

Interview skills

An interview is your chance to expand upon the content of your CV/application and to convincingly and confidently articulate why you are the best person for the job. If you get to the interview stage, the employer clearly likes what they see.

You should also treat the interview as an opportunity to reach an informed decision as to whether the position is right for you.

Think positive! Go into the interview with the sole intention of getting the job.

Know yourself

To prepare for any interview, it is important that you know who you are, based upon your:

- Values
- Interests
- Personality
- Skills (VIPS).

You should consider these in relation to the role and organisation. Think about 'who you are', 'what you do', 'why you are different' and 'what your goals are'.

The organisation will be looking for someone that personifies professionalism, is self-aware and has a positive attitude.

A professional outlook is determined through your behaviour, knowledge and skills. Understanding these and your fit — your strengths, weaknesses and personal characteristics — will help to identify how suitable you are for the role.

Before the interview

Re-familiarise yourself with the job description paying particular attention to the person specification and the essential requirements. Ensure that you are completely aware of what they are looking for. The questions that the interviewer asks will be based upon these requirements and the specifics of the role

Review your application form/CV to remind yourself of examples and evidence that you provided. Be aware of your own skills and experience and be prepared to articulate and demonstrate these in detail

For each of the essential requirements think of one or two examples that effectively evidence them. If possible, at the interview, try to use different examples for your answers to show variety and breadth of knowledge and experience

Have a clear understanding about the employer/service/department and be prepared to answer questions about why you wish to work for them and what you know about them

Prepare answers to standard questions — 'Tell me about yourself'; 'Why do you want to work for this service?'; 'What are your strengths?' 'What are your weaknesses?'

Prepare answers to ask the employer — think about what you need to find out from them

Plan what you need to take with you. Qualification evidence? Certificates? A copy of the application form/CV?

You may wish to find out who will be interviewing you — a one-to-one or panel interview.

You may also enquire about the structure of the interview — if there is any testing or presentation that you are required to undertake, does this come before or after the main interview? How long will the interview last?

Think about what you should wear. If you are unsure what to wear, it is best to err on the side of caution or ask them directly

Check your social media — are you presenting a positive impression as the employer may check you out?

Know how to get to the interview venue! — do a test run if possible.

At the interview

Making a positive first impression

Don't underestimate the impact of positive body language and the power of first impressions. It is estimated that first impressions are formed in the first few minutes with 55% based on visual impact such as dress, facial impressions and body language; 38% on your tone of voice and 7% on what you say. Employers will be looking to see whether you are a fit for the organisation/department and an immediate indication on this is how you present yourself.

To create a positive first impression:

- Smile and maintain good eye contact

- Have a confident handshake

- Assume a comfortable sitting position

- Address all people on the panel when you are answering their questions

- Before the interview use breathing techniques to help you calm your nerves — breathe in slowly through your nose, hold briefly and then slowly out through your mouth.

- Also, be aware of the interviewer's body language — do they look engaged and interested?

[9 simple body language tips for your next interview](#)

Types of interview question

When answering interview questions, be positive and specific about your achievements, ensure you relate them to the job in question and make sure that you are answering the question being asked. If you need clarification on the question, just ask the interviewer. If you didn't understand the question, ask them to re-phrase it.

Avoid giving general answers — you need to tell your story. Also, avoid using 'only' in your answers, as this can lead to you underselling your abilities.

Specific questions — invite factual replies and may cover specific clinical skills.

Open questions — what, where, how, when, which, who or why. Encourage full replies.

Hypothetical questions — require you to imagine yourself in a situation and to describe the actions you would take to solve the problem. They test your speed and quality of thought.

Competency-based questions — require you to demonstrate how you are competent in a particular skill. Use the **STAR(R)** technique to frame your answer.

Negative questions — May ask you to talk about your weaknesses or a time when you haven't been successful. Approach this by showing how you are aware of any weakness that you have and how you address it to ensure it doesn't have a negative effect on your work.

The STAR(R) technique

Most interviews will contain questions about your competencies and skills that you will be expected to answer with supporting evidence. The STAR(R) technique is a useful way to structure your answer in a clear and logical way.

Situation — briefly describe the situation where the example you are providing took place

Task — outline the task or objective that required you to use the skill in question.

Action — describe what you did. Focus on your role and your input that clearly demonstrates the skill in question — use clear evidence. The 'action' should form the bulk of your answer and should clearly show how you have the skill in place.

Result — what was the outcome and what skills did you develop?

Reflect — talk about whether you would do things differently in the future and how you learned from the process.

[Competency based interviews](#)

Tell me about yourself

This is a popular first question for an interviewer to ask and often one that candidates find difficult to answer, so consider the following.

Structure your answer into four parts:

Who you are — Provide context to why you have applied to the job and a brief insight into what got you to this point.

What you do — Talk briefly about your specific responsibilities. This can come from employment, education or your personal life. Try to keep it relevant to the listener and make it interesting.

Show how you stand out/how you are unique — Talk through the unique qualities that you have that can benefit or will be of interest to the interviewer. Talk about how what makes you stand out from the crowd and be sure to evidence this.

Your goals and ambitions — Be clear about your goals and if possible align them to what the interviewer is looking for. Try to match their needs.

Strength-based interviews

Strength-based interviews are increasingly common as they allow recruiters to identify candidates that share the same passions as themselves. They tend to lead to fewer 'fake/pre-prepared' answers and provide a more genuine insight into applicants.

You can identify your strengths by asking yourself some of the following questions:

- What do you learn quickly?
- What gives you energy?
- Describe a successful day that you had. Why was it successful?
- Do you prefer to start or finish tasks?
- What things always remain unfinished?
- What do you least enjoy?
- What comes easily to you?
- Of what are you particularly proud?

Example interview questions

What are you looking for in a new position?

Why do you want to work in this department?

What was your biggest accomplishment in your last job?

What were the biggest challenges in your last role and how did you overcome them?

What makes you passionate about nursing?

What experience can you bring to this role/department/organisation?

How do you think the NHS can improve?

Talk me through a time when you had to solve a specific patient problem. What did you do, how did you approach it, and what was the result?

Effective communication within this role is key. Can you demonstrate a time when you have had to communicate difficult/challenging information to a patient/their family? What did you do and how did you learn from the process?

How do you know that you are doing a good job?

How do you organise your day?

Why should we offer you this position?

Example questions to ask the interviewer

What is a typical day like?

Is there an opportunity for growth/professional development?

What training opportunities will I be able to access?

Who are you looking for to fill this position?

When will I find out if I've been successful?

After the interview

- Always aim to get feedback so that you are able to learn from the process.
- Follow up the interview with an email to the person/people interviewing you to thank them for the opportunity (and to re-emphasise your interest in the position). You never know, this could make the difference if they are struggling to decide between two candidates.
- Self-reflect on how the interview went. Ask yourself questions such as:
 - Was I as prepared as I could have been?
 - Did I clearly show my interest and enthusiasm and showcase positivity throughout the process?
 - Did I clearly relate my experience to the role?
 - Did I give specific examples of my skills and experience?
 - Did I clearly demonstrate how much I wanted to land the job?
 - Did I demonstrate a good understanding of the organisation, the department, the position and how I fit within it?
 - How did I come across?

Be proud of getting to this stage of the process, whether you get offered the position or not!