

APPRENTICESHIP



How to ace an interview

Awesome work – your CV must have knocked the socks off the company you want to work for, what a great start! Now all you have to do is ace the interview – easy, right? Well read on, and it should be a walk in the park.

Different types of interview

You may be invited to do a telephone interview before being invited along to a face to face interview.

Telephone interview – this is an interview that takes place over the telephone, and is normally used to shortlist the best candidates who will then go on to have a face to face interview.

Just because you're not going along to meet the interviewer, you should prepare for, and treat a telephone interview as you would a normal face to face interview. After all, you don't want to fall at the first hurdle when you've managed to get this far.

Tips for a telephone interview

- Answer the phone professionally – Say 'Hello, [your name] speaking' – this will enable the interviewer to clarify that it's the right person on the other end of the phone. It will also demonstrate what you would sound like if you were answering the office phone in the future.
- Go to a quiet place with no distractions five minutes before the call is due, and stay there for the duration of the interview. There's nothing worse than background noise or an annoying little brother irritating you when you're trying to concentrate, so just make sure you have somewhere quiet to go.
- It seems silly to say, but always make sure you have enough charge on your phone and good enough signal to take the call, without losing the interviewer. It will reflect badly on you if the call drops out halfway through.

Face to face interview – this is an interview with a representative or maybe a few representatives from the workplace that you wish to join, or with the training provider. You will be expected to go along and answer questions that are asked, within an agreed time limit – normally 45 minutes to an hour.

Tips for all types of interviews

Preparing for the interview

- Research the company and the individual(s) that will be interviewing you. If you don't know the name of the person due to interview you, it's your right to know, so simply ask the person that is arranging it.

- Ask the person arranging the interview if there is any preparation they would like you to do (other than the normal stuff of course). They may ask you to bring along some recent coursework, or to prepare a presentation to present to them.
- Even if you've not been asked to bring anything along, always take a neat print out or two of your CV, and any pieces of work you are particularly proud of, or that you refer to in answer to the basic questions. Evidence is always very powerful and will help you to stand out against the other interviewees. If you are going to take evidence along, always make sure it's presented professionally, in a folder or clear wallets...no tatty edges or milkshake stains in sight! The dog ate your homework excuse doesn't wash at work 😊
- Prepare 3 or 4 questions for the interviewer. What do you want to find out about working for the company that isn't already on the website? You might like to know if the team has away days to promote team working, or what the objectives are of the business in the next 12 months.

What to wear (for a face to face interview)

- Generally, you need to look smart, and wear office attire to any interview. A good tip is to look at what other people in the company wear to work, as this will mean you'll fit in. Look at the company website to see if there are any photos. However, if they don't wear particularly smart clothes, don't do the same – once you've got the job you can!
- Guys should wear trousers, a shirt and shoes and ladies should wear a smart outfit and smart shoes – not a trainer or hoody in sight...but you can get them back on afterwards.
- Accessories – What you take along with you is important too. Is it going to rain? If it is, take an umbrella – you don't want to turn up soaked as it'll make you look like you weren't prepared. You don't need to take a big bag, but do take something to carry your CV, and any other printouts of your grades, or work from college, for example. Beware, some people believe that your shoes say a lot about a person. What do your shoes say about you?

Arriving on time

- Being late will cost you the opportunity of a job. There's absolutely no excuse for being late. Always go and find the place that you need to go to beforehand – even a week before if you can as you'll be able to work out how to get there and how long you'll need to give yourself to get there too. Some offices can be really hidden away and hard to find, so it's really important you don't just risk finding it on the day. If you haven't had a

chance to go there beforehand, maybe check it out on Google Street View so you can familiarise yourself with the area.

- From the second you are outside the office you are being interviewed. What you do whilst outside the building, how you knock on the door, or walk into the reception area are all going to help you get the job. Don't hang around with your girlfriend / boyfriend outside, or be talking on your phone when you walk into reception (remember to turn your phone off). Be aware of your behaviour and be super polite. Always make sure you introduce yourself and explain that you are there for an interview, before giving the name of the person who you are meeting with.

Body language

- Your body language will say a lot about you, before you even open your mouth. If you slouch, or are too laid back in your chair, the employer will assume this is how you will sit at your new desk. Sit up, stand tall, chin up and smile. Do this right up until 10 minutes after your interview has ended – you never know who may have followed you out of the office as they take their lunch break, for example.

How to answer questions

- You won't know beforehand what questions you will be asked, but it's good to prepare for all eventualities – see a list of example questions below. If you prepare to answer all of these, you should be able to answer every interview question that's thrown at you.
- Never answer a question starting by repeating the question itself. This is a stalling technique that makes employers think you are struggling to answer. Instead, if you need a few seconds, just say 'good question, now let me think about how to answer this one'. Employers love honesty, and they are often looking for how you handle a difficult situation, should you find yourself in one once they've employed you.
- Don't waffle, but don't be too short either. Answer the question, and then stop talking. The interviewer will ask you to elaborate if he or she needs you to. A common technique that interviewers use is the silent treatment....if they stay silent, you will feel you have to continue to talk, and this can result in you talking nonsense. Once you've answered the question, stop talking and smile.
- At the end of the interview the interviewer will ask you if you have any questions – now's the time to ask the questions you have prepared. Remember! The question may have already been answered during the interview, so make sure you leave any out that no longer apply. If all the questions you had prepared are no longer relevant, just explain that the questions you did prepare have already been answered.

- If an interviewer asks you to admit your weaknesses, never do so without balancing it out with a strength. For example, you might say I struggle with getting out of bed in the morning, so I always get up an extra hour early so I arrive at work bright and early. Or, you might say 'I can be forgetful, so I always keep notes on my phone. If you see my typing on my phone, that's what I'll be doing.'
- If you don't understand a question, ask the interviewer to explain it. You don't want to try and answer the question and get it wrong, so it's important to clarify the meaning first. The interviewer will think you asking him or her to clarify its meaning is completely normal.

Example interview questions:

- Can you give me an example of a time where you've worked well as part of a team?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you've worked independently and had a great outcome?
- Do you prefer to work independently or as part of a team?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you made a mistake, and what you did to rectify it?
- Tell me why I should employ you?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What did you enjoy most about your course / qualification?
- Why do you want to go into [industry]?
- What do you know about our company?

A few confidence boosters

When heading into an interview, remember these five things and you'll ace your interview, just watch!

1. Remember that the interviewer once sat where you are – they had to be interviewed to get to where they are today.
2. The interviewer wants you to do really well – they don't want to spend time interviewing lots of unsuccessful candidates – they're on your side.
3. Your CV has already got you 50% there – there's no one in the world that can bring your CV to life better than you can.
4. In 60 minutes time your fate will be decided – just let the adrenaline take control and enjoy the ride.
5. The interviewer is taking 60 minutes out of his or her day to spend with you – what a compliment, now go and make them pleased they did.