

Help with interviews. Career kickstart.



Be prepared.

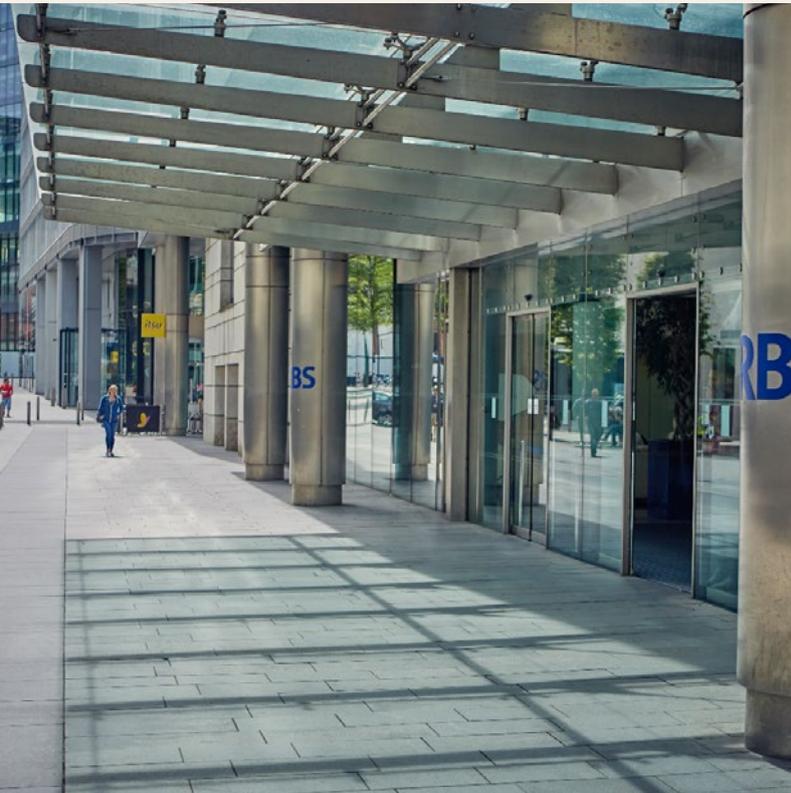
No matter what age you are, what you do, or how much experience you have, job interviews can be scary. The trick is to be prepared. So here's what you need to think about to bring your A-game when you sit down at your next interview.

Start by researching

The more you know about the company and the job you are being interviewed for, the more chance you have of making a good impression. This research will also help you to prepare a list of questions you can ask. But more on that later.

Role play an interview with a friend or family member

Practising your answers to common interview questions is a great way to be prepared. Here are some to get you started:



What are your strengths?

This is a question you should expect. If you're particularly modest, think up some answers in advance – just make sure you can back them up! You might want to use the following list as inspiration:

- Hard working
- Good time keeper
- I finish the tasks I am given
- Good attention to detail
- Good questioning ability
- Excellent communication skills
- Good problem solver
- Good people skills

What are your weaknesses?

You should always turn weak points into positives. For example, if you aren't very confident public speaking, show how you are overcoming that weakness e.g. by enrolling on a presentation skills course, or by getting as much practice as possible and your confidence is now growing.

Why are you leaving your current employer?

If you've been employed before, try to make this sound positive. So if you want more responsibility or more training, say so. If you're changing sectors, show how your skills and knowledge can be transferable.

Tell me about a time when...

The best way to answer these questions is to use a formula called STAR to structure your reply clearly:

S-ituation, what is the situation (place, role) you are explaining.

T-ask, what is the actual task you are referring to.

A-ction, what did you do and how.

R-esults, what was the outcome as a result of your actions?



Here is an example.

Last summer when I was working as a Shop Assistant (S). I was given the job of improving front of store promotions to increase sales of our new product (T). I decided to visit competitor stores and research how they use their promotions and put new ideas for our store that would keep us a head of the competition, such as a new offer and staff wearing branded clothing to promote it (A). My manager took my ideas on board and after a week of the new promotions, our sales increased by 10% (R).



Here are a few examples of competencies you may get asked about.

Tell me about a time when you used your initiative?

Think about roles you have had in clubs or societies. Maybe you organised events for your school sports team, or you were head boy/girl at school and made some good decisions.

Tell me about a time when you made the wrong decision?

This is something that is very difficult to answer. Whatever you choose to talk about, it is important to remember to say what the outcome was and state what you learned from this experience. Again, don't say that you were fired!

Why do you think you'd be good at this role?

Here you should talk about your skills and qualities and how they'll help you handle the job. So if you're a clear and confident speaker and your job will involve taking phone calls, then this is the sort of thing you should talk about.

What can you bring to this organisation?

Use words like dedication, initiative, motivation and enthusiasm. Research the company's values and show how you could fit in through what you'd bring.

Do you feel you can work well unsupervised/in a team/both?

Talk about times where you've worked in a team or on your own, perhaps a group drama performance or a big project you had to deliver by yourself.

How do you cope under pressure?

Give some examples of occasions where you were under pressure and you succeeded – like exams, public speaking or a busy time at a previous job.

Give me three words to describe yourself.

This is a tough thing to be asked; try to be positive, but don't be afraid of throwing in one slightly less positive one to talk about. Remember, if you use a word that's a little bit negative be ready to spin it into a positive. Good examples you might want to use are motivated, cooperative and cautious or enthusiastic, committed and decisive. Show your personality professionally too!



What questions should you ask?

An interview isn't just about answering questions. You should also think about what you want to know. This shows you've done your research and that you're really interested in working for the company. Make sure the questions you ask are relevant to the job role and the organisation.

Here are a few to get you started.

Apart from what is written in the job description, what else are you looking for in the ideal candidate for this position?

Translates to: Am I the kind of person they are looking for?

How many people at my level are you looking to hire this round?

Translates to: What chance do I have of getting this job?

What is the company culture like?

Translates to: Would I fit in here?

What kind of work would I be doing on a day to day basis?

Translates to: Is this the sort of work I want to do?

What do you offer to your customers and employees that other companies don't?

Translates to: Why should I work here?

What does your company value?

Translates to: Do we share the same values?

What training and development will I get?

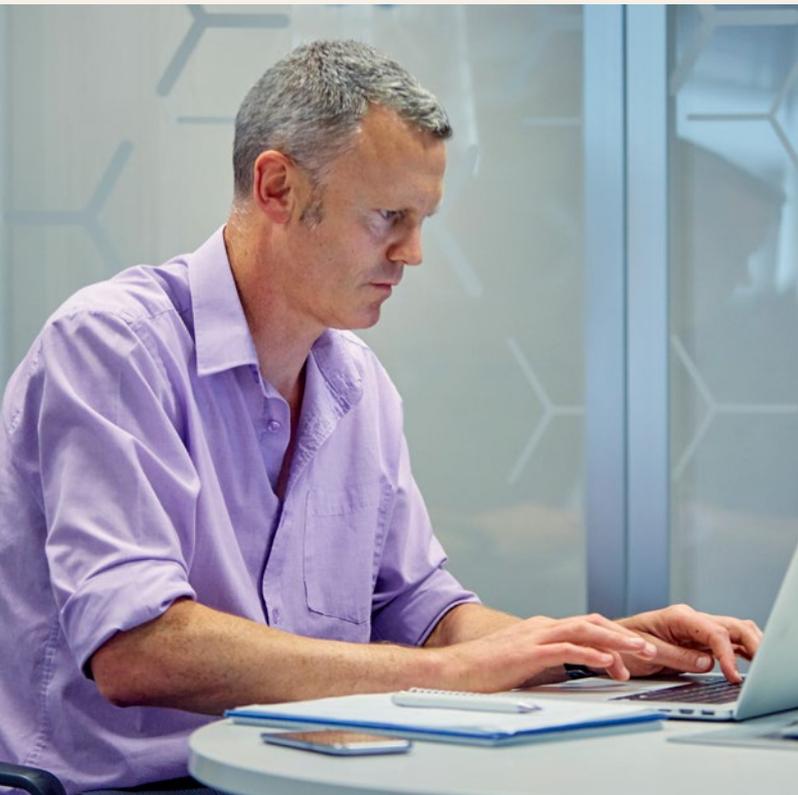
Translates to: How will I be trained and assessed?





Top tips

- Dress for success and look sharp – try to dress the way you would if you were showing up for work.
- Be sure to get there on time.
- Get to bed early the night before so that you look rested, healthy and alert for the interview.
- Take a copy of your application, CV and qualifications with you.
- Don't ask questions where you could easily get the answer from the job description or company website – it may look like you haven't done your research if you do! Pre-interview checklist.
- Do your research, be ready to back up the points you make and make sure you practise answers to common questions.
- Think up example answers for competency based questions – structure them using the STAR method. Think about the Situation, the Task, the Action you took and the Result you achieved.
- Make sure the experiences you choose are ones you can talk about in detail and have back-up examples to give, just in case.
- Look smart.
- Be yourself.
- Don't be afraid to pause when answering a question.
- Pay attention to the interviewer and ask questions of your own.
- Always ask for feedback.



And for more useful careers information, check out these websites:

[The Student Room](#)

[CareerPlayer](#)

[The National Careers Service Website](#)

[Careers in Wales website](#)

[Careers in Scotland website](#)

