

Embracing Change

Supporting NHS Staff in the West Midlands through Transition

1. Supporting Yourself

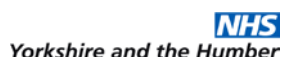
Preparing for a new job – practical advice

Part 3 – Interviews and Other Selection Techniques

Developed by:



Using information and materials provided by:



Interviews & other selection techniques

(Source: *Transitions - An evolving guide to working through organisational change*. ©NHS Yorkshire and Humber)

Getting and succeeding at interviews is one of the most important targets of any job search. This section looks at how you can improve your skills at each stage of the interview process:

1 What are interviews?

2 Different types of interviews and selection techniques

3 Preparing for interviews

4 Improving your interview technique

5 Closing the interview

1. What are interviews?

Interviews are a two-way dialogue where you and the interviewer swap information about your experiences and expectations and try to impress each other.

They want to find out how well you could do the job and fit in with their organisation.

Your aim is to convince them that you are the best person for the job and the organisation.

You also want to find out what it would be like to work there.

Think about it from the interviewer's point of view

- What are they looking for?
- How will they assess you?
- What questions are they most likely to ask to help them judge these things?
- How can you convince them that you are the best fit for the job and organisation?
- What evidence have you got to support that?

2. Different types of interviews

Interviews are always part of the selection process, but they're not always traditional one-to-one interviews. You might be interviewed over the phone or by a panel of people or take part in assessment tests.

You should be told what format to expect. If you don't know, or if you have any questions, ask them. You need to find out:

- What is likely to happen on the day
- How many interviews you'll have and how many interviewers – will it be a panel

interview?

- The name and job title of your interviewers – memorise them if you can.
- Who else you are likely to meet and when
- If there will be any psychometric assessments and if so, which type.
- If you will be expected to deliver any presentations

Assessment Centres

Employers are using assessment centres more and more as they help to make selection more objective.

Their aim is to test you against an agreed set of competencies.

They use a variety of techniques including:

- Interviews
- Written exercises that test verbal, numeric and spatial reasoning
- Case studies
- Group discussions and exercises with 6-10 other interviewees, often ending in a group presentation
- Simultaneous or role-play where assessors observe behaviour
- Psychometric tests, often PC-based.

All activities – group and solo, formal and informal – are designed to see how people react in a range of situations where they are observed by specially trained assessors.

Psychometric testing

Psychometric tests give a profile of people's characteristics which employers can compare with the impression they got at interview. This can make selection more effective, so all sectors tend to use these tests. But they can't predict accurately whether someone will be good at the job or not.

These are three common answer formats:

- Free response – where you write in your own words
- Multiple choice – where you select answers from several options
- Forced choice – where you choose between two options

And two main types of test: performance-based tests and self assessment-questionnaires.

Performance-based tests

These are timed tests where you are assessed on how well or how quickly you perform specific tasks. They test your attainment, ability or aptitude:

- Attainment tests – these can be simply arithmetic or typing tests or tests of specialist knowledge, technology or experience.
- Ability tests – these include verbal, numerical, spatial ability or 'intelligence tests'.
- Aptitude tests – these are used to evaluate how quickly you can pick up specific skills.

Our advice on performance based tests

- Ability tests are always timed, so do them as quickly and accurately as possible. Move quickly from one question to the next. Don't waste time on difficult questions.
- Don't expect to finish or find them easy!
- Practice beforehand.

Self-assessment questionnaires

They create a picture of you through your response to a standard set of questions. There are no right or wrong answers, but they include consistency measures to check you are answering honestly.

- **INTEREST AND MOTIVATION QUESTIONNAIRES**
These reveal how interested you are in different activities and occupations and then match your preferences with typical answers in your occupational group.
- **PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES**
These highlight personal characteristics which could cause or predict future behaviour.

Our advice on self-assessment tests

- They are not usually timed, but try to finish in a reasonable time.
- Work through the questions quickly. Don't ponder too long – put down your first answer.
- Be as open and honest as possible.

Persuasive Presentations

Build on your own wisdom and experience

Identify a particularly persuasive or powerful presentation you have experienced

What were the key features? What made it so powerful?

In advance

- Check equipment and numbers of people to be present
- Practise timing
- Contingency Plan
 - Take Handouts of the presentation
 - Save your presentation on to a Memory stick
 - Pre-prepare a flipchart
- Note cards
 - Complete these in 16 point so that you can see them easily
 - Suggest you punch a hole in the top left hand corner and loop them together with a treasury tag or plain ribbon so that it is easy to turn them over but they don't get jumbled if you drop them

Design

- Treat it as real
People relate well to stories and shared experiences

Relate what you are saying to the world *they* are currently living in

- Use case studies and stories
- Relate to *their* experience
- Plan to talk one slide per 2-3 minutes
- Delight the eye
 - Use colour and image
A picture paints a thousand words: Find an image that will act as a metaphor for your presentation message – use real photographs or a downloaded art. Use this on the opening slide and then devise your colour scheme around this using slide master (in “View” on the toolbar).
 - Check visibility
 - Keep simple and uncluttered
 - Use key points only
 - Six lines per slide maximum
 - Vary the font size for interest but two font styles is enough for any presentation – otherwise it starts to look untidy

Warm Up

- Move your mouth as if eating an imaginary apple, sing scales or laugh to get your jaw warmed up – you are less likely to fluff your first line!

Delivery

- Stand, don't sit
- Posture
 - Head up, back straight, shoulders back and down – energised and confident
- Movement
 - Some movement can be useful to retain attention during a presentation if this is possible given the room layout
- Ensure everyone can see the screen
- Maintain Eye Contact – look at your interviewers, not at the screen
- Tell them what you want them to know – don't simply read from the screen but add to what you are presenting visually
- It's ok to be yourself
- Its ok to make mistakes
- Treat it as a relationship not a performance

3. Preparing for interviews

Good answers are only one of the keys to success at interview. Groundwork and preparation will really pay off as well.

You need to look beyond the job you are applying for to understand the organisation as a whole and the environment in which it operates. You do this by finding out as much as possible about the job, the organisation and what it's like to work there.

- Role
 - What is actually entailed?
 - What will this post-holder be involved in over the next 6 months? What do they need to achieve or deliver?
- Organisation
 - What is their core business?
 - What challenges are they currently facing?
 - How are they rated amongst other organisations in the same field?
 - Who are their major stakeholders?
- Interviewers (if this information is available)
 - Who will be on the panel?
 - What is their role in the organisation?
 - What are their particular interests?

Anticipate likely questions

Anticipating the questions you are likely to be asked and preparing suitable replies should help to make you more confident – even if you're still just as nervous.

There are standard questions which you are likely to be asked in one way or another – questions about work, the job you're being interviewed for and your life outside work.

Review your cv and the information you have been sent

- Why do you want this role – what attracts you to it?
- Why are you leaving your current role? (Keep this positive!)
- When you think about yourself doing this job, what specifically do you think you will be particularly good at?
- Are there any areas of this role that you might not obviously match? How might you overcome this?
- What have been your most significant achievements in your current role?
- How do you think this role will be different from your current role?
- For each key area of the role give an example of how you have handled a similar challenge/activity
- What have been your most significant achievements
 - *Remember that this is within the context of your current role*
 - *What have you most enjoyed doing?*
 - *What have you found quite challenging and then been proud that you have managed to overcome the challenges?*
 - *Where do you think you have been at your most effective in the last year?*
 - *Keep a note of achievements over the next few months*
- Handling Challenging Areas
 - *Stay positive*
 - *Be honest – if there has been a problem, say so and then say what you have learned from it*
 - *Never criticise anyone else or your employer*

You should also prepare some questions to ask them that will show your interest in the job:

- How did this job vacancy come about?
- How do they see the role developing?
- What are the challenges facing the team/department/organisation?
- What would they expect you to achieve in the first three months after appointment?
- Are there any problems in the role that you should know about?

Caution: If you have been offered the opportunity to discuss the role with someone in advance, then they will expect you to have asked these questions there and **not** at interview.

Check the practicalities?

It's important to confirm arrangements and timings:

Try and investigate the place first if you can. You'll feel more confident if you know:

- Which building will the interview be held in
- Parking facilities or train times
- Dress code and working atmosphere

Interviews aren't always held on site nowadays and are often held in hotels or rented premises, so be aware of your personal safety.

- Find out as much as possible about the employer before you agree to attend an interview. Get their name, contact phone number and exact location
- Make sure it's being held in a public place
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going, who you are meeting and when you expect to return
- Arrange for someone to come and collect you at a pre-arranged time
- Never accept a lift home or continue the interview over drinks or a meal, even if it's going well

Remember – jobs that are 'too good to be true' usually are.

4. Improving your interview technique

The first few minutes of an interview are crucial as they strongly influence how the interviewer feels about you. Fortunately, appearing confident is a skill you can learn and practice.

Start with a firm handshake and use a positive tone of voice and body language.

Speak clearly and distinctly and make sure that your voice sounds warm, especially if the job involves communication skills.

Be enthusiastic about the job and the prospect of working for them.

Smile and use hand movements and facial expressions to emphasise your enthusiasm and to support what you are saying.

Keep enough eye contact to establish sincerity – be sensitive about different cultural norms.

They want to know why you should get the job, so....

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- Use convincing STAR examples (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to show what you've achieved in previous organisations and what you could contribute to this one.
- Talk positively about the results and benefits, profitability and productivity to convince the interviewer that you are determined to succeed.
- Get your points across in a factual but sincere manner.

Remember that most interviewers don't set out to catch you out. It's their job to ask challenging, probing questions so they get to know you better. They know the shops are full of books giving your 'textbook' answers. They need to find out about you and how you'd fit in with the job and the organisation.

You can improve your interview technique by:

- Practising answering questions aloud in advance
- Listening attentively to questions and thinking about your reply before you speak (even if you have rehearsed it).
- Answering questions with more than a simple 'yes or no' – the interviewer is trying to get to know you.
- Asking for clarification if you don't understand a question – asking them to explain or rephrase a question shows good communication skills on your part.
- Using the interview to ask questions which show your research into the job, the organisation and the market in which it operates.
- Relationship
- It is easy to forget that interviews are simply discussions between people who are interested in working together in the future. The relationship you establish with the interviewers is as important as the answers you give.
- Establish rapport by:
 - Maintaining regular eye contact with each interviewer
 - Empathy - Demonstrating that you understand the organisation they work in and the contribution that they want you to make
 - Posture – Maintain an upright but relaxed open posture
- Speak clearly and confidently. If possible, allow your enthusiasm for the role to be heard
- Listen carefully to questions, and ask for clarification if needed (it is usually easier to do this by relating back what you think they said rather than simply asking for a repetition)
- Use your experience wherever possible
- If you do not have the relevant experience, say how you would tackle a situation they describe

Resist the temptation to:

- Criticise your previous employer or colleagues – no matter how tempting it is, it's unprofessional.
- Negotiate your salary or terms of employment until you have been offered the job.
- Pressurise your interviewer for a decision – nobody likes to be put on the spot.

Our advice

- Get a good night's rest before each interview so that you're at your best.
- Be on time or arrive early. Arriving late suggests you may always be late for work
- Take a mobile in case of unexpected delays – but switch it off when you get there
- Pay attention to how you look – your clothes and personal grooming make an impression.
- Limit hand luggage to a good quality briefcase or portfolio.
- Take a notebook, file or diary to write down key issues and questions.
- Look as if you already belong in the organisation.
- Read company press releases, brochures, and notice boards for up-to-date information.

Handling Nerves

- For optimum performance, you should be feeling an increase in adrenalin. This will result in increased heart rate and temperature, dry mouth, sweaty palms.
- Don't panic! This is GOOD NEWS! It means that you are firing on all your cylinders and ready to WOW!
- If after all the preparation you are still panicking, or of you have tried these techniques in the past and still perform badly – ring an interview coach – they can be a help

Sample Interview Questions & Answers

“Tell me about yourself”

Must be work related (not an invitation to make personal life disclosures). Use the words in your CV but expand. Must have enough to say to fill two minutes at least.

“Take me through your CV”

You must know your CV almost word perfectly. Don't get caught out being uncertain, or contradicting anything in your CV. You should be able to talk through it in both directions of time. Remember the interviewers will have your CV in front of them but you will not.

“What are your strengths?”

At your interview you are likely to be asked to go into more details about situations you referred to on your application. Be prepared to give further examples if asked. Do not just say 'I am a good team worker' or 'I have excellent IT skills', you must give examples. Demonstrate your ability to handle difficult situations, for example you may give instances where you have calmed down a potentially 'explosive' situation. You may have taken and produced minutes of meetings, or designed a poster or leaflet. Use real examples related to your actual experience.

“What are your weaknesses or development needs?”

These must be non-damaging. Give information on how you corrected the weakness. For example: I have trouble remembering things to do, therefore I have a day book in which I write lists of things to do. I am very late with submitting expenses, but this is my own fault and will not damage the organisation. I don't read background reports on the organisation (which again, doesn't affect the organisation as a whole).

“Why do you want this job?”

Think carefully about this question. Stress the positive aspects, which have attracted you to applying for this position. Do not mention the negative aspects of your current job or the job in question.

“What can you contribute?”

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This is your chance to shine. Tell them about your achievements in your previous positions which are relevant to the new position you are applying for.

“Why do you want to work for this organisation?”

Emphasise the positive reasons why you want to join the organisation, but avoid aspects such as more money or shorter hours. These would not endear you to a prospective employer.

“What do you know about this organisation?”

This is your chance to impress the interviewer with your knowledge of their organisation. Give them a run down of their products and services, sales figures, news, organisation figures, customers, and so on.

“You have not done this sort of job before. How will you cope/succeed?”

Say that you are the sort of person who aims to succeed at everything you do and that you are very determined and will do whatever it takes to get the job done

“Why should we employ you?”

The answer to this question will be based on your previous experience and achievements, which relate to the organisation. At the end you could add that you think there is a good fit between you and the job, and do ask the interviewer for their opinion.

“Why did you choose a career in ...?”

Be positive about your reasons. If you have changed careers make a logical argument as to why you did so.

“Why are you changing careers?”

This question will only be asked if you are making a radical change in your career. Always stress the positive aspects of the change rather than the negative aspects of your previous career. You do not want to come across as someone who is moving just because you hate your old career. Say why you think you will be good in the new career. This should come from your experience and achievements. Stress the transferable skills you have, such as leadership ability, and so on.

“How much does your last job resemble the one you are applying for? What are the differences?”

The interviewer is trying to see how well you would fit in to the position. So you should stress the similarities rather than the differences. When it comes to discussing the differences it will help if you can show that either you have done something similar in the past or that you can quickly pick up the new skills.

“Why did you join your previous organisation? Did they live up to your expectations? Why are you leaving now?”

Always be positive about your reasons for joining and leaving an organisation. Be very careful that you do not say anything negative about your present employer. If you do, the new organisation will wonder what you will say about them when you leave. You might want to stress that you are looking for a new challenge and that you feel that the recruiting organisation who is interviewing you fits the bill.

“ Give me a specific example of where you have”

Use the STAR model to describe the Situation, Task you were undertaking, the Action you took and the Result you achieved

5. Closing the interview

Before leaving the interview, shake hands and thank them for the chance to learn more about the job and organisation.

Send a brief thank you letter or e-mail to your interviewer within a day or so. Keep it simple. All you need to do is:

- Say how much you enjoyed the interview
- Confirm that you are still very interested in them and the job
- Stress how you are a good fit with the job and the organisation

It's a good opportunity to show your communication skills and a chance to mention any relevant skills or experience that you forgot to mention at the interview.

After each interview

- Review your performance – while you still remember
- Always ask for feedback
- Assess where you were successful and what you need to improve
- Note your impression of the organisation, the type of questions they asked and how you coped
- If you're invited back for a second interview, you can build on this information
- If your application is rejected, use the experience to develop your skills and to prepare better next time

Remember – no interview experience is ever wasted