

Improving your chances in the Job Market

How to get the job you want



Contents	Page
Setting goals	3
Where to look	4
Gathering information	7
Knowledge	8
Experience	9
Application forms	11
CVs	18
Covering letters	21
Interviews	22
Nerves	23
Answering questions	24
Other formal conversations	32
Other selection methods	34

Setting goals

Looking for a job is a job in itself – so help your self by getting organised, setting goals and planning what you are going to do and when – and refer back to plan often – updating what you have done and adding new actions.

Here is a typical format for an action plan

Goal	Actions	By when	Comments
<i>Research job opportunities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Get information about other companies locally</i> • <i>Survey Situations Vacant for one month</i> • <i>Explore at least one totally different work area</i> 		
<i>Learn how to make successful job applications</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Read and complete this workbook</i> • <i>Talk to Bob (for help and advice)</i> • <i>Apply for at least four jobs to get job application experience</i> 		

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Where to look

Local papers:

Publication Name	Publication Day
Derbyshire Times	Thursday
Derby Evening Telegraph	Wednesday
Eastwood and Kimberley Advertiser	Friday
Hucknall and Bulwell Dispatch	
Ilkeston and Ripley Trader	Friday
Ilkeston Advertiser	Thursday
Loughborough Echo	Friday
Long Eaton Advertiser	Thursday
Long Eaton Trader	Thursday
Mansfield Chad	Wednesday
Mansfield Recorder Free Press	Thursday
Nottingham Evening Post	Wednesday
Nottingham Recorder	Thursday
Nottingham Topper	Wednesday
Newark Advertiser	Friday
Retford Times	Thursday
Retford Trader / Retford Guardian	Thursday
Sheffield Star	Thursday
Southwell Bramley	Monthly
Worksop Guardian / Worksop Trader	Friday/Wednesday
Opportunities in Nottinghamshire	Monday

Broadsheets

The Guardian features media jobs on Mondays, education on Tuesdays, public and social sector on Wednesdays and IT on Thursdays.

Professional or specialist journals – for professional and technical

Times Educational Supplement
Children and Young People Now
Community Care
Health Service Journal
Local Government Chronicle
Local Transport Today (fortnightly)
Municipal Journal
Planning
Public Finance
Regeneration and Renewal
Computing magazine

Jobcentres

Job centres offer the following facilities:

- Jobpoints - touch-screens with up to 400,000 job vacancies, which allow you to search for jobs suitable for you
- Jobseeker Direct - a phone service whose advisors offer details of job vacancies, send out application forms and arrange interviews. Tel 0845 6969 234

The internet

<http://www.opportunities.co.uk/search.asp>

Newspapers' websites (Guardian, Telegraph, NHS, Boots, Experian, etc)

- Total jobs
- Monster
- Jobcentre Plus
- Fish4Jobs
- Directgov

Recruitment and employment agencies/consultants

Recruitment agencies are listed in Yellow Pages or you can use a search engine like Google.

Broadcasting

Some regional broadcasters air TV shows listing job vacancies. These are usually late at night. Some employers advertise vacancies on local radio.

Careers Service offices

Some careers offices have facilities for adults; services aimed at under 19s are called Connexions offices.

Advertisements outside business premises

Creative job seeking

Knocking on doors
Dropping in CVs

Contact employers directly

Use Yellow Pages or other business directories to get names and contact details of suitable employers. You can drop in to see employers personally or send them a letter. Seeing them in person may take more time and courage, but it gives you a higher chance of speaking with someone.

Networking and word of mouth

This helps to find the jobs that are not advertised.

Safety tips

It's important to keep yourself safe when applying for jobs. The vast majority of interviews are perfectly normal and safe; but as with any situation involving strangers, you should use common sense.

Here are some safety tips for interviews:

Do

- check out the organisation if the advert was very brief
- tell someone where the interview is and what time you expect to be back
- make sure it's on the organisation's premises or in a public place - not a private residence
- arrange to be picked up by someone if the interview is at a strange time or in a remote location

Don't

- agree to continue the interview on a social date - such as drinks or a meal
- apply for jobs that seem too good to be true, such as ones offering huge rewards for little work
- talk too much about personal matters
- accept a lift home from anyone at the organisation

Further resources

Bookshops and libraries stock books (and CD ROMs) about job hunting techniques.

Gathering information

Seeking information means:

- using your contacts
- asking questions
- knowing where to start
- picking people's brains
- asking advice
- seeing the connections and implications of random bits of information
- interpreting what you observe
- becoming a detective!

Information about your organisation or prospective organisation, such as:

- the objectives of the organisation
- the organisation's circumstances – booming, declining, under threat, part of a bigger organisation
- the structure of the organisation
- the policy and practice on equal opportunities, maternity leave, childcare, career breaks etc.
- the opportunities for flexible working, such as job sharing
- career opportunities

Information about qualifications, such as:

- the support that your organisation would give you to study

Take a look at your own organisation (Authority, Department, Team)

- What is the structure of your organisation?
- Which areas offer people a greater chance of promotion?
- What is highly valued, e.g. loyalty, bright ideas, independence of thought, long service, attention to detail?
- What is the general attitude to people outside your workplace?
- Which sorts of people hold the influence
- What are the anecdotes that are told fondly about the organisation or about past members of the organisation?
- Where is the organisation going? Is there a sense of direction?
- What do you know about the people who use your organisation's goods/services?
- Who decides what happens in your workplace?
- Overall, how is the culture of your own place of work affecting you and your availability to achieve your ambitions?

Knowledge

Qualifications and Training

Keep a record of your qualifications here so that you don't have to keep digging them out for each application you make.

School Qualifications eg GCSE (GCE/CSE), A Levels
Other qualifications gained at school , eg Duke of Edinburgh award, Queen's Guide, lifesaving certificates, music/dance/sport certificates
College/University qualifications eg secretarial, NVQ, degree, post graduate degrees, City and Guilds, diplomas, BTEC
Courses attended where no formal qualifications were given at the end , eg management courses, IT courses, communication courses
Professional qualifications (including those you are currently studying for)
Qualifications I need/want to get in the future
Anything else?

What qualifications do you want or need to get from your work?

--

Experience

Your Achievements

What achievements in your life are you really proud of? Write at least six. Look at all areas of your life not just work. Think of old achievements as well as recent ones.

At school/college

In current job

In previous jobs

At home/in the community

Other (Sport, social, hobbies)

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Work History			
Dates	Organisation	Job Title	Experience
13/2/00 – date	Nottinghamshire County Council	Secretary to service managers	Keeping the diary of 3 managers Handling incoming calls for the section Arranging conferences and meetings Typing minutes of team meetings Updating spreadsheets for budget analysis Updating databases with supplier information Sending e-mails to internal colleagues and external suppliers Using the internet to gather information
3/5/95 – 10/2/00			

Application forms

If you want to move yourself on to the next step, the messages you produce need to have a positive effect. A good application form gets you the interview, a good interview gets you the job.

Whether you're applying for something internally or from outside, at some point you'll encounter an application form, be asked for your CV and experience an interview. These are all formal ways of blowing your own trumpet. The important thing is to do just that! Don't be put off by terrifying job descriptions or vague adverts. Use all the work you've just done in the workbook on your skills, knowledge and experience as your raw material and think of job applications as the vehicles for putting it across.

Applying from inside

If you're applying internally for a regrade, promotion, sideways move, or whatever, you will still have to complete an internal application form.

Remember that people interviewing you internally will only be able to use what you write on your form, so your application form is the only document that they can use to assess your ability to do the job - make it gripping reading!

Applying to other organisations

If you're applying from outside of an organisation, then you'll need to do your homework. Here are some suggestions:

- ask for a copy of the annual report, the house magazine and any other useful publications, before you prepare your application.
- research the organisation in the local library – the librarian will help you.
- read the relevant trade/industry magazines and familiarise yourself with current topical issues.
- think of anyone you know who knows someone who works there, or in a similar organisation. Arrange to talk to them about the organisation or business.
- ask for an application form as early as possible, so you can be thinking about the format and learning more about how the organisation works.
- consciously keep your eyes and ears open for information about your prospective employer in the press.
- experience the organisation in whatever way you can, e.g. walk through the premises if they are open to the public or buy something as a customer.

Application forms

Tailor each one specifically to the job you are applying for.

Some nuts and bolts

- get it typed or use capitals in an ink that will photocopy easily
- get it checked for spelling and understanding
- make sure the final version looks neat and clean with an easy-to-read layout
- be consistent in the way you present information, i.e. starting in the past and moving into the present, or the other way round
- make a photocopy for your interview preparation
- staple any extra pages and the covering letter to the application form – a paper clip isn't enough

Getting your message across

- address the requirements of the job description or advert
- only put information that supports your case
- anticipate what they're looking for and address it head on
- be ENTHUSIASTIC
- use every space to tell them what you want to tell them
- make yourself different, e.g.
- don't be afraid to go on to another sheet of plain paper to get in all the right information. If you've written it well, people will happily read on.
- make it results-orientated, not just a recitation of what you are/were responsible for
- you can influence the content of your interview by what you put, and don't put, on your application form
- the most important parts of the form are the empty spaces where you're asked to explain why you're the best person for the job. This is your opportunity to do your advertising!
- make it clear that you have read the job description thoroughly and if you have been to talk to someone already doing the job, or to other people in the organisation, refer to your conversations
- don't be afraid to leave some sections blank, e.g. marital status. Make the rest really compelling and get the interview!
- translate your organisation or professional jargon so that the reader can relate to what you're saying
- explain the implications of the aspects of your past work

How can I make mine stand out from the rest?

- Follow the instructions on the form. If you don't, the employer will probably stop reading. If it says write in black ink or in block capitals, do so!
- You won't need a covering letter if there is a section on the application form where you can provide additional info such as why you want to work for them. If there isn't an additional info section, you could include a covering letter explaining why you want to work for the organisation and what skills and experience you can bring to the job
- Photocopy the original form and do a rough version. When you come to fill in the real form you'll need to get it right first time, so there are no crossings out or Tippex
- Write neatly! If your handwriting is difficult to read you could use block capitals or get it typed
- Use black ink unless asked otherwise. Black ink is easier to read if the employer photocopies it
- Keep the original form clean and tidy! Don't leave it lying around for people to spill food on or put coffee cups on. And keep it away from children or pets!
- Use block capitals for personal details
- Spelling or grammatical errors are some of the most common reasons for getting rejected. Ask someone to check over the form before sending
- Photocopy the form before sending it off. If you get an interview you'll want to remind yourself what you wrote
- Send it in an envelope big enough to hold it without folding it. If it's folded it will look untidy
- Make sure you get education and work history dates right, so it all makes sense
- Don't forget to sign the form!

Advice on answering the questions

- If the boxes don't give you enough space to put all you need into them, continue on a separate sheet. Put your name on this sheet and attach it to the main form
- Read the questions carefully to make sure you understand exactly what the employer is looking for. It will give you an idea if you refer back to the job description and person specification
- Look out for multiple questions within one question and make sure you answer all aspects of the question
- Use a range of examples from your work and personal history – this shows you're a well-rounded person with varied experience
- Watch out when cutting and pasting from previous application forms. The emphasis of the questions and the way you presented yourself might have been slightly different. The employer may be confused by your answer or able to tell you've cut and pasted it and will not be impressed!

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- Fill in every part of the form. If a section doesn't apply to you, write N/A (not applicable) in the box – this shows you've considered it and haven't just forgotten
- Use active language (verbs rather than nouns), short sentences and short words. Don't waffle or use too much jargon

Qualifications

- Start with your most recent qualification or period in education
- Make sure you include grades if you got a good mark – GCSE grade C or above; if you passed but didn't get a particularly good grade - and the form doesn't specifically ask for grades - you can just list them as subjects you passed

Previous employment or work experience

- List your jobs in date order, starting with your present or most recent job
- Summarise the main responsibilities and achievements using "power words" like 'overhauled', 'delivered', 'exceeded', 'co-ordinated', 'implemented', 'instrumental', 'directed' and 'led'
- If you've had a number of jobs or space is limited you don't need to list the older jobs fully; summarise them or group them together

Interests and hobbies

- Choose activities that reflect your personality and show you're well-rounded and capable
- Good examples of what to put in this section include membership of societies, social clubs, sports clubs; and voluntary work. Think about how the skills you used in these activities might be useful to the employer – eg problem solving, project management, time management, communication skills
- Don't list incredible achievements – you're trying to appear human in this section and no-one likes a brag
- Don't include things like membership of political activism organisations. You may be proud of your beliefs but the employer may not share your views. You could show how your skills have developed by membership of this society, but keep the name of it anonymous
- Use those power words again!

Additional information

Most application forms contain a section where you can include other info relevant to your application. Read the instructions on what they want from you. Refer back to the job description and person specification and ensure you address most of the points. You could also look on the organisation's website to see what the work culture is and what they want from their employees.

Employers are usually looking for:

- relevant additional skills, aptitudes and experience (include examples)
- why you're attracted to this particular job (don't put 'the money'!)
- what you can offer the employer
- what your long-term career goals are.

Don't repeat info already included. Structure it well so it's easy to read.

Referees

- Follow the instructions - most forms ask for two referees. Both might need to be employers, or one might need to be an academic or even a personal referee from a professional person who knows you well, such as a teacher
- Check with your referees first that it's ok with them. You could also tell them beforehand what your career aims are, so they know what to include in their reference
- Include full contact details for referees.

Criminal records (CRB checks)

The law about criminal records is complicated and you should get advice from Personnel. If your convictions are not 'spent' you should disclose them.

If your convictions are spent you may not need to disclose them, apart from certain exempt jobs such as jobs working with children and other vulnerable people, health care jobs, jobs in the legal profession; with these jobs you always need to disclose convictions, even if they are spent. However, the application form should make this clear.

Medical questions

Be honest about all health information. Employers are trying to find out if a medical check will be necessary. If you have any doubt about health questions, speak to your doctor.

Ethnic background

Organisations often ask you to fill in an ethnic background form. This is not used for selection and is usually used by the human resources department to check they are receiving applications from all sections of the community.

Online application forms

Fill in online forms with the same care and attention as handwritten ones. But there are a few additional hints and tips:

- keep a copy of any passwords you need
- print off a copy and jot down ideas on it (saves internet connection time!)
- check your answers using spell check on a word processor
- print off a copy of the completed form to refer to before interview
- make sure the info you send will be secure
- save the info every few minutes to avoid losing it in the event of a system failure
- don't use a jokey e-mail address to send it from!
- check your form before sending, paying attention to drop-down menus – one slip of the mouse can choose the wrong option for you

Selling Yourself

Get your results across

Practice describing your last two jobs in terms of results. Don't be modest. Blow your own trumpet!

Job Title	Results
<i>Supervisor</i>	<i>Trained two juniors and a trainee in one year Reduced absenteeism by 20% Exceeded monthly targets</i>

Curriculum vitae

Organisations often ask you to apply by sending you Curriculum Vitae. This is your opportunity to write your own sales material. Your CV is, literally, the story of your life, so it's up to you what you say and how you tell the story.

There is not such thing as a standard CV – you must rewrite it and pitch it differently for every application.

Nuts and Bolts

Do the same as for application forms, plus:

- two pages of A4 paper
- use good quality paper – consider the risk of using coloured paper to make it stand out
- Use one style and font
- staple the pages together
- number the pages
- make sure it's well laid out and easy to read
- Use bold or underline for headings only
- show your first draft to someone who will give you constructive feedback
- be prepared to rewrite it several times, if necessary
- use a word processor on a computer - typed or written CVs won't impress

Also

- use positive language - when describing your work achievements use power "doing" words like "launched", "managed" and "improved". Quote figures if possible to back up your claims.
- include other skills that might be useful to an employer - driving, languages, IT skills etc

Don't

- lie - employers have ways of checking what you put is true, and may sack you if they take you on and find out you've lied to them
- include a photo unless requested

Content

- start with your name, address, work and home telephone numbers and e-mail address, if you have one

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- your personal profile should be as targeted at the job as possible. Include skills and qualities, work background and achievements
- include achievements outside work which strengthen your case
- employment - start with your most recent work, as it's likely to be the one of most interest to the reader, and then go backwards, chronologically. Include employer, dates, job, duties
- describe career breaks as you would a period of paid employment. Refer to them as, for example; 'managing a home' and describe what you did; 'organised finances, managed changing priorities,' etc.
- the different bits of experience that you've had are increasingly described nowadays as your 'portfolio'. This may be something that you consciously work on extending, or a pattern that you identify with the benefit of hindsight
- for each job, give the job title and department or company. Outline your responsibilities in one sentence for the most recent jobs. Follow this with a list of 3-6 notable achievements to prove how good you were. Jobs more than fifteen years ago simply need the job title, organisation and dates.
- education with dates and qualifications, from secondary school onwards
- conclude with items to list under 'interests'. Select them carefully, and make them interesting and different

Examples of different CV styles can be found on the following websites.

- totaljobs.com
- cvspecial.co.uk
- workthing.com
- alec.co.uk
- bradleycvs.co.uk

Or try the following:

Personal details

Name

Contact details (address, telephone number, e-mail address)

Profile

Why you are contacting them: new job, same job but different company, retraining, school leaver, returning to work

Your most relevant skills and achievements

What you are doing at the moment

Your career goals.

Highlight some of the things you have succeeded in doing

Achievements can include all kinds of things - like getting a qualification, caring for a family member or winning an award.

Experience

Most recent job title, name of organisation, location, skills, achievements responsibilities in your job

Start and leaving date

Current position

Other things you are good at

Education

Start

Leave

Name of school

Location

Qualifications/Grades

Special achievements

Certificates

Training

Technical

Personal development

H&S

ECDL

Driving

Interests/hobbies

Show what kind of a person you are

May be relevant to job, eg scout/brownies, sports coaching, organising

References

Either "available on request" or

Name, role, address, telephone number, e-mail, how the person knows you

Covering letters

CV's and application forms do not, strictly speaking, need covering letters, as they more or less speak for themselves. However, it is another opportunity to promote yourself and make yourself different, so always send a short covering letter:

- a maximum of one side of A4 paper
- use good quality paper and get it well typed
- make sure your name and address are clearly visible
- tell them what you're applying for, so you get considered for the right thing! Personnel departments are dealing with many applications for different jobs, course places, etc. at a time
- refer them to the best bits of your CV or application form
- condense your sales pitch into one short paragraph and tell them what's best or special about you
- **EXPRESS ENTHUSIASM – it's a rare ingredient!**

Interviews

Types of interview

Competency-based

These interviews focus on the skills and attributes needed for the job. You'll have to relate your skills and experience to the job in question.

Technical

These are for technical positions such as IT or engineering jobs. You will probably be asked to display your technical knowledge of a certain process or skill. They may ask you to do this by talking about your previous experience or by asking you hypothetical questions, such as "what would you do if you were working on this project?"

Face-to-face

This is where the interviewer meets with the candidate in person.

Telephone

Some organisations use these as the first stage of screening. You may be warned in advance or contacted out of the blue. First impressions count, so you should prepare for a telephone interview just as much as you would for a face-to-face interview. But unless it takes place on a videophone, you won't need to put your interview suit on!

Panel

This is an interview where more than one person interviews you. Usually, one person chairs the interview and panel members take it in turns to ask you different questions. You should direct your answer mainly towards the panel member that asked the question.

Practical arrangements

- Find out where you come in the order of the day
- find out how long you've got
- find out where the venue is beforehand, how to get there and how long it takes
- plan your journey - don't be afraid to ask for a map
- find out what kind of interview it will be so you can prepare
- turn off your mobile!

About you

- dress smartly, look bright and attentive
- speak clearly and confidently.
- look as though you fit the job/role you're applying for.
- get your clothes ready the night before
- deal with nerves

Nerves

Dealing with your nerves can be the hardest part of preparing for an interview. Try the breathing exercise below or visualisation.

Breathing exercise

Wherever you are sitting make yourself upright and comfortable and when you've read all the instructions, begin:

- Note the time
- Close your eyes or just lower them to the ground if you are somewhere too public!
- Breathe through your nose, concentrating on breathing out, pushing the air out with your tummy muscles. This is better for you than taking in a deep breath
- Let your breathing settle again and repeat the longer out-breath three times
- Sit quietly just noticing the breath going in and out over your upper lip until you estimate two minutes have passed
- Open your eyes and check the time

Visualisation - mentally rehearsing the interview before hand

- Define in detail how you want to perform in the interview
- Mentally rehearse the interview from the perspective of an observer
- See yourself answering questions confidently, giving the interviewer exactly what they need

Practise

Practise with a friend or colleague. Make a list of the people who may be able to help you with this and ask them in advance so that you have already got their permission for when a job comes up.

Keep applying for jobs, to raise your exposure and build up your experience of interviews.

Compare notes with friends and colleagues to discover which topical questions are asked at the moment.

Friends/colleagues who may be able to help:

Preparing your responses

- examine the person specification and your CV/application form, and think about what type of questions they will ask you
- prepare answers for the main questions - for example, why do you want the job, what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are the main tasks in this job
- make about three or four points in each answer
- quote real examples of when you've used certain skills - just saying you've got a skill isn't enough

Answering Questions

About Your skills

Typical questions an interviewer might ask:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
- What would your colleagues and friends say your best qualities are?
- Why should we hire you?

What the interviewer really wants to know: **They want to know if you can do the job.**

- Communication - the ability to get on with a wide range of people
- Team working - the ability to be an effective team leader or team member
- IT skills - most jobs these days need some IT skills
- Good attitude - hard worker, honest, polite, co-operative

Improving your chances in the job market

- Problem solving - using your initiative to identify solutions
- Enthusiasm - employers like someone positive
- Quick learner - so you can take on new tasks
- Determination - shows you are focused on achieving goals
- Flexibility - doing a variety of tasks to achieve a common goal.

Good answers:

- Strengths: "I'm a good organiser, and I plan everything in detail. I showed this when I was given a new project, and I had to get it up and running from scratch."
- Weaknesses: "Sometimes I'm too enthusiastic when working on a new project. But I've learned to adjust to everyone else's pace, and not go charging ahead."

About The employer

Typical questions:

- Why do you want to work here?
- What do you know about our company?
- What can you do for us that someone else can't?

What the interviewer really wants to know: **Do you know what we do? Why have you chosen to apply to this company?**

- the size of the organisation
- what the product or service is
- last year's turnover figures
- latest developments in the field
- the history, goals, image and philosophy of the employer.

Good answer:

- "Smith's is a respected firm with a reputation for high quality work, and I'd like to be part of that success. The quality of my work is important to me, so I feel I'd be at the right place. I've also heard you invest in your staff by training and developing them."

About the job

Typical questions:

- What will the main tasks and responsibilities be in this job?
- What do you think the main challenges will be?
- What would you do in the first day/week/month/year?

*What the interviewer really wants to know: **Do you know what the job's all about?***

Good answer:

- "The main task is to supervise a team of sales staff to ensure they exceed sales targets. It's my responsibility to motivate them and pass on my sales experience to enable them to achieve more."

About Your ambitions

Typical questions:

- What are your goals?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?

*What the interviewer really wants to know: **How ambitious are you?***

Good answer:

- "My immediate aim is to get a trainee chef position, then to work through NVQs level 2 and 3 to become a qualified chef."

About Your work history

Typical questions:

- Why did you leave your last job?
- Tell me about a typical day in your current/previous job
- What experience have you got from previous jobs?

*What the interviewer really wants to know: **What have you done in your previous jobs?***

Good answer:

- "In my current job I have developed my knowledge of computer software packages. But now I'm ready for a new challenge, and want to use these skills in a more customer-focused role."

About Your motivation

Typical questions:

- What motivates you?
- Which tasks do you get the most satisfaction from?

What the interviewer really wants to know: **What makes you tick?**

Good answer:

- "I like problem solving - that point you reach in a project where you come up against something unexpected, and you have to think creatively to come up with a solution."

About the product or service

Typical questions:

- What do you know about our products/services?
- What do you think of our products/services?
- Can you think of any improvements to our products/services?

What the interviewer really wants to know: **Are you keen enough to have looked at our products and services?**

Good answer:

- "Your products are recognised as the industry standard, leading the way in style and performance. However, maybe by altering your advertising style you could appeal to older consumers as well as young ones. I think older people would value your product just as much, and this could lead to increased sales."

About Team working

Typical questions:

- What makes a good team?
- What makes a good team member?
- What makes a good team leader?

What the interviewer really wants to know: **Can you operate effectively in a team?**

Good answer:

- "A good team needs to have clear objectives and goals, and procedures to work towards these. Each person needs to be clear what their role is, and what is expected of them. There needs to be openness and trust, and clear communication. When I worked in XXXX team – one of things we would do is have regular weekly meetings and talk through what we were doing, any problems we had and how we could help each other "

About Your personality and interests

Typical questions:

- What was the last film you saw or the last book you read?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?

*What the interviewer really wants to know: **Are you a well-rounded individual?***

Good answer:

- "In my personal life I'm always organising everybody. People look to me for ideas and plans - I guess in some ways that shows I'm a natural leader."

The unusual question

Typical questions:

- If you were a biscuit, what type of biscuit would you be?
- If you were an animal, what type of animal would you be?

*What the interviewer really wants to know: **Can you think on the spot and come up with a sensible answer?***

Good answer:

- This one's up to you!

Other typical questions

Why should I hire you?

This is the most important question for you to answer well in the interview. Use this question to make yourself look good.

How do I negotiate salary?

For some jobs (usually in the private sector) where a salary is not stated, you may have to negotiate your salary. This will usually happen when you are offered the job. Here are some tips:

- ask them what the salary range is for similar jobs in their company
- get an idea of what the going rate is for the job - check other job ads
- if you're asked what salary you are expecting, say it quickly and assertively - don't dither
- start high, and meet in the middle if necessary
- don't ask about salary or benefits before you've been offered the job.

What if I get asked about skills or experience I haven't got evidence of?

You will have to show that you have the *potential* to develop these skills. You can do this by describing times when you've:

- been given extra responsibilities
- been left in charge
- showed this skill on an informal basis, either in work or at home.

What if I get asked why I've been out of work for a long time?

Stress any positive activities you've undertaken during your period out of work, such as:

- voluntary work
- courses
- keeping up with developments in your field
- treating job seeking as a full-time job
- keeping fit
- networking.

What if I voluntarily left my job?

Make sure you state positive reasons for leaving. The best reason is to say that you wanted a fresh challenge, and you wanted to fully concentrate your efforts on finding your next opportunity. Reflect positively on your time in your previous job - describe how you developed in the role and say you were grateful for the opportunity.

Which questions should I ask at the end of the interview?

At the end of the interview you usually get the opportunity to ask your own questions. You should always ask at least one question, to show your enthusiasm and interest in the job.

Here are some examples:

- Can you describe a typical day?
- Ask about something you read about in your research – such as a new product or service
- Who will I be working with?
- Who will my manager be?
- Where do I fit into the organisational structure?
- How much of my time will be spent on this task?
- How do you see the role developing?
- When will you let me know the outcome of the interview?
- What's the makeup of the team as far as experience?
- What does this company value the most and how do you think my work for you will further these values?
- What kinds of processes are in place to help me work collaboratively?
- What's the most important thing I can do to help within the first few weeks of my employment?
- When top performers leave the company why do they leave and where do they usually go?
- What do you see in me? What are my strongest assets and possible weaknesses? Do you have any concerns that I need to clear up in order to be the top candidate?

Questions not to ask

- Is it possible for me to get a small loan?
- What is it that your company does?
- Can I see the break room?
- What are your psychiatric benefits?
- How many warnings do you get before you are fired?
- Can you guarantee me that I will still have a job here a year from now?
- Would anyone notice if I came in late and left early?
- What does this company consider a good absenteeism record?
- The job description mentions weekend work. Are you serious?
- What is the zodiac sign of the company president?
- How do you define sexual harassment?
- Will my office be near an ice machine?

What not to do:

- don't be late!
- don't swear or use slang words
- don't slouch in your seat or do anything else that makes you look disinterested
- don't smoke
- don't lie! The interviewer may see through you
- don't let your nerves show too much.
- don't be arrogant and assume you've got the job.
- don't discuss controversial topics such as religion, politics and gender relations
- don't read from notes or your CV.
- don't criticise former employers or colleagues
- don't argue with the interviewer

Afterwards:

Whether you get the job or not, always ask for feedback on your application, interview performance and, if applicable, your psychometric assessment.

Other formal conversations

Other formal conversations are when you talk to your manager or another key person, in a situation such as an appraisal interview, a target-setting session, a performance review, staff-assessment or career development interview. (You can probably think of others specific to your organisation.) Alternatively, you may find yourself in more casual conversations in the canteen or in a corridor, where it's just as important to create a good impression.

Use all these situations to put into practice all the points about blowing your own trumpet, and remember:

- you are building your image all the time
- all conversations contribute to the picture
- grab opportunities to talk about your aspirations and achievements
- ensure your message is positive

Use phrases such as 'I've outgrown my job' rather than 'I'm bored' or 'I'm looking for something new' rather than 'It's the same old stuff' when someone asks how your work is.

Here are three questions people often ask so make some notes here for your positive replies:

How are you getting on?

What are you doing these days?

What are you going to do next?

Employee Performance and Development Review

This is your opportunity to discuss your aspirations with your manager. It is also an opportunity to remind them of your particular achievements? It isn't being big-headed, it's being positive and self-confident.

These interviews and conversations are two-way processes, so do your preparation and go in there armed with your list of positive things to raise:

e.g.

- ask for feedback on your eligibility for another job
- ask for training
- ask for support for a secondment
- list your achievements

Make a note here of things you want to raise:

Other selection methods

Assessment centres and psychometric testing are becoming increasingly popular with employers.

Assessment centres are often 1 day events where candidates will be asked to perform a number of tasks or complete questionnaires to see whether they are suited to the job. They are often made up of ability tests or personality tests or both:

Ability testing

- General ability tests , eg critical reasoning, non-verbal reasoning, abstract reasoning
- Specific ability tests, eg verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, abstract reasoning and mechanical reasoning
- Job specific ability tests, eg administrative/clerical, technical, IT, call centre/customer services, retail

Personality tests

These test what type of personality traits you have and their suitability to a particular job role

A typical day may include

- Completing a questionnaire on your preferred actions in a given situation
- Completing a questionnaire which asks for words which best describe you
- Discussing a particular topic in a group to see how you participate in a team
- Preparing a talk on a particular topic and doing a presentation
- Sitting down at a desk with an “in tray” of documents and carrying out each task (this could test for accuracy, prioritisation, understanding, literacy etc)
- Solving a technical problem given to you, eg to fix an IT problem
- Writing a report on a topical issue

For more information try the internet to see which companies do psychometric testing and to try sample tests. You can also complete questionnaires which give you guidance on what career would suit you best.