

Getting ready for an interview

It is quite natural to feel nervous about going for an interview. Doing some preparation before the event will help steady your nerves and give you a confidence boost.

First of all – you’ve been selected from dozens of applicants. Your CV, application form or telephone call has done the trick. The employer already thinks you’ve something to offer and wants to know more. So – well done!

What to expect

Interviews can take various forms. Hopefully the letter of invitation will tell you everything you need to know. Read this carefully as knowing the date, time and place may not be enough.

- * You might need to confirm your attendance at an interview in advance.
- * Be very well prepared for all the usual, tough questions – see next page.
- * You may be asked to make a presentation. Make sure you stick to the subject and to the time allocated. If you create a Powerpoint presentation, keep the number of slides to a minimum.
- * You may be interviewed by more than one person – a panel. If you have prepared properly it shouldn’t make any difference that there are a number of people asking the questions.
- * There may be a test or a number of tests to take. You will usually be warned in advance so get some practice in if possible. See *Selection tests* and *Really useful websites*.
- * Some employers like to use group activities or role-play to see how you operate and interact with others. This is often used to assess team working or leadership skills.
- * You might be taken around to look at the organisation and meet various people. Give a good impression and ask some questions – it might all be part of the selection process!



Think about:

Be prepared – you may be interviewed by more than one person.

Ask questions – show you are really interested.

If you create a Powerpoint presentation, keep the number of slides to a minimum.

Tackling the tough interview questions

Here's a list of questions that employers often ask and what they're really looking for.

Practice your answers before the interview. Keep them short and to the point – don't ramble on.

“Tell me about yourself”

- * The employer is looking for a quick overview of what you can bring to the job. Prepare in advance the five key things you want the employer to remember after the interview has finished. Talk about relevant past experiences, your strengths and abilities and why you are good for the job and the company.

“Why do you want this job?”

- * This is about your motivation and commitment. Base your answer around what the job is about. State how the employer will benefit from having you do the job as well as how you will benefit from working for the company.



“What do you do in your spare time?”

- * This is asked for two main reasons. First, to show whether you have a rounded personality; you do things with your life outside of work – you are generally motivated. Also it gives the employer an idea of whether your outside interests will interfere with you doing your job. If you are a club DJ – are you going to be bright and alert at 9am? Go

through your interests quickly and highlight any relevance to the job and the skills you have developed through them.

“What are your main strengths and weaknesses?”

- * This focuses on your self-awareness. Employers want people who know what they are good at and where they need to improve. Link your strengths to

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State how the employer will benefit from having you do the job – as well as how you will benefit from working for the company.

Turn weaknesses into strengths: *“My Spanish speaking skills aren't as good as I'd like – but I'm hoping my evening classes will help me improve”*

the job – show how you'll be a positive influence. Everyone has weaknesses – so don't try to make out you're perfect. Carefully choose 'positive weaknesses' and turn them into strengths: *"I always want to get things just right – but that's good for quality."*

"What have you gained from your previous work experiences?"

- * This is about your ability to learn and develop. Think about all your previous jobs (part-time, holiday, Saturday, work experience). Did you have any responsibilities – however small? Were you always on time for your job? Did you work well as part of a team or were you good working on your own? Pull out all the positives and show how these will benefit this employer.

"When have you had to"

- * Employers like people to be able to demonstrate they have particular skills with real life examples. Again, carefully consider the job description. List the key skills

needed and prepare examples of situations or achievements that show you have each skill. It is okay to draw examples from part-time jobs, holiday jobs, work experience, school projects, interests and hobbies.

"What would you do in situation?"

- * Questions about 'situations' are used to find out about your style and approach. Prepare by listing all the roles you'll be likely to do in your new job. Think about what could possibly go wrong and decide how you would deal with it.

"Do you have any criminal convictions?"

- * If you do, and you still need to declare it, you will need to present yourself in a positive manner. Give a clear, straightforward account of the offence. Talk about:
 - * why you no longer think the conviction is relevant
 - * your achievements since the conviction
 - * skills gained whilst in custody

or on community service

- * your changes in attitude.

Make positive statements about what you can do. The website www.youthinformation.com has some useful guidance – go to Justice and Equality>Crime>Criminal Records.

"Why should we employ you?"

- * The employer wants to make sure you will add value to the company and not simply take the salary. State what skills you can offer and back up everything you claim with short examples.

"Do you have any questions?"

- * You are very likely to be asked this one. Prepare a few in advance and don't be afraid to write them down and take them into the interview with you. It's always good to ask about staff development and training opportunities. You could also ask about how the company sees its future – expansion, new product lines.

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Ask about how the company sees its future – expansion, new product lines.