

Guide: Interview preparation



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Interview Preparation: Executive Summary

The interview process requires strategic preparation beyond simply rehearsing answers. This comprehensive approach begins well before you enter the room and continues after you've said your goodbyes.

Pre-Interview Groundwork

Start by requesting details about the interview format to avoid surprises. Research thoroughly—not just the company, but also the people interviewing you, the industry landscape, and the specific role requirements. Create a concise "cheat sheet" of key information to review immediately before your interview.

Know your CV intimately, particularly the version submitted for this role. Prepare compelling stories about your achievements and be ready to explain any career transitions or gaps with confidence.

Format-Specific Strategies

Different interview formats demand tailored approaches:

- **Telephone interviews:** Choose a quiet location, speak clearly, and smile while talking (it affects your voice tone).
- **Video interviews:** Test equipment beforehand, maintain eye contact with the camera (not the screen), and ensure appropriate lighting and background.
- **In-person interviews:** Plan your journey to arrive 10-15 minutes early, bring multiple CV copies, and remember that your interview begins the moment you enter the building.

During the Interview

The first five minutes are crucial. Prepare a concise 60-90 second response to "Tell me about yourself" that highlights relevant experience. Structure answers using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) for behavioural questions, and always make connections between your experience and the role's requirements.

Demonstrate engagement through appropriate body language: maintain good posture, make natural eye contact, and subtly mirror the interviewer's communication style.

Post-Interview Actions

Send a personalised thank-you note within 24 hours, referencing specific conversation points. Follow up appropriately if you haven't heard back by the agreed timeline. Regardless of outcome, reflect on the experience to identify patterns and improvement opportunities.

The Balanced Mindset

Remember that interviews are two-way conversations about fit, not interrogations. While showcasing your capabilities, also assess whether the organisation aligns with your values and career aspirations.

Preparation builds confidence, but authenticity creates connection. Approaching interviews as opportunities to share your professional story—rather than performances to perfect—will help you find not just any job, but the right job for your next career chapter.

Interview Preparation: The Ultimate Guide

Introduction

Hello there! If you're reading this, you're likely preparing for an interview that could be the next step in your career journey. Whether this is your first interview or your fiftieth, there's always room to polish your approach.

As Sam (your smart CV Assistant) likes to say, "Interviews are a two-way conversation about fit, not an interrogation." Your prospective employer wants to determine if you'll integrate well into their organisation, while you need to discover if the role truly aligns with your career aspirations.

This guide will walk you through everything from preparation to follow-up, with practical tips for different interview formats, career stages, and scenarios. Let's ensure you're ready to put your best foot forward!

Before the interview: Laying the groundwork

Research is your secret weapon

The difference between a good candidate and a great one often comes down to preparation. This starts from the moment you're offered an interview - it is always worth asking for details of the interview format:

- ? Will there be any testing?
- ? Will I need to prepare a presentation?
- ? Are there any specific areas of my experience that you are especially interested in?

This may not provide any specific insight to how the interview might go but it should reduce the chances of a 'curve ball' test.

At the very least it shows that you are on your game and taking the process seriously.

Here's what to research:

The people

- Part of the research for any type of interview should be to see if there is anyone you know, who might be able to vouch for you
- If you have the names of the people you are meeting, have a look at their profiles and connections
- If you have a shared connection, they might be able to testify to your abilities

The company

- Annual reports, website, social media presence


- Recent news and press releases
- Company culture and values
- Key leadership team members
- Products, services, and unique selling points

The industry

- Current trends and challenges
- Major competitors
- Recent innovations or disruptions
- Regulatory environment (if applicable)

The role


- Detailed job description analysis
- Required skills and experience
- Reporting structure
- Team dynamics (if available)
- Growth opportunities

 **Pro tip:** Create a one-page "cheat sheet" with key company facts, notable achievements, and industry insights. Review it just before your interview to keep information fresh.

Know your CV inside out

Your CV is the roadmap of your interview, be prepared to discuss every aspect in detail:

- Review the version of your CV you submitted for the role thoroughly
- Prepare compelling stories about achievements listed
- Be ready to explain any gaps or career transitions
- Consider potential challenging questions about your experience
- Practice quantifying your achievements with specific metrics

 **Warning sign:** If you can't easily discuss something on your CV, it might signal that you've overstated your experience or that your CV needs adjustment.

Interview question preparation

While you can't predict every question, you can prepare for common categories:

1. Your professional background

- "Tell me about yourself and your career journey."
- "What were your main responsibilities in your last role?"
- "What's been your biggest professional achievement?"

2. Job and company interest

- "Why are you interested in this position?"
- "What do you know about our company?"
- "How do you think you can contribute to our team?"

3. Behavioural questions

- "Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult colleague."
- "Tell me about a project that didn't go as planned and how you handled it."
- "Give an example of when you showed leadership skills."

4. Technical/skills assessment

- Questions specific to the technical requirements of the role
- Problem-solving scenarios related to the job
- Knowledge-testing questions about industry specifics

5. Future-focused questions

- "Where do you see yourself in five years?"
- "What are you looking for in your next role?"
- "How do you plan to continue developing professionally?"

6. Salary and benefits discussion

- "What are your salary expectations?"
- "Which benefits are most important to you?"
- "When would you be available to start?"

Using AI to practice interview responses

AI tools can be invaluable for interview preparation. Here are some effective prompts to use with AI assistants:

For general practice:

"I have an interview for [position] at [company type]. Can you provide 10 likely interview questions and help me practice my responses? Focus on [specific area you want to work on]."

For behavioural question practice:

"I need to prepare for a competency-based interview for [position]. Can you create 5 STAR method questions about [leadership/teamwork/problem-solving], then evaluate my responses?"

For technical role preparation:

"I'm interviewing for a [specific technical role]. Please simulate a technical interview with 5 questions about [relevant technologies/skills], increasing in difficulty."

For challenging question preparation:

"I have a gap in my CV from [date] to [date] because [reason]. Can you help me practice explaining this professionally in an interview?"

For industry-specific questions:

"I'm interviewing in the [industry] sector. What are the current trends and challenges I should be prepared to discuss intelligently?"

Preparing your own questions

Having thoughtful questions ready shows genuine interest and engagement. Consider these categories:

About the role:

- "What would success look like in this position after 6 months?"
- "What are the biggest challenges the person in this position will face?"
- "How does this role contribute to the company's overall objectives?"

About the team:


- "Could you tell me about the team I'd be working with?"
- "What's the management style of the person I'd be reporting to?"
- "How does the team collaborate and communicate, especially with remote/hybrid working?"

About development:

- "What opportunities for professional development does the company offer?"
- "How do you see this role evolving over the next few years?"
- "What have been the career paths of previous people in this position?"

About the company:

- "What are the company's main priorities for the coming year?"
- "How would you describe the company culture?"
- "How is the company adapting to [relevant industry change]?"

 **Pro tip:** Prepare at least 5-7 questions, knowing some might be answered during the interview. Have a mix of practical and strategic questions to demonstrate both immediate interest and long-term thinking.

Interview formats: Tailoring your approach

Different interview formats require different preparation strategies. Let's explore how to excel in each:

Telephone interviews

Often used as an initial screening, telephone interviews require special consideration since you lack visual cues.

Preparation tips:

- Choose a quiet location with reliable reception
- Have your CV, job description, and notes visible
- Keep a glass of water handy
- Consider using headphones for better sound quality and keeping your hands free for taking notes
- Have a notepad ready to take any notes

During the call:

- Speak clearly and slightly slower than usual
- Smile while speaking, it affects your voice tone positively
- Stand up if it helps you project confidence
- Ask for clarification if you don't hear something properly
- Be concise, it's easier to lose someone's attention on the phone

Common pitfalls:

- Background noise or interruptions
- Speaking too quickly when nervous
- Multitasking or sounding distracted
- Dead air (silence) when thinking

💡 **Pro tip:** Record yourself answering practice questions to hear how you sound on the phone. Are you speaking clearly? Do you use filler words? Is your tone engaging?

Video interviews

Video interviews combine elements of in-person and remote communication. They're increasingly common but present unique challenges.

Technical preparation:

- Test your equipment well in advance
- Download and familiarise yourself with the platform (Zoom, Teams, etc.)
- Position your camera at eye level
- Ensure good lighting facing you (not behind you)
- Use a neutral, professional background
- Close unnecessary applications and silence notifications

Visual presentation:

- Dress professionally from head to toe (you never know when you might need to stand)
- Choose solid colours over patterns (which can create visual distortions)
- Position yourself so your head and shoulders are clearly visible
- Look at the camera, not the screen, to maintain "eye contact"
- Consider your posture, sit upright but comfortably


During the interview:

- Join a few minutes early to handle any technical issues
- Nod and smile appropriately to show engagement
- Speak clearly and pause briefly after answers
- Have a notepad and pen visibly ready for notes

- Keep a glass of water out of camera view but accessible

Common pitfalls:

- Poor internet connection
- Distracting background or noises
- Looking at your own image instead of the camera
- Forgetting you're always visible (maintaining professional behaviour)
- Technical issues with microphone or camera

 **Pro tip:** Do a mock video interview with a friend or family member on the same platform you'll be using. Ask for feedback on your background, lighting, voice clarity, and screen presence.

In-person interviews

The traditional format, in-person interviews allow for the fullest range of communication and impression management.

Preparation tips:

- Plan your journey, consider doing a "test run" to the location
- Aim to arrive 10-15 minutes early
- Bring multiple copies of your CV
- Consider a portfolio or work samples if relevant
- Dress appropriately for the company culture, but err on the side of professional
- Bring a notepad, pen, and prepared questions

First impressions:

- A firm handshake and appropriate eye contact
- Confident, positive body language
- Clear, measured speech
- Showing enthusiasm and interest
- Building rapport with small talk if appropriate


During the interview:

- Be aware of your body language, sit up straight, lean slightly forward
- Make appropriate eye contact with all interviewers if it's a panel

- Take brief notes but maintain engagement
- Ask for clarification if needed
- Be mindful of non-verbal cues from interviewers

Common pitfalls:

- Arriving late or flustered
- Poor personal presentation
- Negative body language (crossed arms, avoiding eye contact)
- Forgetting interviewers' names
- Rushing answers due to nervousness

 **Pro tip:** The interview starts the moment you enter the building. Be polite and professional with everyone you encounter, receptionists, security staff, and other employees. Word can get back to the hiring manager about your pre-interview behaviour.

Assessment centres

Common for graduate positions and some professional roles, assessment centres involve multiple evaluation methods over several hours or days.

What to expect:

- Group exercises
- Individual presentations
- Role play scenarios
- Psychometric testing
- Case studies
- Multiple interviews

Preparation tips:

- Research common assessment centre exercises for your industry
- Practice giving presentations to friends or family
- Refresh on basic mathematical skills and logical reasoning
- Review your CV and prepare for multiple interview formats
- Get plenty of rest before the day

During the assessment:

- Balance contributing with listening in group exercises
- Show leadership but don't dominate
- Demonstrate teamwork and collaboration
- Manage your time effectively in individual exercises
- Stay positive and energetic throughout (even when tired)

Common pitfalls:

- Becoming competitive rather than collaborative
- Running out of energy as the day progresses
- Inconsistent performance across different activities
- Focusing too much on personal success rather than team goals
- Not adapting to different assessment styles

💡 **Pro tip:** Assessment centres are as much about how you work with others as they are about your individual skills. Assessors will be watching how you interact, support others, and handle stress throughout the process.

Career stage-specific advice

For recent graduates and early career professionals

You might have limited work experience, but you can still shine in interviews by highlighting your potential, enthusiasm, and transferable skills.

Emphasise:

- Academic achievements and relevant coursework
- Internships, placements, and volunteer work
- Relevant project work and dissertations
- Extracurricular activities that demonstrate soft skills
- Digital literacy and up-to-date knowledge

Handling common challenges:

- **Limited experience:** "While I'm early in my career, my final year project on [topic] gave me hands-on experience with [relevant skills], which are directly applicable to this role."

- **Salary discussions:** Research market rates for entry-level positions in your field. Be realistic but know your worth.
- **Competing against experienced candidates:** "What I may lack in years of experience, I make up for with fresh perspectives, recent training in [relevant area], and a strong desire to learn and grow with the company."

💡 **Pro tip:** Create a "skills bridge" document that maps experiences from your academic and extracurricular life to job requirements. For example, group projects demonstrate teamwork, dissertations show research and analytical skills, and society leadership positions highlight organisational abilities.

For mid-career professionals

At this stage, you likely have solid experience but need to demonstrate both expertise and adaptability.

Emphasise:

- Proven track record and measurable achievements
- Leadership and management experience
- Industry knowledge and networks
- Problem-solving abilities with concrete examples
- Adaptability and willingness to embrace new challenges

Handling common challenges:

- **Overqualification concerns:** "I'm attracted to this role because [specific aspect], and while I bring substantial experience, I see opportunities to both contribute immediately and grow in new directions."
- **Career changes:** "My experience in [previous field] developed transferable skills in [relevant areas] that apply directly to this role, along with a fresh perspective that could benefit your team."
- **Salary history questions:** Focus on future expectations rather than past compensation. "I'm looking for a role in the range of £X-Y, based on my experience and the market value for this position."

💡 **Pro tip:** Prepare a "career highlights reel" of 3-5 significant achievements that demonstrate your value proposition. Practice telling these stories concisely using the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

For senior professionals and executives


At this level, interviews often focus on strategic thinking, leadership philosophy, and cultural fit with the organisation's leadership team.

Emphasise:

- Strategic vision and long-term thinking
- Transformative leadership examples
- Change management experience
- Executive presence and communication skills
- Industry insights and network value

Handling common challenges:

- **Age discrimination concerns:** Focus on recent achievements, current skills, and future contributions rather than the length of your career.
- **"Overqualified" perceptions:** "I'm at a point in my career where impact and alignment with company values matter more to me than title or conventional career progression."
- **Adaptability questions:** Prepare examples of how you've embraced new technologies, approaches, or market shifts throughout your career.

 **Pro tip:** Research the company's strategic challenges before the interview. Prepare thoughtful questions and insights about their market position, competitors, and opportunities that demonstrate your strategic thinking and industry knowledge.

Handling challenging situations

Explaining employment gaps

Employment gaps happen for various reasons, family responsibilities, health issues, further education, or economic downturns. Here's how to address them confidently:

Preparation strategy:

- Be honest but strategic about the explanation
- Focus on what you learned or how you grew during the gap
- Highlight any relevant activities during that time (volunteering, freelance work, courses)
- Emphasise your commitment and readiness to return

Example responses:

- **For family care:** "From 2019 to 2021, I took time away from full-time employment to care for a family member. During this period, I maintained my skills by taking online courses in [relevant area] and doing occasional freelance work. This experience actually enhanced my time management and prioritisation skills, which I believe will benefit me in this role."
- **For health reasons:** "I took a planned break to address some health concerns, which are now resolved. During that time, I used the opportunity to complete a certification in [relevant skill], which I'm excited to apply in this position."
- **For redundancy/job search:** "After my position was made redundant during company restructuring, I took time to carefully evaluate my career direction rather than rushing into the next opportunity. I used this period to update my skills in [area] and identify roles like this one where I can make the most significant contribution."

💡 **Pro tip:** Practice your explanation until it feels natural and comfortable. If you seem uncomfortable explaining your gap, the interviewer may sense there's more to the story.

Discussing a career change

Changing careers can be a strength when framed correctly:

Preparation strategy:

- Identify and emphasise transferable skills
- Explain your motivation positively without criticising previous career
- Highlight complementary aspects of your background
- Demonstrate commitment through relevant courses, certifications, or side projects

Example response: "After 8 years in marketing, I'm transitioning to project management because I've consistently found the most satisfaction in the strategic planning and cross-functional coordination aspects of my marketing roles. I've completed a Prince2 certification to complement my existing skills in stakeholder management and budget oversight. What attracts me to this role specifically is the opportunity to apply both my new project management framework knowledge and my marketing background to projects that require both technical and communication expertise."

💡 **Pro tip:** Create a "transferable skills map" that clearly connects your previous experience to the requirements of your new desired role, with concrete examples of how each skill has been demonstrated and can be applied.


Addressing being let go

Being dismissed from a previous role is challenging to discuss but can be handled gracefully:

Preparation strategy:

- Prepare a brief, honest explanation without blame
- Focus on what you learned from the experience
- Emphasise what you've done since to grow professionally
- Redirect to your strengths and fit for the current role

Example response: "My employment at XYZ Company ended when our team's approach to the market diverged significantly from senior leadership's vision. While it was disappointing, I've reflected on the experience and recognise that clearer communication about expectations earlier might have helped align our perspectives. Since then, I've worked on enhancing my communication skills and ensuring I fully understand organisational objectives before implementing strategies. I'm now looking for a role where my approach to [relevant skill] aligns with the company's vision, which is why I'm particularly interested in your organisation's focus on [company value/approach]."

 **Pro tip:** Practice this response with someone you trust and ask for feedback on how it comes across. Aim for a tone that's reflective and forward-looking rather than defensive or bitter.

During the interview: Making a strong impression

The first five minutes

Research shows that interviewers often form initial impressions very quickly. Make those first minutes count:

For in-person interviews:

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early, but don't enter more than 10 minutes before
- Greet the receptionist or greeter professionally
- Stand when the interviewer enters, offer a firm handshake
- Make appropriate eye contact and smile genuinely
- Use the interviewer's name naturally in your greeting
- Have a brief, positive response ready for small talk (weather, journey, office building)

For video interviews:

- Join 5 minutes early, with camera and microphone tested
- Have your professional background and lighting ready
- Smile and greet the interviewer warmly when they join
- Wait for the interviewer to lead after initial greetings

- Have your technology fully charged or plugged in

For phone interviews:

- Answer with your name clearly: "Hello, [Your Name] speaking"
- Express your enthusiasm: "Thank you for calling, I've been looking forward to our conversation"
- Confirm they can hear you clearly
- Have your notes arranged and easily accessible

💡 **Pro tip:** Prepare a concise, engaging response to "Tell me about yourself" that takes about 60-90 seconds and highlights your most relevant experience for the role. This question often opens interviews and sets the tone.

Body language essentials

Your non-verbal communication speaks volumes:

Key elements:

- **Posture:** Sit upright but not rigid, leaning slightly forward to show engagement
- **Hand gestures:** Keep gestures natural and contained, avoiding excessive movement
- **Eye contact:** Maintain natural eye contact without staring (look at the camera in video interviews)
- **Facial expressions:** Be mindful of your expressions, aiming for attentive and positive
- **Mirroring:** Subtly match the interviewer's communication style and energy level

💡 **Pro tip:** Record yourself in a practice interview or presentation to become aware of unconscious habits like hair touching, excessive nodding, or filler words ("um," "like," "you know").

Structuring your answers effectively

How you organise your responses is as important as their content:

For general questions:

- Start with a direct answer to the question
- Provide context and detail to support your answer
- Include a specific example if relevant
- Conclude with a connection to the role you're applying for

For behavioural questions: Use the STAR method:

- **Situation:** Briefly describe the context
- **Task:** Explain your specific responsibility
- **Action:** Detail the steps you took
- **Result:** Share the outcome, with metrics if possible

Example STAR response: "When our team was suddenly given a project with a deadline half the usual timeframe (Situation), I was responsible for coordinating our six-person development team to meet this challenge (Task). I immediately restructured our workflow, breaking the project into smaller components, implementing daily stand-ups rather than weekly meetings, and creating a shared tracking document to identify bottlenecks early (Action). As a result, we delivered the project not only within the compressed timeline but with fewer bugs than our typical releases, and the client commended our responsiveness (Result)."

For technical questions:

- Acknowledge the question and clarify if necessary
- Explain your approach to the problem
- Walk through your solution step by step
- Conclude with any alternatives you considered or improvements you might make

💡 **Pro tip:** Practice the STAR method for at least 10 different scenarios from your work history. Having these stories ready will help you respond confidently to a wide range of behavioural questions.

Managing interview anxiety

Nearly everyone experiences some interview nerves. Here's how to channel that energy positively:

Before the interview:

- Practice deep breathing exercises
- Visualise successful interview scenarios
- Exercise lightly the day of the interview to release tension
- Arrive early to avoid rushing
- Limit caffeine to prevent additional jitters

During the interview:

- Take a deep breath before answering difficult questions
- Keep a bottle of water handy

- Pause briefly to collect your thoughts when needed
- Use subtle grounding techniques (feet flat on floor, feeling the chair)
- Remember that some nervousness shows you care

💡 **Pro tip:** If you find yourself getting flustered during an interview, it's perfectly acceptable to say, "That's an interesting question. May I take a moment to collect my thoughts?" This brief pause can help you reset and respond more thoughtfully.

After the interview: The follow-up process

The thank-you note

Sending a thank-you note within 24 hours of your interview is not just good manners, it's strategic:

Key elements:

- Send within 24 hours while you're fresh in their mind
- Personalise it with specific references to your conversation
- Express genuine appreciation for their time
- Reinforce your interest in the position
- Briefly reiterate your key strengths for the role
- Keep it concise (3-4 paragraphs maximum)

Example email:

Subject: Thank you for the [Position] interview

Dear [Interviewer's Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday regarding the [Position] role. I enjoyed our conversation about [specific topic discussed] and learning more about your approach to [relevant aspect of the business].

Our discussion about [specific challenge or project mentioned] reinforced my enthusiasm for this opportunity. As I mentioned, my experience with [relevant skill/experience] has prepared me well to contribute to your team's goals in this area.

I'm particularly excited about the possibility of [specific aspect of the role or company], and I believe my background in [relevant experience] would allow me to make a meaningful impact.

If you need any additional information from me, please don't hesitate to ask. I look forward to hearing from you about the next steps.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Phone Number]

💡 **Pro tip:** If you interviewed with multiple people, send individual notes to each person, customising the content to reflect your specific conversation with them.

Following up appropriately

If you haven't heard back by the timeline provided:

Guidelines:

- Wait until after the decision date they provided
- Send a polite, brief inquiry
- Express continued interest
- Ask for an updated timeline
- Maintain a professional, positive tone
- Limit follow-ups to avoid appearing desperate

Example follow-up email:

Subject: Following up on [Position] interview

Dear [Interviewer's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I'm writing to follow up on my interview for the [Position] role, which took place on [date]. During our conversation, you mentioned that a decision would be made by [their stated timeline].

I remain very interested in the opportunity and am eager to potentially join your team. I understand that hiring processes can take time, and I wondered if you could provide any update on the timeline or if you need any additional information from me.

Thank you again for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Phone Number]

💡 **Pro tip:** If you're actively interviewing elsewhere and receive another offer while waiting, it's appropriate to contact the company and inform them of your timeline constraints. This might expedite their decision process if they're genuinely interested in you.

Learning from the experience

Regardless of the outcome, every interview is a learning opportunity:

After each interview:

- Document the questions you were asked
- Note which questions you handled well and which were challenging
- Reflect on the interviewer's responses to your answers
- Consider what you learned about the company and role
- Identify areas for improvement in your preparation or delivery

If you don't get the position:

- Request feedback (not all employers will provide this, but it's worth asking)
- Analyse the experience objectively
- Update your interview preparation based on what you've learned
- Stay in touch with the interviewer on LinkedIn if the connection was positive
- Maintain a positive mindset—rejection is often about fit, not capability

💡 **Pro tip:** Keep an "interview journal" where you record questions, responses, and reflections from each interview. Over time, this becomes a valuable resource for identifying patterns and improving your interview performance.

Special scenarios and additional tips

Salary negotiations

Discussing compensation can be uncomfortable but is a critical part of the interview process:

Preparation:


- Research salary ranges for similar positions (sites like Glassdoor, Reed, TotalJobs)
- Consider your minimum acceptable figure and ideal range
- Factor in the complete package (benefits, flexibility, growth opportunities)
- Prepare to explain your value with concrete achievements

When asked about salary expectations:

- If early in the process: "I'd like to learn more about the role before discussing compensation, but I'm looking for a package that reflects my experience and the value I can bring."
- If later in the process: "Based on my research and experience, I'm looking for a salary in the range of £X-Y. However, I'm also considering the entire package, including benefits and growth opportunities."

When receiving an offer:

- Thank them for the offer and express enthusiasm
- Ask for time to consider (24-48 hours is reasonable)
- If the offer is lower than expected, provide specific justification for your higher expectation
- Consider negotiating other aspects (flexible working, additional leave, training budget)

 **Pro tip:** Frame salary negotiations around the value you'll bring rather than personal needs. "Based on my track record of [specific achievement] and the value I can add through [relevant skill], I was expecting a figure closer to £X."

Virtual assessment exercises

Increasingly common as part of the interview process, these require specific preparation:

Types of assessments:

- Cognitive ability tests
- Personality assessments
- Skills-based tests
- Written exercises


- Video responses to preset questions

Preparation tips:

- Research the specific assessment format if possible
- Practice with sample tests online
- Ensure a reliable internet connection and appropriate environment
- Read instructions carefully before beginning
- Manage your time effectively during timed assessments

For automated video interviews:

- Practice speaking to a camera without feedback
- Prepare structured responses using the STAR method
- Be aware of time limits for responses
- Test your equipment thoroughly beforehand
- Dress and present yourself as you would for a live interview

 **Pro tip:** For automated video interviews, place a small sticky note with a smiling face next to your camera to remind you to look directly at the camera and maintain a positive expression.

Interviewing while still employed

Balancing a job search with current employment presents unique challenges:

Scheduling tips:

- Request interviews early morning, during lunch, or after work hours
- Use personal leave days for mid-day interviews
- Avoid scheduling multiple interviews on the same day if possible
- Be honest but vague with your current employer about appointments

Maintaining confidentiality:

- Never use current employer's equipment or email for job search
- Request confidentiality from potential employers
- Be careful about updating LinkedIn or other public profiles
- Dress appropriately if you have an interview before/after work

Addressing your current employment:

- Focus on seeking new challenges rather than escaping current role
- Avoid speaking negatively about your current employer
- Explain your job search in terms of career growth, not dissatisfaction
- Be prepared to explain why you're looking to leave

💡 **Pro tip:** If asked why you're leaving your current job, frame your response in terms of what you're moving toward, not what you're leaving behind: "While I've valued my time at [Current Company], I'm looking for an opportunity to [develop specific skills/take on new challenges/work in a different sector] that aligns with my long-term career goals."

Using a smart CV to prepare for interviews

Your a smart CV profile can be a valuable resource for interview preparation:

Leveraging your career database:


- Review your full career history to identify relevant experiences for specific questions
- Analyse which achievements and skills were highlighted for this application
- Use the tailored CV created for this role as a guide for emphasising relevant experiences
- Prepare detailed examples around the key achievements featured in your tailored CV

Creating interview prep notes:

- Export relevant achievements and experiences to create interview talking points
- Review the specific job description and your tailored CV side by side
- Identify the strongest connection points between your experience and the role requirements
- Create a one-page reference sheet of key achievements, metrics, and examples

Post-interview updates:

- After the interview, note which aspects of your experience seemed most interesting to the interviewer
- Update your career database with any new achievements or skills that came up during your interview
- Consider enhancing descriptions of experiences that proved particularly relevant

 **Pro tip:** Before your interview, review the original job description alongside your tailored CV to remind yourself exactly which aspects of your experience were highlighted as most relevant for this specific role.

Final thoughts: The interview mindset

Approach your interview with these perspectives in mind:

It's a conversation, not an interrogation The best interviews feel like professional conversations where both parties are evaluating fit and sharing information.

You're assessing them too Remember that you're also determining if this company and role are right for you. Observe the work environment, how you're treated, and whether the company values align with yours.

Authenticity matters While presenting your best professional self is important, being authentic creates the foundation for a role that truly fits you.

Every interview is a networking opportunity Even if this role doesn't work out, a positive impression could lead to future opportunities or connections.

Preparation builds confidence The more thoroughly you prepare, the more confidently you'll present yourself, creating a positive cycle of engagement.

Remember, interviews are opportunities to share your unique professional story and connect it to the organisation's needs. With thorough preparation, thoughtful presentation, and authentic engagement, you'll maximise your chances of finding not just any job, but the right job for your next career chapter.

Good luck!

YOUR CAREER | YOUR DATA | YOUR CV

