



WORKING
WARDROBE

PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

Bolton
at Home

First of all congratulations! Your CV or application was good and they want to see who you are and what you can do for them.

Interviews can be a daunting experience but with preparation and self-awareness it really doesn't have to be.

Take some time to think about what you can offer.

This is a two part process:

1. Carry out your own skills audit.
2. Match this to what they need in the role.

These should include:

- Knowledge based skills.
- Transferable skills.
- Personal traits.

Draw on your entire life experience. **DON'T be modest!** Prove it and give tangible examples such as award nominations, qualifications and training. Build a case of evidence for each skill you want to present.

On the day of the interview

- Take copies of your cv.
- Take your reference details and copy of the job spec.
- The name and numbers of the interviewers in case you run late.

First impressions

- The interview starts as soon as you walk through the door.

- Be nice and pleasant to everyone you meet, smile and maintain eye contact.
- If you are feeling nervous, sit up straight, don't slouch, and take some deep breaths concentrating on each breath.
- Always remember we can control how we feel. Don't let the nerves control you. You are in charge! Never underestimate the saying "mind over matter". If you tell yourself you are something often enough, your brain will start to believe it. Fake confidence and you'll be confident!
- Heard of power posing? It's been scientifically proven this simple exercise changes the bio chemistry in your body and mind. The stress hormone - cortisol, is reduced by 25% and testosterone increased by 20%. Obviously don't do this in the reception area! Go to the toilet and take a few minutes to stretch out. Stand tall, shoulders back and make yourself taller. Breathe deeply. Get yourself in the best emotional state and mind set.
- When you enter the interview room, shake your interviewers hand, smile and be prepared for small talk at the beginning.
- If the interviewer asks "how was your journey?" remember - your interview has started! So smile, give a short answer and express gratitude. Start off in a positive manner.

Questions they may ask

Tell me about yourself

Tactic: You need to have thoroughly prepared for this answer and rehearse it.

- Make the content a biographical summary. 90% professional, 10% personal.
- Start with your current job, your role, your achievements and how it feeds into the job you're applying for. If you're not in work- start with most recent role.
- You need an ending to this to show you've stopped and hand it back to the interviewer. This could be ending with a reference to your social life or hobbies.
- This opener will set the tone for the remainder of the interview. Be upbeat and talk with passion.

“Why are you applying for this job?” really means: “What can you do, that we need you to do?”.

Tactic: Reflect the job spec in every answer. Talk about their needs.

“I'm applying because my skills, experience and motivation are the best fit for the job”.

Ask yourself – what do you really want from the job? What can you offer?

What are your strengths?

Tactic: Answer with the job description in mind.

Avoid adjectives such as hardworking, reliable, honest etc. Anyone can say these. Give examples and facts.

Read carefully through the job description and learn as much as you can about what the company's up to and what the culture is like. Read various pages on the organisation's website, take a look at their social media accounts, and catch up on

some recent announcements and news coverage if applicable. Use what you've learned, to identify which of your strengths is most relevant and how it will allow you to contribute.

Use the information you have used from your skills audit to match to the job description and person spec.

What are your weaknesses?

Tactic: The interviewer is seeking affirmation of your predicted weaknesses.

- What are you lacking in terms of experience for the job description?
- Show that you're working on your weaknesses.
- Don't talk about character traits. Stick to the facts around experience.
- If you've been out of work for a while, talk about the positive things you've done in that time. Training and self-development. You need to get across that you don't need extensive training. State that you excelled in your previous roles.
- Question them- 'Was there anything on my application/cv that concerned you?'

Tell me about when you worked on a team?

Tactic: Give a real example of recent team play.

Make your answer truthful, specific, recent, focused on your action that led to a positive outcome.

Your answer should show what makes a good team player: Communication, adaptability, empathy, appreciation of others and humour.

Talk me through the gaps in your cv?

Tactic: In an ideal world you'd have used this time productively. Be prepared to explain it.

Reasons could be:

- Raising children.
- Medical issue/accident.
- Caring for poorly family.
- Travelling.

Turn your enthusiasm back to returning to work.

If you've had a medical issue, stress that the problem has been resolved and won't affect future performance.

If you were off for a number of years due to family commitments then turn this to an advantage - transferrable skills such as organisation skills, time management, resilience, conflict resolution!

If you were simply unable to get work, be honest but show you were productive with your time. Training, volunteering, personal growth. We're all human, life's complicated and difficulties can crop up. The interviewer needs to be reassured that you've overcome these difficulties head on.

If you've served time in prison, be aware that the law gives ex-offenders a degree of protection. Tell the truth but talk up your skills, highlight positive changes in mind-set, your personal circumstances or your peer group since being convicted.

What are your hobbies and interests?

Tactic: Share a genuine passion but don't make it sound more important than your work.

This question is asked to see if you'll fit in with the company culture and be pleasant to work with. Often called the airport test - the interviewer asks themselves how they'd feel if they had to pass a few hours with you at an airport whilst waiting for a delayed plane.

Two important things here are:

- Authenticity - never say you love doing something that you don't, and rarely ever do. Only talk about a subject you can talk about in detail and with enthusiasm.
- Show that you're a rounded and engaging person with interests outside work and family.

Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult person?

Tactic: Show you can work with anyone. Nobody is perfect, including you! Always have an answer pre-prepared for dealing with a difficult person.

Don't be tempted to say this has never happened!

You could start with "I could pretend I get on with everyone but that would be a lie". This shows you're a straight talker.

If the question doesn't specify boss, colleague or customer, think of someone whose job it is to give you a hard time.

Your answer should cover whether:

- You listened to the other person.
- You could have changed the situation.
- You did anything to change the situation.
- You could have reasonably been expected to put up with it.

Competency based questioning

“Tell me about a time you...”.

If your interviewer is using lots of these types of questions this is known as a competency based interview.

They're looking for you to give detailed examples to the question. Interviewers use this type of questioning to find out if you have the right experience for the job, if you're self-aware, if you understand what they need and if your personality will fit.

Your preparation should look like this:

- Find out what competencies the employer's looking for. Analyse the job description. Look for keywords, bullet points often give a clue. Research online job descriptions. This will give you more insight.
- For each competency, think of an example that shows you possess it. Use a wide variety of examples ranging from your experiences at work but also in your personal life. These should be positive examples that show your successes and how you bring value to an employer.
- Develop a story for each competency using the star technique to structure your answer.

STAR technique:

Situation/Task:

Give a background to the story. What was the situation you were facing? What tasks did you need to undertake to resolve it? Include how difficult the situation was or the constraints on your actions.

Actions:

What action did you take to resolve the situation? Always present yourself as being the driver in this and consider what skills they're looking for and try to illustrate those.

Result:

What was the outcome? Make sure it's a happy ending!

Give more emphasis to action and result, don't dwell and overshare on the first part (the situation).

Top tips

- Listen carefully to the question and make sure you understand which competency you're answering.
- Take a moment to think.
- Pre prepare answers for the top 10 competency questions.
- Don't rehearse to the point it sounds robotic. Get your personality across.

Your questions

Have a few questions prepared to wrap the interview up. This is your chance to show you've done your research on the company and industry.

The types of questions you might ask, fall broadly into five categories.

Questions about the role:

- What are the biggest challenges for this role?
- What sort of training and professional development will be available to me?
- Is there scope for career development?

Questions about the team:

- How large is the team I'll be working with?
- Who will I be reporting to directly?

Questions about the company:

- Are there any plans for growth?
- What are the most important goals the company is currently focused on?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- The company is facing XXX challenge. How are you responding?

Questions about the interviewer:

- What's the best thing about working at your company?
- Why do you like working here?

- Where do you see the company heading over the next years?

Questions about your performance:

These aren't for everyone but if you have the personality and the confidence to respond to criticism go for it!

- Is there anything you feel I didn't answer thoroughly enough?
- Do you have any reservations about my suitability for the role?
- How do I compare to your ideal candidate?
- When will you be making your decision?

Things you should NEVER ask:

- What's the salary?
- How much time off will I get?
- Is there a pension?
- Is there an opportunity for flexible working?

All of these are very important- but you can ask these questions if you get a job offer.

Finally, ask when you'll hear back from them with their decision.

Once you hear back, if you didn't get the job offer ALWAYS ask for interview feedback. You can learn from this experience and improve for the next time!

Online interviews

While the questions and conversations are likely to be the same, there are some differences between interviewing in-person versus through a digital screen.

If you're in the process of getting ready for a job interview online, here are some best practices to get you set up for success.

Test your internet connection

If something does go wrong, try to relax and, if you can, make light of the situation. How you behave under stress is an important signal to your interviewer.

Prepare your interview space

If you're doing the interview from home, choose a quiet, well-lit space with a neutral background. It's important to remember that video interviews give a peek into your personal life, so make sure that your space is clean and free of distractions. If possible, keep pets and family members in another room during the interview. Turn off all your phone and computer notifications. One of the benefits of virtual interviews is that you can have resources around you, so consider

having a few large note cards at hand that highlight why you're the right person for the job.

Dress the part

Just because you're meeting your interviewers virtually, doesn't mean you should take the interview any less seriously. It's important to dress as you would if you were going to the interview in person. Doing this will not only help you feel more confident, but it'll also give a good impression to the person on the other side of the screen.

Note that, what you wear shows up differently on video, so consider avoiding bright-coloured clothing or large pieces of jewellery that can be distracting. And, make sure your bottom half matches your upper half, in case you need to get out of your seat for any reason.





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