



Succeeding at job interviews

Use this workbook to help you develop confidence around answering questions at a job interview.

So, you've been offered an interview or want to practise your interview skills. It's never too early to start preparing as an interview could happen at any time.

A job interview is used to:

- test the claims you made in your résumé about your skills, experience, qualifications and knowledge
- assess your interpersonal skills such as how well you express yourself and how you will fit in with other employees
- uncover why you want to do the job and assess how keen you are to take on the opportunity

Exercise 1 – Know your strengths

Review your job application and pick out the best examples of your skills (job specific and employability skills), work experience (paid and unpaid), qualifications/knowledge and personal attributes relevant to the job that you should talk to the employer about.

If you don't have an interview lined up, think about what job you would like and which business it would be with and work through the exercises with that job and employer in mind.

Skills:

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Work experience:

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Qualifications/knowledge:

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Personal attributes:

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Exercise 2 – Research the employer

Reading up on the employer is a must before a job interview. Perhaps you know someone already employed at the business. Use the job ad, the internet, your personal knowledge as a customer or a possible personal connection to an employee to answer the questions below.

What does the business do?

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Other than being profitable, what do you see as the business's main priorities?

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Where is it located? If in multiple locations, how many sites does the business have?

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Can you describe the business's working style? Include extra information such as whether staff wear a uniform, perform shift work, interact with the public and so on.

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What are the business's values and what does it pride itself on?

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How does the business interact with the community? This could include selling to the public but also sponsoring a community event or a major charity.

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How do you see yourself fitting into this workplace? What would you like about it?

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Exercise 3 – Interview warm up

Thinking about how you would answer some typical interview questions will help you enormously. The more prep you do now, the better you will be able to think on your feet on interview day. Try this warm up.

A tough question that sounds easy – Tell me about yourself?

To break the ice many employers will ask this question at the start of the interview.

The best approach is to develop a short script right now that you can adapt and tweak for each situation so you are succinct and targeted on the big day. Your script should include some personal information mixed with relevant work-related information aligned to the type of job you are being interviewed for.

As an example, imagine going for a role in a popular family restaurant. You could open with the fact you were born into a large extended family (if you were) and then talk about how you thrive in busy environments dealing with people or that you like to stay fit and healthy so you have lots of energy. Relate your answer to what attracted you to the role if you can.

From the job ad identify the key qualities the employer is seeking. Now write out your script: Tell me about yourself?

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Exercise 4 – Why should I hire you?

Develop another script for this common interview question. Your script should explain why your skills, experience, training and personal attributes fit the role. Try to keep your script to four sentences.

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Exercise 5 – Think up answers to other common interview questions

Using the same job ad, think through your approach to answering the other common interview questions listed below. You don't need to write out a script but do jot down a few points about the main things you would cover in answering each question.

Why do you want to work here? Put yourself in the employer's shoes and provide answers drawing on your research about the employer and the job tasks.

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What are your greatest strengths? Choose strengths that relate to the tasks involved in the job role.

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What are your greatest weaknesses? Try using another word such as, "my main challenge is...".

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Why did you leave your last job? Be as honest as you can without saying anything negative about your former employer. Was the role made redundant? Did the work site relocate far from where you live? Did the skills needed to do the job change to skills you were not familiar with? Did you want a new challenge?

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You have not worked in a while, what have you been doing? Have you been caring for a family member? Studying? Doing work experience or volunteering? Working on your personal development such as better health and fitness?

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Exercise 6 – Time to rehearse out loud

Pick three of the questions from the exercises above. Working with a rehearsal partner (friend, family member, fellow job seeker), practise answering those questions but in interview mode. Ask your rehearsal partner for feedback about:

- the quality of your answer in the context of the type of job you want
- the speed of your speech and volume of your voice (were you too soft, too loud or were you speaking too quickly?)
- how clear and concise you were
- your eye contact – did you look at your rehearsal partner while speaking?
- your body language – are you using your hands or sitting rigidly?
- your facial expressions – did you smile or frown?

If your rehearsal partner is also looking for a job, swap roles. You might learn some tips from what they say or the way they speak.

Exercise 7 – Identify and remove barriers to success

Identify any potential barriers to succeeding at a job interview and the action you will take to remove each barrier.

Examples that you can use and add to include:

Barrier: You like to ‘wing it’ when tackling most things in life but with the result that you often get tongue-tied at meetings including job interviews.

Action: Spend a few hours studying your own résumé and the employer’s website and practise answers to common interview questions.

Barrier: You often forget to turn your mobile phone off.

Action: Set an alarm or alert to remind you to switch your phone to silent before you reach the job interview. Change your ring tone (if it is inappropriate).

Barrier: Being late.

Action: Set an alarm, build in extra time, plot your journey ahead of time including calculating the time it will take you to get there.



What are your barriers and what will you do to remove them?

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Exercise 8 – Preparing for behavioural interview questions

Some employers believe the best way to assess what you will do if you get the job is to ask you to talk about how you have performed in past job roles. To help you share stories of how you have handled tasks in the past, employers will ask “behavioural” interview questions. Questions might start like this:

- Tell me about how you mastered a skill you didn’t think possible?
- Share an experience where you had to complete a task to a high quality but in a short space of time?
- Describe a situation where you had to handle a difficult task and what you did to get the job done?

Think about the following when preparing your answer:

- Where were you?
- What were you doing/trying to achieve?
- How did you do it?
- What were the outcomes?

An example could be, “Tell me about a time when you worked in a team to solve an unexpected problem?”

The answer could be something like – when working in a shop that was flooded when a pipe burst, you used clear communication to direct customers to safety and worked with colleagues to save stock, phone the relevant authorities and utilities plus the shop owner. You would describe your specific actions and the outcome – e.g. that no customer was hurt or any stock lost.

Now you try: Think about a time when you used your initiative to improve something in the workplace (or in a non-work environment if you haven’t worked before)?

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Exercise 9 – Review your job interview readiness

How prepared are you? Rank yourself on these key interview skills to identify areas you would like to work on.

Job interview skill	Novice	Somewhat Confident	Strong
Know yourself			
Sound knowledge of your skills, experience, qualifications and personal attributes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job fit			
You understand how your skills, experience, qualifications and personal attributes relate to the role	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well informed			
You carry out thorough background research on the employer and industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal presentation			
Your clothes fit the job role and business, no stains or buttons missing, modest jewellery and cologne/perfume	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well organised			
You plot your journey to the interview location including estimated time and mode of transport to take. You always know the name of the interviewer and relevant contact details	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punctual			
You usually arrive early (but no more than 10 minutes early)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Courtesy			
You are polite and courteous to each person you meet no matter what their role. You remember to thank the interviewer/s for his/her time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eye contact			
You maintain good eye contact with the interviewer/s	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Job interview skill	Novice	Somewhat Confident	Strong
<p>Speech</p> <p>You speak clearly and not too quickly using a moderate volume</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Quality of answers</p> <p>You listen closely to the questions and provide concise and clear answers avoiding waffle and yes/no answers</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Body Language</p> <p>You sit up straight, lean slightly forward to show interest when others speak and smile where appropriate</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>You show interest</p> <p>You prepare two or three questions to ask the interviewer at the end of the interview</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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