



Time2Work

Module 3:

Support materials for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases returning to work after rehabilitation

Preparing for an interview with a prospective employer

Congratulations! You have been invited to attend an interview.

The key to a good interview is preparation. Think of the interview as your chance to 'sell' yourself and all the skills and abilities you have to offer a prospective employer.

If you have been out of work for some time because of your rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease (RMD), your confidence may have taken a knock and you may find the thought of going for an interview daunting. 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 / 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 key information you would need to know for the interview and anything that will not be discussed

The company/employer

If you have access to the internet you may be able to find out about a company from their website. If you do not have access to the Internet, or the company / employer does not have a website, here are some other ways you might find this information:

- Ask the recruitment agent, or person who recommended you to the job
- If you saw the job advertised and contacting potential employers is considered appropriate in your country, call the company and ask if they can send you any information / an annual report etc.

Whatever level of position you are going for, it looks good if you can talk a bit about the company/employer and why you would like to work for it/them.

The position

- What is involved in the position you are being interviewed for (job description)?
- What skills or qualifications are needed?
- How long has the job been vacant?
- What salary/wage is being offered / are there any other benefits?

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 the person/people interviewing you directly?
- Will you need to be interviewed by others if you pass this interview?

2. What is the employer looking for?

Which of your qualifications, skills and abilities fit the employer's needs?

Look at the job description and what qualifications, skills and abilities it will require. Match these against the qualifications, skills and abilities and personal qualities you have listed for yourself (see separate fact sheet on Listing your skills...)

- Think about examples of similar work, including voluntary work, you have done that you could talk about or show in the interview
- Bring any testimonials and/or references with you, if not previously provided with your CV

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 long slow breaths in and out to help you compose yourself.

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 reliable, successful, creative, considered, serious, individual or intellectual? Do they look too young, too old, too dull, too exciting, too casual, pretentious, inappropriate, stuck in a time warp, 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

The way you use your body can say a lot about how you are feeling. For example, when you are sad or unconfident your body sags and closes in, you will look down and avoid eye contact; when you are nervous your body can make rapid and jerky movements, or you may fiddle with your watch or hair, or talk too fast or too softly or loudly, or laugh nervously. When you feel uncomfortable in a situation you might adopt a defensive or challenging pose by folding your arms. When you are happy, relaxed and confident your posture is upright and your gestures open and relaxed. Practice adopting an open, relaxed and confident posture in front of a mirror, or with friends and family. During your interview use eye contact and smile at the interviewer/s when appropriate. You can register interest, understanding or agreement with what's being said by nodding occasionally.

3. Interview techniques

However hard it may be, you need 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 imagining 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 case
- **Use examples of good work** you have done to support your answers where appropriate
- Use business or the appropriate **language** for the business you are applying to
- **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 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?
- Why is there such a long gap since you were last employed?
- Why would you like to work for this company / employer?
- What is it that interests you about this type of work?
- Why do you think you are especially qualified for this job?
- What can you bring to this company / organisation?
- What skills can you bring to this job?
- Can we rely on you? Even so called healthy people can't be relied upon 100%, but you can say that you are fully committed to doing a good job.
- What are your salary expectations?

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 abilities / skills to overcome problems in the past.

5. You can ask questions too

It is important upfront to identify the key information you would need to know for the interview, as well as to ask what will not be covered. You may want to ask questions or for clarifications on certain points during the interview, or you may also be asked if you have any questions at the end of the interview. It is important to ask some relevant questions, so have one or two prepared. Asking questions shows you are interested in the company / position being offered, but try not to ask too many and keep them simple and to the point.

6. You may also want to talk about your condition

You may want to explain your condition and how this affects your work, including any adjustments or aids you might require, if you feel it is appropriate at this stage (see *also fact sheet, To disclose or not to disclose*). If you are asked about, or choose to mention your condition, focus on the 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 how well you are suited to the job and what you can bring to the job and the company.

7. Practice and get feedback

Once you have prepared the above, you now need to practice and get feedback on your preparation. You might want to ask a friend, family member or a close former colleague to act as a mentor and give their opinion on the clothes you choose to wear for the interview and/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 disheartened or think it is just because of your condition. You have to be realistic and remember a few important things:

- All people experience negative responses to interviews at some stage in searching for a job – try and analyse what might be holding you back and if there is any training that might help you upskill
- There are many reasons other candidates can be selected for a job, such as additional experience, qualifications, or even personality fit with the interviewer or company
- The more interviews you attend, the better you will become at interviews and the more confidence you will have moving forward