

Hints on interview questions and answers

This factsheet is designed to give you an idea of the types of question you can expect to be asked during most job/apprenticeship interviews and what you should think about in your answers. University interviews tend to work differently, so do ask your teachers for advice on how to prepare best for those.

Interview questions will vary according to organisation, but essentially all interviews are designed to find out:

- Your suitability for the job or apprenticeship – skills, knowledge, experience (this could be voluntary rather than paid work experience)
- Your enthusiasm for and interest in the job or apprenticeship
- Whether you will fit in with the rest of the team and organisation

Think about these questions in advance, using real-life examples to illustrate your points.

Q. Tell me about yourself...?

This is a standard opening question used in many interviews. When you answer this question, think about the following:

- Don't be tempted to give a short response – use this time to introduce yourself to the employer in the best possible light.
- Your response to this should be well rehearsed, confident and *relevant*. Don't reel off your life history – instead, focus on things that relate to the job you're going for.
- Include some impressive achievements – awards you have received, competitions won, leading a school club or society, volunteering activities or charity fundraising.
- Talk about how enthusiastic you are about the job and the organisation – do your research beforehand so you know what to say.

Q. Why do you want this job?

Your answer should reinforce why you are a good fit for the job and convey your enthusiasm for the role. You should mention:

- The good match between your skills and what the job requires
- Your interest in the organisation's area of business/products, for example, if you are going for a role at New Look and you always shop there – say so!
- The job being an exciting challenge for you

Q. What are your key skills/strengths?

Focus on what you know they are looking for, even if it has only been a small part of what you have done to date. Download the person specification or job description from the company website, work through it carefully and think about how your experience and skills meet their requirements.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

Nobody is perfect and everyone can identify areas for improvement. However, when thinking about yours, make sure they are relevant to a professional context:

- Don't tell your interviewer that you watch too much TV or you're bad at time – even though it relates to your spare time, this will create a bad impression of you that will be hard to shake off.
- Think about areas that you know you need to develop, or that teachers or even your parents have singled out for improvement. For example, being too outgoing can lead to you speaking over other people.

- Remember to acknowledge that improving on your 'weaknesses' is important to you and, where possible, show how you are working to develop them. For example, you might be someone who is shy, but you purposefully make an effort to talk to people as you recognise this is an issue.

Q. Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

Your interviewer might want to know how the job or apprenticeship you are going for fits in with your long-term plans. It's okay if you haven't worked out the next 20 years in your head – very few people have. However, you should have a general idea about what your interests are, what kind of areas you would like to work in and even perhaps where you see yourself in the next few years.

Tell the interviewer how the job and how their organisation fits in with these ideas – perhaps the organisation offers lots of opportunities for training and development, which in time will help you progress.

Q. Do you have any questions?

Most interviews will end with the interviewer asking you this. As a rule, it is good to ask your interviewers a question or two as it shows an interest. Here are some questions you might consider asking:

- What is the team like?
- What's the best thing about working here?
- When can I expect to hear your decision?

DO NOT ask the interviewer how they think the interview went. You won't get immediate feedback and it will not reflect well on you. Interviewers will understand you being nervous but you will appear far more confident and self-assured if at the end of the interview if you shake their hand, thank them for seeing you and tell them you look forward to hearing from them.

Finally, remember...

- Always say 'please' and 'thank you'.
- Look as smart as possible.
- Make eye contact with your interviewer.
- RELAX – nerves are understandable but don't let them ruin your interview. Be yourself and don't try to 'second guess' your interviewer.

What do employers say?

As part of research conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), employers said that they noticed the following things when they asked young people questions during interviews:

- Problems with offering real-life examples of their skills to show suitability for role
- Young people find it difficult to translate educational/personal experience into workplace scenarios without assistance/encouragement
- Young people seeming 'blasé' or not interested/motivated in an interview
- Unable to answer why they want the job and what they want to do
- Not able to think beyond the immediate opportunity to their career pathways and futures
- A lack of understanding about the organisation they are interviewing with

However, if you take the time ahead of your interview to research the organisation and think about your answers to the questions above then you are headed in the right direction and will be more likely to impress your interviewer.