



Time2Work

Module 1:

Support materials for young people entering the workplace for the first time

Preparing for an interview with a prospective employer

Being invited to attend an interview can be both exciting and overwhelming, particularly if you have not had many interviews with prospective employers.

The key to a good interview is preparation. Each interview will be different, so take time to learn about the company or organisation and job you are applying for and think about the types of questions you might be asked. An interview provides your chance to 'sell' yourself and all the qualifications and skills you have to offer a prospective employer (*see also fact sheets on skills listings and approaching potential employers*).

Practice makes perfect; try role playing interviews with friends and family. Even if you are not offered the job you have been interviewed for, try not to feel too down about it. Use the experience to learn from and build your confidence. With confidence, you will be better able to show your strengths and personality to other potential employers.

Below are some tips to help you prepare for your interview and build your confidence.

1. What do you know?

Before you go for an interview find out as much as you can about:

- The company / organisation / employer you are going to see, including their business, key clients etc.
- The position you are being interviewed for
- The person/people who will be interviewing you
- The current environment the company or organisation works or specialises in, if relevant (e.g., if you are applying to a bank, make sure you are aware of the big news stories affecting the banking industry)
- Potential competitor companies or organisations. Companies or organisations often measure themselves against their competitors or similar organisations, so it may be useful just to know the company's or organisation's main competitors or peers and a little about them
- Familiarise yourself with business or industry terms of the company or organisation you are approaching – you will find a glossary of business terms in this tool kit – so you can understand them and use words that resonate with them
- Be knowledgeable about any State, Government or insurance schemes offered to employers for taking on people with long-term conditions and/or disabilities

The company/employer

Before you go for an interview, find out about a company or organisation from their website. You can also ask about the position you are applying for, for example:

- What is involved in the position you are being interviewed for (job description)?
- What, skills, abilities, core competencies or qualifications are needed?
- How long has the job been vacant?
- How many other applicants are there?
- What salary/wage is being offered / are there any other benefits?
- Are there any potential challenges you should be aware of? For example, travel, accessibility or the building etc.

It may not be possible to find out everything before the interview, but you may be given an opportunity to ask questions in the interview (see 5.)

The person/people interviewing you

- What is their position?
- Will they make the final decision over who is hired?
- Will you be working with them directly?
- Will you need to be interviewed by others if you pass this interview

2. What is the employer looking for?

Which of your attributes fit the employer's needs?

- Look at the job description and what skills, abilities or attributes it will require. Match these against the skills, abilities and attributes you have listed for yourself (see separate fact sheet) *challenge, opportunity – what can you add?*

- Think about examples of similar work you have done that you could talk about or show in the interview, such as casual or part-time work, volunteering, or experiences you have had while at school or in other training – think about how your past experiences can relate to the skills required by the potential job
- Bring any testimonials and/or references with you, if not previously provided with your CV
- Emphasise hobbies – and the skills and talents they can bring, such as perseverance and team player attitude
- Have support with you

Presenting yourself

Leave plenty of time to get to your interview – it is much better to arrive early and have time to relax, than to be late and anxious! Before you go into the interview, try taking a few slow, deep breaths to help you compose yourself. Remember your interviewer was once in your position!

First impressions count; in the first 90 seconds people will make 90% of the impression they have of you when you first meet them, based on:

- 55% your appearance and what you are wearing
- 38% your body language
- 7% what you say

What to wear

You don't have to spend money on new clothes, but make sure what you are wearing is neat, clean, appropriate and suits you. Think about the image you are projecting with the clothes you choose for your interview – are they appropriate to the job you are applying for? If you saw someone else dressed like you, what impression would you have of them? For example, do they look like a leader, successful, creative, considered, serious, individual or intellectual? Do they look too young, too old, too dull, too exciting, too casual, pretentious, inappropriate, trying too hard etc.? Try and see yourself as others might see you – does what you planned to wear match the impression you want to give, or could you wear something different?

Body language

Your body language is a crucial form of communication and will instantly project how you are feeling. For example, when you are sad or unconfident you body sags and closes in, when you are nervous your body can make rapid and jerky movements, when you are happy, relaxed and confident your posture improves, and your body opens out. No matter how you are feeling on the day of the interview, try your best to portray confidence with your body language – don't slouch and look down; keep your head up and engage with the other person/people in the room. Sit up straight with your feet on the floor in front of you, if comfortable for you. Try not to sit on the edge of your chair, cross your legs, wiggle your feet or fold your arms (this can make you look nervous and defensive). During your interview use eye contact and smile at the interviewer/s when appropriate. Look interested and engaged; nod occasionally to register understanding or agreement with what's being said.

3. Interview techniques

However hard it may be, try to appear confident, motivated, interested and enthusiastic. You can do this with body language and through **self belief** by using **positive thought**. Sports people use positive thought and imagery to help prepare them for a match or competition. Simply practice visualising yourself as confident and successful. Focus on all the things you can do and your special skills. Practice two or three times a day and then try it out when you go shopping or meet with friends.

- Check how much **time** you have for the interview
- Be **polite**
- Employers are looking for people with a **positive attitude**
- When you go into the room be **friendly**, but **professional**
- Let the interviewer take the lead and **listen carefully** to what they are asking you
- **Keep your answers to the point** – you don't have to tell them everything you know
- Only **elaborate where it adds value** to your point
- **Use examples of good work** you have done (such as in casual or part-time work or study) to support your answers where appropriate
- Use business or the appropriate **language** for the job you are applying for
- **Thank the interviewer/s** for their time at the end of the interview and ask about the next steps – i.e. any further interviews, or when they might be making a decision

4. Questions you may be asked in your interview

Think about the types of questions you might be asked and how you can best answer them. Practice your answers, including tricky questions, with a friend or family member so you feel more confident about answering them in the interview. For example, how would you respond if you were asked:

- What can you tell me about yourself?
- What are your strong points?
- What are your weaknesses? (Explain how you plan to work on them)
- Why would you like to work for this company / organisation?
- What is it that interests you about this type of work?
- Why do you think you are especially qualified for this job?
- What skills can you bring to this job?
- What are your salary expectations?

If you have disclosed your condition, or it is visible, you should be prepared to answer questions about how it will affect your work, how much time you will need to take off for medical reasons etc.

Depending on the type of work you are applying for, see if you can anticipate any other questions you might be asked and how you might answer them, but be realistic and prepare yourself to handle potentially difficult questions or unexpected situations.

Where possible when answering questions, use examples of how you have used your commitment, abilities / skills to overcome problems in the past.

5. You can ask questions too

You may want to ask questions or for clarification on certain points during the interview, or you may be asked if you have any questions at the end of the interview. It is a good idea to have one or two questions prepared, in case you are feeling tired or nervous and can't think of anything at the time. Asking questions shows you are interested in the company, organisation or position being offered, but try not to ask too many and keep them simple and to the point.

6. Questions about your condition

Depending on the severity of your condition, how visible it is and the type of work you are applying for, you may feel you need to talk about it in the interview. If you choose to discuss your condition, focus on solutions and what you can do rather than what you can't. Talk about your strengths (some of which you may have because of your condition) and your potential, despite your condition. However, make sure you do not make your condition the focus of the interview. Remember, the focus should be on how well you are suited to the work and what you can bring to the job and the company or organisation.

See also fact sheet on, *Approaching potential employers*

7. Practice and get feedback

Once you have prepared the above, you now need to practice your interview technique and get feedback on your preparation. You might want to ask a friend, a close former colleague, or a mentor for their opinion on the clothes you choose to wear to the interview, or to role play the interview with you and give you feedback. This person knows you well and can help you to recognise areas for improvement, as well as whether you are representing the 'real you' in your answers.

8. How to cope with a negative response

If you are not successful at your first, third or even tenth interview, do not be put off or think it is just because of your condition. You have to be realistic and remember a few important things:

- When you are applying for your first job, it is important to keep in mind that everyone can experience negative responses to interviews at some stage in

searching for work. It is also sometimes harder to find your first job, as employers may want people with previous experience. However, you are young, bright and have a lot of potential to grow, learn new skills and develop

- There are many reasons other candidates may have been selected for a job rather than you, such as additional experience, qualifications, or even personality fit with the interviewer, company or organisation
- The more interviews you attend, the more experienced you will be. Use this knowledge to help you improve your interview technique and build confidence moving forward
- Prepare for each interview with a fresh, positive approach
- Keep motivated – you can succeed!