

SMART WORKS

believe in the future

Interview Pack

The Smart Works Interview Pack

The Smart Works Interview Pack is designed to help you succeed in your interview.

Job interviews can be difficult and stressful, but if you spend time preparing properly and rehearsing what you are going to say, you will perform much better during the interview and you will have a much higher chance of getting the job.

For an employer, the purpose of an interview is to select the candidate with the best skills and attitude to do the job.

For you, the purpose of the interview is to convince the employer that you have the right skills and attitude to do the job better than all the other candidates. It is your chance to show what you are good at, and what you are capable of.

Remember that the interview is a two way process. It is a chance for the employer to find out about you, but it is also a chance for you to find out about the job and the company, and to decide whether you would be happy working there.

Don't forget that the employer has asked you to attend this interview, so they have already seen something special in you and they want to find out more.

Please read this Interview Pack carefully and use it to prepare for your interview. It will help you to give yourself the best chance of succeeding.

Before the interview

It is very important to prepare properly for your interview. This means doing some work beforehand to find out about the job and the company, how to get there, and how to answer the interview questions. If you do your preparation properly, you will stand a much better chance of getting the job.

What is the job?

- Make sure you understand what the job involves. Read the job description or advert carefully, and try to imagine the kind of work you will be doing.
- Make a list of the different aspects of the job e.g. dealing with customers; processing information etc. Write down the skills you have that apply to each aspect of the job. This will give you confidence in your ability to do the job well.
- Think of all the experience you have of doing similar work in the past – either in a paid job or in your everyday life, and write this down.
- Think about the parts of the job you haven't done before and how you would deal with these new challenges.
- Once you have a clear understanding of what the job involves, think about why you want the job and why you think you would be good at it. Write your answers down.

What do I know about the company?

- Find out as much background information as you can about the company. Make sure you understand what the company's business is, and how your job fits in to the company's business. The company's website is a good place to start.
- What does the website tell you about the company and its business? Who are the company's customers? Who buys its products or services? Is it a British company or an international company? Where else does it have offices apart from London? Is it a fairly new company or a company that has been going for a long time?
- Think of the things that interest you and impress you about this company, and write them down.
- If it is a public sector organisation eg. local authority or NHS, make sure you understand the function of the organisation and why it is important to society.

Where will the interview take place?

- The single most important thing you should do is make sure you get to the interview on time. If you are late for your interview you will have no chance of getting the job.
- Find out exactly where the interview will take place and work out how to get there.
- If possible, do a practice run the day before so you know how long it takes to get there.
- Arrive at the interview at least 15 minutes before the appointed time, so you have time to relax and gather your thoughts.

What should I take with me?

- Take one simple bag – don't carry shopping bags or anything else that is not essential for the interview.
- Take a pen and paper in case you need to write something down.

Before the Interview - Five Top Tips

1. Make sure you understand what the job involves
2. Make a list of all the skills you have that you will use to do the job
3. Find out as much as you can about the company
4. Work out how to get to the interview 15 minutes early
5. Prepare your answers to the interview questions on pages 7 & 8

During the Interview - Five Top Tips

1. Smile
2. Look the interviewer in the eye, greet them with a firm handshake and a confident hello
3. Speak clearly and confidently and take time over your answers
4. Be enthusiastic about the job and the company
5. Be professional but be yourself

During the interview

First impressions

First impressions are very important. If you look smart, clean and confident when you walk in through the door, the employer will sit up and take more notice of you.

Here are a few ways to make a good first impression:

- Avoid eating spicy food, smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol before your interview – you want to smell good as well as look good.
- Avoid wearing heavy perfume.
- Don't wear too much make-up.
- Wear simple jewellery such as stud earrings and a small necklace. Don't wear anything like large dangly earrings or body piercings that draw attention away from what you are saying.
- Follow the dressing tips on page 12.
- Introduce yourself with a firm handshake, keep eye contact and smile.

Dos and don'ts during the interview

Do:

- Look the interviewer in the eye and keep looking at him or her.
- Remain alert and look interested in what the interviewer is saying.
- Switch off your mobile phone.
- Be friendly and smile.
- If you are nervous, hold your hands firmly in your lap.
- Speak clearly and slowly.
- Take time to think about your answers, and use specific examples.
- Be yourself, but stay professional.

Don't:

- Don't be distracted by things going on outside the window.
- Don't look bored.
- Don't chew gum.
- Don't fidget.
- Don't give long, rambling answers.
- Don't swear or use inappropriate language.
- Don't make jokes or try to be too friendly.

Talking about your family

- We all like to talk about our children, but remember that in an interview situation the employer wants to hear about your skills and how you can do the job, not about your family.
- When the employer asks the question: “Tell me about yourself?” make sure to talk about your work experience and skills and not about your children.
- If an employer asks you about your children, keep your answers concise and make it clear that you have good childcare arrangements in place for when you start work.
- Remember that if an employer thinks you may have difficulties with childcare, they are unlikely to offer you the job.

Going back to work after being at home with your children

- If you are trying to get back to work after a long period at home looking after your children, be positive about this time. You don't need to apologise for putting your children first.
- You have developed a lot of skills as a parent, such as time management, budgeting, negotiating skills, setting up appointments (doctor, dentist, school meetings etc.). All of these are useful skills to an employer.
- Make a list of all the things you have done whilst being at home with your children, such as helping with school fairs, school trips and other events, helping with homework and projects, being a class rep, and any studying or voluntary work you have done. All these activities require team-working skills, good people skills, initiative and enthusiasm – exactly what most employers are looking for!
- Make it clear to the employer that you are really excited about going back to work after your career break.
- Most importantly, be positive about your parenting skills and about transferring those skills to the workplace.

Interview questions

Preparation is the key to performing well in your interview. If you have prepared some answers to the standard questions asked in interviews, you will feel more confident and less likely to be caught off guard by the questions.

Below is a selection of questions that your interviewer may ask you.

Tell me about yourself

- This is a chance to break the ice and to say a few things about yourself to impress the employer. Don't give the interviewer your life history.
- Tell the employer what you are doing at the moment, what your last job was, and what your main skills are.
- Talk about any qualifications you have gained or courses you have studied.
- Talk about a special hobby or interest you have, particularly if it is relevant to the job, and any voluntary work you have done.
- If you speak another language, or have any other particular skill, mention this.

Talk me through your CV

- Make sure you have a copy of your CV with you.
- Work backwards through your CV – start with your previous job and go back through the other things you have done since leaving school.
- Focus on things in your CV that are relevant to the job.

How would you describe your personality?

- Think of three or four words to describe yourself e.g. reliable, friendly, positive, outgoing, shy, hard-working, serious, caring, determined, ambitious.
- Use words and descriptions that are relevant to the job .e.g. "I like finding out about things," "I'm a very tidy and organised person," "I enjoy helping other people."

Why do you want this job?

- Talk about the skills you have and how they match up to the job. Refer to previous jobs where you have used the same or similar skills.
- Say what you know about the company and what interests you about working there.
- Be enthusiastic about the role and explain why you think you would be good at it.

What are your long term aims?

- Make sure that your aims are relevant to the job you are applying for.
- Do not be afraid to show ambition.
- Be honest – it is fine to say: "I want a good, steady job where I can be proud of my work and support my family."

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

- Talk confidently about two or three strengths that are relevant to the job e.g. good IT skills; good team player; good with people; attention to detail.
- Give one positive weakness e.g. “I am quite shy,” or, “My IT skills are a bit rusty,” but always say how you plan to overcome your weakness e.g. “I would like to do some training to improve my IT skills.”

Are you a good team player?

- Give one example of when you have had to work as part of a team. This could be in a previous job or working on a college project, or any situation where you worked alongside other people.

What do you enjoy most/least?

- Talk about something you enjoy which is relevant to the job e.g. “I enjoy meeting new people;” “I enjoy taking on a new challenge;” “I enjoy working with numbers.”
- What you enjoy least should be something that you have no power over e.g. cancellations or interruptions. Let your interviewer know that you are able to handle situations which you do not enjoy.

What would you say is your greatest achievement?

- Give one achievement which is relevant to the job you are applying for. It could be an academic qualification or a difficult challenge you dealt with, or a caring responsibility you are proud of.

Why do you want to work for this company?

- Demonstrate your knowledge of the company’s business.
- Talk about something that impressed you from the website e.g. a good training programme, or a particular product or service they provide to customers.
- Talk about opportunities for new learning, new challenges, personal growth and development.
- Do not talk about money.
- Avoid being rude about your previous company or employer.

Why should we hire you?

- Emphasise how your skills and experience are relevant to the job.
- State very clearly that you really want the job and that you would like to work for this particular company. The employer is much more likely to give the job to the candidate who has shown enthusiasm and real commitment to the job.
- Talk about the positive contribution you would make to the company.

Questions you can ask

Towards the end of the interview, the employer will ask if you have any questions. This is your opportunity to find out more about the job and to ensure that you would be happy working in this role.

Below is a list of questions you can ask the interviewer.

- What training would I receive for this role?
- How does the position fit within the team/within the company?
- What opportunities are there to progress in the company?
- When do you want someone in place?
- When will I hear about whether I am successful or not?
- What will be the next stage of the interview process?

At the end of the interview

At the end of the interview, stand up, shake hands with the interviewer, smile and thank them for their time.

Scenario based interview questions

Sometimes employers ask you to give specific examples of the way you have dealt with different situations in the past. For example:

1. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an obstacle or challenge that was preventing you from achieving your objective (the thing you wanted to achieve)
2. Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure or meet tight deadlines
3. Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a dispute between others or there was conflict in your team
4. Tell me about a time when you had to take initiative (think on your feet)
5. Tell me about a time when you had an angry customer to deal with
6. Tell me about a time when you motivated a colleague

Before your interview, think about how you would answer the above questions. If you can't think of an example from your previous employment, think of a situation from your home life e.g. helping to organise a social trip or family event; sorting out a problem with the council; helping your child deal with a difficult situation at school.

Assessment Days

Assessment Days are used by employers to judge your suitability for the job by putting you in different work situations with other candidates. Assessment Days usually last a day or half day and include some or all of the following activities:

- Group exercise
- In-tray exercise
- Presentation
- Role play exercise
- Group debate
- Psychometric testing (tests to measure your mental ability and personality)
- Interview

Research the company in the same way you would for any other interview. Use your knowledge of the company to help you respond to the different exercises.

Understand the job specification so that you know what skills and qualities the assessors are looking for during the assessment.

Try to relax. Don't feel anxious if you don't get a chance to shine in the first hour or so. Assessment Days are designed to measure your abilities in different situations throughout the day/half day, and the people who make a lot of noise at the beginning are not necessarily the ones who make the best impression overall. Candidates who are composed, consistent, and who stay focussed on the tasks are usually the ones who succeed.

Ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand the instructions given. You can also ask questions about the company, but don't ask too many questions or you will start to annoy people.

Be a team player. In group exercises, don't try to take over or dominate the group. Listen to what other candidates have to say and contribute in a calm and friendly way. Employers are looking for people who work well in teams, not people who try to dominate everyone else.

Don't score points. Don't criticise other candidates or try to put someone else down. It's fine to disagree with someone else's idea or opinion, but do so in a positive way and make sure you can back up your own argument.

Lunch is part of the assessment. Remember that coffee and lunch breaks are part of the assessment process. Be aware of your manners, don't swear or talk about inappropriate subjects during breaks. Take the opportunity to ask questions about the company to show you are interested in what they do.

Value the experience. Try to learn as much as you can and think about what you would do differently next time. Even if you don't get the job, taking part in an Assessment Day is very good experience.

Be positive. The most important thing is to be yourself, be confident and remain positive and focused throughout the day.

How to dress for interviews

Wearing the right clothes and accessories for your interview is very important. The employer will make a judgement about you based on the way you look as well as what you say. If you get your clothes right, the employer is more likely to take you seriously and listen to what you have to say.

The basic approach to dressing for interview is to wear something smart and professional that does not draw attention away from what you are saying.

Dos and don'ts of interview dressing

Do:

- Try to look smart and professional
- Wear a suit or jacket with a matching skirt, trousers or dress
- Keep to dark or muted colours – navy, black, grey, with a top or blouse in a brighter colour to match your suit and your skin tone
- Wear clothes that fit you properly and that you feel comfortable in
- Wear simple jewellery such as stud earrings or a small necklace
- Wear smart shoes that you can walk in comfortably
- Make sure your hair is clean and neat
- If you have long hair, try wearing it tied back away from your face

Don't:

- Don't wear too many bright colours
- Don't wear clothes that are too tight or too revealing
- Don't wear loud patterns that distract the eye
- Don't wear a lot of jewellery
- Don't wear body piercings
- Don't wear heels that are too high for you to walk in
- Don't wear too much heavy make-up

And most importantly, smile.

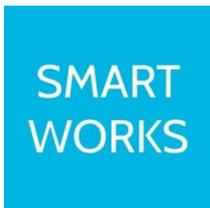
Interview checklist

Before the interview	
Research the company	
Understand the job - read the role/profile/job description	
Prepare yourself - know your application form/CV and how it fits the job	
Prepare some answers both positive and negative	
Prepare some questions to ask the interviewer	
Have an awareness of your body language; watch yourself in the mirror	
Plan your transport and if possible have a trial run	
Know the name of the person you are meeting	
Arrange childcare	
Only take what you need e.g. avoid taking your shopping with you	
Avoid spicy food, cigarettes, alcohol, wearing heavy perfume	
Turn your mobile off before you go into the interview	

During the interview	
Be clear and honest throughout the interview	
Be yourself	
Maintain eye contact and smile	
Do not chew gum or bite your nails	
Know why you want the job	
Be positive and enthusiastic about the job	
If you don't know the answer then say so and/or ask for more time	
Remember they invited you	
Ask questions	

After the interview	
Give yourself a well done	
Call Smart Works to tell them how it went	
Ask for feedback	
Prepare for a second stage if relevant	
Write up notes on how the interview went e.g. what you think went well and what you think could have gone better. This is good for future reference.	

Good luck!



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