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# 15

# TRAINING MODULE 15

## Interviews



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## Meeting potential employers

If you are offered an interview, it means the employer considers you qualified on the basis of the information you have provided in your CV and covering letter or application form, and wants to meet you to help them make a decision between you and other candidates for the job.

Interviews can seem stressful, but an interview is a conversation, not an interrogation or a performance. Even perfect interview technique is not a guarantee of success, but if you have prepared beforehand and can answer any questions honestly and confidently, then you will be able to keep the focus on your positive aspects and make a good impression.

## The learning outcomes of module 15

After successfully completing this module, you will:

- Know what to expect in an interview
- Have some answers prepared for common interview questions
- Know how to prepare for an interview when you get one
- Know how to structure replies to unexpected questions

# Section 1—Types of interview

There are different kinds of interviews, including:

- **Face-to-face** with one person
- **Panel interview** - face-to-face, with 2 or more people and can include a presentation
- **Telephone** - often the first stage in recruitment and used when there are a lot of applicants
- **Group discussion** - usually part of an assessment centre day with other candidates – you will have to show you can get along with people, put your ideas forward and be respectful of others
- **Video interview** – you are sent interview questions in advance and you provide your answers in a video recording
- **Online interview** – you are interviewed via a video call, using an application like Skype or Zoom



▲ Before starting a video or online interview, test your equipment, make sure you will not be disturbed, and position the camera so that your background is tidy and not distracting.

# Section 2—How to answer common interview questions

## Questions about the employer

Employers want to see that you have a genuine interest in working for them by asking questions like:

- What do you know about our company?
- Why do you think you are a good fit for our company?
- Why do you want to work for us?

To prepare for questions about the employer, you need to research the company. You should look at their website and 'about us' pages to find out more about their products, services and values.

*Interview tip: use this information throughout your interview to show what you have learned about the company.*

## Questions about you

Employers will want to get to know you and may ask things like:

- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are your hobbies and interests?

Your answers should show what kind of personal qualities, interests and skills you have.

For example, you could talk about:

- **Cooking** - to show you are organised and can follow instructions

- **Travel** - to show you are adventurous and flexible
- **Team sports** - to show you are a team player with good communication
- **Music** - to show you are creative

If the job requires certain skills, you should demonstrate these in your examples.

## Questions about your work history

Employers usually base interview questions around your work history to give you the chance to talk about your experience. For instance, they might ask:

- When have you faced a challenging situation?
- Can you tell us about a personal achievement at work?
- Have you ever taken the initiative?
- Have you ever failed at a task?

Your answers should reflect the skills the employer wants. Be positive and tailor your examples to the job description.

If your work history is limited, you can use examples from outside of work. You can also use examples from volunteering experience.



▲ When answering a question about yourself, remember the interviewer only needs to know details that are relevant to your suitability for the job.

▼ While volunteering, you may find it helpful to make a note of any problems you face or accomplishments you're proud of as they happen. You can come back to these notes later and think about how you might answer an interview question about that situation.



## Questions about your strengths

The strengths employers look for will depend on the job role. You may be asked questions like:

- What are your main strengths?
- Why should we hire you?

Along with specific examples, you can also highlight your personal qualities as strengths, for instance:

- Communication shows you get on with others
- Problem solving shows you can find solutions
- Enthusiasm shows you have a positive attitude to work
- Flexibility shows you can adapt to different ways of working

Plan your answers around 2 or 3 examples that are relevant to the job. You can back these up with qualifications or training you have done.

## Questions about your weaknesses

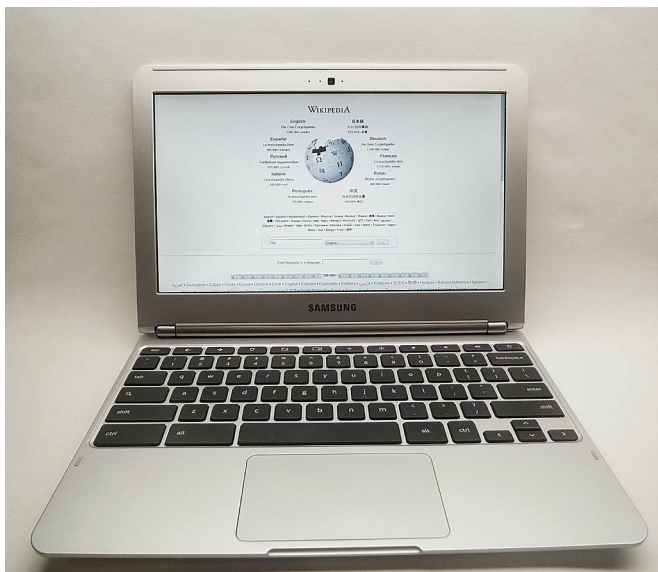
You should answer questions on weaknesses honestly and say how you are working to improve them. However, you should choose an example that won't put the employer off choosing you.

### Example

*Question - Do you have any weaknesses?*

*Good Answer: I sometimes find time management a challenge. I'm working on improving this by creating a timetable of steps at the start of each project and making sure I follow it.*

*Bad Answer: I struggle to get up in the morning and usually arrive at work half an hour late.*



## Questions you can ask

At the end of a job interview, employers will usually ask if you have any questions for them. This is a good chance to show your interest in the company and your enthusiasm for the job.

For example, you could ask:

- What is it like to work here?
- What does a typical day involve?
- How do you see the company developing over the next few years?
- Will there be any training opportunities after I start?

▲ Avoid asking questions you could find the answers to online, as this will make it look like you did not do your research! Rather than asking questions for the sake of it, think about what you want to know that only somebody who already works at the company could tell you. What do you wish you had known before starting your last job or course?

## Questions on why you left your last job

You may be asked questions about leaving your last job.

If you have been out of work for a long time, explain why. Talk about the positive things you have done while away from work. For example, networking, retraining, volunteering or keeping fit.

Use our advice to plan your answers.

### Left by choice

If you left your job by choice:

- Be positive about why you left and why you want a new job
- Describe why their company suits you better

## Redundancy

If you were made redundant (this is where the job you did doesn't exist any more, for example you worked in a shop which closed down).

- Explain the situation
- Describe how you have responded positively since

## Fired for misconduct or poor performance

If you were fired because of misconduct or poor performance, explain:

- Why your standards had dropped
- What you have learned
- How you have improved since the experience



▲ Be honest but tactful when explaining your reasons for leaving a job. Only go into as much detail as you need to explain why you do not expect the same situation to be a problem again.

# Section 3—Preparing for an interview

## Do your research

Make sure you research the organisation, as well as the role you are applying for. Be able to explain why you want to work for that company and what you have to offer. If the employers have created a job description document, make sure to read through it carefully and make notes. This is also a great way to help you think about what questions you would like to ask the interviewers at the end of your interview.

## Review your CV

Look over the CV you provided when you applied for the job and be prepared to answer questions on anything you have written. If you say you have a particular skill or personal quality, think of an example of a time you used it effectively. Your mentor will be able to help you think of some examples from your time with Community Wood Recycling.

## The CAR method

The CAR method is a way of structuring examples of your abilities which provides context and evidence. CAR stands for:

- **Context** - The situation you had to deal with and what you were expected to accomplish
- **Action** - The action you took (as well as how you chose it and any alternatives you considered)
- **Result** - What happened as a result of your action and what you learned from the experience

By giving some information about each of these things, you can tell a brief story that supports what you have said and provides further detail.

## Example

Question: "Give me an example of a time you exceeded a customer's expectations."

| Context   | Action  | Result   |
|---|---|--|
| <i>I was working at the Wood Store and a customer was looking for some wood to make raised beds. I had to help the customer choose the right product.</i> | <i>I found out more about his project and the size of raised bed he wanted to build. When he told me the size I realised that this was the same size as the pallet collars we had in stock, which would give a ready made raised bed.</i> | <i>The customer was very pleased as he could take the pallet collar home and start filling his raised bed the same day. He has since come back to the store to buy a planter for his garden.</i> |

## Activity: Get in the CAR

Use the space below to structure some example responses in CAR form:

Question: "What is your greatest strength?"

| <b>Context:</b> What is your greatest strength, and what is the hardest problem you have solved with it? | <b>Action:</b> How did you solve the problem using your strength? | <b>Result:</b> What were the positive results of what you did? |
|--|---|--|
|  |   |  |

Question: "Give me an example of when you faced a problem at work. How did you handle it?"

| <b>Context:</b> When and where did the problem arise, and what was your responsibility? | <b>Action:</b> How did you decide how to fix the problem and what did you do? | <b>Result:</b> What were the positive results of the way you handled the situation (and what did you learn)? |
|---|---|--|
|   |   |  |

## Mock interviews

A mock interview is an interview practice technique where someone pretends to be an employer and asks you questions they think an employer would ask, and you respond as you would in an interview.

Mock interviews are a brilliant way of you being able to test out your interview skills with someone who isn't evaluating you for an actual job. There are a number of important benefits to practicing your interview technique through mock interviews.

- They provide you with constructive feedback in a low-stress environment
- They help you boost your confidence
- They help you reduce stress and anxiety about interviewing
- They can help you prepare for specific questions about your skills
- You can get feedback on what you did well and what you could improve on

If possible, get multiple people to ask you questions and suggest responses, as everyone will have a different perspective and if you only practice with person, you may be taken by surprise if the actual interviewer behaves differently. Learn to adapt to different interview styles.

## Section 4—At the interview

Before you go in:

- Make sure your phone is turned off
- Use breathing techniques to calm yourself - remember that a few nerves are normal
- Smile and greet your interviewer confidently
- Ask for some water if you need it



▲ If in doubt, follow the interviewer’s lead and match their behaviour.

In 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 you begin your answers
- If you do not understand a question, ask the interviewer to repeat it or explain further
- Use the CAR method to answer questions about your skills
- Be positive about your experiences - if you have faced difficult situations, show what you learned from them
- Tell the truth - do not exaggerate or come across as over-confident
- Ask a couple of questions when you are invited to do so - choose questions that make you sound keen, like ‘What opportunities are there for training with your company?’, rather than ones about pay or holidays
- At the end, thank the employer for their time and tell them that you are looking forward to hearing from them
- When you leave the interview, try to write down some of the harder questions you were asked - this can help you to prepare for future interviews.

## Section 5—After the interview

If you are offered the job, let the company know in good time whether you want to accept the offer. You can also agree the start date and what to bring on the first day.

If you decide not to accept the job, decline it politely, as you may want to work for them in the future.

If you do not get offered the job:

- Be positive - this is a chance to learn from your experience
- Ask for feedback on your interview
- Think about the things that did not go so well and what you could do to improve next time
- Get some interview practice - you could ask friends, family, colleagues or a careers adviser to help

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