

Interview Preparation

When you have been invited to interview, don't panic as preparation is the key to making you feel confident on the day.

When preparing for your interview, it is important to undertake the following key activities to ensure you are knowledgeable about the role and the organisation and can demonstrate your capabilities in the best light:-

- Research the organisation
- Research the role and its requirements
- Prepare answers to interview questions
- Identify gaps in your capabilities
- Prepare your own questions

Further information on each of the above is outlined below

Research the organisation

Most interviews will ask the question "What do you know about us (the organisation)?" and will be looking to see if you have taken the time to understand more about the organisation. To enable you to impress them when answering this question, research the organisation in advance by reviewing their website and relevant information including their mission, values and behaviours.

Research the role and its requirements

Review the recruitment documentation (e.g., job description, person specification or for NHSBT - recruitment profile etc) for the role which will give you an insight into the requirement of the role and the capabilities that the interviewer is likely to be seeking during the interview. Read these carefully and identify your experiences that match the criteria

Prepare answers to Interview Questions

Consider your answers to interview questions by thinking about the issues and responsibilities related to the job and identifying around 3 solid examples that you could use, making sure you don't use the same example more than once if possible.

Questions may start with:

- Please give me an example when
- Please describe an occasion when

The following probing questions could be asked:

- What did you do that really made the difference?
- What were the potential barriers or pitfalls?
- How did you overcome them?
- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- Is there anything that you have learned?

TIP - You may find it useful to review [General Interview Questions and Sample Answers](#), [Competency Based Interview Questions and Sample Answers \(Using](#)

[Situation, Task, Action, Response \(STAR\) Technique](#), and [Sample Interview Questions](#).

How to Structure Your Answers

I am a STAR!!

A useful way of gathering your thoughts is to remember **I am a STAR!!**

Concentrate on **I** in your answers i.e. don't tell the interviewer what we (as a department /team) did but what **YOU** did. Don't be a shrinking violet your team are not being interviewed **YOU** are so without trying to come across as Superhero, do take credit yourself for good outcomes.

STAR is an acronym for

S Situation – Set the context for your example by describing the situation

T Tasks – Explain the tasks which you had to address

A Actions – Explain what you did and why you did it

R Result – Most importantly, explain the outcome and what you accomplished

When using STAR

- Make it concise and informative, concentrating solely on what is useful to the example you are using
- Steer clear of technical information, unless it is crucial to your example
- At the action stage go into more detail. Do not assume the panel will guess what you mean even if they know you
- Be ready to explain what you learnt in that situation and what you might do different next time.

Example of Using the STAR Model

Interview question – Give an example of when you have had to manage a very busy workload with demanding deadlines

Situation

During the summer half term workload was extremely high with minimum staffing levels

Tasks

I had to ensure that the workload was completed to the customer's satisfaction and in a timely manner. I also needed to keep my line manager updated on progress and maintain team morale

Actions

The actions I undertook were:

- I talked to each member of the team to confirm what they were currently working on and checked the deadlines for completion of each task
- I prepared a prioritised work list for the department and put it on the wall for everyone to refer to
- I contacted relevant customers to update them on progress and to try to negotiate some leeway on deadlines
- I reviewed progress on an hourly basis and reported back to my line manager at the end of each day

- I ensured that team members were praised both individually and collectively for their extra efforts and so on.

Results

The outcome was that:

- All key deadlines were met or agreement was reached re deferred deadlines for less urgent tasks
- Conflict with customers was averted by keeping them informed of progress on a regular basis
- Team morale was maintained and the team felt proud of their achievements.

The interviewers may want to know how you reacted to the situation and what you learnt or would do different. This is where you can start selling some important skills. For example, you may want to describe how you used your communication and negotiation skills to keep everyone up to date and motivate the team to achieve the tight deadlines.

Identify Gaps in Your Capabilities

Identify any gaps in the comparison of your capabilities and the requirements for the role and think about how you might address these if questioned at the interview. It may be a good idea to prepare some examples of other times when you have had a gap in your skills or knowledge and how you took action to close that gap i.e. what you did to ensure that you gained the knowledge / skills that were required

Prepare your own questions

You need to prepare intelligent questions to ask at the end of your interview. A good interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. Try to make these questions show that you have done your homework. This is also an opportunity to address any concerns they may have.

You might find [Competency Based Interview Questions and Sample Answers \(Using Situation, Task, Action, Response \(STAR\) Technique\)](#) helpful in using the STAR model, and preparing your own questions.

The Interview Itself

What type of interview is it?

One to one Interview – is where you are interviewed by just one person (usually the boss) and it is normally a question and answer session

Panel Interview – is where you are interviewed by more than one person and is probably the most daunting. The chairperson should be easy to identify, as they will generally make the introductions

Competency Interview – is where you will be asked questions on your past behaviour as this is the best indicator of future behaviour and therefore performance.

What to look for at the interview

Go to the interview with the intention of finding out whether this is the job for you and whether you want to work with these people. You can get a good feel for the organisation from how you are greeted at reception. Notice whether people you see in lifts and corridors smile, hold open doors or do they walk staring at the floor?

What you need to convey in the interview?

Most employers want the same basic things: someone who turns up on time, someone who is reliable and responsible, and someone who is happy, appropriately dressed, and friendly and can work in a team. As well as displaying these attributes from the moment you walk through the door, you also need to convey to the interviewers the qualities they are specifically looking for when answering their questions. Use the STAR to structure your answers – see section above on interview preparation. If you don't think the interviewer has asked you questions that let you demonstrate your ability, try to communicate those points where possible.

Employers use interviews to assess how well you will fit into their organisation and the requirements of the role. They already have a good indication of your skills and achievements from your application form, but you need to use your interview to demonstrate these skills in person, and confirm that you have the qualities to be successful in the job. This makes preparing for your interview especially important. Generally, there are two types of question that can be asked, traditional and competency based. Although you cannot predict exactly what you will be asked in an interview, preparation will help you to feel confident with both styles of interview question.

Traditional Interview Questions

An interviewer will generally ask traditional questions to get a sense of who you are as a person, and whether you are the right fit for their organisation. Quite often, they use these questions to explore your personal and professional motivations, and find out a little about your attitudes and aptitude.

Competency Based Interview Questions

Competency based interviewing (also known as Structural, Behavioural or Evidence Based Interviews) is now the most popular technique for most employers to use. The aim is to use specific questions to discover whether you match the requirements of the role, and identify how you will behave based on how you responded to previous situations.

A lot of people struggle with this type of interview because despite feeling like a conversation, they are very structured. Every interviewee is asked the same questions, with the answers being scored. This makes competency based interviews very fair.

The exact questions you will be asked will vary, but will match the competencies for the role you applied for. This means that you can do some preparation using the person specification.

Competency questions will ask you to provide **specific** examples of how you dealt with particular situations, and will usually start with:

- Tell me about a time when...
- Give me an example of a situation when...
- Describe a scenario when...

A note of caution: Be prepared for probing questions, or follow on questions that explore your answers in more detail. These are designed to find out what you were thinking, and what your motivations were. Due to these additional questions, we advise **not** to use example answers as you will find it hard to explain yourself.

Tips for Dealing with a Difficult Question?

Pause a little before you speak. This gives you an opportunity to think of your response and will assist in exercising more positive control over what you are saying.

Repeat the question back. This will give you time to think about your answer and check your understanding of the question.

Ask to return to a question. This buys you some time to think about your answer but at the very worst if you can't think of an answer you can just apologise and move on.

Rehearse your response to the awkward questions. You may, on occasion, have a particularly aggressive interviewer. Deal with this kind of situation by focusing on the content of the question rather than the emotion behind it: take a deep breath and keep calm.

Tip – you may find it useful to review [Top 10 Tips to Interviews](#)

After the Interview

You are successful so what happens now?

Remember that accepting a job offer is a major decision, which will affect your life and others close to you in a number of important ways. So you need to consider your decision very carefully.

Tip – you may find it useful to review [Top 10 Tips on Accepting and Starting a New Job](#)

If you are unsuccessful

It is a good idea to get feedback from the interviewer because:

- This shows you are still keen on the job which will show that you are interested in case their first choice person does not accept the position or another suitable position arises
- The feedback will help to make any necessary changes to assist with your future job hunt
- It pays to treat each interview as a learning and development opportunity

If you do ask for feedback make sure that you take it well. Explain that is for your own development as the interviewer may be concerned that you will use their feedback against them to take further action. Do not argue as even though you may not always like to hear negative feedback this will help you in the future. You asked for an opinion respect it and use it positively.

Above all **DO NOT GIVE UP**. It is natural to get downhearted when you have not been successful but try to handle rejections positively. Rejections are a natural part of the job search process.

Relevant websites

- <https://www.totaljobs.com/careers-advice/interviews>
- <http://www.monster.co.uk/career-advice/job-interview-tips/>
- <https://www.reed.co.uk/career-advice/interview-techniques/>
- <http://www.interview-skills.co.uk/free-information/interview-guide>

Related documents

- [Top 10 Tips to Interviews](#)
- [Top 10 Tips to Accepting and Starting a New Job](#)
- [General Interview Questions and Sample Answers](#)
- [Competency Based Interview Questions and Sample Answers \(Using Situation, Task, Action, Result \(STAR\)\)](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions](#)