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# You're Hired!



The **COMPLETE** Guide  
To Landing Your  
Dream Job

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## **Introduction**

Follow this Guide and it’ll be **you** hearing the words “You’re Hired!” and not your competition!

The entire Guide is written by experienced management and human resources professionals - people who know what it takes to help you find the career satisfaction you’re seeking or the lifestyle you crave... and who want to share their knowledge with you to help you land your dream job!

It starts at the beginning with your job search and covers the many and varied ways of finding employment.

Once you’ve found the job you want, there’s information and advice on writing a winning resume or CV, as well as examples.

And in case you’re asked to complete a job application form as well as, or instead of, a CV or resume, there’s a whole section designed to make this child’s play.

Then there’s the cover letter – a must every time. Find advice on writing good cover letters, again with examples.

And often you’ll be asked to sit some form of selection test. We explain the various types, give you examples, and tell you where to go for further information and practice.

Phone interviews are becoming more common too, so there’s a section on preparing for these and advice about how to conduct yourself during the interview.

Then it’s the interview itself!

We give advice about every aspect of the interview from what to wear, to how to deal with nerves, advice on body language and an important section on HOW to answer job interview questions. We even cover group job interviews and multiple job interviews.

Next we cover 53 common job interview questions and give suggested answers for each.

And what about questions to ask? Yes – we cover this too, including the ‘what NOT to ask’ at interview!

And if, despite everything, you’re unlucky enough not to be selected this time, there’s advice on what to do next, including getting feedback.

We hope you find this Guide useful and succeed in landing your dream job!

## **Tips for reading this Guide on a computer**

We suggest you print this guide. There’s a lot of information here and it’s easier to read, and better for your eyes to read it in print.

But if you want to read it on your computer, that’s fine. But for the best on-screen experience, try this:

1. From the top menu choose view > full screen. Or just hit "control L".
2. Once you are in full screen mode, use “control +” and “control –” to zoom in and out until you are comfortable with the text size.
3. Then use the “page down” and “page up” keys (instead of the mouse) to move forward and back through the Guide.
4. To get out of full screen mode, hit “control L” again, or hit the “Esc” key.

Ok, let’s get started!

## **Job Search**

This section of the Guide will help you carry out an effective job search.

### **Introduction**

There are many ways to find work. These include:

- Searching online
- Sending speculative cover letters and CVs/resumes to employers
- Looking through job pages or adverts in local and national papers
- Using a recruitment agency
- Visiting employers in person
- Cold calling employers by phone
- Attending job or career fairs

Whatever your situation, taking some time to prepare before starting your job hunt is time well spent.

In each case, ask yourself:

- Do I have a professional, up-to-date CV or resume?
- And if I’m interested in multiple jobs, do I have a separate CV or resume for each?
- Do I have draft cover letters to hand, one for advertised positions and one for speculative enquiries, if required?

Note, if you decide to job hunt exclusively on-line, some companies will build you a good resume AND cover letter, so you just need to gather relevant details and be able to answer YES to the next question!

- Have I approached the right people about providing references?

If you’re job hunting the ‘traditional’ way (i.e. not online), and can’t answer “yes” to all these, we recommend you read the following chapters first:

- CVs and resumes (page 22)
- Cover letters (page 50)

If you can answer “yes”, you’re ready to start job hunting.



## **Searching For Work Online**

With an estimated 17,000 new jobs posted each week in the UK alone and with between 40-80% of employers now searching for candidates online, searching the web for a job is possibly one of the best ways to invest your time job hunting, so we’ll start here.

There are many job search websites, some national, some local and some international. There are even some specialist ones. Finding the right one or ones for you will depend on the type of job you’re looking for and the location in which you’d like to work, so do some research or get some advice.

To assist you, we’ve personally reviewed a number of UK, USA and WORLDWIDE job search websites.

Our two recommended job search websites are what we believe to be the best as measured by:

- Accuracy of information (in terms of errors we could find in job postings etc.)
- Ease and speed of sign-up
- Speed and reliability of service
- The extent to which the information was up-to-date
- Value for money
- Ease of use
- Variety of services offered

Both our job search website recommendations allow you to build, (or upload) resumes and CVs and submit these to employers, directly, on line.

Find out more on the next page....



## **No 1 - Monster.com**

We gave [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com) an overall score of 9/10.

Here are just some of Monster.com features which led us to vote it the best job search website.

### **A. Job Search**

Monster offer both a quick and a detailed search of their extensive job database.

- You can search by multiple fields such as:
  - Location - continent, country, state, county, city, postcode...
  - Occupations - you can choose up to 20
  - Type of employment - full time, part time, temporary, work from home...
  - Keywords
  - Industries – you can choose up to 20
- You can use (free of charge) RSS Feeds which effectively automate your job search 24 x 7, so you never miss an opportunity.

### **B. CVs and Resumes**

- You can
  - Create (or upload)
  - Store, and
  - Edit

up to 10 resumes/CVs and 5 cover letters.

- You can also see how often your CVs are viewed by employers.

### **C. QuickApply**

- Lets you apply for selected jobs online with just one click. Great when you’re applying for many.

## **D. Advice**

Monster offers free monthly newsletters, tutorials, a site demo, a help center and much more.

## **No 2 – Yahoo! HotJobs**

Yahoo! Hot Jobs, a subsidiary of Yahoo!, is, in our view, the next best job search website, with a score of 8.5/10.

HotJobs contains both U.S. and international job listings, though, in our view, it’s more geared up for American and Canadian job hunters.

### **A. Jobs Search Options**

Like Monster, Yahoo! HotJobs has quick and advanced search options which allow you to search by multiple fields such as job category, location, keyword, date posted, salary etc...

If you register, you can save both searches and job postings into your own account.

### **B. HotJobs Resume Posting**

If you don’t already have a CV or resume you can use Yahoo’s Resume Builder. It’s quick and easy to use and the templates are good.

If you do have a resume, you can copy and paste it into HotJobs or upload it. There’s even an option to create a web page for your CV/resume.

### **C. HotJobs Registration**

As well as searching for jobs, registered users (it’s free to register) can take advantage of a whole host of other functions such as:

- Having search results automatically delivered by email
- Saving your search results
- Blocking employers from seeing your resume
- Creating and saving cover letters

## **D. HotJobs Extras**

There’s lots more information and advice for job seekers on HotJobs, including resume writing advice, job searching tips, industry news and salary and benefits information.

All in all, HotJobs, the Yahoo Search website, offers excellent value to jobhunters and is a great place to start your job search.

## **Finding Work Through Classified Ads**

Despite the growing use of job search engines as a means of bringing employer and employee together, some people still prefer to browse the classified ads, even if they choose to browse these online!

So here’s some information and advice to help you if this is your preference (or just one of the job search methods you use).

### **Actual newspapers!**

Job pages and job ads in local and sometimes national papers are still an excellent source of some very good jobs.

Some local and regional employers (and some national employers) prefer not to advertise on the big job sites like Monster or Yahoo! HotJobs for fear of being overwhelmed with applicants. In some cases, they also want to avoid any possible relocation costs.

## **Online newspapers**

Don’t worry about having to make a daily or weekly trip to the local store for a paper though.

A lot of papers now place their classified ads online so be sure to check.

It’s sometimes easier online, because newspapers will often let you search by type of work, field of employment or salary etc.

They might also give you information about employers relocating to your area or expanding which might open up opportunities you want to explore before jobs are advertised, so be sure to look out for this!

## **Recruitment Agencies**

### **What are recruitment agencies?**

Recruitment agencies are paid by employers to find suitable applicants for vacancies the employer has.

The fee is paid (by the employer remember) once someone starts or after someone has been with employer the required time.

Positions may be permanent, temporary, contract, full time or part time, or a combination of these.

In the case of temporary jobs, the agency often pays the worker direct and charges the company a little extra on top to cover their fees.

## **What types of employment agency are there?**

There are many types of recruitment agency, but the main ones are:

- High street chains (many with websites)

In the USA, these include:

- Manpower - worldwide
- CBS Personnel - 130 offices in 16 states
- Pro staff – 90 offices across the USA

In the UK, these include:

- Reed
- Manpower
- Brookstreet

These agencies deal with a wide variety of work. A high proportion of vacancies are temporary and contract positions, particularly administrative or secretarial.

- Specialist job agencies.

Such as Hayes, Computer People, Accountancy Additions, Driver Hire.

These agencies tend to specialize in one or more job sectors and as such have a lot of expertise. If you know the job sector in which you want to work, this can be very useful indeed. For general jobs, try the non-specialized recruitment agencies.

## **What are the disadvantages of using a job agency?**

- Because their main aim is to make money by filling jobs, and because that money comes from employers, you’re not their main concern.
- In some cases, this means that agencies will be more interested in people who they can place in jobs quickly and easily.
- This means that if you don’t have a lot of experience, skills or qualifications, you may not be their top priority. Unfortunately, getting them to notice you by making daily phone calls often doesn’t help!

### **What are the advantages of using a job agency?**

- More and more employers are using agencies to recruit temporary and contract staff, rather than advertise themselves. This means that agencies have access to jobs that you wouldn’t normally hear about.
- They do the leg-work for you. Once they have your resume or CV, they sell your skills to employers, set up interviews and negotiate the work and possibly the salary on your behalf (with your agreement).
- Many agencies have strong business relationships with key clients, which can help you get your foot in the door, especially if you’ve been turned down direct by the Company you wish to join.

### **Should I use an employment agency?**

Based on our experience and research, it’s worth registering with an agency, or more than one, if you:

- Are looking for a job locally
- Are looking for immediate general temporary work
- Wish to join a particular company on a temporary basis which turned you down before.
- Are looking for work in a specialist field (use a specialized agency)

### **Job Agency Tips**

If you wish to use a recruitment agency, here are our tips:

- Approach agencies relevant to the jobs you want (if you know what you want).
- Don’t rely just on agencies. Use other methods of job searching as well.
- Don’t expect immediate results. It can take time. You’re not in the driving seat.
- Be as professional with a recruitment agency as you would be with any other employer. If they think you are good, they are more likely to recommend you.
- Have your CV or resume ready when you first go in.
- Don’t go in expecting to be only a few minutes. It takes time to register and you might have an initial interview.
- Be clear about what kind of work you are looking for. Don’t waste your time or theirs.
- Keep in regular contact with them, but don’t call every day as this may work against you.

## **Sending Speculative Resumes/CVs To Employers**

Research suggests that as much as 80% of the job market is ‘closed’. This means that up to 80% of jobs are not advertised! That’s a lot.

So if you only go for advertised jobs, you’re missing up to 80% of what’s out there.

That’s why visiting employers, phoning them or sending them your details is time well spent.

We cover all three.

For advice about sending speculative cover letters with your CV or resumes, go to page 50.

## **Visiting Potential Employers**

It is possible to find a job in person.

We’ve already said that as much as 80% of the job market is ‘closed’, which means that you won’t know about vacancies unless you ask.

If you’re looking for work in any of the following fields, personal visits are recommended:

- Retail sales outlets (i.e. shops).
- Leisure outlets such as cinemas, theatres, bowling centers etc.
- Food and drink outlets, such as pubs, cafes and restaurants.
- Social event outlets such as clubs.

### **Benefits of visiting employers in person include:**

- If you do it right, you create a powerful first impression.
- You can grab an application form there and then (no relying on the post or someone’s memory!).
- When you get an interview, you know where to go, who to ask for and can even say “It’s nice to meet you again”. They will hopefully remember you and the positive impression they had of you before.



- If there are no suitable jobs, you know right away, so no waiting around for calls back or answers to your letters.
- It shows confidence and initiative. Most employers prefer to employ people who show some get up and go. It’s easy to put a covering letter and CV in an envelope in an attempt to find a job, but harder to approach someone in person.

### **Advice for visiting employers in person:**

Here are 9 tips to successful personal visits.

- Dress smartly
- Carry a folder, briefcase or similar in which to put job application forms or other information
- Have a pen (or two)
- Have copies of your CV or resume
- Look around the place first as a customer if you can. You might grab the attention of the person who’s hiring, who’ll be impressed that you have approached them only after some consideration.
- Smile
- Greet the person you first speak to with a handshake
- Give your name
- State your business

It might go something like this:

“Good morning (you offer your hand and smile). My name is John Smith. I’m here to enquire about any job vacancies you might have?”

Avoid asking to speak to “the manager” for 2 reasons:

1. The person you ask might **be** the manager (and not happy that it wasn’t obvious to you).
2. The person you ask might **not** be the manager (but not happy you didn’t think so).

Best not to risk offending anyone!

**The possible outcomes when visiting employers in person:**

- If the answer is that ‘no, they have no jobs’, take their word for it, thank them politely and leave.
- If the answer is yes, there are many options.

You might be:

1. Invited to speak to someone else
2. Given an application form
3. Asked to send your CV to Mr and Mrs X, the Manager

If the answer is 1), great. Here’s your chance to make that first great impression.

If it’s 2) or 3), follow the instructions they give.

If you have your CV or resume, leave a copy with the person to whom you spoke if it seems convenient, and send another (or the job application form) with a tailored cover letter when you get back home, mentioning that you visited them and thanking the person who spoke to you for their time.

If you’re sending another CV or resume, just add “I’m enclosing a further copy of my resume, should you need one”. This way you can be sure the right person got it!

## **Find Jobs By Phone - Our Top Ten Tips**

Phone-calling potential employers can lead to great results. Here’s how to do it right.

### **1. Do your research**

Before you dial, do some research. Find out about the Company, who you need to talk to and what position they hold. You might find this on a website, or through the Company switchboard or secretary.

### **2. Plan your call**

Write down what you are going to say and what you want to get out of the conversation. If you are looking for a particular job, write this down too, in case you’re asked.

### **3. Be professional and friendly to whoever answers**

It’s important, particularly in a small firm, to develop a good relationship with the Secretary or Personal Assistant. He or she may decide whether you get to speak to the boss or not. Ask the person’s name and use it in the conversation - it strikes up a rapport.

### **4. Try a little familiarity**

If someone else in the Company gave you the name of the person to speak to, you would do well quoting them. You might say “Good Morning. My name is Sandra Jones. James Smith in Finance recommended I give Sally Smith a call. Is she available to speak with?" It might get you past the first hurdle!

### **5. Don’t lose the contact**

Once you’re talking to the decision-maker, explain who you are and why you’re calling. Then give them an alternative - Ask whether it’s a convenient time to talk or offer to call back later. Whichever option they choose, they enter into a psychological contract to talk to you which is difficult to break.

You might say:

“Good morning Mr Jones (wait for an acknowledgement, if there’s one). My name is Jennifer Penny. James Smith in Finance recommended I speak to you about possible Accountant positions within your Company. Can I ask if it’s convenient to talk, or would you prefer I called back later?”

## **6. Deliver your sales pitch**

If you’re given the go-ahead to talk, speak slowly and confidently but add some energy and enthusiasm to your voice. If you win their attention within a minute, you’re on your way (since research shows it’s more difficult to cut someone off after the first minute).

## **7. Build rapport**

Once you’re into conversation, try to speak at the same speed as the other person. If one person talks very fast while the other speaks slowly, it can feel strange and you’re off to a bad start.

Provide any information about yourself and your objectives in small chunks and give the other person a chance to respond. Don’t hog the conversation.

## **8. Keep them talking**

The longer you keep someone on the phone, the stronger the psychological bond between you.

Even if the conversation doesn’t result in an offer of an interview, you can still learn a great deal which can help you in your next phone call. And if the person you’re talking to can’t help, ask them to suggest someone who can.

## **9. Stay positive**

Keep a note of your calls and the responses. Be prepared for most people to say ‘no’ early on, either because they’re too busy or don’t have the budget for new recruits. It’s nothing personal.

And if somebody is rude to you, politely bring the conversation to an end and move on. You have other opportunities to explore.

## **10. Be persistent**

You may have to make a lot of calls to secure a few interviews but carry on. You’ll get more confident and shrewd with each attempt.

## **Job or Career Fairs**

Although people don’t tend to think of career or job fairs as a good way of finding work, a SHRM/Career Journal Survey found that over 70% of human resources departments who responded, rely on job or career fairs to recruit employees.

### **Job fairs offer the following benefits:**

- They are an excellent source of general industry information as well as specific company information.
- Information on current and future employment opportunities is readily available, as are people to answer your questions about these openings.
- They provide excellent opportunities to expand your network of contacts.
- Some also offer chances to perfect your interview skills.
- Information about training opportunities is also on hand.
- It’s the only way to gather information about a wide range of companies all in one place (one-stop-job-shopping!)

### **How to find out about job and career fairs:**

Upcoming career fairs are usually advertised:

- In schools and colleges/universities
- In local (and sometimes national) newspapers
- On the Internet
- At job or employment centers

### **Our Top Tips for visiting job/career fairs**

Before you go, read these hints and tips about career fairs to ensure your time spent there is worthwhile.

- Dress as you would for interview. Career fairs are like interviews, so make sure you dress smartly and professionally.
- Wear comfortable shoes. Queues can be long as the day progresses and you should expect to wait at most stalls. Wear smart, used footwear.

- Bring copies of your CV or resume to give to companies who you are interested in joining.
- Take a briefcase or folder to keep these in and to hold company literature you pick up.
- Prepare and rehearse a short summary of your CV or resume so you can introduce yourself positively to employers who ask what they can do for you.
- Arrive early. Fairs get busy so make sure you arrive early to park and find time to get familiar with the fair layout. Often you have to register too.
- Be assertive and show initiative. Offer your hand and give your name to recruiters when you reach their stall. Act interested in the company and their job opportunities.

## **CVs and Resumes**

### **Introduction**

Here’s something to think about!

One internet source we found said that employers spend, on average, only **10-15 seconds** on each resume and that **82-94%** of applicants get rejected at CV stage.

So we timed ourselves. We spent, on average, 80 seconds on each resume before making an initial decision - Yes or No.

We found we read any cover letters in full.

Generally we interview no more than 6 people for any one position. Based on the average number of resumes we receive, that’s an 80-90% rejection rate.

You’ll realize from this that it’s not necessarily the most qualified person who is shortlisted for the job, but the one whose CV or resume grabs the attention of the interviewers.

So if the job you are going for is a senior position or if you suspect the competition is tough, do consider having your CV or resume professionally done.

There are many companies who will do this for you. Get a recommendation or do some research to find the right one for you.

In our personal and professional view, there is no substitute for a professionally done CV or resume.

They don’t have to be expensive and any cost is easily outweighed by the advantage a properly done CV gives you. (And if it gets you the job, the cost doesn’t matter!)

Our sample resumes further on will help you see the difference.



We receive between 30-60 CVs/resumes for each job we advertise and we’d say that less than half are professionally done. These ones stand out because they are:

- Easy on the eye at first glance
- Easy to read
- Relevant
- A good length, and
- Flow nicely
- Error free!

The only exception we would make to recommending a professional resume writer is for entry level (e.g. trainee/apprentice) jobs or lower skilled jobs where the requirement for this level of professionalism is less. But if you can gain an advantage by doing something that no-one else does, why not, whatever job you are going for?

We do recognize however, that you may be unable or unwilling to pay for a professional CV or resume, so to help you avoid common mistakes, here’s a CV/Resume Writing Guide and two sample resumes, as well as advice about using CV/resume templates:

## **Resume and CV Writing Guide**

### **General Guidelines**

Remember - your CV or resume is the **first impression** you give a potential employer.

He or she may only have a couple of hours to sift through several dozen resumes and may only spend minutes, sometimes less than a minute, on each, before deciding “Yes” or “No”.

Like an advert, your resume or CV needs to appeal to the reader, pretty immediately. Four pages of irrelevant text won’t do that.

Instead, ask yourself: *"Why should the employer choose me?"*

Write your resume or CV in such a way that the answer is clear. Pick up on the key skills the employer wants and focus your CV or resume on these.

So:

- Be as much to-the-point as possible.
- Do your research so your resume or CV is tailor-made for the job and the Company and has more chance of being in the ‘YES’ pile.
- Before you send it off, ask a friend or colleague to read the job advert, look at your CV/resume for 20 seconds and then give you feedback. If it’s not obvious to them why you’re a suitable candidate for the job, review your CV/resume. Then try again.

## **Layout**

This is really up to you but keep it simple (see the example on the page 28).

Complicated layouts aren’t easy on the eye and can give the wrong impression that you think the packaging is more important than the product! Style is fine, but don’t go overboard.

This is where a Resume or CV Writing Company comes into its own. Their experience gives them a ‘big picture view’ which you don’t have. They know what is acceptable or not within given industries which can mean the difference between you getting an interview or not.

## **Heading**

This is the place for general information such as:

- Name
- Postal address
- E-mail address
- Phone numbers (landline and mobile)

(If you’re applying for an overseas job, don’t forget to include your international dialing code).

## **Objective**

If you’re actively job hunting, we recommend having several resumes/CVs with different profiles, personal summaries or objectives.

Elsewhere we refer to CVs and resume as often not being specific enough for the job the person is applying for. Yours needs to be.

A general CV or resume may not get you an interview for a particular job if you’ve not highlighted strengths the interviewer is looking for (but someone else has!)

For example, have a CV for Technology Team Leader and one for Senior Technology Technician. You might be actively looking for senior technology jobs and would consider either role, so have a resume for each. One will highlight team leader experience and qualities. The other might highlight your technical expertise and mentoring skills.

## **Qualifications**

List all your relevant qualifications in this section, grouped into dates or types of qualification for easy reference.

If you don’t have enough room for them all, include the most important ones and add a note which refers to the attached appendix where ALL your relevant qualifications are listed.

If you have more work experience than qualifications, change the order of the CV/resume and put the next section before this one.

## **Work Experience**

Include in here any work experience that you have which is relevant to the job you’re applying for, even if it was part time, voluntary, or seasonal.

Each job should include the following basic information:

- Your job title
- The length of time you worked
- Your responsibilities
- The name of the company or organization

If you’ve had many other unrelated jobs, put these in an appendix. Don’t dilute your resume by adding irrelevant items.

Remember that your resume or CV must be to the point. An interested interviewer can always read the appendix if they wish, but get the main relevant items in front of them first.

## **Key Skills**

List your main skills which are relevant to the job for which you’re applying. Be brief. See our example on page 28.

## **Achievements**

List your achievements, remembering what your potential employer is looking for. Include the following:

- Awards you’ve won
- Relevant qualifications (if you've not included these already)
- Projects you’ve delivered
- Cost savings you’ve made
- Promotions you’ve gained with your current, previous or last employer

## **Interests**

Be brief here. Employers generally only skim over this bit just to get ‘a feel’ for your personality.

Be honest – don’t say you play 5-a-side hockey because you think it sound teamy! The interviewer might ask you about it in an interview and that could be embarrassing if you’ve not done it for 10 years!

## **References**

It’s always a good idea to include references because it shows:

- a) Forward planning, and
- b) Confidence that others will endorse you.

But don’t forget to ask the people if they are willing to serve as referees before you give their names to a potential employer!

## **CV/Resume Examples**

**Here is a good example**

**Fred Bloggs**

---

10, The Street  
The Town  
The City  
The State/Country  
Zip or Postcode

Tel: +44 0101010 0101010 (work)  
060452650121 (mobile)  
Email:fredbloggs@hotmail.com

---

**OBJECTIVE:**

I would like to occupy a senior position within your Loans and Insurance Division, ideally in a Team Leader or Supervisory capacity with some line management. I would therefore like to be considered for any opportunities you have, either within a Sales or Customer Service environment.

**RELEVANT  
QUALIFICATIONS:**

**Management/Team Leading:**

NVQ Level 2 in Team Leading - September 2008  
MSc Human Resource Management - June 2007

**Insurance:**

CII Insurance Diploma - February 2007

**Loans:**

Certificate in Mortgage Advice - March 2008

**Other Qualifications:**

Please see Appendix 1, attached.

**RELEVANT WORK  
EXPERIENCE:**

**Customer Service Supervisor** - Sept 2001 to Oct 2003

ABC Loans Limited

Responsible for: all aspects of line management for 18 customer service staff, including recruitment and performance management.

**Sales Team Leader** - May 2005 to present

XYZ Insurance Brokers PLC

Responsible for: all aspects of line management for 15 sales staff, including recruitment and sales performance management.

**For more information and other work experience**, please see Appendix 2, attached.

**KEY SKILLS:**

Recruitment and Selection

Performance Management

Mentoring and Training

Competency Frameworks

Absence Management

Sales Skills

Understanding of the Loan and Insurance Markets, including regulatory matters.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

These include:

- Winning a promotion from Customer Service Supervisor to Team Manager with ABC Loans Limited.
- Winner of the "Team Manager of the Year Award" in December 2004.
- Top Performing Sales Team for 2006 with XYZ Insurance Brokers PLC.
- I led an absence initiative which resulted in a reduction in staff absence from 8.5% to 4.1% between 2005 and 2006.

**INTERESTS:**

Films and theatre

Playing squash

Travel



**REFERENCES:**

**Professional:**

Mr James King  
Senior Sales Manager  
XYZ Insurance Brokers PLC  
The Office  
The Street  
The Town  
The Zip or Postcode  
Tel: 0000523

**Personal:**

Mrs Sally Jones  
10 The High Street  
The Town  
The State  
The Zip or Postcode  
Tel: 06052152626 Tel:  
06052152626

## **Here is a bad example**

---

### **Curriculum Vitae**

**Name:** Andy Bloggs

**Address:**

1234 Long Road

The Town

The City

The Country

Telephone: 010101 1010101

**Date of Birth:** 12 Sept 1956

**Work History:** 1997 to 2000

Gas fitter for ABC Gas Company Ltd

Worked for a national firm fitting gas appliance in people’s homes. Used to dealing with different people and planning my own day. I enjoy meeting people and fixing there problems.

2001 to now

Gas fitter for XYZ Home Appliances PLC

I work as a fitter of appliances in people’s home, fires, cookers etc.. I cover the whole of the county so drive long distances and work long hours. I am given work to do but plan my own day to fit all the jobs in

**Education:** General School, London, GCE O Levels in English Language and Maths  
A Levels at high School – Science and English

**Hobbies:**Five a side football with the team from the local pub. Fishing with my son.

---

Did you notice the following in our bad resume example?

- Poor formatting
- Some missing returns
- Inconsistence use of bold formatting
- No Zip or Postcode
- Gaps in employment history (and no reference to an appendix where these might be found)
- Poor spelling, grammar and punctuation
- No objective

## **Resume and CV Templates**

There’s an abundance of free resume and CV templates on the Internet.

A lot of people search for them and a fair few end up using them. They fill in the required boxes and send them off with baited breath. Often they are disappointed when they get a negative response and sometimes no response at all!

Why is this?

Well for us, there are two reasons:

- Standard or template CVs and resume are too often **just plain bland**.

When we get a pile of say 30 CVs, which is not uncommon, seeing one bland CV after another does nothing to engage our interest. When we come to the 10th and it’s different and interesting we sit up and take note. It’s human nature.

- And often standard CVs and resume are **just not relevant**.

They don’t address the specifics of what we’re after in an applicant. Why send us 3 pages of A4 describing your experience, qualifications and skills when only about 1 page of the text is relevant to the job?

Here’s an example:

One of us recently advertised a Team Leader position for a technical support team. One CV was 4 sides of A4, listing all the applicant’s non-supervisory technical jobs and qualifications spanning 20+ years. But the one supervisory position he had held, and held for over 5 years, was relegated to two lines of text!

Had he revised his CV to fit the job for which he was applying and shortened it to 2 pages, he might have won an interview.

You need to be original and relevant to get noticed and unfortunately free CV templates aren’t!

Remember, just like job application forms, a resume/CV is the first impression you make on an employer. Make it count. Show the employer that you are professional, serious and better than the other 29 average applicants whose template CVs he’s just waded through.

### **So are CV and resume templates ANY use?**

Yes, but only where there is little competition and/or where employers are likely to have lower expectations, such as lower graded jobs.

Catherine has a nephew. He left school in summer 2007, intending to go to college in autumn 2008. He wanted a job for a year, just to save some money.

His CV was simple and limited (as you’d expect for a teenager) but sufficient to win him an interview. He’s now working in a DIY outlet. He used a CV template. After college, when he wants an in-demand job, CV templates just won’t do!

In our opinion, and in the opinion of many industry professionals, you will have trouble winning interviews for tough jobs with free CV/resume templates.

And it’s not like you have to spend a lot getting a good resume or CV written for you. It is possible to get a good CV or resume for only \$50 or £25, though like everything, standards go up with prices.

Our advice? Get a personal recommendation or look for a professional Company with good feedback and who offer some form of guarantee should your resume or CV not win you interviews. This keeps the Company working for you! Giving you free updates for 12 months let’s say, is also a bonus.

## **Using Apostrophes Correctly**

We decided to include some advice on apostrophes for 2 reasons:

- Their misuse is the most common grammatical mistake we find in CVs, resumes, job application forms and cover letters, even at senior applicant level.
- We reviewed some job websites during our research and found mistakes even on these, in amongst advice on spelling etc!

But once you’ve mastered it, it’s easy!

Apostrophes have two uses:

1. To show OMISSION (a missing letter). Mistakes **aren’t** common here.
2. To show POSSESSION (ownership of something). Mistakes **are** common here.

### **Omission**

Apostrophes show you that some letters have been taken out of a word to shorten it:

**Do not** becomes **don’t**.

**I will** becomes **I’ll**.

**Could have** becomes **could’ve**.

**You are** becomes **you’re**.

The ’ goes where the letter/letters have been removed.

Although some people will tell you not to shorten words when you’re writing formal letters, we don’t agree. Shortened words sound more warm and personal and are easier to read. Though there are still a few people who prefer formal language, this number is dwindling. Plain English is commonplace now.

## **Possession**

Here apostrophes show you that something belongs to something else. To show belonging, you add 's.

The dog's tail - the tail belongs to the dog.  
The car's lights - the lights belong to the car.  
Tony's hair - the hair belongs to Tony.

Usually the ' goes **before** the s.

If the owner already ends in an s, then the ' goes **after** the s that is already there.

You can add 's in some cases but it's optional. To avoid confusion, just add ' after the s.

James' parents – the parents belong to James.  
Chris' money – the money belongs to Chris.  
The dogs' bowls - the bowls belong to some dogs.  
The boys' coats - the coats belong to some boys.  
The cars' wheels - the wheels belong to some cars.

Watch out for plurals that don't end in s. Words like men and children don't end in s, but they are talking about lots of people. These words use 's to show possession. For example:

The men's hats - says that the hats belong to the men.  
The women's house - says that the house belongs to the women.



# **Job Application Forms**

## **Introduction**

It’s a fact that most people struggle with job application forms.

In a recent article, Time Magazine reported that US high school graduates have even gone as far as to sue their school systems because while they got respectable grades and a diploma, they can’t fill in a job application form correctly!

This section of the Guide will make the whole thing easy. We’ll help you write winning application forms that get you ahead of your competition and on your way to an interview.

---

Though it may seem obvious, some people forget that the sole purpose of submitting a job application is to WIN you an interview. Without an interview it is highly unlikely you will get the job! So make it count.

Often your application form is the only information your potential employer has about you. It needs to tell them clearly what makes you suitable for the vacancy. The most suitable candidates, based on their applications, will be interviewed and you need to be among them.

Don’t be put off by your employment application form. Most sections are easy – they just want information.

The other sections will be after more, but we’ll give you advice and an example to help you.

## **General Advice When Completing Application Forms**

- **Spelling and Grammar**

When we read job application forms, we circle any spelling and grammar mistakes. One we’ll accept, two is bad, three is a no-no.

Why? Because if you have not taken enough care to make sure your application is error free, we will doubt your commitment to the job and your ability, and likely not shortlist you for interview.

It’s simple advice we know, but you’d be surprised how many applications we receive with mistakes.

**Quick Tip 1:** Ask someone else to read your application. We can almost guarantee they will spot things you haven’t.

**Quick Tip 2:** Read our advice on using apostrophes (page 35), the most common grammatical mistake we find.

- **No Blank Spaces**

Answer every question on the application form. If no answer is needed, write “N/A” or score through the section. Again, it shows you have taken your time, read every question and checked the application form.

We do receive incomplete application forms, often with key information missing. Examples of questions left blank include:

- “Do you have a full, clean driving license?”
- “Are you a US resident?”
- “Do you have any disability which could affect your ability to do the job for which you are applying?”

- **Type or Write?**

Whenever possible, type your answers. Typing is easier to read.

Some employers can provide e-application forms. If they do, use one.

If not, write clearly using a good pen - don’t risk it running out!

Write out any free-format answers roughly first, before writing them on the employment application form itself.

It’s better to type out any longer free-format answers and attach them as separate sheets. Remember to write “please refer to attached sheet” or something similar on the application form in the relevant place.

**Quick Tip:** Try to get 2 copies of the application form, just in case (despite the above!) you make a mistake.

You can always say one is for a friend, or get a friend to ask for one.

Finally, take a photocopy of your completed job application form. Don’t arrive at the interview not remembering what you said!

## **Specific Advice On The Free-Format Section**

Most job application forms include a section which asks you, in any number of ways: “Why do you want the job and why are you suitable?”

We’ve seen application forms with no more than a few lines here, and even some with only a few words!

REMEMBER - this is (provided the rest of the application form is correct) what will get you the interview or not.

So Sell Yourself.

How?

In a minute, we’ll show you a job application example where the person has done just this - sold themselves. But read these two steps first, to put it into context.

Step 1: Decide WHAT you are going to say

Step 2: Decide HOW to present it

### **Step 1: What to Say**

- **Use the advert to your advantage!**

The advert will tell you what the Company is looking for in a successful applicant.

Get pen and paper. For each requirement:

- Make a note of it
- Write down how you meet it
- Come up with an example showing how you meet it

E.g.

- “Excellent communication skills”
- *“I have excellent communication skills”*
- “I was asked to coach two colleagues on improving their communication skills”

If you cannot meet a requirement, don’t ignore it. This is because most employers score applications against a list of criteria. They used these criteria to write the advert. If you don’t cover it, you will get **no marks** for this at all. It might mean the difference between you getting an interview or not!

Instead, be honest, but positive.

If the advert asks for ‘experience dealing with customers on the phone’, which you’ve not had, there is nothing wrong with writing this, for example:

*“I have a lot of experience dealing with customers face to face and am confident that the skills I have will allow me to deal with customers on the phone just as effectively”.*

You would at least get a mark for this, perhaps 2, since you suggested that the skills needed are much the same, which is true. We've used an instance like this in the job application example to follow.

- **Mirror language**

Always try to describe your skills using the language of the advert.

The person who wrote the advert thought hard about the words they used to describe the job. Look at the adjectives they use like ‘exceptional’ ‘excellent’ ‘great’ ‘good’. If your experience and skills match the advert then use the adjectives from the advert.

For example, if the advert asks for extensive experience, don’t say you have “a lot of” experience, use “extensive” as they did. See our job application example for ideas.

- **Use examples**

**Please Read This:** Not using examples to back up statements made in application forms is a common but crucial mistake.

Without examples, your ‘Sell Yourself’ section is simply a series of statements which anyone can make. If our decision to call for interview is between one job application with numerous statements of worthiness and another with less statements, but proof, we choose the latter.

Let us explain why:

Anyone can write (when the adverts calls for influencing skills)....

*“I have successfully influenced senior managers in my department”.*

But it is far better to say.....

*“I have successfully influenced senior managers in my department. In December, I put together a proposal to change the way in which the incoming calls were handled. This proposal was adopted and resulted in a 20% reduction in call waiting times”.*

- **Use quotes by other people about you**

Radical? Yes, but it works. We have used it!

Again it separates out mere statements from statements with proof!!

Read this example: *“My Manager wrote in my last appraisal ‘John is an excellent influencer. On his advice, we changed the way we trained new staff and trainees are now taking calls in week 2 rather than week 3’”.*

Isn’t that good?

It’s helped us win jobs – we are certain. We have only seen it on a handful of job application forms but it shines like a diamond!

## **Step 2: Decide how you are going to present the information**

- **Language**

Use English, and Plain English if you can. Don’t flower-up your language.

A job application flows, and is so much easier to read when it’s written in simple terms.

Again, the example job application which follows shows you how this works.

- **Length**

If the application form doesn’t give you enough room in the ‘sell yourself’ box, write (type is better) your answer on a separate sheet and attach it.

But don’t write an essay. One page of A4 is enough. More than this and interviewers tend to get bored, especially if they have 30+ applications to read.

- **Bullets and spaces etc..**

Break your text up with bullets where appropriate, like lists.

Break your text into small paragraphs. It’s easier on the eye.

## **A Real-Life Application Example**

Below is an extract from a real job application form showing you how to put the advice on the previous 7 pages into action!

This job application form resulted in an interview and a job!

The position was for a Manager of a Customer Excellent Team. Among other things, the advert asked for:

- “...someone who is passionate about wanting to see us deliver the best possible customer service and who can lead a program of customer service enhancements...”
- “...someone who can lead a team of consultants and managers and who has the ability to provide direction and support to a highly motivated and focused team...”
- “...someone who can influence across the organisation at senior levels...”

Here’s what the applicant wrote:

*"To make things easier for you, I've linked my experience to the desired characteristics and job responsibilities you've mentioned in the advert. I've also attached sample feedback to support my application.*

***“...someone who is passionate about wanting to see us deliver the best possible customer service..... leading a program of customer service enhancements...”***

*ABC Company exists for its members. Wherever you work in the Group, and whoever you call your ‘customers’, serving ABC members (and potential members) is our end game.*

*Some of my existing team have struggled with this, since many are, first and foremost, technicians. Getting them all to recognize the importance of customer service wasn’t easy but I managed it.*

*In 2007, working with a few key people, I introduced the XXX Charter. This is a simple but effective customer service charter, covering such things as responding to X within 24 hrs and keeping users informed. Within 6 months, the team’s customer satisfaction score rose from an average of 3.2 to 3.6 (I set a target of 3.5).*



*More recently, we’ve improved our service level agreement and introduced traffic lights to indicate our success at bringing down the number of outstanding X. Again, the drive has been to improve customer service which is now the best in the Department.*

***“Lead the team of consultants and managers... ability to provide direction and support to a highly motivated and focused team.”***

*I’ve successfully led multi-site teams in both X and X Departments, providing direction and support both operationally and as a line manager. The attached feedback supports this.*

*In X Department, my operational management was extensive, to the point of deputizing for the Senior Manager in his absence.*

***“...energy, enthusiasm and organizational awareness...”***

*Others recognize my energy, my love of challenge and that I welcome change.*

*My Senior Manager recently said of me “X is very astute and quick thinking and has loads of drive and energy”.*

*My Head Of said “X is very conscientious, hardworking and full of ideas as to how to make things better. She is always at the forefront of new initiatives and can be relied on to move things forward.”*

***“...influence across the organisation at senior levels...”***

*My influencing skills have improved year on year and my audience has grown, from customers (as a Sales Rep), to peers and now to Senior Management.*

*I’ve supplemented practice with theory through an Influencing Skills Workshop. Among other things, this showed me the benefits of tailoring my influencing techniques to my audience.*

*In 2008 I volunteered to take over the review of the X framework in my Department. Progress had been slow and the need to deliver a better program was pressing. I brought together a team of managers and staff and over a few months, a revised program was designed.*

*I met with the Heads Of to sell the revised program to them. The new X framework was launched shortly afterwards and feedback was excellent."*

## **4 Common Job Application Mistakes To Avoid**

Here are the 4 most common mistakes we find in job application forms. In our experience, avoiding these will set you apart from most of your competition.

### **Over-use of the word “I”**

Interviewers expect to see a lot of “I”s in job application forms, resumes, CVs and cover letters but don’t start every new sentence with one. If you have, remove a few using these ideas:

- Just change the words around so that instead of saying:
  - “I have actively sought technical challenges since working in this team”.
  - Say...
  - “Since working in this team, I’ve actively sought technical challenges to develop myself”.
- Or add other words, such as:
  - “In addition, I”, or
  - “As well as this, I”, or
  - “You’ve asked for someone with excellent communication skills, which I feel I have”.

### **Long paragraphs**

A new idea should always start a new paragraph.

Limit your paragraphs to 3 sentences, 5 max. Any longer and the paragraph is no longer easy on the eye.

There is nothing wrong with one sentence paragraphs if there is only one point to cover.

### **Focusing on the features, not the benefits**

Too many applicants describe what they do, but fail to sell the **benefits** of what they do, or their contribution.

Here’s an example from an application form which one of us was asked to check for a colleague. She had written:

“I was involved in a project which aimed to deliver new processes to our finance department to allow them to process cheques in 5 rather than 7 days. After that, I worked on another project which led to the upgrading of the department’s software.”

We suggested to her that she wrote this instead, which better reflected her role.

“My Manager asked me to lead a workstream within a project, which aimed to reduce cheque processing time from 7 to 5 days. Through investigation and negotiation with other parties and by using the skills of my team to the best, I delivered the changes early. In fact, cheque processing time fell to a little over 4 days.

Immediately after this, my Manager recommended me for a related project, which I delivered on time and to budget.”

### **Too formal language**

Being too formal makes reading hard for any interviewer, because they are forced to read in a way that’s not natural to them. This immediately creates a bad feeling, something you’ll want to avoid.

Again (using a real-life example), why write:

“I am applying for the position of Technology Team Leader because I believe I possess the skills and attributes you are looking for and will be an invaluable addition to your team.

To begin with, I have excellent communication skills.....”

When the following is much easier to read, more engaging and much more persuasive:

“I’m really excited by this opportunity to join your team.

Please take a few minutes to read my application, in which I’ve covered the points you mention in the advert. I hope you’ll agree that my experience and skills make me an ideal candidate and I look forward to meeting you for an interview soon.

You mention that the ideal candidate will have excellent communication skills, and I’m pleased to say I do....”

Here’s another real life example. A colleague wrote:

“My own activities in this area have also furnished me with related skills; this is illustrated by my creation of a disaster recovery solution that, if faced with an inoperable operating system (OS), would resolve the problem. I developed an unattended Windows XP installation disk that with only simple key presses would completely re-install Windows XP, Support Tools and minor applications such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.”

We suggested this instead:

“Because of my involvement in this, I learned new skills which I was able to put into practice. Here’s an example:

Restoring a failed operating system is a long, manual process. Using my new skills, I development an unattended Windows XP installation disk. This completely re-installs Windows XP, Support Tools and minor applications such as Adobe Acrobat Reader with only a few clicks of the mouse. It’s a major improvement”.

Can you see how each of these examples was improved, using a little imagination and energy?

## **Cover Letters**

Did you know that employers read cover letters more often than resumes and CVs?

Well it’s true, and means that a well written cover letter can be more important to your job search than your resume or CV!

So to help you, here’s an introduction to writing great cover letters, along with two covering letter examples.

### **Introduction**

At a recent recruitment seminar which one of us attended, a speaker said that an average employer spends longer reading cover letters than CVs or resumes.

And in our experience, he’s right. We also read covering letters in full but often skim CVs and resumes looking for relevant information.

This isn’t surprising when you think that most cover letters are one page long, and most CVs 2-4 pages long and that we receive between 30-60 CVs for every job!

So include a cover letter every time you send off your CV or resume. Chances are that this will be read in full.

If you’re not yet convinced about cover letters, here are another three good reasons why you should always include one

- 1. As interviewers, you engage us personally.**

By this we mean that if you write to me, using my name, it makes me feel human to you.

Strange? Not really. Let’s say you write a song (one of us does this in our spare time) which you want to get noticed. Record labels and music publishers receive hundreds of demos every day, most addressed to “The A & R Department”.

If you read relevant websites about getting your music heard, most tell you to find out the name of the person in charge of the A & R Department (or at least one of the staff) and write to them personally. It increases your chances of being listened to for longer or listened to at all.

In fact, a survey conducted by the UK Royal Mail found that CVs and covering letters addressed to a named person were significantly favored over those addressed to a generic job title by 55% of Personnel Departments.

Since you know the name of the person advertising the job, or can easily find it out, write to them. Don’t just put a CV, resume or job application form in an envelope – it’s impersonal.

2. It sets you apart from all the other resumes and CVs. Only about 1 in 10 resumes or applications we receive has a covering letter. So already you are different.
3. It shows you have singled that job out particularly. Anyone can print off another copy of their CV/resume and stick it in an envelope when a suitable job appears. But writing a personal letter, expressing your interest and suitability for one particular position, makes you seem genuine and keener. Our covering letter examples show you how.

## **Cover Letter Examples**

On the next 3 pages, you’ll find 3 cover letter examples:

- The first in response to an **external** advert
- The second in response to an **internal** advert
- The third a speculative cover letter

**In response to an advert** your cover letter should include:

- What position you are applying for and what makes you the best candidate for the job
- A reference to the publication in which the advert appeared
- Details of what you can contribute to the Company and how your experience makes you particularly suitable
- A note about your career aims and how they relate to the job for which you are applying
- A request for an interview

**A speculative cover letter** on the other hand, should include:

- An explanation of why you are writing
- What position or type of position you would like
- Reasons why you are looking to join the Company
- What experience you have that would be beneficial
- A request for a reply or an interview



(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

(Today’s Date)

Dear (Mr/Ms/Miss Name given in advert),

I’m writing with regard to the position of Customer Sales Team Leader which was recently advertised in My Town Chronicle.

I’m very interested in this position and have the knowledge, skills and experience you’re looking for to make the job a success.

My long term experience as a Supervisor in the Customer Sales Industry has taught me how to lead and motivate a team to achieve demanding sales targets within a competitive market. In January, my team reached its monthly sales target after only 2 weeks and went on to secure sales of more than double any other team, with no compromise to sale quality or customer service.

I’m keen to develop my career in Customer Sales and am ready to move to a more senior role where I can demonstrate my potential. I believe the position of Customer Sales Team Leader can give me this opportunity and that I can help ABC Company reach its goals.

Please find enclosed my resume which gives you further information about my career and my suitability for this position.

I look forward to meeting you soon for an interview.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

(name)

(Phone numbers)

(Email address)

(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

(Today’s Date)

Dear Jonathon,

**Re Operations Manager Role**

I’m very excited about this opportunity to join X Department. It’s come at a great time and offers me the career challenges I’m looking for, as well as the chance to make a real difference in a key business area.

It was great to meet you last week and learn more about the role and the kind of person you’re looking for. Thanks also to Sally for telling me a little more about what it means to be an Operations Manager in X Department.

From my CV you’ll see that I have what it takes to be a successful leader. My achievements demonstrate my ability to deliver the following through my Team Leaders and Coordinators:

- Improvements in customer service
- Increases in quality, efficiency and productivity
- Better processes, controls and reductions in risk
- Improved staff attitude and performance through coaching and performance management

Here are just a few examples to illustrate each:

- Raised customer feedback scores from 3.2 to 3.5 over 6 months (having set a target of 3.5)
- Drove through changes to team structure to facilitate improved customer service and efficiency, resulting in quicker response times
- Achieved 245% of target for team competency completions within Y Department
- Coached 12 people through development contracts resulting in improved performance and increased individual and team morale
- Delivered a revised competency framework following staff frustration
- Facilitated inter-team training sessions to improve cross-skilling
- Delivered a People Strategy for the Department

I’ve also attached sample feedback from others in support of my performance.

I am really keen on this role and look forward to discussing my suitability with you at interview.

Yours sincerely

(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

(Today’s Date)

Dear (Mr/Ms/Miss Name),

I’m writing to enquire whether you have a vacancy in your Company for a Technology Engineer. I enclose a copy of my CV for your consideration.

As you will see from my CV, I am currently working for ABC Limited as a Desktop Support Technician. In this role, I’m responsible for identifying and resolving hardware and software issues for over 200 users across 3 sites.

This requires excellent technical skills as well as the ability to deal effectively with all levels of staff across all Departments. The need to work to strict timescales and adhere to established procedures is also crucial.

I am interested in joining your Company because I believe it offers the opportunity to broaden my skills and experience. I have heard that your Company offers good training and good prospects and that employees enjoy working for you.

I believe my experience can help your Company achieve its objectives and hope you agree.

I would be grateful if you would contact me for an interview if you have any relevant vacancies in your Company.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

(name)

(Phone numbers)

(Email address).

## **Phone Interviews**

### **Introduction**

Here you’ll find phone interview tips that will help you WIN a face to face interview.

We’ve used phone interviews to reduce the pool of applicants to a manageable size for interview, especially for national recruitment campaigns like the graduate scheme.

And more and more companies do this now, for two reasons.

1. It allows them to reduce the pool through a *form* of interview assessment rather than just through reading resumes, CVs or application forms, which can be a bit hit and miss.
2. But if they have reduced the pool in the usual way, it costs a lot less to phone candidates than invite them all for a face to face interview.

Face-to-face interviews will only be offered to those who ‘pass’ the phone interview.

You can be ‘phone-interviewed’ in two ways:

- By invitation, when you are given a time to call or a time to receive a call.
- Without invitation, i.e. unexpectedly!

So while you’re actively looking for a job, it’s important to be prepared for a phone interview at a moments notice. You never know when a Company or Agency might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk.

We have some tips for preparing overleaf...

## **Preparing For A Phone Interview**

Like any interview, good preparation is crucial. It often means the difference between getting to the next interview or not!

Here are some Top Tips to help you prepare for your phone interview.

And on the next page, we help you answer telephone interview questions.

### **Before Your Telephone Interview**

- Have a copy of your CV, application form or resume with you so you can refer to it, possibly when they do
- Have a pen and paper ready for taking notes
- If it isn’t a convenient time, ask for an alternative date or time or offer to call back later. Don’t risk the alternative
- If you have ‘call-waiting’, turn it off so you’re not interrupted
- Clear the room of noise and distractions - kids and pets are a good start
- Ask a friend or family member to conduct a mock telephone interview and record it so you can hear how you sound over the phone. You’ll be able to hear your “ums” and “uhs” and “okays” and you can practice reducing them. It will also give you the chance to rehearse answers to those typical interview questions you’ll be asked

### **During the Interview**

- Use the interviewer’s title (Mr or Ms and their last name). Only use their first name if they ask you to
- Don’t interrupt the interviewer. Wait for them to finish, completely
- Take your time – better to take a moment or two and give a good answer than rush and give a bad one
- Give short answers – you can always add “does that answer your question?” if you are worried you’ve not said enough
- Try to smile – it helps lift your voice so you sound more positive
- Don’t chew gum, eat, or smoke
- Have a glass of water handy, in case you get a dry mouth
- Speak slowly and clearly

### **After the Interview:**

- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
- Remember to say “thank you.” Follow with a thank you note which reiterates your interest in the job (see page 134).

## **Types of Telephone Interview Questions**

Telephone interview questions are usually designed to narrow down a pool of applicants to a manageable size for interview, not to determine the best candidate.

Because of this, interview questions are usually more general in nature than face to face interviews and sometimes even multiple choice.

Multiple choice questions will ask you, for example:

- “Do you strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree with the following statement: ‘I have the killer instinct’”.
- “Do you strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree with the following statement: ‘I prefer to work on tasks on my own’”.

These type of telephone interview questions try, at a very basic level, to wean out candidates wholly unsuitable for the job.

Our advice? Know the sort of person the interviewer is looking for and answer the questions accordingly.

If the phone interview questions are not multiple choice, they are still likely to be more general than regular interview questions, because the level of detail is often not needed at this stage.

However, there is no harm in preparing as if it's the real thing. In fact, we would positively encourage it! It is better to be over-prepared than under-prepared.

Please visit our Interview Questions and Answers pages for a full list of likely phone interview questions.

## **Selection Tests**

### **Introduction**

According to BBC News “the use of job aptitude tests as part of the interview process has boomed in the last few years.”

And at a recent recruitment seminar which one of us attended, 30% of attendees were using selection tests in the recruitment process. Research suggests the actual number is closer to 40%.

This section of our Guide gives you information and advice to help you ‘pass’ selection tests.

We’ve use selection tests in two ways:

- To enable shortlisting for interview. So your results determine if you are called for interview or not.
- To supplement the interview. So your results help determine whether you are offered the job or not.

You may find that the term ‘aptitude test’ covers any or several of the following tests:

- Psychometric Tests
- IQ Tests
- Verbal Reasoning Tests
- Logic Tests
- Numerical Tests
- Maths Tests
- Personality Tests
- Career Aptitude Tests

In most cases, a potential employer will tell you the title of the test beforehand, and this will be a great help.

## **General Test Taking Tips**

- Most tests are multiple choice, take place under exam conditions and have strict time limits. You are rarely expected to complete the test within the time given.
- There is not usually a ‘pass mark’ as such, but your score is compared with other scores. These comparisons are with people in a similar role or individuals successfully doing the job you’ve applied for.
- If you are asked to sit a job aptitude test, it will typically cover two or three separate areas. There are lots of different types, but usually one part will measure verbal reasoning, another numerical reasoning and perhaps a third will measure spatial or diagrammatic reasoning.

To **improve your performance** in any job aptitude test we recommend you:

- Reach the test location in good time, well rested and in a positive frame of mind.
- READ/LISTEN to the directions carefully. Occasionally, the marks are not awarded evenly. Section A might carry 40% of the marks and Section B only 10%, so use your time wisely for maximum marks.
- Be both quick and accurate. The faster you go, the more errors you may make. The slower you go, the fewer questions you’ll be able to answer. Find a balance.
- If you get stuck on a question, don’t spend too long on it. Move onto the next one. However, don’t abandon a question prematurely, if, with a few extra seconds, you might have solved it.
- Resist the temptation to check each answer thoroughly until you are absolutely convinced it is right. You will waste valuable time if you do.
- If you aren’t sure of an answer, put down your best guess and move on. However, avoid wild guessing. In some tests, marks are taken off for wrong answers.
- Sometimes the questions get harder as you work through them, so don’t panic if later questions take longer to answer than the earlier ones.



- If calculators are allowed, take your own with you, since you are familiar with how it works.
- The test may have some practice questions at the start. Make sure you understand these thoroughly before the test itself begins. If you don’t, be sure to ask the administrator to explain the test properly. They will.
- Do some practice tests with [AnalyzeMyCareer.com](http://AnalyzeMyCareer.com) or other websites. In our view, practice is the key to success for many of these tests. It’s perhaps our top test taking tip!

**Extra Tip:** Print these Test Taking Tips pages and take them with you to the test as a reminder!

## **Advice About Math/Numerical Tests**

There are two types of math or numerical tests. One is a simple math test, similar to tests you took at school, which measures your math ability. The other is a numerical reasoning test which measures how quickly your mind is able to reason with numbers and understand information presented in a numerical form.

For the first, it’s a good idea to refresh your memory if you’ve not studied math for a while. It’s sometimes the case that you’re not allowed to use a calculator, so brushing up on your mental arithmetic can save you time and give you confidence.

Here are some quick tips to help you:

- Go over your times tables
- Remind yourself of some basic calculations such as percentages and fractions
- Check that you can do long multiplication
- Practice estimating answers - even if you are allowed to use a calculator this can help make sure you are on the right track
- Don’t worry about more advanced math such as algebra or equations. These will not be tested unless the employers tell you explicitly
- Visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/numbers/wholenumbers/>. This BBC page takes you through some basic math which you’ll find useful for numerical or math tests

And additionally, for the second type of test:

- Questions are often based on your ability to interpret data presented in tables so get hold of a financial paper (or something similar) and spend some time becoming familiar with reading tables of information.

Now, some practice!

In this numerical reasoning test example, you are presented with a table of information followed by 5 questions. Your task is to select the right response from five possible answers.

<b>Age</b>	<b>11-15</b>	<b>16-20</b>	<b>21-25</b>
<b>Cartoons</b>	24%	15%	4%
<b>Feature Films</b>	20%	23%	20%
<b>News</b>	5%	18%	21%
<b>Soaps</b>	15%	20%	20%
<b>TV dramas</b>	13%	10%	13%
<b>Sports</b>	23%	14%	22%
<b>Number in survey</b>	120	80	50

1. **Over all ages, what is the most popular sort of TV programme**
  - a) Sports
  - b) Soaps
  - c) Feature films
  - d) Cartoons
  - e) News
2. **What proportion of 16-20 year olds watch something other than the News?**
  - a) 54%
  - b) 18%
  - c) 28%
  - d) 82%
  - e) 74%

3. **What sort of programme shows the greatest increase as viewers get older?**
  - a) News
  - b) TV dramas
  - c) Soaps
  - d) Sports
  - e) Cannot tell
  
4. **How many 16-20 year olds like cartoons the most?**
  - a) 15
  - b) 10
  - c) 8
  - d) 12
  - e) 16
  
5. **How many more 11-15 year olds like to watch feature films compared to 21-25 years olds?**
  - a) 14
  - b) 10
  - c) 8
  - d) 12
  - e) 0

How do you do?

Turn the page for the answers....

1. **The correct answer: c**  
Feature films because together they add up to 63%, the highest category (20% + 23% + 20%).
2. **The correct answer: d**  
 $100\% - 18\% = 82\%$
3. **The correct answer: a**  
News goes from 5% to 21% as people get older.
4. **The correct answer: d**  
15% of 80 people in the survey = 12
5. **The correct answer: a**  
 $(20\% \text{ of } 120) - (20\% \text{ of } 50) = 14$

How did you find that?

If you want more practice, visit [AnalyzeMyCareer.com](http://AnalyzeMyCareer.com). It has the full range of tests we describe in this Guide.

## **Advice On Logic Or Verbal Reasoning Tests**

Verbal Reasoning or Logic Test Questions look at how easily you understand and interpret written text.

Increasingly, employees are required to deal with large amounts of information which they need to analyze. Employers look for this ability in their job applicants.

To help you, here’s some advice on Logic Tests and places to go for practice.

And by the way, these types of tests will not test your vocabulary, grammar and spelling.

Typical verbal reasoning test questions start with a passage of text followed by statements based on the information given in the passage.

You are asked to indicate whether the statements are:

- True, or
- False, or
- Whether it is not possible to say so either way.

When answering these questions, you should only use the information given in the passage. Don’t answer them based on what you know or assume from the ‘real-world’.

Here is a quick example question to try.

**Leading scientists defend animal testing**

At a recent conference sponsored by a number of leading pharmaceutical companies scientists defended the role of animal testing. The continued use of rabbits, guinea pigs, rats and mice in the development of medicines was strongly endorsed. Many delegates complained that the public did not understand that there were some products which could only be tested on live systems. Also that medical techniques such as kidney transplants would not exist were it not for pioneering animal testing. The conference confirmed that 3000 animals had been used in tests in the previous year.

**New alternative to animal testing discovered**

At present there are over 10 000 ingredients available to the cosmetics industry which have not been tested on animals. These can be used in the development of new products, free from the controversy surrounding animal testing. Where testing on live subjects is required this can be achieved by using groups of human volunteers, or methods which mimic the response of a particular protein *Vistek* which simulates the reaction of the eye. In the future, as has been the case with nuclear weapons, there is also the possibility that all testing will be modeled by computers.

Now, read each of the 5 statements overleaf. For each, you need to say if the statement is:

**True** - It follows logically from the information provided

**False** - It is obviously incorrect given the information provided

**Cannot tell** - It is impossible to tell given the information provided – i.e. you need more information to decide.

1. Animal testing is in decline
2. Some products can only be tested on animals
3. Animal experiments and nuclear testing make people angry
4. Vistek is a protein found in the eye
5. Animal testing has been used to develop 10 000 ingredients

How did you get on?

1. **The correct answer:** Cannot tell:  
You have no idea how many animals were used in any year apart from the previous one.
2. **The correct answer:** True  
It says that some products can only be tested on live systems
3. **The correct answer:** Cannot tell  
There is no information on whether testing makes people angry
4. **The correct answer:** False  
It says that Vistek simulates the reaction of the eye
5. **The correct answer:** False  
It says that the 10,000 ingredients were not tested on animals.

You may have realized that the best way to prepare for logic tests or verbal reasoning tests is to practice.

We recommend you visit [AnalyzeMyCareer.com](http://AnalyzeMyCareer.com) for some practice.

## **Personality or Career Tests**

On this page, we cover personality and career tests and how you can use both to your own advantage.

The use of personality tests as a means of employee selection has fallen out of favor with many employers recently. Their reliability as a means of selection is questionable and there have been a number of lawsuits filed against employers for using personality tests as a means of employee selection.

Although you may still come across personality tests at work, the use of these is often now limited to individual and team development rather than any form of candidate selection.

Personality tests do have a place in career development though, but for YOUR benefit, not an employers. This is because they can help you determine which jobs match your personality type and which careers you may have an aptitude for.

While the test results are only an indication, they may assist your decision making when choosing a job or career path. Then, in common with millions of other people, you too can find a more satisfying career.

Everyone knows that working is so much more enjoyable when you use your best strengths and natural talents. This, and the fact that you’re successful at what you do make each day another day to look forward to.

But many people aren’t sure how to identify their natural talents. They are even less sure about how to find great jobs that match these talents.

Monster, like many in the employment industry, believe that the first step is to determine your personality type.

To help you, they have a (free) career aptitude test at: <http://resources.monster.com/tools/quizzes/perfectcareer/>, which takes only about 10 minutes to complete.

And if you found that one useful, there’s a good selection of personality and career tests designed to help you match your personality to a job at: [AnalyzeMyCareer.com](http://AnalyzeMyCareer.com)

A career or personality test can be invaluable at the right time.

When the time is right for you, try one. You might be surprised what it throws up!

## **Before The Interview**

### **Introduction**

In preparing for an interview we cover:

- Researching the job/Company if you’ve not already
- Interview clothes
- Arriving for an interview
- Job interview expenses

There are more things to consider when preparing for a job interview than you might think, but spending time preparing can give you a real head start!

No doubt you’ll have heard the phrase “failing to prepare is preparing to fail”. This is as true for interviews as anything else. Prepare well and you will improve your chances of success.

According to research, people who prepare well for interviews:

- Feel more relaxed
- Understand more about the job
- Know the sort of questions they’ll be asked
- Have good answers prepared for those questions
- Sell themselves better
- Leave the interview feeling like they did their best

### **Research**

A crucial part of preparing for a job interview is research.

We’ve interviewed candidates who have clearly done little, and sometimes no research about our Company or the job we’re interviewing them for.

As this is generally our 3rd or 4th question, the interview is off to a bad start. Often we’ll wrap it up quickly for 2 reasons.

1. Do they really want the job?
2. Do we really want them?



After all, they weren’t keen enough to do any research. And if they’re not prepared to put in the effort to do any, how effective an employee are they likely to be?

You see our point?

Good preparation will be invaluable so don’t delay starting your research. You may be called for interview at short notice so you need to get ready. The advert will have given you some information but you will need more.

Don’t forget that research is not just to ensure you are well informed. It’s also for your benefit to make sure that you’re making the right move for you!

Preparing for a job interview is easier if you already know someone who works for the employer. Even better if they work in the department where the job vacancy is!

But don’t worry if not – there are other ways to find out what you need.

### **Know The Company**

Most companies have a website. Read it and make notes. Take the notes with you. You can always refer to them in the interview.

But memorize some key facts. After all, you want to join the Company so you should be interested enough to remember some.

If they don’t have a website, ask them to send you some company literature. Tell them you’re preparing for a job interview with them. If it’s a small company, they will remember that you asked and you’ll score brownie points for your initiative.

If they have no literature, ask for an appointment. Go on! Again, tell them you are hoping to join them soon and are preparing for a job interview with them. Most small companies love to talk about their success and will be thrilled you want to too.

We regularly meet with candidates before they submit job applications and/or before job interviews. It’s a chance to make a good first impression before everyone else. Granted, most of these are internal candidates, but we have met some external ones. Not many, because people are often too afraid to ask – don’t be.

Whichever route you choose, preparing for a job interview must involve finding something out about the Company.

## **Know The Job**

The same applies here.

We always ask interviewees to tell us about the job for which they are being interviewed. Believe it or not, some do not know what the job entails day to day, even some internal applicants. As we said before, we’ll often wrap the interview up quickly for the same 2 reasons.

1. Do they really want the job?
2. Do we really want them?

Follow the same research avenues as before. Whichever avenues you choose, preparing for a job interview must involve finding something out about the job.

**Quick Tip!** If you don’t understand what a word or phrase in the advert means, contact the name given in the advert and ask them.

Often when someone is sorting through a pile of applications, resume or CVs, they’ll remember that you called and that you have shown interest in the job and used your initiative.

You may just have demonstrated one of the key qualities they were looking for! It’s better than not knowing the word or phrase when it comes up in the interview!

## **Know Yourself**

Make sure you re-read the job advert and your employment application form or resume/CV before the interview and take copies of both with you.

## **Interview Clothes**

For some, knowing what interview clothes to wear may seem like a no-brainer.

But remember, the first impression you make on a potential employer is the most important one.

And like it or not, the first judgment an interviewer makes is going to be based on how you look and what interview clothes you are wearing. That’s why it’s always important to dress professionally for a job interview, even if the work environment is casual.

We would always suggest suits for men and suits, dresses/skirts or smart trousers and a conservative top for women.

And take a moment to think about these other considerations:

### **Interview Rash**

Some people suffer from a reddening rash which rises up across the top of the chest and up the neck. We’ve seen this perhaps 20 times.

Being conscious of this as it happens, causes you to get redder and takes your mind away from the actual interview.

And if an interviewer has not seen it before, it might distract them too, if only for while, and quite unwillingly!

If you know or think you suffer from this, try to wear a higher collar (less easy for men!) or neck scarf so that the rash is less visible. If it’s less visible, you can focus on answering the questions.

Alternatively, if you know you suffer, let the interviewer know early on.

One person did this in an interview with one of us, quite subtlety and with humor! She said something like this: “Just before we start, you may notice that I develop a rash during the interview, but it’s just nerves, nothing contagious”. We laughed and moved on and no-one took any notice when the rash developed.

## **General Appearance**

As well as interview clothes, think about your face, hair, the amount of jewellery you have on, the strength of your perfume or aftershave and the bag you carry.

Here is a checklist you should follow:

- Iron your interview clothes and do it properly – You may not think anyone will see your shirt cuffs with your jacket on, but you’ll be sorry when the room gets hot and you are invited to take your jacket off but don’t want to!
- Polish your shoes – Even a great suit doesn’t make up for dirty shoes.
- Make sure your hair is clean and tidy – If it needs cut, get it cut several days before the job interview so you are comfortable with it. Don’t wake up on the day of the interview and have to worry about that as well!
- Make sure you have clean, tidy finger nails – You’ll shake hands several times and your hands are in full view on your lap during the interview, so make sure they are clean.
- Perfumes/aftershaves - Smell nice, but don’t knock out the interviewer. Less is more. Ask someone you trust before you leave for the interview.
- Have fresh breath – You may be closer to the interviewer than you think if it’s a small room. If you have to smoke or drink coffee to calm your nerves, use mints, or better still, brush your teeth in the toilet when you arrive!

## **Arriving For Your Interview**

**Food For Thought...** You may not think that what happens before the interview starts is particularly important.

It is.

Some opinions are formed in the first 4 minutes of any meeting.

Although your interviewer/s will have the whole interview to form the rest, don’t get off to a bad start!

Arriving for an interview in style, with confidence and a friendly manner will set the tone for the whole interview, so work it to your advantage.

After all, you have done all this work and preparation, so don’t spoil it for two minutes extra effort.

So here are some simple but important tips....

### **When you arrive**

Be friendly and polite to whoever greets you. You might think it’s ‘just’ the receptionist, but maybe the person interviewing is her boyfriend, and if you are not polite, he may get to know!

If it’s a small company, they probably all know each other anyway and may discuss applicants over lunch!

Thank this person for showing you to the interview room or waiting room.

### **When you are called to interview**

- Smile and make eye contact with the interviewer/s
- Offer your hand in greeting to all interviewers
- Greet the interviewer/s by using their name/s and tell them yours. You will sound confident
- Don’t sit down until you are invited to
- When you are invited, take your time to get comfortable and compose yourself
- If there is a desk, don’t lean on it!

## **Interview Expenses**

So you’ve been offered an interview for your ideal job – Great News!

You eagerly type the zip or postcode into your routefinder.

It’s a long way and oh no! - the Company won’t reimburse your job interview expenses.

### **So what do you do?**

While it used to be norm for employers to pay travel costs, a large and growing number are declining to pay these expenses, mostly in an effort to keep recruitment costs low.

But with fuel and public transport costs rising, you might question whether it’s worth going.

Think about the following.....

- Find out what the employer’s position is on interview expenses.
  - If they don’t mention it in the letter or literature, call them and ask. It’s usually the HR Department who’ll give the answer so don’t worry about losing brownie points with the interviewers.
- If their policy is **not** to pay costs, ask them if they are able to make exceptions in certain cases. Yours might fit.
- If they won’t pay and you know you can’t afford the cost of the trip to a first interview, ask the employer if it’s possible to do a phone interview instead.
- But, at the end of the day, it’s your call. If you get the job, you’re unlikely to be bothered about any interview expenses. It will be money well spent!

# **At The Interview**

## **Introduction**

Your job application, CV or resume WON you the interview – Well Done!

Now our advice on interview questions and answers will help you WIN the job!

In this section, we give advice on:

- HOW to give good answers to interview questions.

Giving good answers is as much about HOW you say things as WHAT you say. Being positive and persuasive when you give an answer is magic!

Here we give you general advice on HOW to answer interview questions, with some examples.

- Interview nerves.

Almost everyone gets nervous before an interview. Remember one thing though - the interviewer probably is too (we interview and we sometimes get nervous!).

Don't forget that the interviewer is just trying to solve a problem - they need someone in that job. The interviewer is NOT trying to test you or find fault. They are matching you with that vacancy. They want the vacancy filled as much as you want the job!

We've got some advice on coping with nerves too.

- Interview body language.

Did you know that only about 17% of communication is verbal? The other 83% of what you communicate is through other signals you send out, like body language, intonation in your voice and so on.

When you talk, your actual words only convey part of the message. You can give a great answer but if you're giving out the wrong signals at the same time your interviewers may have some doubts about what you are saying. So there's some advice on this too.

## **HOW To Answer Job Interview Questions**

Remember that an interview is a ‘conversation with a purpose’. The purpose for the interviewer is to find out if you would be suitable for the vacancy. For you, it’s finding out if you would like the job if they offered you it.

A typical interview, lasting about 50 minutes, usually comprises:

- A greeting, scene setting and finally a wrap-up - 5 minutes
- Finding out about you, the interviewee, through your answers to interview questions – 30-40 minutes
- A chance for you to ask any questions of your interviewers – 10-15 minutes

And if you know or suspect you’ll be involved in multiple interviews or group interviews, there’s some advice on these too.

During the interview, the interviewer/s will be comparing your answers with the criteria they listed for the vacancy. It’s the same criteria they used to write the advert and to score your application form, resume or CV, so it should come as no surprise to you.

Your employment application form, CV or resume indicated how you met these criteria but only briefly. What the interviewers want to do in the interview is find out more about your suitability by asking you questions based on this job criteria.

## **General Guidance on Answering Interview Questions**

Don’t worry when people tell you a job interview is a “selling exercise”.

Most of us are not sales people and cringe when someone says “sell yourself”. For many, it conjures up images of pushy, arrogant people, full of their own importance.

But this isn’t what we mean when we say “sell yourself”.

Think about this: Successful sales people say you must “sell to a need”.

You know what the need is - the interviewer advertised it in the vacancy! And you already showed you met the need via your resume/CV or job application form!

So in the interview, you simply demonstrate, through answering interview questions, how well you meet this need and leave the decision to them.



So

- Be confident when answering interview questions. You may be nervous and not entirely sure that the answer you gave was the ‘right’ one, but still say it with conviction. Belief goes a long way.
- Listen to ALL the question before answering.
  - We have interviewed people who only hear the first bit of a question because they are already thinking about the answer. They then miss the next bit.
  - For example: “Talk to me about two of your strengths and give me examples for both”.
  - Some people hear the word “strengths” and off they go..... They list 2 strengths then stop, and wonder why the interviewers are looking like they expect more!
- Think before answering interview questions. What might seem like ages to you, really isn’t. Too many people jump in as soon as the question ends. Don’t.
- If you don’t understand the question, ask your interviewers to explain it. This shows confidence and maturity and is far better than giving a wrong answer.
- If you can’t think of an answer, ASK to come back to it. This is far better and shows more confidence than saying nothing, stammering or talking rubbish (people do). Just say *“I need a little more time to think about that one. Can I come back to it later?”*
- If you don’t know the answer, SAY SO. Again, it’s better than silence, guessing, or worse, lying. Just say *“that’s something I need time to think about”* or *“that’s outside my present experience, I’m afraid”*. There’s nothing wrong with not knowing the answer to everything.

- Use persuasive language when answering interview questions. By which we mean this:

Don’t say, when asked what you’ve done in your current job:

- “In my current job I did X and Y. Then I did Z”.

Instead, use words like “project led”, “volunteered”, “was asked” “successfully”.

*“In my current job, I was asked to implement X. After this, I project led a team to implement Y. After that I volunteered to take on X and completed it successfully before the deadline”.*

Can you see that this is much better? You sound active in your own successes, not just passively doing tasks given to you.

- And be positive when answering interview questions. Don’t use negative words or say anything bad about your current job, boss or Company. Instead talk about what else you are looking for. Say *“I genuinely enjoyed my last job, but I’m eager to move onto a different challenge and use the skills I’ve gained”*, or something similar.
- If you make statements, back them up with examples. Interviewers prefer to learn about how things happened in reality and examples give them this.
- Maintain eye contact with all interviewers when answering interview questions. Looking away at times is quite natural and ensures you don’t stare, but do keep good eye contact.
- And don’t be afraid to refer to any notes you have made and taken with you.

When asked a question, just say *“Is it ok if I refer to the notes I’ve made?”*. The interviewer will say ‘Yes’ and be impressed that you anticipated the question and prepared for it.

- Take the initiative. If you’re not asked about something which you feel is important, raise the subject yourself. After all, this is your one chance to sell yourself, so don’t waste the opportunity. You can do this at the end by adding *“I’ve not had the opportunity to tell you about X. Do you mind if I take a few minutes to tell you?”*.

- Be consistent with your answers. Sometimes, interviewers may ask you the same thing twice, phrased slightly differently as a way of checking you out. Listen to yourself as well as to them. If you feel you’ve made a mistake in answering interview questions, put things right by saying, *“going back to what I said earlier about...what I really meant was”*...
- Be careful not to talk TOO much. When you’ve finished answering interview questions, don’t be tempted to fill any awkward silences with nervous chatter. Sometimes, silence is used as a technique to see how you’ll react. You can always pass the lead back to your interviewers by pleasantly saying *“does that answer your question?”*

## **Interview Nerves**

Interview nerves are quite normal.

Everyone is nervous even if they don’t show it!

In our view, the best way to reduce nerves is to PREPARE.

So if you’re not prepared, go back to Before The Interview (page 68) for advice on preparing.

Then come back here.

If you are prepared, read on....

To help you cope with interview nerves, follow these simple steps:

- Get a good night’s sleep – eat dinner earlier than usual and go to bed a bit early.
- Eat breakfast, even if your interview is in the afternoon – it gets your brain working early.
- And eat lunch (for pm interviews)
- But try to finish eating at least 1 hour before the interview to give it a chance to begin digesting.
- Try some breathing exercises – take a deep breath through the nose, hold for 2 seconds and release through the mouth. Repeat a few times.
- Try to think about something which makes you happy while you wait – it increases your sense of wellbeing.
- Put your interview into perspective. If you feel like this is the last interview you’ll ever get, change your perspective. Even if you haven’t won an interview for months, this isn’t the only job out there. Don’t allow your desperation to turn your mindset into a negative one.

Instead, try to think about the interview objectively. Maybe you’ll get the job. Maybe you won’t. But if you don’t, there will be other interviews down the road. You just have to be patient.

By being a little proactive and heading off your nerves before they sabotage your interview, you’ll be upping your chances of hearing those wonderful words, “You’re hired!”.

## **Body Language**

Some understanding of body language is important so you can avoid negative gestures which might lessen your chances of getting picked for the job.

But it’s not rocket science. Don’t worry so much about it that you’re not natural. What you say counts for more!

Here are just a few Dos and Don’ts that you might like to think about:

- **Do sit up straight**

Sitting up straight helps you manage your nerves better by opening your chest and allowing you to breathe fully. It also stops your shoulders from slumping which can give the impression you’re bored.

- **Do make eye contact**

Maintain good eye contact with all interviewers if there is more than one, even if only one is asking the questions. This shows you respect the other interviewer/s being there.

Maintaining good eye contact shows you are confident and indicates mature social skills.

It also helps you gauge the interviewer/s reaction and react accordingly.

- **Do smile**

Make sure you smile a bit, even though you’re nervous. It facilitates a friendly atmosphere.

- **Show you are listening**

Let your interviewer know that you’re listening attentively by nodding and using facial expressions.

- **Don’t cross your arms**

For some people it’s quite natural and not a sign of anything negative but it can appear defensive so avoid it.

There is a ton more information on this subject available from many sources, especially online. If you are interested, by all means look. Just don’t get too hung up on this.

## **Multiple Interviews**

The use of multiple interviews is not uncommon these days, especially in high-flying companies and the financial and technological industries.

We know of companies who routinely hold three interviews, reducing the pool of applicants each time, much like a sports competition!

In the UK MI6 apparently uses seven interviews with the Civil Service not far behind!

Companies who are successful with this approach ensure that each interview serves a clearly defined and distinct purpose.

The first interview, lasting about 45 minutes is often the ‘general’ interview, in which common questions are put to applicants. Those unsuitable after this ‘first pass’ will not be invited back.

Second and subsequent interviews usually assess (in more detail) one or more of the following:

- Intellectual capacity (this often includes an interview and tests)
- Personality or psychological profile
- Motivation
- Management ability

These are fairly typical of the types of interview you may face and thankfully, you can prepare for most.

And interview preparation is essential. As for any interview, think beforehand about the questions that are likely to come up (a common question in intellectual capacity interviews is to ask you to oppose an argument you've just put forward).

Where it's less easy to prepare specific answers, think about what interviewers are likely to be after.

A psychological interview for example, usually assesses drive, determination and reliability. Interviewers will be looking for people with self-awareness - people who have thought about their life and what they've learned from it. The best interview preparation you can do here is to ask yourself what challenges you've met and how you've overcome them.



Motivational interviews build on personality interviews by seeking to understand what drives you as an individual. Interviewers will be thinking about the work and work environment and checking there’s a match.

Sometimes, there’s a final round-up interview, which often focuses on key strengths and possible weaknesses you’ve shown in the previous interviews. This is the decider.

## **Group Interviews**

Occasionally employers conduct a group job interview, especially for large scale recruitment campaigns such as trainee schemes or graduate schemes.

Group interviews are where many candidates gather together with several interviewers to participate in an exercise of some sort.

Because you can’t predict the exercise or exercises you’ll be involved in, it’s less easy to prepare, but there are things you can do to improve your performance in these types of situations.

We’ll explain group exercises in more detail and provide some group interview tips to help you prepare.

### **What is a group job interview?**

The employer will already have selected the best candidates through the usual method of reading cover letters and CV or resumes but the group interview allows them to reduce the candidate pool further by deselecting unsuitable candidates in bulk. It’s less time intensive than interviewing each candidate individually.

Usually the group ‘interview’ involves one or more exercises designed to imitate a work environment. One example involves dividing the group into two or more teams and giving each team a hypothetical (usually work related) situation or dilemma to resolve. Each team is then asked to present its results in front of the entire group.

Sometimes the dilemma is not work related, such as the case whether candidates are asked to decide how to choose 50 of 100 people to save from a sinking ship. These types of hypothetical situations cause a lot of controversy and interviewers can tell a lot from them about how people interact, influence and reach decisions.

During the group interview exercise, the interviewers often walk around the room observing behavior and listening to conversations. Occasionally they will ask questions and take notes and even throw in a one liner or two to stimulate debate or create argument.

**But it is individual performance they are interested in, not group dynamics.**

## **Group Interview Tips**

We’ve already explained what a group job interview is.

Here are some great **group interview tips** that will go a long way to improving your performance in group interviews.

We mentioned that during group interview exercises, interviewers often wander around the room, listen to conversations and observe behavior. Sometimes they will ask questions, make a statement or take notes.

Although they are observing the group, it’s individual performance they are interested in, so you must make a good impression.

Interviewers want to know:

- How well you interact with others
- How good you are at influencing and persuading
- Whether you work well in teams
- How effective your communication styles are
- Whether you reach decisions rationally or on a hunch
- If you listen well to others
- How well you manage under stress

In addition, the interviewers might be interested in seeing **who takes charge** and how effectively he or she delegates tasks to others. How individuals react to the leader is also very revealing.

They will be interested to know if the leader:

- Involves all other team members, even the quiet ones
- Can take on feedback and alter his or her course in light of new ideas
- Listens and questions well
- Gives praise where due

**Important Tip:** During group interview exercises, it is better to be **one of the leaders** than one of the followers and most people recognize this. But don’t get yourself involved in a battle of wills to get elected as leader as this can get ugly and you won’t score points.

If you want to lead and have the chance to express an interest and state your case, do so, but be gracious if you’re not chosen. And don’t sabotage the leader’s performance in protest - this is not The Apprentice!

If you are not a nature leader, that’s ok. With half the group wanting to lead you won’t be forced to. **But you must be an active participant as a minimum.** Don’t simply observe and say nothing.

### **Preparation**

Because you can’t predict what exercises you’ll be given it’s less easy to prepare than for a regular job interview. But there are things you can do to improve your performance in these type of situations. Here are some group interview tips:

- Remembering what interviewers look for, spend some time observing your colleagues in the workplace, especially how they interact in team meetings or when decisions need to be made.
- Watch for good behaviors such as active listening, giving praise and asking questions.
- Notice when people are left out or don’t get heard above the noise and how the group deal or don’t deal with this.
- Write down the good and bad behaviors and attitudes you saw and note the impact these had on individuals and ultimately the team's success.

Follow these group interview tips and your group job interview experience will be a positive one. You’ll come across as mature, confident and professionally and personally competent.

# **Interview Questions and Answers**

## **Introduction**

Here are 53 of the most common interview questions, together with advice and examples for each.

Although it’s impossible to know **exactly** what questions you’ll be asked, it’s fair to say that interviewers have the same objectives. In essence, interviewers want to know:

- 1) Can you do the job for which you are applying?
- 2) Will you fit into the company/team?

To take this a little further, interviewers look for:

- 1) Ability – can the applicant do the work? Do their qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge prove this?
- 2) Aptitude – can they adapt/learn new things/take the initiative? What examples can they give to show they do more than ‘just the job’?
- 3) Personality – will the applicant fit easily into the team? Will they be accepted and respected?

As you read our answers to interview questions, put yourself in the interviewer’s **and** interviewee’s shoes.

Remember, interviewers have a problem they want fixed. As the interviewee, you need to convince them you can fix this problem.

## **Questions About You**

- **Tell me about yourself.**

Ok, so this seems quite straight-forward. However, it may not be clear what, in particular, the interviewers are looking for you to speak about.

Do they want to know about your career so far, about your hobbies, marital status?

If in doubt, ASK them to clarify what they wish you to talk about. Then give a short factual answer, ending with *"is there anything else you'd like to know about me?"*

Typically you should cover the following in this order:

- Your attributes, skills, knowledge, experience and possibly achievements
- Your ambitions
- Yourself

If you've written a good CV or resume objective, you can use elements of this in your answer. Here's an example:

*"I'm a self-motivated, successful salesperson with 12 years experience in several fields and a recognized qualification. I've won several awards for my sales results and sales initiatives. I'm keen to develop my career by taking on more leadership responsibility and this job seems ideal. I'm married with 2 children of school age and enjoy basketball (playing and watching) in my spare time. Is there anything specific you'd like to know about me or my career?"*

This is only an example and what you say will depend on you of course. But keep your answer short and focused. If your interviewers want more they can respond to your question at the end.

- **Why are you applying for this job?**

Show that you have your own AND the Company’s interests at heart. In essence, show that you like the Company, you can do the job and that they’ll be better off with you on board.

Start with the Company. Most people like the Company for which they work and like to hear good things about it. It reinforces their decision to work there. So get off to a good start with the interviewers by playing to this. Mention things about the Company which attract you, like its ethos/ethics or the fact that it’s leading edge, or new to the market, or different in some other way.

Then explain how your skills, experience, qualifications and knowledge will enable you to do the job and contribute towards the Company’s success.

So you might say:

*“I really want to join your Company because I believe in its ethos of putting the customer first. Most of your competitors focus on profit first and the customer second, and I don’t believe that’s sustainable long term. I share your vision and really think I can contribute to your success. In my current job, I led a customer service initiative which increased client satisfaction by 10% in 3 months. I’m sure I could do the same here.”*

- **How would you describe yourself?**

Try to think about what the interviewers are looking for and keep this in mind as you answer this.

Remember the advert? Were they looking for initiative, a good communicator, someone with good attention to detail? Describe yourself in these terms.

For example – if the advert calls for someone who can manage their workload with little supervision and show initiative in the absence of instructions, you might say:

*“I am very confident and self-motivated and need little or no supervision to do my work. I’m very happy to follow instructions but enjoy using my initiative when needed...”*

Be ready to give examples to back up what you say.

- **How would your boss describe you?**

If you get the job, your interviewer may be your future boss so you need to answer this question carefully. Describe yourself as any boss would want to see you but blend in some keywords from the advert too. You might say:

*“My boss would describe me as hard working, loyal, friendly and committed. He would say that I work well on my own initiative and deliver what he wants on time and to a high standard”.*

Don’t use the term “I think my boss would say..” as it gives an element of doubt. Be positive and certain with the answer that you give.

Be ready to give examples to back up what you say.

- **How would your friends describe you?**

Your answer may well be different to the one above. Emphasize the positive things that friends see in you but which an employer would value too, such as loyalty, empathy etc. Avoid telling the interviewers you're the team joker!

For example:

*“My friends would describe me as confident, straightforward, loyal and supportive. I’m often asked for advice on personal matters because I find it easy to empathize and give honest and fair feedback or suggestions”.*

You probably won’t be asked to give examples to support your answer but have some ready, just in case!



- **How did you prepare for this interview?**

Answers here are very enlightening. It quickly becomes apparent who is genuine about the job, who’s organized and who has initiative.

Those who’ve done nothing, demonstrate a lack of all three.

Go back to Before The Interview (page 68) to find out how to prepare and give a good answer to this question.

A good answer might look something like this:

*“I contacted Jon Smith after reading the advert and he kindly told me more about the role and the department. I also did some research into the Company online. Then I spent time thinking about the challenges of the role and how my experience and achievements could show I would meet these. I also considered the questions I’d be asked in this interview and how I would answer.”*

- **What motivates you?**

When we ask this question, we want to find out if the role will be enough for you.

For example, let’s say we are filling a position where there’s a lot of lone work. If an applicant says they are motivated by being around other positive people, we might question if working alone would suit them.

Similarly, someone who is motivated by targets, might find it hard where there are none.

As you consider interview answers, think about the job and the work environment you’re likely to be in. That way you are likely to give more relevant answers.

So if the job involves meeting demanding sales or service targets, focus on this. You might say:

*“I’m motivated by having demanding targets. I like having something tangible to work towards that stretches me in my job. So far I’ve exceeded my targets this year and this is a great feeling. It motivates me to do even better”.*

If the job involves dealing with the public, you might say:

*“I really enjoy making customers happy. There’s nothing better than solving a customer’s problems or answering their query. It gives me a real buzz when a customer goes away happy because of something I’ve done.”*

- **What do you look for in a job?**

This is really a question about suitability, though we’ve included it here. Remember the advert? Focus on the advert criteria and you won’t go far wrong.

For example, if the advert called for someone to lead others, you might say:

*“I like a job where I can lead and motivate others and enjoy seeing improvements in team performance”.*

If the advert called for a target-focused individual, you might say:

*“I like having targets. They encourage me to stretch myself and beat them!”*

You could go further and talk about the company too, particularly if the interviewers ask “what do you look for in an employer?” Something like this might be good:

*“I look for an employer with a good track record for customer service because this is important to me and I know you’ve won a number of Service Excellence awards. It’s also important to me that a company invests in training and developing its staff and I know you do this. As for what I look for in a job, I would say I look for challenge, reward and scope for personal development”.*

- **Describe a situation in which your work was criticized.**

If you pick an instance where the criticism was clearly unfair and you were in the right, you risk looking as if you’re simply taking the opportunity to air an old grievance, so go for the “distant past” option.

Our advice would be to briefly describe the task and the criticism you received for it. Then go on to explain how you learned from this criticism and that you haven’t repeated such mistakes since. If you can recall an example where the activity for which you were criticized was ‘minor’, all the better.

Here’s an example:

*“That’s an interesting question. I remember a time, a couple of years ago, when I was criticized for my record keeping. My manager couldn’t find details of a transaction I’d completed as I had failed to file it (luckily I had a copy so we could complete the records). As a result of this I made a checklist and there’s been no recurrence since”.*

- **What is your personal mission statement or motto?**

Not everyone has one, but because you might be asked, think what yours would be.

Here are some of the replies we’ve had:

*“Just do it!”*

*“Right first time, every time”*

*“Less talk, more action”*

*“Treat others as you’d wish to be treated”*

*“Fortune favors the brave”*

*“Quality, quality, quality...”*

Our advice: This is one of those times when we ask candidates to explain their answers to our interview questions. So whatever you say, it’s likely you’ll be asked to give a reason or example so have one in mind. For most jobs, you want to sound positive and motivated, but possibly not ruthless or inconsiderate.

- **If you had 6 months to do what you wanted, with no financial constraints and no obligations, what would you do?**

Clearly open ended, this can elicit interesting answers. Most people talk about spending time with their family and this is fine. If you’re a free spirit and would probably do wild and wacky things, that’s okay too, but whatever answer you give you must show that you’re serious about your career. After all, you’re back in 6 months!

You might say something like this:

*“That’s a very interesting question. Let me think...*

*Well, it would be great having more time with my family, and there are things I’d like to do around the home. But I’d also like to do some more study. There’s an interesting course at the local college on X which I think would help me be more effective in my job.*

*I’d also like to visit X Company in Y place, as I read in a magazine that they’ve started using Z techniques in their Company. This might be of interest for the industry over here.”*

## **Questions About Your Current Company or Job**

- **What do you enjoy most about what you do now?**

If you are being interviewed for a similar job, you might be best to focus on some aspect of the key role as being your main passion. As you think about answers to interview questions, think about the job and what the interviewers are likely to be after.

Let’s say the interviewers are looking for someone with IT support experience but mention in the advert that engineers need to be efficient. You might say:

*“I really enjoy the technical nature of the job and the speed at which I’m able to fix faults. I get a lot of satisfaction from getting people back to work as soon as possible”.*

Even if you hate your current job, and are being interviewed for something entirely different, find something positive to say. Focus on something the interviewers want which you enjoy.

If working as part of a team is mentioned as a requirement of the job, you might say:

*“I really enjoy being part of a team. I like it when the team pulls together to achieve something and everyone can take some credit”.*

- **What do you enjoy least about your current role?**

A good answer might go something like this:

*“Actually, I enjoy everything about what I do. I suppose if I had to give something up, it would be.....”*

The ‘something’ depends on you, but it’s best to mention something incidental to your job, like admin or paperwork. So you might say:

*“I’m not sure (pause). I suppose if I had to pick something to give up it would be paperwork. I know it’s important, and I do it well, but if someone else did it for me, that would be great!”*

Most interviewers would appreciate this and it might raise a smile in agreement!

- **Why do you want to leave your current job/company?**

If you’re applying for a more senior job, you might say:

*“I really enjoy what I do, but I’m ready for more responsibility and challenge which your job offers. Unfortunately, my current job/employer can’t give me this at the moment.”*

If this isn’t the reason, use yours instead, but always be positive in your answers. Most of your answer should be about what the job you’re applying for can offer, not what your current job doesn’t!

Here’s another example:

*“I’ve really enjoyed working for ABC Company but recently their focus has shifted from making customer service their first priority. We’ve had some bad press as you know and there appears to be little appetite for turning this around which is a shame. Providing good customer service is very important to me and your company appeals to me particularly because of its continued commitment to great service. I am confident that in this climate I can be as successful with you as I have been with them”.*

When answering questions about your current or past employers, always be mindful of confidential company information and don’t disclose anything that’s not in the public domain.

- **What do you think of your current boss?**

If your current boss is great, say so, listing why. Focus on the good things he/she does which help you work better, not on his/her good jokes! You might say:

*“My current boss is great. He sets the team challenging but realistic targets and motivates us to achieve them.....”*

*“My current boss is very good. She deals with her team firmly but fairly and enjoys our respect because of this....”*

If your current boss is not great, and you are prepared to answer more questions about this, say so, but do balance each criticism with a positive point. Remember the need to appear positive in your answers to interview questions. You might say:

*“My current boss has strengths and weaknesses. He is very good at listening to people but sometimes, in my view, doesn’t deal with underperformers firmly enough. This affects team morale sometimes....”*

Most people have a weakness of some description so it’s fair to mention the bad with the good. In fact, your interviewers may appreciate your honesty and confidence and a balanced answer may score your more points. It shows you can highlight development needs and aren’t afraid to criticize.

- **What will you miss about your present job?**

People is the best answer here.

Anything else and you’re suggesting the job you’re applying for won’t give you everything you had and more, and might even leave you wanting! As you think about answers to interview questions, always have in mind the need to create a positive impression. So you might say:

*“Well I’m confident that the job you’re offering will give me everything I have now and more so I don’t think I’ll miss anything about the job itself. But I’ll miss some of the people of course....”*

- **Describe the workload in your current or most recent job.**

Though you might think a short factual answer is fine here (after all, the interviewers are only after some information about your current job, aren’t they?), this is really about how you deal with your workload and therefore a suitability question.

You need to show you can manage and prioritize a heavy workload. That you can take changes in workload in your stride and stay focused. So you might say:

*“The workload is pretty heavy where I work most of the time. To make sure I get everything done on time, there’s a few rules I follow. I have a working to-do list which describes what needs to be done and when. And when I’m able to, I plan to be away from interruption for periods of time to focus on important tasks. It works well. I’m able to manage any changes in workload and still meet my targets/objectives”.*

If your workload varies considerably, show your interviewers that you can stay motivated and focused in times of little work **and** excess work.

## **Questions About The Potential Company Or Job**

- **What can you tell me about XYZ Company?**

If you’ve done your research (page 68) this should be easy.

If you need to, start by saying *“Is it ok if I refer to my notes?”*. When you get the nod, off you go.

Give short factual answers covering such things as company history, products, staff, turnover and future. Something like this is fine:

*“I believe the Company began in 1967, with just one outlet, but now has 25. From what I’ve read, you sell A, B and C products across Europe and the States and have a turnover in excess of \$5 million. You employ 125 staff. You hope to enter the Asian market by 2010”.*

End with *“would you like me to go on?”*. You will likely hear “No, that’s fine. Thank you.”

- **What do you think XYZ Company can offer you?**

There are two bits to this question, the role and the Company. Think about why you want to join the organization and take on the role and mention both. You might say:

*“I’m told the Company has a firm commitment to individual training and development. This is great news for me because I’m keen to learn and advance in the Company.*

*The role itself appears challenging and rewarding which I’ll find very motivating”.*

You’ll probably say much more, but this gives you an idea.



- **And what can you offer XYZ Company? What contribution can you make?**

This is the other side of the coin. You need to show your interviewers that there’s something in it for them if they employ you. What did you learn from your research? What are the Company’s goals? You need to have done your research to answer this well.

Although most companies exist to make a profit, how they go about this varies from firm to firm.

And your contribution to this will vary from job to job too. If you’re in administration, your contribution might be to increase efficiency, and reduce costs. If you’re in sales, it might be to increase income and thereby profit. In all cases, try to show how you can contribute to the bottom line via your role. And use examples if you can. You might say:

*“I’m aware that the Company wants to be in the top quartile in the next 3 years and that it’s looking to reduce its costs/income ratio by 5%. I believe that I can help towards this by identifying ways to increase efficiency and reduce costs within the X Department. I did this in my current role by.....”*

Or,

*“I know this Company prides itself on its customer service and I agree that meeting customer needs will boost its success. In my current job, I..... and this led to improved customer service and higher customer retention. I won an award for this initiative”.*

- **If you’re successful, what do you think you’ll be doing day-to-day?**

Again, if you’ve done your research (page 68) this should be easy.

Again if you need to, start by saying *“Is it ok if I refer to my notes?”*. When you get the nod, off you go.

You might start by saying *“I understand that I’ll be .....”*. Then you could talk about the main role, any other activities and any targets you expect to be given.

## **Questions About Your Suitability**

- **Can you give me an example of a situation where you showed initiative?** (This is a behavioral interview question – see page 125).

You **will** be asked these type of questions. To be prepared, go through the advert, note down what the interviewer is looking for and think of an example for each. (If you followed our section on Job Application Forms (page 37) you would have done this exercise already).

Don’t forget to mention the **benefit** to the organization of you using your initiative when you give an example. All employers want to know how you can make things better for them. Here’s an example:

*“Yes I can. Restoring a failed operating system is a long, manual process. Using my new skills, I development an unattended Windows XP installation disk. This completely re-installs Windows XP, Support Tools and minor applications such as Adobe Acrobat Reader with only a few clicks of the mouse. It’s a major improvement”.*

- **Why did you think you are suited to this job?**

What they are really asking is “You know what we are looking for so can you tell us what you have done or what you have, that is relevant.”

Good interview answers will involve you expanding on your job application form, resume or CV.

So think again about the job advert. What in particular does the role require? What qualities, experience, skills and knowledge are required to make the job a success?

Let’s say the job you’re applying for is a real estate negotiator. Your interviewers will be looking for someone who:

- Builds rapport easily
- Can put customers at their ease
- Is professional yet friendly
- Can read customer signs and respond
- Can negotiate and influence successfully

You should have seen some of these listed in the job advert.

A good answer would be:

*“I’m confident I could this job really well. I find it easy to build rapport with clients while remaining professional and I’m often told I put customers at ease quickly. I’m good at giving an alternative view when customers point out flaws and have secured sales in some tricky cases where other negotiators have failed. I can give you a recent example if you like.”*

- **Why should we give the job to you above other applicants?**

This is often our closing question. We want to know, in a nutshell, why you are the best candidate. This is a chance to list your best attributes as they relate to the vacancy. Don’t be cocky, but don’t be shy.

We’d suggest preparing a short and precise summary of what makes you ideal for the position. You might be able to use your Personal Summary or Objective from your resume or CV if this is good. Otherwise consider the following:

- How your skills, experience and knowledge match the job requirements
- Achievements you’ve had which provide proof of the above
- Your qualities and how they relate to the needs of the role and/or company

Here’s one example:

*“I have the skills, experience and knowledge you’re looking for to make this job a success and my achievements to date demonstrate this. I’ve successfully led a team of 12 advisers to achieve record sales while meeting customer service and compliance standards. My current employer has promoted me twice in two years on the back of my performance. I’m self motivated, energetic and flexible and believe I can make a real difference to XYZ’s success”.*

- **Would you say you are a follower or a leader?**

If you are going for a supervisory role, you need to emphasize your leadership potential (see the answers a few pages on for more on this).

Otherwise, describe aspects of both. Tell the interviewers that you are capable of following directions as well as contributing to team decisions, but that you can also demonstrate leadership skills when required. Again, give examples if you can.

For example, for a supervisory role you might say:

*“I prefer to lead. More often than not I’m a person with vision and the ability to make change happen through others. I enjoy giving people direction and motivating them to achieve great results. There are times when it’s not right for me to lead though and I’m happy to allow others to lead instead. It depends on the circumstances and the overall objective of the activity really. Would you like examples to show what I mean?”*

For a role with no apparent leadership, it’s still good to show you can lead at times, even if it’s on a smaller scale:

*“A bit of both really. I’m comfortable following directions and most of my roles have required this as a matter of course. But I enjoy being involved in group discussions and reaching group decisions. There have also been a few times when I’ve taken a leadership-type role, enjoyed it and done it well. For example, recently I was asked to complete an audit of our fault logging system. This involved giving direction to 2 temps, monitoring their activity and giving feedback.”*

- **How well do you work under pressure?**

All jobs involve some sort of pressure at some time. Emphasize that you work as well under pressure as you do at any other time but that when you’re busy, you prioritize activities so that your workload is manageable.

If the interviewers focus on other pressure, such as pressure to meet targets, dealing with difficult customers etc, give an appropriate reply, mentioning past situations where you have coped under such pressure.

Here’s an example:

*“I work very well under pressure as I do at all other times because I’m organized and efficient. When I’m busy I simply take a few more minutes to prioritize my workload so I can do the urgent or most important things first. I’m flexible to work additional hours if required too.”*

- **What sort of people do you find it difficult to work with?**

Don’t make sweeping generalizations here and don’t use individuals as examples.

Instead, start by saying that you are an easy going person who seems to get on with everyone.

Go on to say that if you had to pick a type of person that bothers you, it’s the one who doesn’t pull their weight or isn’t worried about the standard of their work because it reflects badly on the rest of the team.

For example:

*“I’m pleased to say that I get on well with almost everyone so it’s not usually a problem (pause). I suppose if I had to pick someone I’d say I find it difficult when a person doesn’t pull their weight in a team and let’s the team down.....”*

If you can think of an example, use one....

*“... We had an instance like this a couple of months ago. I was part of a team working on X and one member wasn’t completing their tasks on time. I spoke to the individual on the team’s behalf and explained the problem. Their performance improved for a few weeks and then fell again. In the end I spoke to my manager as the project delivery was under threat.”*

- **Sell me this pen!**

In interviews for sales job, you may hear this, believe us! In fact, one of us had a non-sales interview and was asked this, unexpectedly. The object you are asked to sell could in fact be anything.

Some interviewers like to see whether you focus on the **benefits** of the object or its **features**.

The features of the pen might be that it’s blue, with a roller ball and plastic coating. The benefits might be that it’s reliable, easy to hold and leak proof.

Good interview answers are considered to be those which outline the benefits. Answers like this will impress the interviewers because, in sales for example, better results come when people can see the benefits of a product.

So to prepare for this question, practice highlighting the benefits of objects around you. You’ll soon get into the habit. What about the kettle? The toaster? The shower?

- **What key skills do you think you need to be successful in this role?**

You got this far because your application form, resume or CV matched the interviewers’ criteria as specified in the advert. Just expand on this in your job interview answers. List the skills you think are required, giving a little explanation as to why each is needed.

You might then be asked to give examples where you’ve used one or more of these skills. These are behavioral interview questions (see page 125).

For example, let’s say the vacancy is for a retail sales advisor, working in a busy high street shop. The advert might say:

“We’re looking for an enthusiastic worker who is polite and friendly and who can interact well with customers. Ideally you’ll have experience of dealing with customer complaints and used to working under pressure in a busy environment...”

A good answer might be:

*“The ability to work under pressure is an important skill in this job, which is something I do well. I also believe it’s important to have good verbal communication skills as there’s a lot of interaction with customers. Again, this is something I have a lot of experience of and do well. Would you like one or two examples?”*

## **Questions About Your Achievements**

- **Can you give us examples of some of your work achievements?**

List these, covering such things as:

- Awards you’ve received
- Promotions you’ve gained
- Obstacles you’ve overcome
- Qualifications you’ve completed

Expand on these if asked about them.

Remember to focus your words on YOUR role in the achievement, even if it was a group achievement.

And be enthusiastic in your answer and show your obvious pride in your results. Managers know that success is a great motivator and want to see that you are genuinely pleased with how well you’ve done.

Here’s a simple example:

*“Yes. Last year I was promoted to Senior Technician. I was really pleased because I’d worked so hard in the Technician role and had excellent results. It was great that my manager noticed this and saw my potential for development.....”*

Here’s another:

*“Yes I can. There’s one particular achievement I’m really proud of. Our team was set a target to reach 126 sales in one week – that’s 15% more sales than we’ve made in any other week.*

*Half way through the week we were a little down on sales and it looked unlikely we’d hit our target. The team was a little deflated. I was meeting my personal target however and suggested we meet 15 minutes before work the next day to share ideas. I led the discussion and shared some of my tactics.*

*Three of my team doubled their sales that day and the next and we beat our target. All three mentioned how I’d helped them and I won a special award. It was great”.*



- **What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?**

Think about an example that you can describe clearly. Expect to be asked to explain why you think it is your greatest achievement.

By ‘greatest’ we mean:

1. An achievement which was especially hard to reach, requiring considerable effort or skills (i.e. greatest in terms of effort), or
2. An achievement which had the best outcome either for you or the company (i.e. greatest in terms of result)

You may already have given your best example in answer to the first question but here you need to explain why it’s your best. Describe in more detail the obstacles you had to overcome and the challenges you faced which required you to work harder or smarter. Or if it was the result which was the achievement, explain why it was so good by focusing on the implications for you and/or the company.

Employers always want examples of achievements because it shows them you can deliver. Don’t waste the opportunity to show your interviewers how good you are.

- **What motivates you to go the extra mile?**

You’ve described your achievements above. Now the interviewers want to know WHY you achieved, rather than WHAT you achieved.

This is really about your motivation. You should show that you are motivated by a combination of internal and external factors. That, by your nature, you like to look for ways to do things better; that you like to push yourself to achieve more each time and encourage others to do the same; that you like targets, because you want to beat them; that you want the respect of your managers and peers; that you are ambitious and want your successes to help you advance your career.

Say this and the interviewers can see not only what’s in it for you, but what the Company can get out of you too. Remember that ALL employers want employees who go the extra mile. Show them that you’re one of them.

You might say for example:

*“I would say I’m motivated by a combination of factors. I love exceeding my own and others’ expectations of me and enjoy the satisfaction and recognition this being – it gives me a real sense of achievement. And I’m always on the lookout for ways to do things quicker, cheaper or better and this keeps me on my toes. I’m ambitious too and this motivates me to do better than my peers...”*

## **Questions About Your Ambitions**

- **Where do you see yourself in five years time?**

This can be a difficult question, especially if you haven’t thought beyond today!

You want to sound ambitious enough to seem motivated but not too much in case it seems like you want to use the job only as a stepping stone to something else.

Be realistic too. Don’t aspire to job roles way above the one you’re applying for. Your interviewers will know you’re unrealistic and no-one wants to hire a person who isn’t well-grounded.

Know your industry and how long it takes to reach certain levels. In some companies or industries, promotion can be very quick. In others it can take many years just to reach the next level, so consider this in your answer.

Here are two examples to help you:

*“In 5 years time, I expect to be doing this job very well and looking for promotion to Section leader....”*

*“In 5 years time, I expect to have performed this role to an excellent level and have been promoted to Senior Trainer. My current employer has promoted me twice in the last 5 years and I am confident I have the potential to do the same thing here.”*

- **How does this job fit into your career plans?**

Similar to the above really, except that this question asks how you’re going to get there and doesn’t require a timeframe. Be realistic.

You might say something like this if you’re going for a middle-management position:

*“My ambition is to lead a department and be involved in strategic decision-making at a senior level. I expect the role I’m applying for to give me more experience of leading and some introduction to strategy so that I’m ready for a senior role in a few years time”.*

- **Where did you think you’d be at this stage in your life?**

Avoid saying further than you are now!

It’s better to show you’ve met or exceeded your ambitions than fallen short of them. Tell the interviewers that you are happy with your life, but are looking for more challenge as you like to stretch yourself to achieve more.

Something along these lines would be good:

*“I’m pleased to say that I’m further on than I expected in terms of my career. I’ve always been ambitious and had some firm ideas about where I wanted to be at this stage in my life. Because of my success, I’ve been promoted earlier than expected which is great news. I’m now keen to take on more responsibility and achieve my full potential”.*

You might prefer:

*“My career path is right on track. I wanted to be successful at my current role and expected to be looking for promotion about now. I have ambitious but realistic career targets and work hard to meet these. I’m not at a stage in my career where I’m ready to make even more of a contribution....”*

- **If you could start again, what career decisions would you make differently?**

You’re on sticky ground if you start trying to think of hypothetical changes that might have served you better in the past. Your answers will suggest you’re not happy with the way things are and no-one wants to hire an unhappy person.

So the best answer is that you wouldn’t change anything. That you are happy with your career as it is now but want fresh challenges. You might say:

*“I really wouldn’t change anything. I am very happy with my career choice and the level I’ve reached...”*

You might add something like this:

*“Besides, I’m not the kind of person who looks back with regrets. I prefer to invest my energy looking forward”.*

## **Questions About Management Or Supervision**

- **How would you approach a typical project?**

If you’re applying for a project based job, such as a project manager, you will be asked this question. Don’t give a long winded answer (project managers are expected to be concise), but try to demonstrate that you would take into account the main components of effective project planning such as:

- Planning the schedule backwards from completion
- Working out what you need to get the job done effectively and on time
- Budgeting - costs, time and resources
- Allowing a contingency

If you follow a particular project methodology, such as PRINCE, say so.

Here’s an example answer:

*“I’m a firm believer in the saying ‘failing to prepare is preparing to fail’ and approach every project with this in mind. There are a number of important activities I always undertake and these include planning the schedule backwards from completion....”*

Finish with “would you like me to give you an actual example to illustrate this”.

- **How would you get the best from people?**

If you are applying for any management role, it is highly likely you’ll be asked this question. The kind of skills that we’d be looking for are:

- Good communication
- Teamwork skills
- Recognizing what each person can bring
- Setting a good example
- Praising good performances

You might say:

*“I follow the ‘carrot’ rather than the ‘stick’ approach in most cases. I believe that employees perform better when their achievements are recognized and rewarded. I also think it’s important to be open and honest and keep talking to your employees about matters affecting them. This increases morale and builds a team spirit, both of which contribute to success. Would you like an example of how I’ve applied these ideas in practice?”.*

- **Give us an example of how you have resolved conflict.**

As this is a behavioral interview question, you need to find an example of conflict that you have resolved. The sort of skills you need to demonstrate are:

- Fairness
- Discussing problems with individuals in private
- Making sure you get to the root of the problem
- Finding a solution that everyone will accept

Although we can’t guess what your example might be, here’s one we’ve used in interviews to help you:

*“Recently we had some personnel changes and introduced a new Coordinator into the team. He and another Coordinator weren’t getting on and this was beginning to affect the quality of the team’s work. Neither was taking steps to resolve the situation.*

*I spoke to each individually to understand the issues and suggested they meet to talk, with me as facilitator. They agreed. Through listening to both sides and getting each to see the other’s point of view, we reached a compromise which both accepted. Their relationship and the quality of the team’s work improved afterwards”.*

- **What did you look for when you hired people in the past?**

This is a general question. Don’t think about specific skills of the job you are applying for. Think generally about the key attributes everyone looks for in a good applicant. Among others, these include:

- Aptitude
- Skills
- Initiative
- Flexibility
- Commitment

An example answer might be:

*“Generally I look for 3 things – ability, aptitude and attitude. I want to know that the person can actually do the job, has the potential to do more than the job and has the right approach to work and colleagues. Without all three it’s difficult to see how they can be successful long term.”*

## **Questions About Working In A Team**

- **Do you work best by yourself or as part of a team?**

Most jobs require both, to varying degrees.

As with all answers to job interview questions, think about the position you are applying for. Are the interviewers looking for a team worker? Did they mention this in the advert or is it implicit in the job description?

If a team player is required, tell the interviewers that you work well in a team. Give an example if you can. You might say:

*“I prefer to work in teams. I find that better decisions are reached when people work together and share ideas. Of course I’m happy to work alone when required too.”*

If the job is mostly done alone, you might say:

*“I work very well by myself because I’m self motivated, organized and conscientious. I’m comfortable working in teams though and recognize that this is better in some situations....”*

- **What kind of personality do you work best with and why?**

You will deal with many personalities in any job.

If the interviewers know the people you’ll be working with, they might have a personality in mind! It’s hard for you to know this however, so stick to a safe answer. You might say:

*“I find I work well with almost everyone but who I work best with might depend on the activity. If it’s a project, I prefer to work with someone who’s practical and organized because this is important. If it’s leading a discussion, working with someone who’s a good facilitator is important.”*



- **How would you go about establishing your credibility quickly within the team?**

Gaining credibility quickly is important. Making sure you listen, learn, question and understand helps. You might say:

*“That’s a good question and I realize it’s important to gain credibility quickly. I believe the best way is to show your colleagues that you respect their experience and want to learn from them as well as about them. You need to listen, ask the right questions and make sure you understand. If they can see you’ll fit in early on, it helps...”*

- **Tell me about a time where you had to deal with conflict on the job.** This is a behavioral interview question (see page 125).

We covered this question in the section on supervision too but even for non-supervisory roles you may be asked this as you’ll find conflict among colleagues too.

If you can’t think of an example, it’s ok to say so. If that’s the case, either say how you would deal with it, or use an example where someone you know dealt with conflict well.

Most interviewers would look for:

- Getting both sides
- Compromise
- Tactfulness
- Empathy

- **What irritates you about other people, and how do you deal with it?**

This question is common and comes in many guises. Interviewers recognize that personal conflict is inevitable in the workplace and are interested in how candidates deal with it.

As with all answers to job interview questions, if you have an example, use it.

Try not to say that A or B irritates you. Instead, talk about the characteristics which you find hard, not the people. You might say:

*“I find I get on with most people so it’s not normally a problem. It’s rather disappointing when people don’t pull their weight I suppose and this has happened. In that instance I spoke to the person in private, explained that they were letting the team down and asked them to make more of an effort. They did.”*

- **Tell me about a time when you had to gain the cooperation of a group over which you had no authority. What did you do?**

This happens from time to time in team situations. You need to show that you can influence, persuade, perhaps even charm others to do what you want. To do this successfully, you need to know what motivates others and work this to your advantage. You might say:

*“Yes – that’s a difficult situation, but I’ve been there a couple of times. I think it’s important to understand that different people have different views and values. The best way to encourage others to join you is to show them how your ideas match those views or values.*

*For example, last year I wanted to change the way we did X. Initially it would mean more work, but eventually less. There was some resistance. I showed one of my team that implementing this idea would, after 2 months, save him 20 minutes a day. This would increase his productivity. I showed another that my idea would reduce the amount of paperwork she had to do. She hates paperwork. They agreed and all were happy with the change.”*

## **Other Questions**

You may be asked other, more specific questions, depending on the nature of the job for which you’re applying. These might include:

### **Questions about your honesty or integrity, such as:**

- Can you describe a time when your results/performance weren’t up to your manager’s standards. What happened?

Interviewers want you to show; an awareness of your own performance; disappointment that it’s fallen short; a willingness to receive feedback; and a desire to act upon feedback to improve your performance.

As you answer, don’t dwell too much on the underperformance and don’t choose something really bad. There must be something you’ve done which most people do at some point, like forgetting to complete some paperwork, or similar. Make it clear that you pride yourself on working to high standards and that this was an isolated event. But do describe what measures you’ve put in place to ensure it doesn’t recur, like putting a note in your diary, or writing a checklist.

- Tell me about a time when you demonstrated your trustworthiness or integrity at work,

and/or

- Have you ever spoken to your supervisor about another person’s performance?

Employers ask these types of question because they want to be sure that you can put the needs of the Company and its customers before personal relationships and your own ends.

Be honest. If you’ve not experienced these things, say so, but then tell the interviewers what you would do.

In your answers, it’s sometimes good to recognize that it’s difficult to report on others’ behavior or performance, but that it’s necessary for the good of the Company and its customers.

**Questions about your attention to detail or ability to follow procedures, such as:**

- Give us an example of where you’ve had to do something complex, following detailed instructions.

Interviewers want to know that you can focus on a complex task until it’s complete. Tell them that you can and provide an example or examples. Describe how you went about the task and what actions you took to ensure you did everything right, in the right order and on time (a checklist for example). Finish by saying that you were successful.

**Questions about your reliability, such as:**

- When we contact your previous employer, what are they likely to tell us with regards to your dependability/attendance?

Be honest, because they probably WILL contact your employer. If you’ve had time off, explain why, but reassure the interviewers that this was an isolated episode and you’ve had no recurrence.

If in fact you have an ongoing condition which affects your attendance at work, explain why, but tell them what steps you have taken or take to lessen the effect on your employer. Tell them that your current employer is very understanding because you are an excellent performer who contributes more than your peers despite occasional time away from work.

If you have an excellent attendance record and a reputation for reliability, show off! But give examples or use quotes by other people to support your assertion.

**Questions about your assertiveness, such as:**

- If someone asked to get you to ‘bend the rules in the interests of customer service’, what would you do?

This is also a question which assesses your honesty, as well as your ability to stand up to people.

Remember that it’s okay to sometimes make exceptions for the right reasons provided you have the authority and can justify your actions. In business, this happens from time to time and in most cases it makes sound economic or ethical sense.

You need to recognize that you understand this and know your limits in exercising discretion.

As with all your answers, if you have an example – use it!

## **Questions About Salary**

Here’s an actual salary negotiation example. Imagine this....

You’re in the middle of an interview for your perfect job. Everything is going really well. It looks like the job is yours!

Moments later, you realize you’ve accepted a salary far lower than you wanted. Although you were prepared for salary negotiation, you panicked at the last minute and lost your nerve.

As you leave the interview room, your excitement at getting the job is tainted. You can’t help feeling undervalued, even a little duped.

We know what it’s like to be here - not nice.

Our top wage negotiation tips will help keep you right.

**“Can you give me some idea of the salary you’re expecting?”** is one of those interview questions that can really get you tongue-tied.

What do you say?

If you ask for too much you risk looking unrealistic, over confident, maybe even greedy. Ask for too little as you risk undervaluing yourself and your contribution, and ultimately being underpaid.

For many of us, salary is one of the most important factors in taking a job, but it’s often the hardest to deal with.

One of us knows the consequences of unsuccessful salary negotiation.

When asked to give a figure within the salary range in her last but one interview, Catherine gave one just above the lowest figure, even though she fully intended to suggest a figure just above the middle.

Nerves got the better of her and, worried about sounding greedy, she suggested a lower amount. When she was offered the job, there was the salary she suggested, right at the start of the offer letter. She wasn’t surprised but was disappointed.

So how can you avoid this happening to you?

Follow this advice.

- Research is essential when it comes to suggesting a reasonable salary. Take time to look through job adverts for similar positions. Research the WWW or post a question in a forum or on Yahoo! Answers.

Research the Company too. A large Company, if asked, will probably have more scope to offer you a better benefits package than a smaller one.

- Don’t initiate salary discussions or say anything about pay during your job interview unless asked.
- If you’re asked for a figure, suggest a range rather than an actual figure. This gives room to negotiate if a firm job offer is made during the interview.
- If you’re offered the job and reach agreement on a salary, make sure the written job offer states this amount clearly.

When it comes to the actual salary negotiation, here are the essential Dos and Don’ts.

- The most important thing to remember when discussing your salary is that it is a negotiation. Like any form of bartering, the first figure you mention probably won’t be the figure you agree on. But it’s a place to start.
- Be confident about what you’re worth. Recognize that you’re bringing something unique to the Company, and that you’re worth the salary you’re requesting. Even if you’ve only just finished school or college, you still have something unique to offer and it’s important to bear that in mind.
- Remember also that finding the right person for any job isn’t easy. If you’ve impressed the interviewers enough to employ you, you have the upper hand and paying a little more to keep you isn’t too big a deal. So ask for a slightly higher salary than you expect.
- If the advert indicates a salary range, employers will be prepared to pay the top figure for the right candidate. If you’re not comfortable asking for the top amount, then go for just above mid-range. This gives the impression that you are worth a decent salary and is a great place to start.

Assuming an advertised salary range of \$30,000 to \$42,000, you might say this:

*"I'm expecting a salary in the region of \$38,000, based on my knowledge and experience".*

- Remember that salary is not everything. If the salary is less than you hoped and the Company won't or can't go any higher, ask about other benefits which are important to you like training courses, financial help with further study and so on.
- If salary **is** the most important factor in your decision to accept a job, we recommend a little more reading. Amazon has a number of good books which cover only salary negotiation. For a small price, they can give you a big lead. See for yourself.



## **A Note About Behavioral Interview Questions**

During interviews, we ask all candidates several behavioral interview questions (also known as situational interview questions).

Behavioral or situational interview questions are simply questions that ask you to give a real life example as evidence of a skill, knowledge or experience.

So instead of asking you:

- “What would you do if someone disagreed with you?”,  
we ask:
- “Tell us about a time when someone disagreed with you”.

We ask behavioral interview questions because we believe that how you actually performed in a situation is more of an indication of how you will perform than a theoretical answer!

Research we’ve carried out suggests that this type of interviewing is actually FIVE times more accurate than traditional interviewing techniques.

And it’s not just us who have interviewed this way. Behavioral Interviewing is becoming increasingly common and is used by many large companies, especially the large banking organizations.

So behavioral interview questions are simply open-ended questions relating to your behavior in past situations. They will relate directly to the requirements of the job you are applying for, so your clue is in the advert!

If the advert calls for someone who can handle difficult customers, you might well be asked a situational question about this. If it asks for influencing skills, expect a question asking you to give an example of when you have successfully influenced.

The behavioral interview questions we ask usually start:

- Tell us about a time when you....
- Give us an example of a situation where you....
- Describe a situation in which....

We’re trying to find out:

- How you react in a given situation
- What thought processes you go through
- How you reach decisions
- What action you take
- How you monitor your results

Often, we’ll probe further.

Why?

Because it’s this type of questioning that really finds out about what type of person you are and how you operate at work. So if you didn’t provide enough information, be prepared for further questions from the interviewer, in response to the answer you give, such as:

- How did you reach that decision?
- Would you do anything different next time?
- Did your actions work?

Here’s where it pays to be honest and prepared. The more the interviewer digs, the more difficult it will be for you to sustain a fabricated story.

We recommend that your behavioral interview answers are based on your own real experiences and that they link to the job requirements.

If you did an application form which covered the advert criteria, you would already have shown the interviewer how your experience matches what they are after. Just expand on this.

And make sure you describe **YOUR** role. Remember, the interviewer wants to know how good **you** are, so cover the following if you can:

- Describe the situation or problem you faced
- Tell them how you evaluated the situation or problem
- Describe the action you took to resolve it
- Tell them about your successful outcome

We believe that answering behavioral interview questions can actually be easier than answering theoretical questions because you can draw on real experiences rather than having to imagine a situation, so don’t be afraid.

Just remember, as you did with your job application form, to

- Read the advert or job description
- List the job requirements
- Have an example of how you meet each.

## **Not-So-Common Questions**

Here we list the **less common** interview questions for those of you who want all bases covered!

None of us have asked more than two of these questions in interview, but you will find them (and others) scattered about the www. and elsewhere, so for completeness, we wanted to include them here.

- Picture this: You are at a business lunch and order a rare steak. The waiter brings it to you well done. What would you do?
- Why is there fuzz on a tennis ball?
- There’s no right or wrong answer, but if you could be anywhere in the world right now, where would you be?
- What are your lifelong dreams?
- What do you ultimately want to become?
- What kind of car do you drive?
- What’s the last book you read?
- What’s your best film ever?
- What magazines do you subscribe to?
- How do you think I rate as an interviewer?
- If you were an animal, which would you be and why?
- What would you do if you won the lottery today?
- What is your greatest fear?
- What’s the most important thing you learned in school?
- How do you feel about taking ‘no’ for an answer?
- What is your favorite memory from childhood?
- What was the most difficult period in your life, and how did you deal with it?
- Tell me one thing about yourself you wouldn’t want me to know.
- Tell me the difference between good and excellent.
- How many times do a clock’s hands overlap in a day?
- How would you weigh a plane without scales?
- If you could choose one superhero power, what would it be and why?
- What’s the best movie you’ve seen in the last year?
- If you could get rid of any one of the US states, which one would you get rid of, and why?
- With your eyes closed, tell me step-by-step how to tie my shoes.
- Who are your heroes?
- Tell me 10 ways to use a pencil other than writing

So what did you make of those less common job interview questions?

Some are very “off the wall” and it’s difficult to prepare for such questions.

Others are a little less obscure and a few minutes considering how you might answer these interview questions could be time well spent.

## **Interview Questions to Ask**

### **Introduction**

Here we cover what interview questions to ask your interviewers and when to ask them.

Firstly, always have at least one good interview question to ask. Why?

Because if you have none, we think, as interviewers, that either:

- You think you know everything about the job and Company (though we know you don’t).
- You are perhaps not investing enough thought in your career or job choice (since you’d take the job without asking more about it).

So even if there is nothing else you want to know, have a few good interview questions to ask. Ask at least one, perhaps about the Company, or the role for which you are applying.

It can be as simple as *“Can you tell me about the Company’s plans for the next five years?”* It can open up a good conversation and ends the interview on a nice positive note and gives a good last impression!

### **When To Ask Interview Questions**

Some interviewers (us for example) will say to candidates, before beginning questions, that they are welcome to ask any questions as we go along, or wait till the end – whatever they prefer.

If you are told this, do whatever you prefer.

Sometimes, a relevant question will come to you during a conversation.

Don’t be afraid to ask it then.

Sometimes, asking a relevant question can spark a related conversation during which you can demonstrate more of what you have to offer.

Keep general questions to the end, unless they crop up earlier.

You should ask a question if:

- You don’t understand a question asked of you
- There is anything else you still need to know about the job before making a decision
- It allows you to describe an ability, strength etc not yet covered by the interviewers’ questioning.
- You’re worried about whether your response to a previous question made sense

## **What Interview Questions To Ask**

### **To find out about the company**

Good questions to ask at interview include lots of open-ended questions which encourage the employer to talk. Questions like:

- “What is the Company’s Vision?”
- “What is the Company’s long term plan?”
- “How would you describe the Company culture or ethos?”

Asking some personal questions adds as a nice touch too. It shows that you see your interviewer as a person, not just your interviewer. So ask the interviewer/s questions in their capacity as an employee, like: “How long have you worked here?” and “What’s the best thing about working for the Company?”

### **To find out about the role**

Good questions to ask at interview are any about the role which will help you understand what is required of you, how you are measured and so on....

- “How will I be measured?”
- “Are these team or individual targets?”
- “What involvement will I have with others on a day-to-day basis?”

Questions about developing in the role can help determine if you have made the right long term career choice....

- “What will the scope for learning and development be?”
- “What are the opportunities for progression or promotion?”

Good interview questions to ask include those about the leadership. The answers can help you decide if the management style suits how you work....

- “What can you tell me about my boss?”
- “Can you tell me about the management/leadership style within the team?”

### **To find out how the interviewers perceive you**

A few times, interviewees have asked us:

“Do you have any reservations about my ability to do this job?”

Two of us now routinely use this when we go for interviews ourselves.

If you feel brave enough, try it. You might say:

*“I’m very interested in this role and believe I could do it well. Do you have any reservations about my ability to do the job?”*

It may seem a bit cheeky but it’s a reasonable question to ask.

At the end of the day you’re a salesperson, selling yourself as the perfect candidate for the job. Asking this question gives the interviewers a chance to clarify any points they may have. They can only say “no” if they have no reservations.

Subtly, you are convincing them that you are the right person for the job if they can think of no reason not to hire you!



## **What Questions NOT To Ask**

Are there really ‘bad’ job interview questions to ask? Yes.

Most interview guides tell you there are some definite Dos and Don’ts around what interview questions to ask at your interview.

This is true.

Remember that you want to create a positive impression and not give your interviewers any reason NOT to hire you.

Minor details can always be ironed out if you are offered the job.

You should NOT ask questions about:

- Notice periods (we’ve been asked this, honestly)
- Taking time off
- Sick pay
- Any other company policies which indicate a lack of commitment on your part

Finally, asking good interview questions will give you an idea of whether the way the team or company operates will suit you.

**Do find out what you are letting yourself in for.**

Too often people will see a job advertised and think “I’d love to work for that company”, without knowing what the reality of life inside that company is like.

## **After The Interview**

### **Introduction**

Sending an interview thank you note, right after your interview, is a great way to put yourself in the forefront of the interviewer’s mind.

It really is a very powerful but unexploited method of raising your profile.

Very few interviewees do this. In fact, between us, we can count our interview thank you notes on one hand!

But you should send one – here’s why:

9 times out of 10, interviewers prefer to sleep on a decision, sometimes for more than 1 day.

During this time they are weighing up the candidates. Often they’ll have narrowed the choice down to just a few, maybe even two candidates. Take advantage of this delay and bring your name to the top of the candidate pile by reminding the interviewers how well you meet their criteria.

There are two great benefits of sending a note of thanks after your interview.

- 1. You strengthen the psychological bond which developed between you and your interviewers at the interview.**

Don’t forget that interviewers are human too and are more likely to choose a candidate whom they connect with.

And they enjoy the same recognition and appreciation of their time and efforts as you do.

Catherine remembers when she received her first interview thank you note. It was nice to have an interviewee express his appreciation for the time she’d taken to see him.

Catherine had also mentioned to this candidate, as she showed him to reception, that she was seeing a musical that night, in response to a comment the candidate had made. He ended his thank you letter with an expression of hope that she’d enjoy herself that night. It was a lovely touch.

The choice was between two candidates. This one got the job. Catherine can’t say that the letter swung it, but she admits it had a powerful effect!

When she read the letter, he immediately sprung to her mind. This is what you want to do, even if you don’t have the benefit of this personal touch!

## **2. You remind the interviewers of your unique selling points.**

Remember that they may have interviewed 10 people over 3 days.

If you were one of the first, a lot of your competitors would have enjoyed the advantage of being interviewed after you. Less time has passed since the interviewers saw them, and this can play to their advantage.

So use your thank you letter to remind the interviews why they can’t do without you.

## **Common Interview Thank You Qs And As**

The benefit of thank you interview letters is a well kept secret.

But flick through any career book and 9 times out of 10 you’ll find a section which advises jobseekers to send thank you interview letters after being interviewed.

So why do so few interviewees do this? Between us, we can count our interview thank you notes on one hand!

Research suggests that only 5% of candidates send them, though based on our experience, that’s optimistic!

When we’ve suggested to our own staff, friends, family and customers that they do this, we’re often met with quizzical looks and questions. Here are the common ones:

- **Don’t I look a bit desperate or like I’m sucking up if send a thank you interview letter?**

No. We enjoy getting them, few though they are! And so do colleagues we’ve spoken to.

Research shows that most employers consider this an underused tool, and agree that it differentiates candidates because it shows they have real interest in the position. It keeps that person right in front of them psychologically which is what you want.

- **Should I send a typed or handwritten thank you interview letter?**

We really don’t mind, and studies show it makes no difference either.

It’s actually doing it at all that matters, since most people don’t!

But if you have poor handwriting, or need Word to do a spell check, type it!

- **If I’ve not got time to send a letter, will an email interview thank you do?**

Yes, though a letter is always preferable since it takes more time and effort. If you have time to send one, and can get it there the next day, do a letter. If not, email is fine. Again, it’s the doing it which will make you stand out from the crowd!

- **If I’m interviewed by several people, should I send an interview thank you to each one?**

It’s up to you really. If there was a main interviewer, it’s enough to address the letter just to them. Simply refer to the other interviewers too, to give them credit.

If the interviewers all played an equal part, you can write to each. Use essentially the same letter, but vary it slightly to individualize the letters in case your interviewers compare them.

- **How soon after my interview should I send a thank you letter?**

Immediately, but no more than 24 hours after the interview.

- **Is it worth sending a thank you interview letter if I know the decision will probably be made before it’s received?**

In this case, if ‘snail mail’ is too slow, find a faster way, such as email, fax or hand-delivery.

In fact, if the interview was local, hand-delivery of your thank you letter makes a great impression!

- **What other advice do you have?**

If you can personalize your letter, do. If you found out that one of your interviewers loves dogs, send them a note on paper with a tasteful picture of puppies.

If you know they were going out that evening, express your hope that they enjoyed themselves. It’s all about creating a bond!

There’s an example interview thank you letter on the next page.

## **Example Thank-You Letter**

(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

Dear Mrs Smith,

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your Sales Manager position with me. It was lovely to meet you and Mr James and find out more about ABC Products Inc.

After talking with you and observing your Company’s operations, I’m further convinced that my knowledge, skills and experience coincide well with your needs.

I really appreciate the time you gave me. It was interesting to learn more about your Company and hear your own experiences of working for ABC Products Inc.

It’s no surprise that your Company retains its employees for so long and enjoys widespread recognition, both for its successes and its investment in people. I feel I could learn a great deal from you both and would love to work with you.

In addition to my skills and experience, I will bring excellent work ethics and sound decision making to this position.

With the many demands on your time, I’m sure that you need people who can be trusted to carry out their responsibilities to a high standard and with minimal supervision. I am one of these.

I look forward to hearing from you when you’ve reached a decision.

Once again, thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Jones

## **Getting Feedback**

### **Introduction**

We all know how disappointing it is to get an employment rejection letter, especially after all the effort you’ve put in. But it’s not the end of the world.

Remember, there are always more candidates than jobs, so if you got as far as an interview, you should congratulate yourself on getting to that stage. Most don’t.

If you did not get an interview, please go back and review this Guide and work on those areas which let you down.

If you did get an interview but weren’t chosen for the position, turn the experience into something positive. Here’s how:

If asked, a lot of companies will provide feedback which will help you at your next interview.

Personally contact the person who interviewed you by letter, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. Thank them for giving you the interview, express your disappointment at not getting the job and invite them to give you feedback so that you can improve your chances of being successful next time.

Following the feedback, you can decide what you have learned from the interview experience.

Look at areas of weakness and decide what you’ll do differently next time.

Make a commitment to do something and put these actions into some form of development plan.

Review ALL the advice we’ve given.

If you do this, you can turn receiving an interview rejection letter into something positive.

Don’t give up.

Work on those areas that let you down and be ready to do better next time.

## **Example Feedback Letters**

To turn your post interview rejection letter to your advantage, simply copy and paste the example letter/s into Word, or similar and replace the words in brackets with your own.

Don’t forget the pre-paid envelope. We have received requests for feedback where the envelope they mention is not enclosed. Not a good sign that you pay attention to detail!

Wait a couple of weeks. If you have heard nothing, send the same letter again without changes (it might simply never have arrived).

If you still don’t have a reply after another 2 weeks, following it up with a third letter as shown in the second example overleaf.



(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

(Today’s Date)

Dear (Mr/Ms/Miss Interviewer),

Many thanks for giving me the opportunity of an interview (last Thursday) for the position of (Team Leader in your Product Development Department).

I was a pleasure to meet you and (Mr/Ms/Miss other interviewer/s) and learn a little more about the role and your Company.

Naturally I am disappointed not to have been selected for the position, but hope you will give me another interview opportunity should further positions arise.

To help me, I’d be really grateful if you could find a few minutes to give me some feedback on my interview. I am keen to improve my interview technique and any advice you can give me on what to do better would be wonderful.

I’ve enclosed a pre-paid envelope for your reply.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks again for your time.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

(name)

(Phone numbers)

(Email address)

(No, My Street)  
(My Town)  
(My City)  
(My County/State)  
(My Post/ZIP Code)

(Today’s Date)

Dear (Mr/Ms/Miss Interviewer),

I’m writing further to my letter of (date), a copy of which I enclose.

I can appreciate how busy you are, but if you’re able to find a few minutes to give me feedback on the interview I had with yourself and Mr/Mrs X on (date), I’d be very grateful.

I really want to learn ways to improve my interview technique and you can help me do this.

I enclosed a further pre-paid envelope for your reply.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Thanks again for your time.

Yours sincerely

(signature)

(name)

(Phone numbers)

(Email address)

## **Final Message**

That concludes our COMPLETE Guide to Landing Your Dream Job.

We hope you found it useful and can use our advice to help you land **your** dream job.

We’d love feedback on the Guide – good or bad!

If we can improve it, [please let us know](#).

If it’s over-priced, [please let us know](#).

We’d like everyone to benefit from the Guide so **any** feedback is gratefully received.

Good luck in your career.

[www.job-application-and-interview-advice.com](http://www.job-application-and-interview-advice.com)