



Interview Skills for Candidates

Application forms

The Application Form provides:

- ◆ prospective employers with facts they need to know about you in a brief easy to read format;
- ◆ the impression you are well organised and serious enough about getting the job, to have put some thought into it; and
- ◆ an opportunity to sell yourself.

When asked for qualifications or employment history, start with the most recent first unless otherwise stated. Do not try to cram this information in if the space is not enough, attach additional information on separate sheets, but remember not to write your name on these sheets as your name will be kept confidential from the selection process.

Depending on what job you are applying for, you may have several qualifications that are not relevant to the post. Bear in mind when writing them down as a Grade B in Biology at GCSE may not be so relevant when you have a Degree in Accountancy going for a job in Finance!

The additional information should be clear and concise but truthful and be no longer than two sheets. It should be typed or neatly handwritten and error free.

Employers are interested in achievements – things that make you stand out from the crowd, such as:

- ◆ problem solving skills;
- ◆ team working;
- ◆ time savings / money saving;
- ◆ contribution to service improvement; and
- ◆ understanding business goals.

Preparing for the interview

- ◆ Give yourself plenty of time to get ready.
- ◆ Find out all you can about the job.
- ◆ Check the time, date and place of the interview.
- ◆ Find out how to get there, check parking, public transport and so on.
- ◆ Practise answering questions – use a friend, partner, tape recorder or similar.
- ◆ Think of answering questions you might be asked (....and the answers!).
- ◆ Dress smartly but comfortably.
- ◆ The company phone number in case things go wrong and you are delayed.
- ◆ Visualise yourself in the interview, performing well.

At the interview

Do

- ◆ Smile.
- ◆ Speak clearly and confidently.
- ◆ Look at the interviewer.
- ◆ Be polite and interested.
- ◆ Be positive about yourself and the job.
- ◆ Ask questions.
- ◆ Ask about job conditions, training opportunities, prospects – think of what you want to know.
- ◆ Answer questions fully, not just yes or no.

Don't

- ◆ Criticise previous employers.
- ◆ Make negative comments.
- ◆ Be late.
- ◆ Be afraid to ask for time to think or for more explanation of a question.
- ◆ Lie.
- ◆ Make jokes, flippant remarks or appear not to be taking the interview seriously.
- ◆ Overdo perfume or aftershave.
- ◆ Overdress.
- ◆ Put on an act – it will show.

Positive action words to use

Consider the following words when preparing your CV or completing your application and apply them to the experience or qualifications you have. They will help you to make a positive, favourable impression on the potential employer, both in your application and also at interview.

competent	profitable	managed
successful	positive	directed
capable	complete	supervised
resourceful	investigated	initiated
qualified	designed	created
versatile	developed	organised
efficient	built	worked
knowledgeable	established	led
consistent	communicated	co-ordinated
experienced	processed	analysed
productive	participated	improved
effective	sold	repaired
stable	engineered	employed
well educated	implemented	expanded
wide background	controlled	achieved
equipped	guided	specialised
accomplished	administered	

Positive personal qualities

Assume at the interview you will have similar skills to everybody else being interviewed. Using these words will help to set you apart from the other candidates.

Adaptability
Creativity
Thriving under pressure
Fitting into teams
Memory
Logic
Analytical skills
Problem solving skills

Present a positive image

Do

- ◆ Relax while you are waiting for the interview.
- ◆ Think positively, picture yourself enjoying the interview and answering the questions brilliantly.
- ◆ Walk into the room confidently; move forward to shake hands if you feel confident enough to do so.
- ◆ Establish eye contact with the interviewer as soon as you enter the room and maintain it.
- ◆ Sit back in the chair in a relaxed but upright position.
- ◆ Listen attentively to questions and ask to have them repeated if you don't at first understand.
- ◆ Answer as fully as you can without wandering off the point and provide examples of your achievements where appropriate.
- ◆ If there is a panel, look at the person asking the questions.
- ◆ Think about what **you particularly** have to offer and highlight this in your replies, it is your achievements they want to hear about, not what the team did.
- ◆ Emphasise your strengths but always tell the truth.
- ◆ Speak clearly and confidently.

Don't

- ◆ Sit until invited by the interviewer to do so.
- ◆ Slouch in the chair, or sit on the edge of it.
- ◆ Fidget or display other signs of nervousness.
- ◆ Joke, swear or be over familiar with the interviewer.
- ◆ Draw attention to your weaknesses.

Selling yourself

Remember during discussions (and in your letter / application form) employers look again at people who:

- ◆ work on their own initiative;
- ◆ work well as part of a team;
- ◆ have an understanding of the section they are going into, for example, housing; and
- ◆ have a real enthusiasm for getting the job.

Employers also like to hear instances of how you can:

- ◆ cut costs;
- ◆ get it done more quickly;
- ◆ avoid potential problems;
- ◆ improve appearance;
- ◆ organise it;
- ◆ increase productivity;
- ◆ make the workflow more efficient;
- ◆ use old things in a new way;
- ◆ provide more information;
- ◆ cut down time;
- ◆ reduce the risks;
- ◆ meet deadlines easily;
- ◆ get government support;
- ◆ develop employee performance;
- ◆ turn round a bad situation;
- ◆ introduce new systems; and
- ◆ improve teamwork and relationships.

Remember the interviewer is hoping that you will have the experience and qualities which are sought. Most importantly, tell the panel what **you** as an individual have done successfully, not what you did as part of a team – your contribution could have been tiny. Talk about **I**, not **we**.

Questions

You should prepare for questions. Practise questions and answers with a partner or friend to help increase your self-confidence.

Some commonly encountered include:

- ◆ where does your main experience lie?
- ◆ where are or were the main responsibilities of your current or last job?
- ◆ what were the main problem areas in the job?
- ◆ what do you do particularly well?
- ◆ what are your career objectives?
- ◆ why did you leave your last job?
- ◆ why do you want to join this section / department / organisation?
- ◆ what appeals to you about the job for which you are applying?
- ◆ are there any people you find difficulty working with?
- ◆ what do you want to be doing in five years time?
- ◆ what are your strong points?
- ◆ what are your weak points?
- ◆ why should we employ you?

Practise answers that will be useful in any of the above questions. The phrases you memorise will come back to you in the interview, helping your confidence.

Don't be surprised by the awkward or unusual question. If one arises stay calm, these questions may be aimed to test you under pressure. Don't be afraid to ask for more time to think or for the question to be clarified.

You will also be asked questions about your knowledge of the subject, so make sure you do plenty of background reading. Hypothetical questions will also be often asked to check out how you would react in a given situation.

Assertiveness - non-verbal signs

Non assertive	Assertive	Aggressive
<p>Posture</p> <p>Slumped Shoulders forward Shifting often Chin down Sitting – legs entwined</p>	<p>Erect but relaxed Shoulders forward Few shifts, comfortable Head straight or slight tilt Sitting – legs together or crossed</p>	<p>Erect, tense, rigid shoulders back Jerky shifts or firm in place Chin up or thrust forward Sitting – heels on desk, hands behind head or tensely leaning forward.</p>
<p>Gestures</p> <p>Fluttering hands Twisted motions Shoulder shrugs Frequent head nodding</p>	<p>Casual hand movements. Relaxed hands Hands open, palms out Occasional head nodding</p>	<p>Chopping or jabbing with hands Clenched hands or pointing Sweeping arms Sharp, quick nods</p>
<p>Facial expressions</p> <p>Lifted eyebrows, pleading look, wide eyed, rapid blinking Nervous or guilty smile Chewing lower lip Show anger with averted eyes, blushing guilty look</p>	<p>Relaxed, thoughtful, caring or concerned look, few blinks Genuine smile Relaxed mouth Shows anger with flashing eyes, serious look, slight flush of colour</p>	<p>Furrowed brow, tight jaw Tense look, unblinking glare Patronising or sarcastic smile Tight lips Shows anger with disapproving scowl, very firm mouth or bared teeth, extreme flush</p>
<p>Voice</p> <p>Quiet, soft, higher pitch errs, ahs, hesitations Stopping in ‘midstream’ Nervous laughter Statements sound like questions with voice tone rising at the end</p>	<p>Resonant, firm, pleasant, smooth, even flowing, comfortable delivery Laughter only with humour Voice tones stay even when making statement</p>	<p>Steely quiet or loud, harsh ‘biting off’ words Precise measured delivery Sarcastic laughter Statements sound like orders or pronouncements</p>