



# Succeeding at job interviews

Use this workbook to help you build your confidence to impress an employer 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.

Employers use job interviews to:

- check the claims you made in your résumé about your skills, experience, qualifications and knowledge
- test your 'employability' skills such as how well you express yourself and how you will fit in with other employees
- understand 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 relevant:

- skills (both technical and 'employability' - also called 'workplace' or 'people' skills)
- work experience (paid and unpaid)
- qualifications/knowledge and
- personal attributes.

If you don't have an interview lined up, think about a job you would like with a business you would like to work for. Complete these exercises with that job and employer in mind.

Skills:

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Work experience:

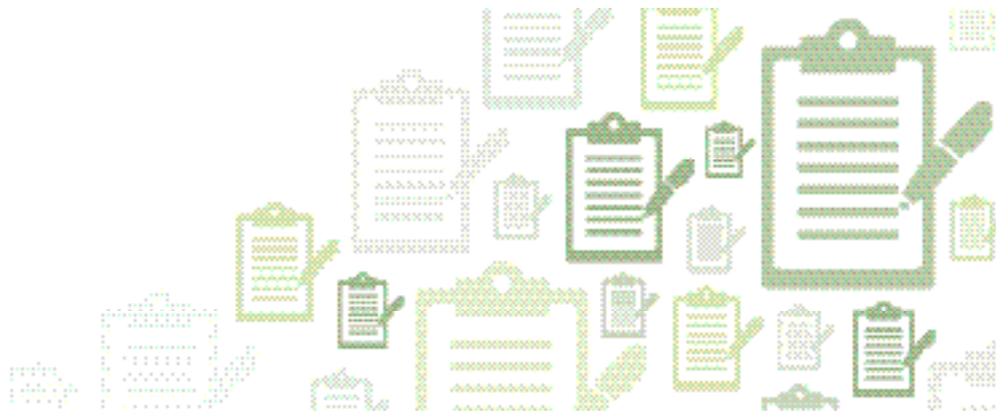
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Qualifications/Knowledge:

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Personal attributes:

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## Exercise 2 – Research the employer

It's really important to do some research on the employer before a job interview. If you know someone who is already employed at the business, ask them for their insights and tips. You can also review the job ad, look the business up online and on social media, and use your personal knowledge as a customer.

Using your knowledge of the business, answer these questions:

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

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Can you describe the business's working style? Do they have a formal workplace or do they seem more relaxed? Also think about things like 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 working there?

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## Exercise 3 – Interview warm up

It can really help to think about how you might answer some typical interview questions. The more prep you do now, the more confident you will feel 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.

It will help to develop a short script right now that you can adapt and tweak for each situation. This will make sure your answers are succinct and appropriate on the big day.

Your script should include some personal information mixed with relevant work-related information relevant 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 make you a good fit for 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 about how you could answer the other common interview questions listed below. You don't have 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? Hint: Use the research you did about the employer and the job tasks to build your response.

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What are your greatest strengths? Choose skills, abilities and/or aptitudes 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...”. And then explain how you are trying to improve this skill/behaviour.

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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? Was the work site too far from where you live? 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 questions from the exercises above. Working with a partner (friend, family member, fellow job seeker), practise answering those questions in interview mode. Ask your partner for feedback about:

- whether your answers were relevant to 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?)
- whether your answers were short and interesting to listen to, or did you talk for too long?
- your eye contact – did you look at your partner while speaking?
- your body language – are you using your hands or sitting rigidly? Did you look confident and relaxed?
- your facial expressions - did you smile or frown?

If your 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 what you could do to remove each barrier.

Examples include:

**Barrier:** You like to ‘wing it’ when tackling most things in life but this means 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’s not work appropriate).

**Barrier:** Being late.

**Action:** Set an alarm, build in extra time, plot your journey ahead of time including working out how long 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 work out whether you are a good fit for 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. What did you do 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
<p>Knowing myself</p> <p>I have a good understanding of my skills, experience, qualifications and personal attributes</p>			
<p>Job fit</p> <p>I understand how my skills, experience, qualifications and personal attributes relate to the role</p>			
<p>Well informed</p> <p>I can do background research on the employer and industry</p>			
<p>Personal presentation</p> <p>My clothes fit the job role and business, no stains or buttons missing, modest jewellery and cologne/perfume</p>			
<p>Well organised</p> <p>I can plan my journey to the interview location including estimated travel time and mode of transport. I always know the name of the interviewer and relevant contact details</p>			
<p>Punctual</p> <p>I usually arrive early (but no more than 10 minutes early)</p>			
<p>Courtesy</p> <p>I am polite and courteous to each person I meet no matter what their role. I remember to thank the interviewer/s for his/her time</p>			
<p>Eye contact</p> <p>I maintain good eye contact with the interviewer/s</p>			



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

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