

INTERVIEW SKILLS SELF- HELP PACK

This is a self help pack for adults who want to prepare for an interview

Produced by nextstep South West @ Connexions West of England

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SEVEN STEPS TO MANAGING INTERVIEWS

1. Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know what the job is about • Know what you can offer • Know how it meets your needs and theirs
2. Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look well-groomed • Plan your journey to be on time • Act professionally from entering the building
3. Meeting & Greeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be friendly and positive, shake hands and smile • Wait to be seated then relax • Avoid refreshments
4. Handling Nerves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think positive – banish negative thoughts by using calming breathing • If you go blank – ask for time, water or clarification to give you a minute to calm • Remember the interviewer may be nervous too
5. Body Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use positive body language, lean forward, show interest, make eye contact • Be seen to be listening by nodding
6. Answering Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully to the question and ask for clarification if unsure • Be honest & polite • Enjoy the chance to talk about yourself and prepare any questions you would like to ask
7. Saying Goodbye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shake hands on leaving • Leave on a positive note • Don't relax until you leave the building

FIVE SECRETS OF SECURING A JOB OFFER

1. Ability & Suitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the interview, make a list of your useful/transferable skills and match them to the requirements of the job, then think of evidence to illustrate each of your skills. • If you are familiar with the industry you have applied to, make sure you demonstrate that knowledge • Preparing both these things (your skills and knowledge) adds to your value to the employer.
2. Willingness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers these days look for willingness and may ask if you are prepared to do something outside the job description – they are looking to see if you are a flexible, team player with the right attitude. • Have ready an example of your willingness to help your company. For example, working late to meet a deadline, covering work for a colleague, taking on new responsibilities.
3. Manageability & Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers want to avoid unmanageable employees and the interview will be looking to see how you would fit in. • They are looking to see if you can work alone, with others, can take direction or criticism and use initiative. • So demonstrate that you are a team player who gets along well with others, and has no problem tolerating other opinions or beliefs.
4. Professional Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional behaviour is one of the universally admired skills of successful people. • Use examples during the interview to demonstrate your professionalism and support this view of yourself with your behaviour and attitude.
5. Everyone employs people for the same job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surprised? Employers don't run payroll for the love of it, regardless of the job you are employed to do – the key and most important skill the employer wants is the ability to problem solve. In doing this, you will help your employer to be more effective. • Think of a problem you have solved, how you did it and how you could bring those skills to a new problem.

TOP TIPS FOR MANAGING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

STEP 1 - PREPARATION

1. Understand the purpose of the interview so you can structure your preparation accordingly.
 - *recruitment agencies* – interview should be about what you are looking for and finding out how the agency operates (what's in it for them?)
 - *Employer interviews* – first screening interviews (proving you are able to do the job), second interviews (proving you are the best candidate for the job)
 - *HR interviews* – skilled interviewers who are good at gathering information although this might be done in a very relaxed, chatty way
 - *Equal Opportunities interviews* – Candidates are asked set questions and are allocated points for their responses to them. At the end of the session, their points are added and the highest point scorer receives a job offer
2. Prepare all the necessary information – it will help you to have it ready.
 - Have a file in which you keep your CV and copies of application forms, the job ad and any information sent from the company. If they do not send an interview pack, phone up and ask them relevant questions. Read your application to refresh your memory before the interview
 - Research about the company you are seeing, through company materials or their website. This will help you ask appropriate questions (you will probably already have done this when applying for the post)
3. Be aware of your own wants and needs and be prepared to justify them if necessary.
 - Know your current salary, your ideal salary and the minimum salary you will accept. You can research other similar roles for a market average
 - Be aware of the company benefits and of the travelling time and cost as these may be a way of offsetting a lower salary offer

- 4 Plan your journey with military precision so everything goes smoothly on the day.
 - Allow plenty of time. Ensure you know the route and how you will get there. Check timetables and travel news etc.
 - Take a mobile phone in case of emergency.
 - Lateness is not the end of the world but it will be remembered by the employer and will upset you. You may not get the full allocated time for your interview.

STEP 2 – PRESENTATION

1. Making a good impression is about more than the way you look.
 - Appearances do count. It is important to let the interviewer know you have made an effort.
 - Judgements will be made about you very quickly.
 - A good impression is created by your appearance, manner, attitude and timekeeping.
2. Choose your interview clothes and accessories carefully, create the right image and impression.
 - Be comfortable and well-groomed. Don't forget your shoes, bag and coat, they need to be smart too.
 - Don't overdo the smellies.
 - Freshen up after cigarettes and don't have alcohol beforehand.
3. Plan your journey to the interview to allow for contingencies and waiting time.
 - Don't arrive too early. However, waiting before the interview is a chance to calm and prepare yourself.

STEP 3 – MEETING & GREETING

1. Remember you may be noticed from the moment you enter the building.
 - Secretaries and receptionists may be asked for their impression of you.

STEP 3 – MEETING & GREETING cont'd

2. Breaking the ice may be something you have to initiate.
 - Make some small talk if it seems appropriate. Don't moan about the journey. Don't talk excessively.
3. Shake hands appropriately.
 - Sweaty palms – wipe your hand discreetly. Never wipe your palm after shaking hands.
 - Limp handshake shows you lack confidence.
 - Crushers – show you are competitive and domineering.
 - Make eye contact and smile, give a firm confident handshake for the count of three.
4. Accept refreshments only if appropriate.
 - If you can avoid drinks other than a glass of water, do so. You are there to talk!
5. Even the way you sit down adds to the interviewer's impression of you.
 - Wait to be asked to sit unless it is clear you are not going to be offered a seat, then take the initiative.
 - Try to sit at an angle to the interviewer as this is less confrontational.
 - Be relaxed and try to avoid closed body language (crossed arms or legs).

STEP 4 – HANDLING NERVES

1. Emotions can be handled. Remember that nerves are natural and can help you improve your performance as you will be more alert.
 - Thinking negatively will increase anxiety. Try and turn thoughts into positive self talk. For example, What if my mind goes blank and I can't answer the question?
 - I am well prepared and I'll ask for a minute to think if I lose the thread.
2. Learn some techniques to help you relax and feel calmer. Use them.
 - Deep breathing, think relaxing thoughts.
 - Take a short walk

- Avoid stimulants
 - During the interview, sit in a balanced way (both feet on floor)
3. Remember that you can cope with an emergency by resorting to emergency measures.
- Ask for a glass of water (buys you some thinking time)
 - Pause and count to five
 - Ask for thinking time
 - Ask for clarification – gives you time and will help target your answer
 - Admit nerves to the interviewer (they're probably nervous too).

STEP 5 – BODY LANGUAGE

1. People like people who are like themselves. Try to establish rapport and find common ground.
2. Use positive body language throughout.
 - Leaning forward, smiling, chin up, steepling fingers, open palms.
3. Eye contact is critical but don't overdo it.
 - 5-10 seconds connection is good. Too much eye contact can be confrontational or intimidating.
4. Remember listening is an active process. Be seen to be listening.
 - Nod, make agreement sounds, reflect back what you have heard.
5. Disagree graciously – don't be aggressive or confrontational.
 - Show surprise that you disagree (reinforces the message that you are really like-minded people)
 - It is better to stand up for yourself at the start than build a relationship on misconception.

STEP 6 – ANSWERING QUESTIONS

1. Enjoy answering the questions. Listen carefully and take your time to answer.

- The interviewer is looking to see if you are a good fit for the post so expect questions around your skills and experience. It is just a question of presenting what you have in a positive way for the interviewer. You will already have prepared for this.
 - If the interviewer asks poor questions, try and respond with the information you think they are after and ask for clarification if necessary.
2. If you need to correct an interviewer, be polite and factual.
 3. Be honest and truthful.
 4. Prepare your questions beforehand.

STEP 7 – SAYING GOODBYE

1. Plan your goodbye in advance – it gives as important an impression as the greeting.
 - Wait for the interviewer to rise first, gather your things together before the close to avoid awkward moments.
2. Shake hands and prepare some nice closing statements.
3. Always leave on a positive note.
 - Don't ask 'how you've done', press for a decision or highlight any problems or anything that went wrong during the interview.
4. Don't relax until you are away from the building.

HANDLING QUESTIONS

There are different types of question that might come up in an interview. If you have already thought about what your answer might be, it will be a lot easier on the day. You can also prepare by re-reading your cv /application form and rehearsing some of your answers with a friend before the interview.

1. Reasons for applying for the job

- You've been with your current employer for 12 years. Why have you decided to leave now?
- You've been running your own business for X years, do you think you will find it difficult not being in control?

Always answer in terms of a positive that you have gained from your past situation. Follow it with some positives about the company for which you are being interviewed. You know why you want the job because you've already thought it through!

"My current post has given me a great opportunity to get started in customer care and I have gained a lot from it, however, when I saw this post I felt it would offer an excellent chance to develop my skills in supervisory management".

2. What you know about the company and why you have chosen it

- What do you know about this company/why have you chosen this company?
- What did you think of our website/brochure/marketing materials?
- How would you rate us against our competitors?
- How would you like to see this company develop over the next three years?
- Is there anything you think we do badly?

The answer is always that you are impressed with the company, their reputation, their products. You will know this because you have done the research!

"I researched several paper products companies and what stood out about this company was your"

3. Your best strengths

- What would your current manager (best friend, work colleague) say about you?
- What would you say is your best strength(s) or achievement(s)?
- What would you bring to the company or why should we employ you instead

of someone else?

- Why do you think you would be good at this job?
- What skills do you think you need to be an X?
- Why have you decided to change from a Y to an X role?
- What makes you think you will succeed in this very competitive profession?
- Give me three reasons why I should give you this job.

Before you go into the interview, spend some time identifying your strengths. Think about which ones you wish to highlight, and how your strengths apply to the role you're being interviewed for.

4. Your weaknesses

- If we asked a colleague of yours to describe a fault you have, what would they say?
- What are your weaknesses?
- Do you think you are over-qualified for this job?
- What don't you enjoy about your current job?

Faults/weakness questions should always be something that is a likeable fault. Show you are aware of it and are trying to overcome it.

"I sometimes get too involved in other people's work. Because I am an approachable person and very experienced in project management, colleagues come to me for advice and if I am not careful I find myself more involved in something than I would like. I have to remind myself that it is not my responsibility and draw the line between being a helpful and supportive colleague and taking on someone else's work."

"I am very enthusiastic about my work and if an idea excites me, I have to be careful that I don't respond too impulsively. I have learned to step back and consider things before leaping in."

- You've been out of work for a long time. Will you find it difficult to return to the workplace?
- You've had a lot of time off sick recently. Is this usual for you?
- You've made a lot of job moves. Do you have difficulty settling into jobs?
- Have you ever been asked to resign?

The answer to each of these questions is no. Then promote your strengths as a way of countering these negatives. You can acknowledge the truth of what they say before offering an explanation.

"Yes, I have had some time out of the workplace/moving jobs/time off sick. However, I did use my time effectively, raising my family/studying/have gained lots of very useful experience and the skills to manage change/but fortunately I

am now fully recovered and do not envisage having to take any further sick leave.”

- One of your referees says you lose your temper easily. How would you respond to that question?

Explain it has happened on one or two occasions and that you were quick to apologise to colleagues. You are aware you can get frustrated and make particular efforts to stay calm.

5. Checking your experience

- Tell me how your experience to date makes you suitable for this job.
- What have you learned from your current/past jobs?
- Did you find the time spent on X useful?

Provides a great opportunity to promote your suitable experience which matches the needs of the post.

6. Checking your skills

- How do you cope if you are working on a project that goes wrong?
- What action do you take if two members of your staff don't get on?
- What is the most difficult situation you have had at work and how did you deal with it?
- How do you deal with an angry customer?
- Describe a situation where you had to...

Many of these questions can be dealt with by showing you are able to evaluate and problem solve. (Demonstrating the skill of solving situations is more important than the outcome).

- How do you cope under pressure?
- How do you manage your time effectively?
- How do you prioritise your work?
- Give me an example of your X skill.

Great opportunity to demonstrate your appropriate skills for the post. Back up with an example.

7. How you get on with colleagues

- As a manager, what would your staff say about you? (a strengths questions)
- What do they like about your management style and what are they less enthusiastic about? (this is a strengths and weakness question combined)

- Have you had to work with a difficult colleague/subordinate and how did you tackle this?
- What contribution do you make to your team?
- What makes a good team?
- What do you think of your current employer?

Comments about colleagues should always be positive, otherwise you will give the impression of someone who is difficult to work with. If you do want to criticise, suggest it as an improvement.

Difficult colleagues/subordinates questions, acknowledge that whilst we can't always like everyone we work with, it is important to remain professional and get the job done. Sometimes people have to agree to disagree so they can focus on the task in hand.

8. Your development plans/views

- What staff development/learning opportunities have you taken advantage of in the last year?
- How do you keep informed about developments in your profession?

"It is important to keep informed about developments in the profession/keep up with staff development opportunities. These present an opportunity for networking with colleagues as well as learning something new."

- Where do you see yourself in X years' time?
- How long do you intend to stay with us?

"I would like to spend some time learning from this new post and developing my skills in X. However, as this is a growing/reputable/dynamic company, I would be happy to consider other development opportunities if they arise."

- Do you think you are ready for the increased responsibility that goes with this post?

"I agree that I have not worked in X for very long but I feel that my skills in X, X and X and my experience of Y, have prepared me for this next step. I also feel very motivated and excited about the challenge it presents."

9. About you and your personality

- Tell me about yourself?
- How do you spend your leisure time?
- What are you reading at the moment?
- Your CV shows your interests as being solitary, does this reflect your personality?

- What is your leadership style?

Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Always show balance between being a loner and a team player. Turn leisure interests to show your skills and qualities.

- How do you cope with disappointment?
- How do you react if someone criticises your work?
- How do you react if you don't get your own way?
- How do you keep yourself motivated?

Acknowledge any negatives then turn these into strength questions.

"Of course nobody likes to be disappointed/criticised, but I believe if something doesn't turn out the way I would like, that I can learn from it. It's a chance to ask myself why it didn't work out so I can prepare for the next time."

10. Negotiating salary questions

- You lack the relevant experience for the post so we wouldn't be able to match your current salary. How do you feel about taking a drop in salary?

"I have already considered the financial implications of my decision and would be able to accept the salary on offer. However, I would bring enthusiasm and commitment to the role and hope that before long my salary would increase to reflect my input."

- What is your current salary?
- What salary are you expecting for this post?
- Do you think you are being paid enough?

"I currently receive X but as this post involves new responsibilities/is more demanding in terms of X, I would expect to receive a better rate if offered the post."

"I have researched industry rates for this type of role and would expect to receive a salary in the range of X. I believe this would reflect my experience/skills/personal qualities I would bring to your organisation."

"My current salary is within the range for this type of work. However, I like to think I will bring commitment, hard work and a wide range of experience to the role and would like to be rewarded for this."

- Would you take this job if it were offered to you?

Always say yes unless you are absolutely sure you wouldn't want it.

You can consider it after the interview when you are relaxed, if necessary.