



Apprenticeship
Connect

A guide to interview preparation

Before your interview

Congratulations on landing an interview! You're one step closer to your dream job and we want to make sure we do everything we can to help you find the right role and get the best from your career. We have put together this handy guide to employer interviews to support you throughout the process. We know interviews can seem daunting, but you're not doing this alone. We are behind you every step of the way. Remember, we wouldn't have put you forward for the interview if we didn't think you would be right for the role!

We are here to help you and we want to find the very best position for you. This document will support your interview preparation, maximising your chance of success. We are here to support you, so if you have any questions or if you're not sure how best to answer a question - talk to us!

Stage 1: Research...

Research is key! If you know your stuff, you will be fully prepared for any question that comes your way.

Top tip: Write it down. Make a note of the key information and take your notes with you to read on your journey to the interview.

1. The company

Take time to read through the company website and find out the following:

- Who they are
- What they do
- When they were founded
- Where they are based
- Who their clients are

2. The industry

Understand the industry the business operates in, knowledge of the industry you wish to work in shows ambition and drive. You could start by researching the following:

- Typical job roles in the industry
- The purpose of each job role
- Typical progression routes
- Key competitors
- Key industry events and changes

3. Your CV

Never lie on your CV, you will get caught out! It is likely the person interviewing you will have a copy of your CV to hand and they will ask you questions about it. Learn it and remember what you included.

4. The role

Analyse the job description, take time to understand the key personality traits and skills the employer is looking for and match your own strengths and experience to the job description. Think about where you can bring value to the company and where you have previously demonstrated the skills they are looking for.

Stage 2: Plan!

A failure to plan is a failure to succeed! Poor organisation will leave you stressed and unprepared, so make sure you think ahead and give yourself a head start.

Top tip: Plan everything the night before, go to bed early and wake up knowing everything is ready.

1. Your journey

You will need to travel to the interview, whether by road, rail or foot. Follow our five easy steps to make sure your journey runs as smooth as possible:

1. Plan your route and write it down
2. If you're travelling by public transport, ensure that you have topped up travel cards, booked tickets in advance or collected tickets in advance
3. Google the location – make sure you know where you're heading and try and find out what the outside of the building looks like so you know what you're looking for when you get there
4. Allow extra time! Arriving late is a no-no, set an alarm for the morning and allow an additional 30-45 minutes on top of your travel time for unexpected delays. If you arrive very early, find a nearby café and read through your research notes
5. Save our contact details. We will call you before your interview to make sure you're prepared, but if you get stuck or if you're running late, please let us know

2. Your outfit

Plan your outfit, ask a second opinion and have it laid out ready for the morning. For a professional look, we recommend the following:

- Suits: stick to navy or grey where possible
- Shirts: long sleeve is best
- Blouses: avoid sheer blouses
- Skirts and dresses: stick to knee length or below
- Ties: we always advise wearing a tie, with your top button fastened
- Shoes: smart and professional, stick to black or dark brown
- Bags: make sure your bag is smart and professional, avoid bright colours and backpacks
- Less is more: keep your make-up subtle and facial hair neat and tidy
- Tone it down: extravagant piercings and tattoos should be covered
- Clean and ironed: iron your clothes and hang them up so they stay neat and wrinkle free

3. Your bag

Pack your bag the night before and leave it next to your outfit, you'll be surprised how often people leave it at home! Here's a few things you might need:

- Documents: do you need to take any documents to the interview? Passport or national insurance card – check!
- Notes/notepad: if you need to do any additional preparation on the interview day, you can take the notes you have prepared but remember to keep this in your bag during the interview.
- Charger: if you have one, take a portable phone charger for the journey in case you need a helping hand from Google maps or you need to give us a call
- Chewing gum: gum is always handy, but remember to throw it in the bin before you get to the building!
- Hair brush/hair tie: avoid the 'windswept and interesting' look and have a brush to hand
- Umbrella: English weather is unpredictable, don't get caught out

Stage 3: Prepare

Every interview is different, but if you prepare strong answers to a variety of questions you already have a head start. Here's a list of frequently asked questions for you to prepare...

Top tip: Prepare your answers using the STAR method: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Start by explaining the situation, who, what, where and when. Follow with an explanation of the task you were asked to carry out, explain the actions you took and finish with the result and the objectives achieved.

About you

The employer will be curious about you as a person - how you see yourself, how others see you, what you like and what you dislike. This can highlight whether your personality is a good fit for the business and the team.

Example questions	How to answer
Tell me about yourself...	By asking personality questions, the employer wants to know how well you know yourself - how 'self-aware' you are. Having self-awareness is a good quality, as it suggests you can look at yourself critically, you know what you're good at and where you could improve. For example:
What are your hobbies?	"In my personal life, I'm always the organised one. My friends always look to me for ideas and plans." When it comes to your interests, try to choose a wide range to show you're well balanced. If possible, relate your interests to skills that are relevant to the position you're interviewing for. For example: "I love expressing myself through creative writing, I write a movie review blog" Try not to mention interests that are too obscure or extreme, employers want to gain an insight to who you are outside work, but remember you are there for a job interview and not to make a friend.

Work experience

What tasks have you completed before that demonstrate the skills listed in the job description?

Example questions	How to answer
Do you have any previous experience?	The employer may ask you about your previous work experience to gain an understanding of what kind of employee you are, and whether you have any experience that might be relevant to the position.
Where have you worked previously?	When you talk about your previous work experience, always focus on positives. There are a few things that you should avoid saying in your interview to not come across negative. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "I hated my previous workplace."• "I really didn't like my old manager." If you're unsure what to say here, try jotting down your previous tasks and responsibilities. These can often sound more impressive than you think.

Ambitions and motivations

This is a great opportunity to show how passionate and enthusiastic you are about the position and the company. Employers are always impressed by candidates who display ambition and drive not only for the job role, but for their future and what they can bring to the organisation.

Example questions	How to answer
<p>What are your goals?</p> <p>Where do you see yourself in five year's time?</p> <p>What are your aspirations for the future?</p>	<p>Showing genuine enthusiasm for the role can impact the employer's decision. Always display interest in the role and the company, not only when these questions are asked, but throughout your interview. If you're asked about your future aspirations, talk about your short-term and long-term goals and how you plan to progress in your career. For example:</p> <p>"My immediate aim is to gain an accredited qualification in business administration. As I continue to develop my skills and knowledge in this field and gain the necessary experience, I aim to progress into more senior positions in which I can teach and manage other people."</p> <p>When asked about your ambition as an individual, avoid giving indecisive answers. For example:</p> <p>"I'm not sure. I'll see how it goes."</p> <p>You should also avoid sounding over-ambitious to an extent which is unrealistic. For example:</p> <p>"I want to become the managing director in three years."</p>

Example questions	How to answer
<p>What motivates you?</p> <p>What encourages you to do well?</p>	<p>By finding out what motivates you, the interviewer can find out which environment you'll be best suited to. Try to think of examples when a task excited you. Here are some examples of good answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I like problem solving and enjoy having to think creatively to come up with a solution." "Responsibility motivates me, knowing that I am entrusted to take charge of and complete a task." "I am motivated by deadlines, setting and reaching them gives me a sense of accomplishment." <p>Always provide an answer relevant to the position you're applying for. For example, someone applying for a sales position might say they are motivated by money, whereas someone applying for a customer service position would say customer satisfaction motivates them.</p>

Strengths and weaknesses

Understanding and acknowledging your strengths and weaknesses is crucial for a successful interview. This will highlight to the employer whether you're capable of doing the job and you are confident of your own ability, so you must always remember to make sure what you say is impressive and relevant to the role you're being interviewed for.

Example questions	How to answer
<p>What are your strengths?</p> <p>What would you say you are good at?</p> <p>What skills do you possess that are suitable for this job?</p>	<p>Remember your preparation, try and mention the skills and traits you have that are relevant to the job description. Some typical answers may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication: "I am able to communicate clearly and concisely." Teamwork: "I work well with other people to achieve our goals." IT skills: "I am good at using computers and computer software." Enthusiastic: "I'm interested and eager to progress in everything I do." Quick learner: "I can take on new tasks and understand things quickly." Determined: "I am always focused on achieving my goals." Self-motivated: "I don't need to be pushed by others to get things done." Independent: "I work well by myself and know how to take initiative" Organised: "I can prioritise well and work efficiently and productively."

Example questions	How to answer
<p>What are your weaknesses?</p> <p>Where do you think you could improve?</p>	<p>When it comes to weaknesses, always answer with your "best weakness" and provide them with what we call a "strength in disguise". Here are some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too critical: "I can sometimes be too critical of myself." Too enthusiastic: "Sometimes I can be too enthusiastic when working on new projects. But I've learned to adjust to everyone else's pace, and not charge ahead." <p>These weaknesses provide a positive twist. Do not to state a weakness that is too damaging. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I am very disorganised." "I struggle with punctuality." "I get distracted easily."

The company

Here's where your research will make a difference. The employer wants to know your knowledge about the company, its history, its values and its industry. Time to impress!

Example questions	How to answer
Why do you want to work here? What do you know about our company? What can you do for us that someone else can't?	<p>The interviewer wants to know you've done your homework and that you know about the company and the industry it's in. They want to know you've chosen to work with them for a good reason. Show your knowledge of the company by having some facts and figures at the ready, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The size of the organisation• What the product or service is• The latest developments in the industry• The history, goals, image and philosophy of the employer <p>While talking about why you want to work for the employer, focus on what you can do for them rather than what they can do for you. Here's an example:</p> <p>"Smith's is a respected firm with a reputation for high quality work, and I'd like to be a part of that success. The quality of my work is important to me, so I feel I'd be at the right place. I've also heard you invest in your staff by training and developing them."</p>

The role

The interviewer wants to know if you fully understand what the job will involve. They want to know why you think you would be good at the role and how you would approach it if they offered you the position. To answer this question well, make sure you read the job description thoroughly and research how the organisation operates.

Example questions	How to answer
What will the main tasks and responsibilities be in this job?	<p>The interviewer wants to know how well you understand what the role involves. Here is an example of a good answer from someone interviewing for a sales position:</p> <p>"The main task is to support the sales staff in their day-to-day roles. It would be my responsibility to help them complete the necessary forms and solve issues, allowing them to meet and exceed targets."</p>

Unusual questions

Employers often ask unusual questions to see if you can think on the spot and provide a sensible answer.

Example questions	How to answer
If you were a biscuit, what type of biscuit would you be?	<p>Unusual questions are difficult to prepare for, so the interviewer wants to see if you can think on your feet. Take your time with this question, and think of something that reflects you, but also has positives you could apply to the world of work.</p>

Stage 4: On the day

You've completed your research, you're fully prepared, smartly dressed and your bag is packed. It's time to make a good impression...

Top tip: Relax! Believe in yourself and your own ability.

- 1. Check your route:** wake up with plenty of time to spare so you're not rushing around. Check your journey plan and make sure there are no delays. Leave the house with at least 30 minutes to spare in case of unexpected delays
- 2. First impressions count:** if you're travelling with a guardian or friend, kindly ask them to wait outside the building. You can't take your friend to work and employers want to know you're confident
- 3. No distractions:** as you approach the building, turn your phone off and put it in your bag until after the interview. Do not set your phone to silent as this often activates a 'vibrate' setting which can cause unwanted interruptions
- 4. Greetings:** every person you encounter may have an impact on the decision to hire you, greet the receptionist politely and explain who you are there to see. Don't forget your manners, please and thank you can make a big difference to your first impression
- 5. Body language:** no chewing gum, stand up straight and smile!
- 6. Coats:** take your jacket off when you sit down and hang it neatly on the chair behind you
- 7. No notes!** Put your research away, the interviewer doesn't want you to read from a piece of paper looking down at your lap or the desk
- 8. Communication:** the interviewer is not a friend, avoid colloquial language. 'Like' 'Things like that' and 'Yeah'... avoid at all costs
- 9. Think!** If you're unsure of an answer, pause and think for a moment before answering
- 10. Confidence:** remember your strengths and have faith in your ability!

Stage 5: After the interview

At the end of the interview, most employers will ask you if you have any questions. It is a good idea to prepare at least two questions. Here's a few examples of the type of questions you could ask:

Top tip: Never ask questions related to the role such as the wage, holiday or sick pay. These questions are best to save for us, stick to questions that show your interest in the company and the position.

- What are the businesses plans for the next three years?
- Do you promote internally?
- Why did you decide to work in this industry?
- Who do you consider your top competitor, and why?
- What are the biggest opportunities facing the company/department right now?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the company/department right now?

Always thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you and shake their hand before you leave.

Remember: We want you to find a role that you will be happy in, if you change your mind or if you can't make the interview, let us know! Be honest with us, not showing up to an interview creates the impression that you're disorganised and uninterested and will damage your chances of finding a position that will help you achieve your goals.

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