the ability to adapt to change
- the ability to co-operate with other people, and
- having a good sense of humour and so on.

Give examples of how you showed these in previous work situations or leisure activities.

### 14. How do you cope with pressure?

Describe pressures in previous jobs using a recent example (for example, how you coped with a deadline that had been brought forward, how you completed a rush order or dealt with staff shortages).

### 15. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Strengths - The employer should already know your strengths from your application but you may want to emphasise particular skills relevant to the job by giving examples.
- Weaknesses – start by describing parts of your last job which you found difficult and then explain how you overcame these difficulties or be brief but honest (for example, 'I can sometimes be a little too enthusiastic').

**Remember:** Employers value people who can admit their mistakes rather than blaming their failings on others.

### 16. What would you like to be doing in five years' time?

Explain that you would ideally like to be working for the same company but to have developed within it.

### 17. What wage do you expect to earn?

If the wage level is negotiable, be prepared to negotiate. The difficult thing to decide is where to start. If you tell them a wage that is too high, you could price yourself out of the job, but if you give an amount that is too low you could lose out. Before going to the interview, try to find out about wage levels in your area (for example, look at similar jobs advertised with your Jobcentre, in newspapers or on the internet). You might be able to use this information in your negotiations. If you are really not sure, then say you would expect to receive the going rate for the job.

### 18. How often were you absent from your last job?

- If you were hardly ever off work, say so.
- If sick leave has been a problem, explain why and reassure the employer that you have sorted out the problem.
- If you have had time off because of a disability, discuss this openly, including the possible solutions – be positive.

### 19. When would you be available to start?

As soon as possible! Do not put any barriers in the way.

### 20. Do you have any questions?

You may like to prepare for this, as it is almost always asked at an interview. Asking some questions (but not too many) can show you are interested. One or two of these may be appropriate.

- Do you offer ongoing training and development?
- What will my first job be?
- How soon will I hear the result of my application?
- Does the company carry out performance reviews and if so, how often?



### Finally

- Try to get a good night's sleep.

### On the day

#### Before you leave

- Give yourself plenty of time to get ready.
- Make sure you've got all the relevant paperwork with you.
- If you are delayed, contact the employer as soon as possible to explain, apologise and arrange another appointment.

#### When you arrive

- Aim to arrive about 10 minutes before the interview time.
- Give your name to the receptionist or whoever is there to greet you.
- Try to relax and keep calm.
- Chat to the receptionist, or whoever greets you before going into the interview. It will help calm you.
- Remember that the interviewer can be just as nervous as you!

### At the interview

First, accept that it is natural to be nervous, and you may have a fast heartbeat, clammy hands and 'butterflies' in your stomach. These are your body's natural way of meeting a challenge, and in small doses it can help you.

You will make an impression in the first few minutes. It takes this time for people to assess you and store this information. Once you have made a first impression, it's hardly ever changed. It's important to make a good first impression.

If you are nervous, your voice may sound shaky and squeaky. Practise deep, slow breathing before you get to the interview. This will slow down your heart rate and help you avoid taking quick, shallow breaths if you are nervous.

Here are some general tips which may help you. Not all of these will be appropriate to you – use the ones which are suitable to your situation or style.



### Do

- Enter the room confidently.
- Shake hands firmly and introduce yourself.
- Smile!
- Be polite and friendly - look the interviewer in the eye as soon as you enter the room.
- Check that it's OK to use cue cards or notes during the interview.
- Try to maintain eye contact with the person or people you are talking to.
- Look interested, and ask questions as well as answering.
- Answer questions as fully as you can, avoid just saying 'yes' or 'no'.
- Provide examples to prove your skills and achievements.
- Tell the truth.
- Ask if you don't understand a question.
- Speak clearly.
- Sell yourself – get your good points across and be positive.

### Don't

- Sit down until the interviewer asks you to.
- Fidget, slouch in the chair or fold your arms.
- Swear (even mildly).
- Criticise your past employers.
- Interrupt.
- Draw attention to your weaknesses.
- Lie or be too enthusiastic. Stay calm and stick to the facts.

Remember, most employers like people who:

- listen
- answer questions with examples
- are brief and keep to the point
- come prepared, and
- appear confident.

### Other types of interviews

#### Competency-based interviews

Competency-based interviews are designed to allow you to show your skills and experience in the main areas of the job. You may be asked to discuss examples of your previous work and achievements. The examples you give should expand on or be different from those on your original application form. Before the interview, you will need to list the skills and experience needed for the job and think about what you have done that you could use as an example for each one.

#### Group interviews

You may be invited to be assessed as part of a group. This is to test how you might work as part of a team. Be prepared to take an active part in the discussion or task and put forward your ideas. Be confident but not aggressive.

#### Telephone interviews

Some employers may carry out a first interview over the phone. Be prepared for this when phoning employers by having your CV handy and reading through the sample questions in this fact sheet.

#### Skills tests or work sample tests

These tests are designed to measure the level of your knowledge or understanding of the job (for example, typing tests and so on). Find out what the test will involve and try to practise before the interview.

#### Personality tests

You could be asked questions about your thoughts, feelings and behaviour in certain situations. There is no such thing as a right or wrong answer, as the overall picture is what is important. The end result is a personality rating used to see if the person fits the job advertised. Analysing these tests is a highly-skilled process and larger organisations may use these tests along with other methods.

#### Aptitude tests

Aptitude tests are designed to predict how well you might do certain tasks. They test abilities such as:

- reasoning with words, numbers or diagrams
- problem-solving, or
- following instructions.

These are usually set as a test paper which you have to finish within a set time. You can do practice tests to try to improve your ability.

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