

APPRENTICES

A GUIDE TO APPRENTICESHIP INTERVIEWS

Hints and tips to help you succeed.



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Introduction

If an application is successful, for example, the applicant's CV or application form has been shortlisted, they will be invited to an interview with the employer.

An interview is a chance for an employer to see if the applicant is the right person for the job. It provides the applicant the chance to make a good impression and demonstrate what they can offer the employer. It is also an opportunity for the applicant to decide if the company is right for them.

Interviews for apprenticeships are often similar to interviews for any other job. They can differ from employers, for example, a small employer may only conduct one interview whereas a large employer could request up to three.

The interview could be:

- face to face with one person
- with a panel - face to face with two or more people
- over the phone
- a group discussion which is usually part of an assessment centre day with other applicants
- a video interview where questions are sent in advance and the answers are delivered using a video recording
- online using applications like Skype or Zoom

Applicants should ensure they:

- research the apprenticeship and the organisation
- double check the job advert and ensure they understand the application process

- practise interview techniques
- check where and when the interview is
- prepare questions to ask the employer during the interview

Types of interview questions

Employers use different types of questions when interviewing.

They may be:

- competency-based where applicants are asked to give examples to show they have the skills needed for the job
- strength-based which explore what the applicant enjoys doing or does well and are generally used to test practical or teamworking skills
- technical-based to understand job-related knowledge and understanding of work processes
- situational judgement questions to test how applicants would react in work situations and the ability to problem solve
- value-based questions which are typically used in health and care jobs to confirm that the applicant shares the right values and understands the company's culture
- motivational questions to help the employer to see what drives the applicant and ensure they are the right fit for the company

It is important to structure and practise answering commonly asked interview questions to properly prepare for an interview.

EXAMPLES OF COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions about yourself:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- How would you best describe yourself?
- What skills have you developed from any work experience or previous employment?

TOP TIP:

Think about any positive feedback you've received and how your friends, family, colleagues would describe you. Then practise explaining how they are relevant to the job role.

Questions about the employer:

- What research have you carried out about our company?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about our products or services?

TOP TIP:

You don't need to know everything about the company but showing an interest and making an effort to know the main products or services is important. Start by looking at the employer's website, reading their latest news and following them on social media.

Questions about the job:

- What do you think the main tasks and responsibilities will be?
- Are there any aspects of the job description that you're not sure about?
- Which parts of the job do you think will be most enjoyable/challenging for you?

TOP TIP:

Read the job description and pick out different tasks and skills that you think are a good match. Re-read it and identify anything you don't understand and do some research. Look online for any apprentice case studies that the company has published to gain some insight into what the role is like.

Using the 'STAR' technique to answer competency-based questions

The STAR ('Situation, Task, Action, Result') technique is a recognised format used in interviews to answer competency-based questions like "tell me about a time you solved a problem to a tight timescale".

Using this method to answer interview questions allows the applicant to provide strong examples of proof that you possess the experience and skills for the apprenticeship.

Situation

Explain a recent challenge or situation that relates to the question.

Task

Describe the tasks, objectives and targets relevant to the situation.

Action

Describe the action taken to complete the tasks and objectives, why those actions were taken and what the alternatives were.

Result

Explain the outcome of the situation, for example what objectives and targets were met. Don't forget to describe key learnings from the situation and how they have been used since.

SITUATION
TASK
ACTION
RESULT

FILL IN THIS GRID USING YOUR OWN EXAMPLES:

SITUATION	TASK	ACTION	RESULT
<i>E.g. volunteered for a local community group</i>	<i>E.g. Planned an event for 100 people on a budget</i>	<i>E.g. Contacted key stakeholders for help. Asked for feedback in the local community</i>	<i>E.g. Event was organised within the budget and received great feedback</i>

Answering strength-based questions

Employers are looking for various qualities and characteristics in a potential apprentice. A lot of these qualities are outlined in the job advert and on the company's website so it's important to be familiar with them.

It can sometimes be difficult to think of ways to describe your strengths on the spot, so it's important to plan out and practise describing strengths relevant to the role.

Sentence openers

Examples of how to introduce strengths during an interview include:

- I am skilled at....
- I am competent in...
- I am talented at...
- I am excellent at....
- I am very good at...
- I am qualified to...
- I am able to...
- I am excellent at...
- I am extremely good at...

Words and phrases employers are looking for

Take a look at the job description and employer's website to gain a better understanding of the skills and characteristics the employer will be looking for during an interview.

Examples of common words or phrases employers look for include:

Able	Cooperative	Friendly	Polite
Accurate	Cope under	Good	Proactive
Adaptable	pressure	communicator	Punctual
Alert	Creative	Hardworking	Reliable
Ambitious	Decisive	Helpful	Resourceful
Analytical	Dedicated	Imaginative	Responsible
Articulate	Dependable	Insightful	Supportive
Assertive	Determined	Independent	Tactful
Astute	Diplomatic	Innovative	Team player
Bright	Diverse	Initiative	Tenacious
Capable	Drive	Intuitive	Thorough
Calm	Dynamic	Knowledgeable	Trustworthy
Confident	Educated	Leadership	Willing
Committed	Effective	Methodical	
Common sense	Energetic	Objective	
Competent	Enthusiastic	Organised	
Computer literate	Flexible	Patient	
Consistent	Focused	Perceptive	



TASK

Select and circle the relevant sentence openers and strength words listed and prepare some sentences that could be used in a job application or interview. Then list some examples that demonstrate those strengths.

Example: I am friendly and a good communicator. An example of this is when I was buddied with a new Year 7 student to show them around the school and help them settle in.

Preparing for an interview

Prepare for your interview with these following tips:

- read the job description and person specification carefully and be clear on the skills and qualities the employer is looking for
- check the company website to find out more about its products or services and their plans for the future
- go over the application form, CV or covering letter and think about things the employer may ask
- prepare examples that demonstrate the right skills, personal qualities and experiences
- if presenting, practise timings and keep a back-up copy
- practise answering questions with a colleague, friend, family etc
- write down questions to ask at the end of the interview
- prepare something suitable and comfortable to wear
- check the arrival time and the name of the person to report to
- plan the route in advance and allow plenty of time to allow for traffic
- if you have a disability and need adjustments to make the interview accessible, you can get advice from Scope on how to ask for them;
<https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/ask-for-adjustments-at-interview>

Interview checklist

Be early

Prepare the route in advance and plan to arrive in plenty of time to allow for traffic problems.

Check what the employer has asked for

Take any important documents that the employer has asked for, for example, ID, certificates or portfolio.

Review the application and prepare notes

Take a copy of the application as a reminder of what questions could be asked. Take any notes to read through before the interview starts.

Check the dress code

Dress smartly, for example, an ironed suit or skirt and blouse. If unsure, check with the interviewer about the company's dress code.

Prepare examples

Employers will often ask about previous experience, skills and strengths. Prepare relevant examples so that answers come more naturally.

Prepare questions for the employer

Many employers will ask the applicant if they have questions at the end of the interview. Preparing some questions demonstrates interest and enthusiasm. Draw on information found during research to impress the interviewer.

Just before the interview

Before you go in to the interview:

- turn off any electrical devices (e.g. mobile phone)
- use breathing techniques to calm any nerves, but try to remember a few nerves are normal
- smile and greet the interviewer confidently
- ask for water if needed

During the interview

During the interview, remember the following:

- be polite and use the right language and tone for a formal situation
- listen carefully to questions and think before answering questions
- ask the interviewer to repeat or explain the question if there is any confusion
- use the STAR method to answer questions about your skills
- be positive about experiences - if describing a difficult situation, demonstrate what you learned
- tell the truth - do not exaggerate or come across as over-confident
- ask questions when invited to do so
- thank the employer for their time

After the interview

After the interview, try to write down some of the interview questions to help prepare for future interviews.

Try to write an account of the experience and reflect on what went well and what could be improved and use this to prepare for future interviews.

If successful:

- accept the offer in a timely manner and agree on a start date and next steps
- if declining the offer, do so in a timely and polite manner

If unsuccessful:

- be positive and learn from the experience
- ask for feedback
- think about things that went well and did not go well to improve next time
- practise with friends, family, colleagues or a career adviser

Additional support

For additional support and information about interviews, you can:

- visit the National Career Service website: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/interview-advice>
- speak to a national career service adviser by calling 0800 100 900 or using their webchat; <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/webchat/chat>
- speak to local college or school career advisers
- visit a local JobCentre Plus; <https://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus>

For more information, visit:
www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

