

Preparing for an interview

You've been invited to interview for the post you applied for — well done. Your application was successful, and the organisation wants to learn more about you.

You will probably have a mixture of emotions ranging from excitement to anxiety which is completely natural. Interviews are a crucial part of securing a job, as it's potentially the last opportunity to demonstrate your experience, skills and attitudes to work, as well as your personality. You will be scored on the answers you provide, so preparation is key. Being prepared can often reduce some of the anxiety you might feel because you will feel confident.

Preparation is best undertaken a few days running up to the interview and not left to the last minute because you can take time to consider various aspects of the interview. Below are areas to focus on, helping you prepare for the interview — so you stand the best chance of securing the job.

1. Examine the job description

The job description provides a list of the qualifications, experience, and skills the employer is looking for in an ideal candidate. Refresh your memory of your application responses — what examples do you have to evidence what they are looking for? Your answers will prove to the interview panel that you have a good understanding of the requirements of the role and why you are best

suited to the job. The job description may also provide ideas about the questions you may be asked and also the questions you may want to ask.

2. Remind yourself of your qualifications

In refreshing your memory about your skills and experiences you are not only boosting your own confidence, but also providing yourself potential answers to questions as to why you are the right person for the role. It's also a good opportunity to appreciate aspects that might not be obvious from your experience, such as the added value you will bring to the employer which could come from experiences outside of employment.



3. Research

Research is fundamental to any interview and can ultimately help you score higher because your answers and indeed questions can be more insightful, fuller, and stronger because of it. Knowing the sector, the company and about your role may give you a competitive edge as you can align yourself with the company culture, mission, and values.

To know more about the company, its values, and ethos, you could research the following:

- **Website:** especially pages such as About us, Working for us, Mission and Values, etc.
- **Documentation:** annual reports, financial reports, strategy or policy documents, etc.
- **Social media:** you could follow them and look at their recent posts to pick up on an insight to reference in the interview.
- **Media and publications:** look up media mentions or publications they have been cited in to understand their audience, reach, and impact.
- **Professional network:** reach out to other professionals who have more knowledge or experience with the company to learn more about the company from all perspectives.
- **Credentials and accolades:** find out more about the quality marks or governing bodies associated with the company which would indicate the company's credibility, etc.
- **Absent information:** perhaps there is an aspect that you can't find out information on which could be a potentially interesting question for the panel.



4. Consider your answers to common interview questions

Preparing answers to common interview questions will not only help you to articulate your experiences and skills effectively but also help to reduce your anxiety during the interview. Whilst you won't be able to predict every question you'll be asked in an interview, there are some common ones that you can plan answers for.

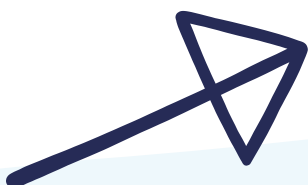
Here are a few common interview questions you can consider:

• Why do you want to work here?

The best way to prepare for this question is to learn about the history, mission, and culture of the company. Your response can refer to aspects of the company that appeal to you and align with your own career goals, values, etc.



Example: "I'd love the opportunity to work with a company that's making a difference. Finding a company with a positive work environment and values that align with my own has remained a priority throughout my job search and is the main reason I applied here."



- **What interests you about this role?**

This question is often asked to ensure you understand the role, and to give you the opportunity to highlight your relevant skills. It can be helpful to compare the role requirements against your skills and experience. Choose a few things you particularly enjoy or excel at and focus on those in your answer.



Example: "I've been passionate about supporting people throughout my professional career. I was excited to see the impact that your company has made and really want to be a part of that. In my recent position as Carer's Support Officer I was able to signpost people to support which noticeably impacted on their lives (expand how etc)."

- **What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?**

This question gives you an opportunity to talk about both hard and soft skills. When asked to describe your strengths, you could share qualities and personal attributes but ensure you relate them back to the role for which you're interviewing.



Example: "I'm a natural problem-solver. I find it rewarding to dig deep and uncover solutions to challenges. It's something I've always excelled at in my career too. Much of product development is about finding innovative solutions to challenging issues, which is what drew me to this career path in the first place."

When asked to explore your weaknesses it's important to remain authentic but wise to avoid talking about ones that could suggest you're not suited to the role applied for. You can couch your answer in a way that suggests not only self-awareness but also proactively seeking personal growth.



Example: "I am very used to leading on projects but I understand this role will be within a larger team than I have experienced which is really exciting but it will be important to provide time and space for others to contribute and will further enhance my listening skills."

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

The interviewer is wanting to find out how committed you are to the position and how invested you are in staying with the company. This is a great opportunity to say how your career goals align with the role and any aspirations you may have within the company. It's also a great way of expanding on how you hope to grow in terms of personal development.



Example: "If I was fortunate enough to be selected for this role, I would work towards exceeding sales targets and hope to eventually be given the responsibility for managing a sales team here. I think working as a team member, experiencing all the challenges and opportunities we face in retail will help me grow into an effective manager one day."



5. Handling curveball questions

Preparing for these types of questions is tricky because they are from a slightly different perspective than those you prepare for and often unexpected. The questions may appear quite random and potentially off topic, but the interviewer may be testing how quick and adaptable you can be and how confident you are in navigating the unexpected.

They might ask questions similar to: “Would you prefer to be liked or feared?” (to analyse your personality and management style), “If you could be anyone, who would you be?” (to understand you better and what inspires you), or “What’s the biggest fear you’ve overcome?” (to see if you take on challenges). All of these have a purpose despite seeming on the surface to be uncommon and unconventional.

They might wish to run a scenario by you to see how you would be in a situation or wanting to explore more detail to ensure you are the right person for the team. You can try and link this back to an attribute that is crucial for the job you are applying for.



Example: “If you could take on a superpower what would it be and why?”

Example answer: “I would read people’s minds. I think very often when conversing there is a lot unsaid and truths that people hold back from saying. I am quite a robust person and would like to know how people process their thoughts — it wouldn’t phase me. I would be able to create authentic and non-judgemental relationships with people — helping me to understand how I can support them.”

6. Prepare questions to ask the interviewer

Asking questions about the role or company gives a positive impression that you are keen and committed. There may also be questions that you need to ask for your own development and to see whether the company is right for you. It is usually best not to ask too many questions — a couple at the end would work best in the process. Some examples you could consider are listed below but do check they are right for you and the position you’re applying for.

1. **What is a typical day like in this position?**
2. **What are the immediate priorities this post must take on within the first six months?**
3. **What does success look like in this role?**
4. **What challenges might I face in the role?**
5. **What objectives would this role fulfil alongside the broader strategy?**
6. **What opportunities are there for personal development? (i.e., training, peer mentoring, etc.)**
7. **What are the company’s plans for the next few years? (i.e., expansion, growth, securing funding, etc.)**
8. **How does the company look after their employees? (i.e., EAP, pension, counselling, occupational health, etc.)**
9. **When might I hear back about the decision?**
10. **Consider questions fundamental to you accepting the role.**





There might be certain aspects within the company or role that you wish to clarify, which could be deciding factors in accepting the position. Often these questions feel harder to ask and require some tact, diplomacy, or sensitivity. Questions around pay can be hard to frame but quite critical to accepting the offer. Here are some questions you could consider, again do check these and only ask one or two of them at the appropriate time.

- **Are there opportunities for salary growth within the company?**
- **Is the salary negotiable based on experience and qualifications?**
- **Could you provide more details about the salary range for this position?**
- **How often are salary reviews conducted?**
- **Are there any performance-based incentives with this role?**
- **How does the company handle overtime or additional hours?**

Another area to consider discussing are adjustments or accommodations that be a critical deciding factor in accepting the offer. For example, you may have caring responsibilities which necessitate greater flexibility or physical or mental health needs that require certain adjustments to the work environment. It's entirely your choice as to whether you ask these questions at this stage, after you've been offered the job, or within the probation period.

Below are some questions you could consider — again check them and ask only a couple of them when you feel it's appropriate. You don't have to provide any information as to why you're asking them, but the interviewer/s could ask further. Only share information you feel comfortable to.

- **Could you provide information on the company's approach to accommodations for employees with disabilities?**
- **What is the process for requesting adjustments or accommodations in the workplace?**
- **How does the company ensure an inclusive work environment?**
- **How flexible is the company in terms of work arrangements, such as remote work, or compressed or modified hours?**
- **Can you explain how the company supports employees who may need temporary or permanent adjustments to their work environment?**
- **If I need an adjustment in my work setup, how does the company handle these requests?**
- **Are there provisions for assistive devices or equipment to help with physical tasks or mobility within the office?**
- **Can you tell me about the company's approach to promoting a mentally healthy workplace?**
- **Are there any specific programs or initiatives in place to support mental health and wellbeing in the workplace?**
- **What support does the company offer for employees with caregiving responsibilities?**
- **How does the company support work-life balance, particularly for those with dependants?**



As you can see, there is a lot to prepare before an interview. It's really worth investing the time to understand the role you are applying for and the company. The more interviews you do often reduces the time you spend on preparing. However, with each opportunity, it's good to review and revisit what you said in the previous and what you would change in the upcoming interview.

Preparation ensures that you:

- **Showcase the experience and skills most aligned with the role you're applying for.**
- **Provides confidence and calms anxieties as you feel better able to respond effectively to questions.**
- **Equips you to handle challenges or unexpected issues or questions that could arise.**
- **Maximises on the opportunity to make a good impression but also ask information that crucial to your acceptance of the offer.**



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